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I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

Tredegar Comprehensive School,
Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent

Tredegar Comprehensive School is a secondary school based in Blaenau Gwent, with 650 students on roll. Mandy Williams-Griffiths, the school's Accelerated Reader Coordinator, discusses how the school has implemented Renaissance Accelerated Reader.



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Gender

Reading Culture

Non-Fiction

Celebration

Reading for Pleasure

Library Use

Progress Monitoring

Transformed Reading Attitudes in Blaenau Gwent

Implementing Accelerated Reader

At Tredegar, we have implemented Accelerated Reader in earnest since February 2015, using it with all students in Key Stage 3.

We have close links to another school which uses the programme, and had the opportunity before we took on the programme to look at their implementation, we really liked the direction they had gone with it, and were interested to see what impact Accelerated Reader would have on our students.

In two registration periods per week, students are given the opportunity to read, visit the library, take out new books and complete Accelerated Reader quizzes. Each class also has one weekly English lesson dedicated to Accelerated Reader in the library. On top of this my room is open to students during morning break and lunchtime for any students who want to read, to talk about their reading or undertake a quiz. There is constant reading, swapping of books, quizzing and chatter about reading going on.

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The Impact of Accelerated Reader

It's had quite an astonishing impact on the school. The success of the students has been astronomical. We've seen a lot more enthusiasm for the actual choosing of books, and we've noticed a big increase in conversations between students about what they've read, and what they would recommend others to read. Renaissance Star Reading test data indicated that, for the majority of our students, their Reading Age increased between September 2015 and May 2016. We saw some huge leaps as well; some students made two or three years of progress in that time, and one student even made four years progress according to the Star Reading test data.

Accelerated Reader has helped us to encourage students to broaden their reading, particularly to include non-fiction. When a student comes to the library, we'll encourage them to select a book within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), read it, and take an Accelerated Reader quiz on an iPad. When they've completed the quiz, we'll go over the results with the student and talk about what they liked about the book, what they didn't like, and sometimes suggest that they try something different next time to encourage them to vary what they're reading. Suggesting some non-fiction can really pique their interest, and generally they'll say 'oh, I've never tried that before, but I really enjoyed that'. We've built our entire library around Accelerated Reader, and are using it to cater to all levels, all interests, and all students. We've had some lovely feedback from parents about Accelerated Reader, who have noticed their children starting to read at home. When we first implemented it, we received a call from a parent asking, 'what is this new scheme?', because their child was reading on a Sunday. The parents themselves were avid readers, and were sat reading themselves, and suddenly their child was sat reading quietly with them as well. They were able to have a conversation with their own child about what they were reading, which they hadn't been able to do for a very long time.

Closing the Gender Gap

We've also noticed a much smaller gap between boys and girls in terms of their reading interest. There used to be a perception that boys wouldn't take reading as seriously as the girls, but that has been quashed at Ysgol Gyfun Tredegar. The boys have enjoyed Accelerated Reader, and have put as much if not more effort into their reading than the girls since we implemented it. We haven't seen a marked gender gap and a lot of students, including the majority of the boys, have told us that this is the first time they've really taken their reading seriously, and that they didn't really bother with books before they used Accelerated Reader.

One thing that's really engaged boys is the range of competitions and celebrations we run using Accelerated Reader. For example, every month we have an 'AR Star' prize for every class, where we decide which student has shone that month. It's not necessarily the student who has read the most, but maybe a student for whom taking and passing their first quiz was a big milestone for them, or a young pupil who brought their books in every day and was

particularly diligent with their reading that month. The boys love to be the AR Stars – they love the friendly competition that comes with it.

We also run a monthly competition in the library. Last year one such competition was: 'What's your favourite Accelerated Reader book so far?' Students submit something, it can be visual or written, describing what they enjoyed about their favourite book they have read and quizzed on, and what they found interesting about it. There's massive interest in it, from Year 8 and 9 as well as 7, and again we probably received more entries from boys than girls.

Incentivising and Celebrating Reading Success

We also run a word millionaires scheme: if a student reads a million words over the academic year we create a bank note with their name on, their picture, and the date they achieved the milestone and add it to a display in the library. Last year we had seven millionaires, two of whom were boys. Both of these boys read over two million and one went on to read over three million words. We held a millionaires tea party at the end of the year, and this year everyone is desperate to achieve that millionaire status. At the beginning of last academic year we set the whole Key Stage a target of 25 million words to read for the year. They achieved that by February half term, and ended up reading 54,886,561 words; we now need to top this achievement this year. Accelerated Reader as a scheme has given reading a different face in the school; even the most reluctant reader has come back with a new, fresh approach. Students in Year 9 last year were upset that they would no longer be using Accelerated Reader in Year 10, but most of them have said that they're going to continue to read anyway!

Support from Renaissance has been phenomenal; I've never had anyone say they couldn't help me: it's always been the case that if I need to know, I ask. It's so easy to get around the system, and I make sure I'm attending all the

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webinars to keep myself up to date with Accelerated Reader. Alongside Accelerated Reader, we do use Star Reading to determine Reading Ages and ZPDs. We administer a Star test at the beginning and end of the year, and when we looked last year at the progress students had made there were no surprises, because throughout the year we were tracking how they were progressing with their Accelerated Reader quizzing as well.

The key to the programme isn't just reading books, it's the fact that this is combined with taking quizzes, which they all want to do. They find out their quiz results immediately, and we can then discuss their results and their thoughts about the book; if the quizzes weren't so immediate, or were done on paper, I think the interest in reading would wane. The fact that you can immediately see how many words the book contained really helps. We had one student who was averaging 18,000 words per book and didn't realise what they were achieving until it was in front of them on an iPad. You can then go on to their dashboard and see all the books and words they've read, and then you can see just how far they've come. We're in October now, and it's already up and running for this year, and we're really looking forward to what the end of the year will give us.



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