Using Renaissance Accelerated Reader with pre-Star Reading Children

If teachers are working with very young children or with older ones who cannot take a Star Reading assessment the children can still use Accelerated Reader (AR). The teacher needs to ensure that the book level for reading practice is right for each child.

Reading practice must be at the right level of difficulty or Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in order to promote growth. Normally teachers will obtain this information when children take an initial Star Reading assessment. But if children do not have the necessary skills to take a Star Reading assessment this does not preclude them from using AR.

Emergent readers typically begin by listening to books which are read to them. In time they can read together with a more experienced reader. Eventually they begin to read independently. Reading practice utilising AR can have one, or a mix, of these three reading practice types.

Children listening to books that are read to them can be assessed for understanding of the content, characters and plot within the book. AR can be used to check this comprehension. Since the book was read to them, children can also have the quiz questions and alternatives read to them.

As their word attack skills develop they can read with others. As their skills in reading develop their comprehension skills can also be checked. The quiz can be read with them too.

The National Literacy Trust has developed an excellent guide to establishing paired reading in schools. Click here to view and download it.
Eventually children will be able to read independently on their own. By this stage their comprehension skills will also be honed so they can take the AR quizzes independently too. The video “How Are Goals Different for Early Readers” will help explain and can be found here: https://vimeo.com/163558615

To begin this process, teachers need to identify the ZPDs for emergent readers. They read ‘age appropriate’ books to children. Comprehension can be assessed by reading AR quizzes to them individually or by using voice recorded quizzes. This will provide data for each student.

You may wish to use a whole class/group approach to familiarise children with the process. A PDF document outline a suggested course of action can be found here.

Looking for the range of book levels within which a child can average 85% to 95% on quizzes indicates the Zone of Proximal Development, the not too hard, not too easy level of difficulty.

This is a flexible system in which the ZPD is set by the teacher and checked by the quiz data. It opens up the use of AR to classes or groups who are not independent readers but who can, none the less, begin to develop their comprehension skills. The video “ZPDs for Emergent Readers” can be found here: https://vimeo.com/161057252

To keep track of how children are progressing we recommend using reading logs. They include space to record ZPDs as well as quiz results. Emergent readers will need help filling these in.

You can download a Reading Log here.
In addition, to help children find books at the right level, we suggest giving them index cards which show their ZPDs. Be careful however not to just provide a range such as 1.5 to 2.4 but list every book level value within the range. It’s easier for very young children to look for books within the range if they have every value listed. If your books are colour coded then use the coloured dots instead.

As children read and quiz, keep an eye on their reading practice data. When averages dip below 85% guide them to easier books or provide them with the additional support they need. As the year goes on open up the top of the ZPD as appropriate and encourage children to shift the balance of TWI towards more independent reading.

Finally encourage your emergent readers to find books within their ZPDs that they find interesting and enjoyable. This way they will experience how rewarding and meaningful reading can be.