

Measures of Success: Portraits of BOOKMATCH Readers

“One of the most important ways you will become more effective at teaching reading is through responding to your students’ needs.”

—Susan Davis Lenski & Susan L. Nierstheimer, *Becoming a Teacher of Reading: A Developmental Approach*

In this chapter we present portraits of three readers from our first-grade classrooms and their experiences with BOOKMATCH. The profiles of these three students—Ronnie, Aggie, and Corey—provide a glimpse into the different reading behaviors that you may see in your own classroom throughout your implementation of BOOKMATCH and independent reading. Rather than label a reader as low, average, or high, we like to describe typical reading behaviors of developing readers. We look at our readers in terms of development. Each reader comes to us with different experiences regarding books and self-selection. Their reading behaviors are a direct result of their prior experiences. These reading behaviors are valued in a way that allows them to progress at their own developmental pace.

We have identified three different levels of progress in students’ increasing success with self-selection behaviors: reluctant, transitional, and self-directed (Wedwick & Wutz, 2006). Reluctant, transitional, and self-directed behaviors are one way to characterize how readers perform regarding self-selection in a reading workshop environment. We like to think about these behaviors on a continuum. This developmental continuum reflects a range of distinguishable behaviors common for

TABLE 8
Independent Reading Continuum of Self-Selection Behaviors

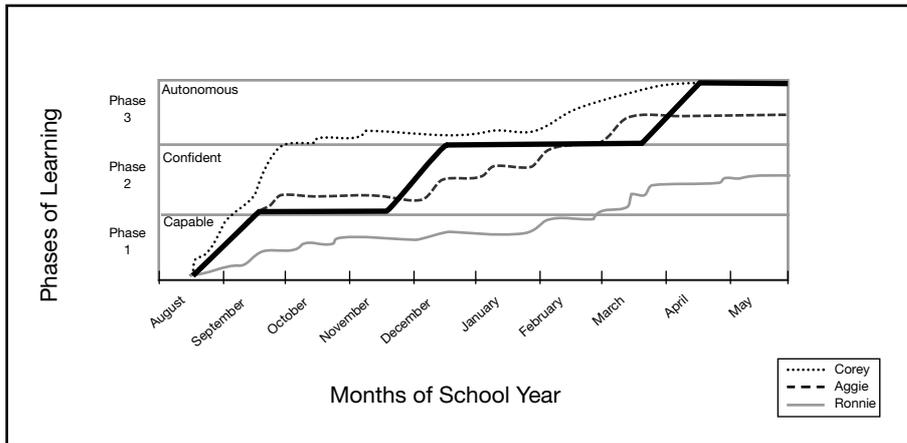
Reluctant	Transitional	Self-Directed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose to read occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eager to read and eager to please 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose to read all the time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need additional support beyond whole-group, small-group, and conferring to gain meaning from text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need basic support as found in whole-group, small-group, and conferring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need limited support—but may need nudging toward challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandon a majority of the time—do not find a purpose in reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish most books—abandon due to difficulty, length, and interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to finishing a book—abandon based on personal preferences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain minimal meaning from text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read for surface information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand at a deeper level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give minimal consideration to selecting just-right books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work toward matching self to just-right books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully select just-right books

elementary-age students (see Table 8). Seeing our readers on this continuum helps us set instructional objectives and learning goals, as well as meet individual needs. At one end of the Independent Reading Continuum is Reluctant and the characteristics that correspond to those self-selection behaviors. At the opposite end of the continuum is Self-Directed and the characteristics that correspond to those self-selection behaviors. Somewhere in the middle are Transitional behaviors. The students you will read about in this chapter each represent a different stage of development along this continuum (see Figure 28).

We use these self-selection behaviors as a guide for identifying when students are ready for more responsibility. When a majority of the students are exhibiting transitional behaviors, this may be a period of plateau according to the pattern of implementing BOOKMATCH (see Figure 1 in the Preface or other versions of this pattern in Chapters 2 through 4). This doesn't mean that you won't see some signs of all the self-selection behaviors in each Phase of Learning—in fact, students continue to challenge themselves with a variety of texts. Your students will move along the continuum as they build background knowledge, learn to self-select, and encounter a variety of texts.

Keep in mind that this is a developmental continuum. Because our goal is to meet each reader's developmental needs, the continuum merely

FIGURE 28
Portraits of Readers According to the Independent Reading Continuum of Self-Selection Behaviors



allows you to more effectively plan your implementation of BOOKMATCH to meet the specific needs of your readers. Whether a reader displayed reluctant, transitional, or self-directed behaviors, our instructional strategies were chosen in response to that individual's needs. When we implemented BOOKMATCH, we paid close attention to the effect of our instruction so that we could modify and differentiate as needed. Regardless of the behaviors, each of these three readers found success with self-selection and independent reading. Although our expectations are high, we meet each reader within his or her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). We believe that you may connect to the three readers we present here and be reminded of similar readers from your own classroom. By reading about Ronnie, Aggie, and Corey, you will see the success that is possible.

The progress that all our readers made, not just Ronnie, Aggie, and Corey, was a result of the environment, instruction, and empowerment. Our preparation was purposeful, and so were the modeling, shared demonstrations, conferences, and assessments in which students participated. The goal was always self-selecting that just-right book. After all,

What more important decision does any reader make? If children learn how to choose a book they will enjoy or use competently, they are on the road to loving books and reading on their own. The right book at the right time is a gift of major proportions. (Skolnick, 2000, p. 129)

Ronnie: Reluctant Behavior

Ronnie began first grade with reluctant self-selection behaviors for independent reading (see Figure 29 for Ronnie's profile and self-portrait; his self-portrait hung throughout the year to show that he was a member of our class). He had a very rough kindergarten year. He had repeated instances of being sent home for language, violence toward others, and outbursts that typically led to yelling at teachers and administrators. Before the first-grade school year began, Ronnie was assessed using *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2006). Ronnie's scores on the assessments were as follows: Letter Identification, 53/54; Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, 24/37; Writing Vocabulary, 23; Ohio Word Test, 19/20; Concepts About Print, 13/24; Instructional Text, Level 5. Ronnie's scores, in comparison to his peers, suggested that he had a partial

FIGURE 29
Profile and Self-Portrait for Ronnie

Reader Profile: Ronnie
Favorite Book: Any book from Magic Tree House series
Interests: Playing outside with friends; building blocks
Pets: 2 dogs, Baily and Bosco
Favorite Subject in School: Recess
Definition of Reading: I don't know
Something I'm really good at: Swimming
Someday I want to...be a teacher.
I love it when...I ride my bike.
Motivations: Choosing a treat from the treat jar, reading chapter books, playing basketball with older boys.



understanding of concepts about print and books in general as well as minimal writing vocabulary. While level 5 as an instructional level may not be that unusual for incoming first graders, in comparison to Ronnie's peers,

CLARIFICATION SPOT

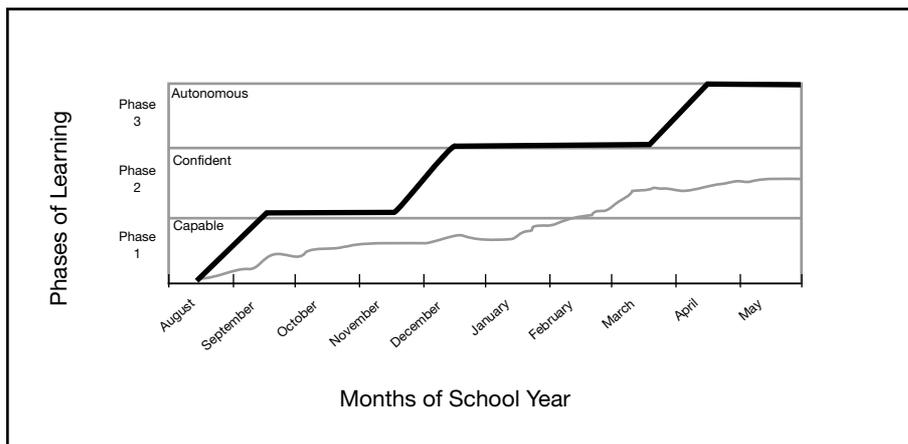
Reading Recovery is an early intervention program for students in most need of literacy support. It provides one-on-one, intense, daily instruction designed specifically for each participant's unique needs. Screening typically occurs the first week of school. This program uses text levels as a way to monitor students' progress. At our school, we like students to leave first grade reading at least at level 20.

he was on the low end. Because of his limited background experiences with literacy, his scores on the early literacy assessments, and his previous behavioral concerns, he was referred to and qualified for Reading Recovery intervention in the first round (first semester). In the initial discussion with the classroom teacher and the support staff, the assumption was that Ronnie would need services the entire first-grade year.

One-on-one interviews with Ronnie showed that he wanted to learn and responded well to praise once he trusted the adult. He was well aware of what the others in the classroom were doing, and at times he would do his best to do the same. He had trouble making friends and did not take suggestions or criticism well.

Figure 30 illustrates Ronnie's progress in response to the implementation of BOOKMATCH. Throughout the year, he remained

FIGURE 30
Ronnie's Progress According to the Pattern
of Implementing BOOKMATCH



significantly below the typical pattern of learning. He remained in Phase 1: Capable for the majority of the school year, showing a distinct upward movement to Phase 2: Confident at the end of the year. His behaviors showed an increase in confidence with self-selection, but he didn't plateau at this phase, indicating he should continue practicing self-selection over the summer and in second grade in order to continue that upward movement of learning.

At the end of the first-grade school year, Ronnie was reassessed using *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2006). Ronnie's scores on this set of assessments were as follows: Letter Identification, 53/54; Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, 37/37; Writing Vocabulary, 57; Ohio Word Test, 20/20; Concepts About Print, 17/24; Easy Text, Level 28. Ronnie's scores at this time, in comparison to his peers, suggested that he had a better understanding of concepts about print; however, he continued not to attend to details. He now had a stronger writing vocabulary, including hearing more sounds in words. Ronnie went from an instructional level of 5 to an easy level of 28. Although a word accuracy level of 28 (determined with running records) was well beyond the expectation of exiting first graders, Ronnie will still need additional support with comprehension. In our school, with post-assessment results, instructional levels of word accuracy reading are not always obtained. We do not push the reader into texts that may be developmentally inappropriate just to obtain a "hard" level. While the support staff originally believed that Ronnie would need a full year of Reading Recovery, his instruction was discontinued after the first round. Ronnie made remarkable progress as a result of the classroom experiences, the ideal practice environment, and the one-on-one instruction for reinforcement that we provided.

Instructional strategies for Ronnie were chosen to build on his strengths and reflect our understanding of reluctant behaviors. During Ronnie's first independent reading time, he selected *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (Atwater & Atwater, 1992), which was too difficult, too long, and too complex. However, Ronnie used his book stick correctly, sat at his table spot, did not disrupt anyone around him, opened the book, turned the pages, and sustained these behaviors throughout the reading time. For Ronnie, it was important to remember the purpose of the day. The purpose was getting students to understand the routines of reading workshop and specifically of independent reading. If we had questioned him about his practices, Ronnie may have become confused because he

did what had just been modeled for him; however, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves or ahead of what Ronnie needs. These behaviors are important aspects of developing into a reader with which Ronnie needed opportunities to practice; he was simply not metacognitively ready to self-select successfully three weeks into the school year. Our instructional strategy was to allow him the needed practice in acquiring the reading behaviors appropriate for reading workshop. Students have to learn what it means to be a reader and identify what readers do. This is also called the Discourse (Gee, 1989) of readers and includes all the behaviors and talk that allow learners to gain access to this Discourse group. Ronnie reminded us that learning the Discourse of readers and eventually the Discourse of independent readers takes time.

Another instructional consideration for reluctant behaviors is to find something that connects to the readers' motivation and interests them. Ronnie called all books with pictures "baby books." While conferring with Ronnie, he asked, "Did Corey have to read those books first, too?" (He was referring to another student who was already reading chapter books). This conference was helpful because Ronnie revealed a motivation and desire to read a chapter book. Because our classroom library had a wide variety of books, we were able to suggest beginning chapter book series to Ronnie, such as *Henry and Mudge* by Cynthia Rylant, *Nate the Great* by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, and *Ricky Ricotta's Mighty Robot* by Dav Pilkey. Nudging Ronnie into these books served the following purposes:

- Ronnie's reading endurance increased while building his vocabulary.
- He realized that he would not be restricted to "baby books."
- He believed that he could achieve like other chapter book readers during the independent reading time.

As with any reader who has challenged himself with more difficult texts, it is important to confer frequently to confirm that he is gaining meaning.

Finally, Ronnie's use of minimal criteria for self-selecting just-right books indicated a lack of understanding about books, their features, and the selection process. Therefore, while some students were becoming confident using the criteria already taught for BOOKMATCH, Ronnie needed more time to become confident with just the first few letters taught. Our instructional strategy here was to wait for Ronnie to exhibit confidence with *B* and *M* before expecting him to consider additional criteria.

Ronnie's reluctant behaviors are not uncommon in people who have limited literacy experiences. The most important instructional response to Ronnie was for us to accept where he was and to use his strengths to help him progress. Perhaps he didn't close the gap completely, but we're proud of the literacy foundation he acquired. We could have chosen to focus our attention elsewhere, but we believed that Ronnie was capable. He proved us right.

Aggie: Transitional Behavior

Aggie began first grade exhibiting transitional behaviors, with limited experiences in self-selection but eager to have control over her book choices (see Figure 31 for Aggie's profile and self-portrait). She had a typical kindergarten year; however, in comparison to her peers, her reading skills were low.

Before the first-grade school year began, Aggie was assessed using *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2006). Aggie's

FIGURE 31
Profile and Self-Portrait for Aggie

Reader Profile: Aggie

Favorite Book: *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?*
(Jenkins & Page, 2003)

Interests: Art, going to the park

Pets: Walter (dog)

Favorite Subject in School: Recess

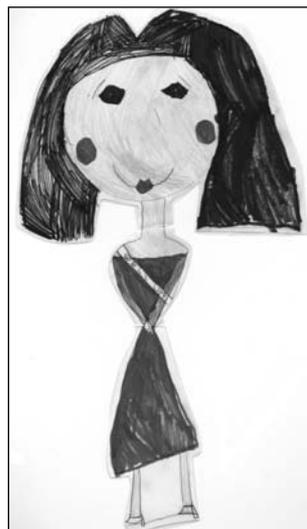
Definition of Reading: You eat with your eyes.

Something I'm really good at: Swimming, I got two first place ribbons for backstroke.

Someday I want to...be a pop star.

I love it when...I walk my dog. I torture my brother.

Motivations: Reading in a comfy chair with a stuffed animal (reading buddy), getting out the watercolor paints, reading aloud to another classroom of students.



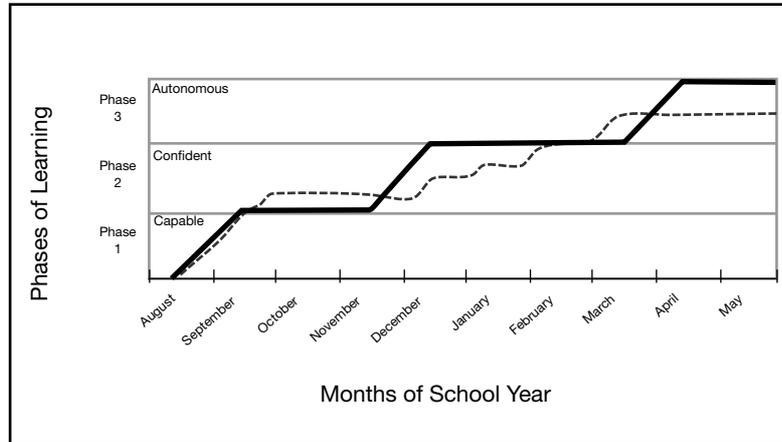
scores on the assessments were as follows: Letter Identification, 52/54; Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, 33/37; Writing Vocabulary, 28; Ohio Word Test, 13/20; Concepts About Print, 17/24; Instructional Text, Level 5. Similar to Ronnie, Aggie's scores, in comparison to her peers, suggested that she had a basic understanding of concepts about print and books in general as well as limited sight word vocabulary. Like Ronnie, Aggie's word accuracy reading as determined on the running record was a level 5. While these scores may seem relatively low, she had made significant progress over the summer months. Even though Aggie did not qualify for the first round of Reading Recovery intervention, she was considered a priority for the second round (second semester).

Aggie is very witty and often lifted the spirits of other students by getting them to laugh. She would often ask if she didn't understand something. She was very aware of other readers' interests. She became intrigued with the choice option and the opportunity to spread out in comfy chairs during reading workshop.

Figure 32 illustrates Aggie's progress in response to the implementation of BOOKMATCH. Throughout the year, Aggie followed the typical pattern of implementing BOOKMATCH, the only difference being that she did not have a lengthy plateau in Phase 2: Confident. Once she began the upward movement in Phase 1, she continued that same slope of upward movement into Phase 3: Autonomous. When you consider the span of the school year, Aggie's results show a positive response to learning self-selection strategies and applying these strategies independently.

At the end of the first-grade school year, Aggie was reassessed using *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2006). Aggie's scores on this round of assessments were as follows: Letter Identification, 53/54; Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, 37/37; Writing Vocabulary, 49; Ohio Word Test, 20/20; Concepts About Print, 23/24; Easy Text, Level 30. Aggie's scores suggested that she had a much better understanding of concepts about print. She recognized all sight words on the assessment. Most astonishing from these scores is Aggie's word accuracy level. She went from an instructional level of 5 to an easy level of 30. It was noted on her assessment that she also had strong comprehension and excellent fluency. While the support staff originally believed that Aggie would need Reading Recovery support, she exceeded expectations by second semester and was performing within the upper third of her peers.

FIGURE 32
Aggie's Progress According to the Pattern
of Implementing BOOKMATCH



Instructional strategies for Aggie needed to build on her strengths and reflect our understanding of transitional behaviors. Metacognitively, Aggie was ready within the first week to engage in self-selection experiences given basic instructional support through modeling, time to practice, guided groups, and conferences. Her eagerness to learn was refreshing and contagious.

Allowing Aggie choice during independent reading time proved to be the most effective instructional strategy for her transitional behaviors. Aggie encountered choice from the very first day of the school year when students had opportunities to just browse books that would eventually be sorted for the classroom library. Even decorating her book stick allowed for choice. Aggie took her first search for a just-right book very seriously. But the ultimate reward for Aggie was the opportunity to choose where she would read that just-right book. Aggie reacted very well to the "reward" of spreading out into a comfy chair. Later in the year we saw her escape into the world of Kevin Henkes's *Chrysanthemum* (2005). Because we recognized and supported choice as a motivator to read she practiced engaged reading, which we know was a critical factor for improving her reading ability.

Another way we supported Aggie with transitional behaviors was to allow her the time to really browse and think about her selections. She was meticulous about finding a just-right book, sometimes spending the whole independent reading time selecting a book. She was very familiar with the containers and would spend many minutes browsing, without disturbing others or losing track of what she needed to be doing. Her routine was to pull a container off the shelf, holding her book stick at the ready in case she wanted to pull anything out for further inspection. She looked at every book within one container to make sure nothing was missed. Then, she would put the container back on the shelf and place all of the selections in her book nook before going off to look in another container and repeat the process. We did not question Aggie's process within the routine and didn't panic that she was not sitting at her seat with just one book to read. It was important to allow Aggie to show her process because if we had stopped her, Aggie wouldn't have realized this was in fact productive (and efficient) behavior. The following day, Aggie would spend the independent reading time reading as many of those books selected as time would allow. She was often the last one cleaned up from independent reading because she didn't want to stop.

Aggie also benefited from the option to abandon. If she did so, we expected Aggie to talk through her reasons for abandoning using the language of BOOKMATCH. When Aggie said, "I've had these books too long so I decided I'm going to get rid of them," she was pulled for a conference as soon as possible to explain her decision. In the conference, Aggie revealed why the books did not fit her anymore. Sometimes, students lose interest, misjudge difficulty, or realize the length of the book is just too much work.

Teacher: Tell me why you want to abandon these books.

Aggie: Well, this one I read a bunch of times like almost 10 times, and this one I'm just not interested in anymore. And, well, this one was harder than I thought. I can't read all of it.

Teacher: I like that you were thinking about *H*—high-interest, because it's important to be interested in what you're reading, so you made a good decision to abandon when you weren't interested anymore. For this last book, you said it was harder than you thought. Do you mean that this book was not a good match for you because *M*—manageable text is actually too hard? The words are too hard? Can you show

me what you mean? [Aggie read from one page of the book] You're right, you made a good decision to abandon this book, too.

We reinforced the terminology of BOOKMATCH by clarifying Aggie's responses and praising Aggie when she used the terminology independently. This reminded us that readers need conversations and conferences to discuss their reasons.

The combination of our instruction and the opportunity for choice created an ideal environment for Aggie to achieve beyond expectations. Aggie was able to close the achievement gap between herself and her most capable peers. Her success impressed us as she seemed to thrive on daily independent reading and her feelings of empowerment. Transitional behaviors need nurturing and consistent, successful literacy experiences. Instructional strategies for transitional behaviors might also be of benefit with reluctant behaviors or even self-directed behaviors. The key is to recognize an appropriate instructional response to the reading behaviors.

Corey: Self-Directed Behavior

Corey began first grade showing tendencies of self-directed behaviors (see Figure 33 for Corey's profile and self-portrait). He always chose to read, even during free choice times. Corey was shy, loved science and robots, and watched over his little sister. He liked to read the *Guinness Book of World Records* for pleasure. It was obvious that he visited the local library often. He even brought books from the library to read during independent reading time. His life experiences allowed him to understand harder content and vocabulary. Corey was already reading and rereading nonfiction books before he started first grade.

Corey was not screened with the whole battery of Reading Recovery assessments because he was already at an instructional level 16 and reading fluently. Even though we weren't worried about Corey, we still took time to take running records, check comprehension, and assess sight word vocabulary. Although Corey was already a good reader, we needed to make sure that his reading continued to progress. He was pulled for guided groups, received one-on-one conferences, and had weekly learning goals. He was assessed as often as all the other students throughout the school year.

FIGURE 33
Profile and Self-Portrait for Corey

Reader Profile: Corey
Favorite Book: Any book on planets
Interests: Cooking
Pets: Two fish, Leafy and Leafah
Favorite Subject in School: Writers' Workshop
Definition of Reading: You get to read books sometimes, so you can get to know more about things.
Something I'm really good at: Playing basketball.
Someday I want to...fly a plane.
I love it when...my mom gives me big hugs.
Motivations: Teach the class about what he just learned in his book, time at the take-apart center, work with Brock.

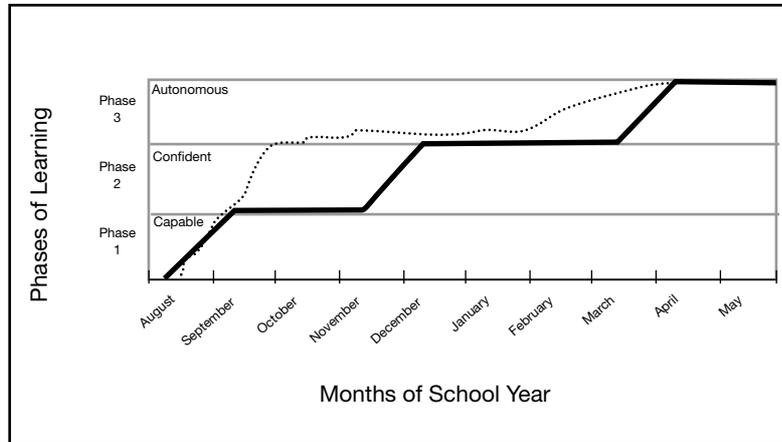


Figure 34 illustrates Corey's progress in response to the implementation of BOOKMATCH. For the first several months, Corey performed above the typical pattern of implementation. He had an initial, immediate upward slope, which is a good indication that the instruction was within his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). He moved quickly through Phase 1: Capable and Phase 2: Confident, but spent considerable time working through Phase 3: Autonomous. In Phase 3, he was able to perfect self-selection and build habits for lifelong literacy learning. Corey's results show a positive response to learning self-selection strategies and applying these strategies automatically.

At the end of the school year, exiting assessment using Rigby leveled texts (corresponding to Reading Recovery levels) showed that Corey could read accurately and comprehend at level 40. Comparatively, a reader with easy word accuracy at level 40 would be a secure third-grade reader. Corey was reading well beyond our first-grade expectations, and we imagine he will continue to perform at a high level.

Instructional strategies for Corey needed to build on his strengths and reflect our understanding of self-directed behaviors. Corey still had some learning to do. It didn't matter that he was reading at such a high level because we know that learning to read is ongoing. It's not just that you learn to read and then you're done. We wanted to make sure that he

FIGURE 34
Corey's Progress According to the Pattern
of Implementing BOOKMATCH



was not ignored because he came in reading well. He, too, needed instructional attention.

Corey appeared confident when choosing books for independent reading. He found books quickly, sat and read them, appeared engaged, and returned books to the containers. He seemed to have a good grasp of the kinds of books that were just right for him. However, conferences revealed that he had been choosing “easy” books. Our first instructional strategy was to allow Corey to choose books in his comfort zone while he was still learning the workshop routines. Eventually, when we realized that he was not moving beyond easy books, we shared our running records as a way to explain that he needed to challenge himself during independent reading. We went so far as to explain what the check marks meant and that he had all check marks on every single book that he chose. While many students were using *M*—manageable text to make sure the text was not too difficult, Corey needed to think about *M* to make sure texts weren’t too easy. Because Corey could decode most of the words in his selections, he needed to think about expanding his vocabulary. He waited for the teacher to tell him he was ready for chapter

books even though he had been ready for awhile. He initially looked at the Magic Tree House series by Mary Pope Osborne, but the Stanley series by Jeff Brown became a more comfortable starting place for him to grow. Follow-up conferences were necessary to make sure that he continued to challenge himself. Because he caught on to things so quickly, he needed weekly monitoring.

Another instructional strategy used with self-directed behaviors is to expand knowledge of genres. Primary-age readers are more often exposed to fiction texts, but Corey typically selected nonfiction. His selections were based on his interests in science and robotics. A goal for Corey was to broaden his exposure to a wide variety of genres. We knew that this exposure would serve him well and balance his reading experiences. When Corey chose *Stanley in Space* (Brown, 2003), he was thinking about his interests, but also experiencing the treatment of a science topic within fiction. Corey found he was able to understand fictional texts at a deeper level because he brought significant background knowledge to his selection.

Eventually, Corey exhausted the nonfiction books within our first-grade classroom library. He completely mastered the reading workshop routine and never had to be redirected. To keep Corey engaged and challenged, our instructional strategy was to allow him access to more books. We made arrangements with other teachers in the building to allow Corey into their rooms, with book stick in hand, to select from their libraries. Corey looked for books in the other first-grade classroom, both second-grade classrooms, and in a third-grade classroom during the second half of the year. Corey took full advantage of this opportunity and rose to the level of responsibility with which we had empowered him. Allowing Corey access to more books and books with higher complexity was important for his growth as a reader. Of course, we continued to monitor his selections for *T*—topic appropriateness during conferences.

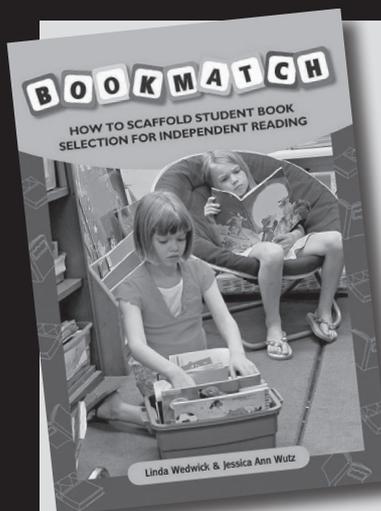
What would have happened to Corey if he had been limited to just our classroom library? He likely would have become bored, less engaged, and unproductive. We probably would have had to redirect him often. Instead, we supported his self-directed behaviors. Self-directed behaviors need attention too, but in a more targeted way because students who exhibit these behaviors are secure in their own abilities. In other words, they know what they can do, and such students can be taught in a more in-depth, sophisticated manner.

We know that Ronnie may still exhibit reluctant behaviors as he moves to the next grade, but we are confident that in a similar environment, he will continue to move along the continuum. Next year, when Ronnie's second-grade teacher says, "It's independent reading time," Ronnie will know exactly what to do. He'll be able to feel success right away. We know that Aggie's transitional behaviors remained until the end of the year, but we are confident that she will enter second grade as a self-directed reader. We know that Corey left first grade a very strong reader with self-directed behaviors. As a 7-year-old, Corey should challenge himself but consider the topic appropriateness of his selections. Based on what we saw in first grade, Corey will thrive when reading content texts in the upper grades.

Reflection Point

Who do the students in this chapter remind you of? How do you see BOOKMATCH supporting students like Ronnie, Aggie, and Corey in your classroom?

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BOOKMATCH

How to Scaffold Student Book Selection for Independent Reading

Linda Wedwick and Jessica Ann Wutz

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