

# Matching Students to Text: The Targeted Reader

*Targeted reading is self-reinforcing,  
pleasurable and productive*

Teachers share two intuitions:

- Texts can be ordered according to the difficulty each presents for a reader.
- Readers can be assessed according to the success each will have with any particular text.

Teachers make use of these two premises to match readers to text. Knowing a lot about text is helpful because "text matters" (Hiebert, 1999). But ordering or leveling text is only half the equation. We must also assess the level of the readers. These two activities are necessary so that the right books can be matched to the right reader at the right time. When teachers achieve this match intuitively, they are rewarded with students choosing to read more.

When texts are selected that align with all facets of the reading process, the reader is truly "targeted." The targeted reader benefits from a caring adult (teacher, library media specialist, parent) who takes the time to understand the reader not just in the terms of reading level, but also in the terms of interests, motivation, developmental maturity, prior knowledge, purpose for reading, and available scaffolding support. An ideal or "targeted" context for reading practice and deepening comprehension can be created when this caring adult helps a student to select appropriate reading material (Five, 1986). The objective reality is that targeted readers comprehend a high percentage of the passages they read. The subjective reality is that they report confidence, capability, and control when reading. Finally, targeted readers choose to read, and thus read more and read better. Targeted reading is self-reinforcing, pleasurable, and productive. Poorly targeted reading can be discouraging or worse; it can produce frustrated students who do not choose to read or like to read.

The best of my own teachers were gifted diagnosticians who seemed to have a second sight about the next chapter or book I should read. They built upon my strengths with just the right mix of success and failure, soaring and stumbling, clarity and confusion. As a learner I felt centered and on target. However, it can take decades for teachers to polish intuition, to learn a 200-book classroom text collection from the lowest level book to the highest, and to refine field-based techniques for leveling readers. And because the product of these thousands of hours of professional practice is a private, non-exchangeable metric for simultaneously ordering books and assessing readers, the profession at large does not advance.

## **The Lexile Framework®**

The Lexile Framework is a system for measuring texts and readers in the same metric. When a reader's Lexile measure and a book's Lexile measure are both known, a forecast can be made about the success that the reader will have with that book. Tens of thousands

of books now have Lexile measures (www.lexile.com), and tests such as the Scholastic Reading Inventory, or SRI, (print and electronic versions), Stanford 9, North Carolina End of Grade Test, the forthcoming Metropolitan 8, and other well-known reading achievement tests have been linked to the Lexile Framework. Such links make it possible for the users of these tests to request equivalent Lexile measures for any specific score. The teacher, librarian, or parent can then look up the reader's Lexile measure on the web site and build a customized, targeted reading list for that reader. Former Assistant Superintendent of Schools in North Carolina, Dr. Suzanne Triplett, states:

The Lexile Framework manifests what good teachers try to do anyway, which is to judge where a student is and find material that will challenge him adequately without being so difficult that he loses his motivation. The problem is that as children get into the latter stages of elementary school, the variance in texts and among students increases dramatically. The choice of material expands and the range of reading skills widens, so it becomes much harder for teachers to make accurate judgment about where children are and what materials are good choices for them. By using the Lexile Framework, schools can take the guesswork out of this equation, and operationalize the selection of developmentally-appropriate material for their students.

Empowerment has become a hackneyed word, but that's the key advantage of the Lexile Framework—it gives students, parents, teachers, and administrators accurate information that empowers them. With a Lexile measure, you know precisely where a student stands in terms of an absolute scale of reading comprehension, and you know exactly what steps that student needs to take to achieve higher levels of reading performance.

The Lexile Framework is a tool that can be combined with other tools, techniques, and strategies to optimize instruction. The Lexile Framework offers an open standard and a public, exchangeable metric for measuring text and readers.

### **The Lexile Map**

[The Lexile Map](#) is a visual display of the reading continuum ranging from early first-grade texts (100L) to advanced graduate school texts (1200L). The Lexile Map combines nouns (books) with numbers (Lexile measure). Every book ever written in English has a theoretical location on this Map. Once measured, a book takes a unique and invariant position in relation to every other book. In this sense, a Lexile measure is absolute in that it is independent of other books that might be measured or reader performances that might be observed. Readers can be visualized as "in motion," moving up the Lexile Map, each on an individual growth trajectory as he or she encounters various new and enriching texts. If we were to plot a "poor" reader's growth trajectory, we would find that a high proportion of the assigned reading registers above the growth trajectory—sometimes far above (250L+). In contrast, for a "good" reader, we find a high proportion of assigned reading falling below the growth trajectory—often far below. The consequence is that the "poor" readers get reinforced in the belief that they can't read for meaning and the "good" readers receive reinforcement that they can. There are, in an absolute sense, no "good" or "poor" readers. Comprehension is relative; it is a simple

function of the match between reader and text. We can control the text level and thereby gain control over the motivational consequences of reading "on" and "off" target.

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