Kidwatching
Yetta M. Goodman and Wendy Hood

Miscues and Aaron's Reading

Aaron, a seven-year-old just starting sec-
tond grade, is reading The New Baby Calf by Edith Newlin Chase and illustrated by Barbara Reid (1984) to his three-year-
old brother cuddled with him on the sofa. The book is one Aaron has never seen or heard. He reads the title on both the book jacket and the title page, taking in the picture as he reads.

The first page (p. 4) of the written text is:

Aaron reads somewhat slowly with a steady voice.

Buttercup the cow had a new baby calf.
A fine baby calf.
A strong baby calf.

Not strong like his mother.
But for a calf, for this baby calf was so new.

We are observing Aaron in a comfortable home setting that provides a good opportunity for miscue analysis. This procedure involves lis-
tening to the unaided oral reading of a complete story or article, asking readers to reflect and retell following their reading, and analyzing the responses they make to the text (Goodman, Watson, and Burke, 1988). The unexpected responses readers make are known as miscues.

In miscue analysis procedures, instead of comparing the text and the reader as we did above, a typscript of the text is used so that the observer can record all the reader's miscues and rereadings while the reader reads the original text. The reading is tape-recorded to provide opportunities to check the typescript markings and to maintain a permanent record for thror-
ough analysis later. In miscue analysis, we don't examine a few miscues at random; we analyze a minimum of 25 consecutive miscues in order to discover the quality of the miscue, the knowl-
edge the reader has about the language cueing systems, the reader's concern for maintaining the grammatical structure and the meaningfulness of the text, and how the reader changes strategies throughout the reading.

The next few pages of Aaron's marked typescript follow.

I Used to Be...But Not Now...!

I used to point out every mistake, But now I misinterpret the miscues and we learn from them.

Grace Lythgen

The New Baby Calf has 31 pages with the printed text on the left hand page and fine illus-
trations of farm life on the right. Whenever he turned a page, Aaron's eyes always went to the illustration first. He examined the picture quickly and then read from the printed text starting at the top left of the page and returning to the beginning of the next line. He returned to the illustrations when he was reading, always using them selectively. He seemed to know that the pictures would be helpful. He never used them when he was reading function words such as the, with, that. In fact, Aaron han-
dles high frequency words well. With words such as very (p. 12), he seemed to know that illustrations were of no help, so he reread the sentence twice, omitting the intensifier each time. He used the pictures for help with nouns such as farmer (p. 14). The miscues in this sec-
dion are discussed later.

Aaron's miscue analysis provides wealth of information about his reading. It is obvious by the tone of Aaron's voice, his continuous read-
ing, and his use of the illustrations, that he knows he's reading a story. His predicting strate-
gies are evident when he substitutes new born, a common interpretation with calf (p. 1). Baby is usually a noun and may not be as pre-
dictable in this structure. He does read baby as expected in the last sentence (p. 4), substitutes born again (p. 6), and then reads baby as expected the next eight times it occurs.

Rarely does Aaron self-correct his predictable miscues that result in acceptable sentences. But Aaron responds differently when his predictions are unacceptable. These different responses show his ability to use his confirming strategies to self-correct appropriately.

He predicts fall down (p. 14) but self-corrects immediately. The example (p. 24), she had every-
things shows an appropriate predication, but when it doesn't fit with the following sentence portion, he makes four more attempts, self-correcting to the expected response. He reads all the way to the end of the sentence, rereads to the point of the miscue, and in so doing corrects (p. 24).

Aaron often reads to the end of the sentence with an unacceptable miscue before he decides to reread and self-correct, indicating that he is not yet confident enough to self-correct more quickly and needs the additional context to confirm or disconfirm his miscues. His confirm-
ing and self-correcting strategies can also be seen on page 8. He initially reads licked as expected, then abandons his correct response (AC) and substitutes liked for licked. He again reads to the end of the sentence before he returns to self-correct licked although he omits warm and substitutes soft for strong. In the next sentence he reads warm but with a questioning intonation, indicating that he is not quite sure of the phrase soft warm tongue.

Examining the same word across the text adds further to our understanding of Aaron's reading processes. This analysis reveals his knowledge of the graphophonic system in his sounding-out strategies for strong on pages 4 and 6 (is, stong, stam, sawg). He initially uses st to blend when he encounters the graphophonic model, but when this doesn't work he moves to using other graphophonic information. Strong has an unusual graphophonic pattern, being the middle of five consonants. In addition, Aaron's problem is compounded by the syntactic and semantic complexities of the context. Aaron uses his graphophonic cue, but his meaning is much more complex syntactically (tongues and babies can indeed be strong but walks cannot). He has had time to build more context about the growing independence of the calf and is now more familiar with the poetic form and rhythm of the language that helps him make more competent predictions.

I used to go on long walks once a week and I say strong so he could run and kick. Aaron simply omits it here, and it results in an acceptable sen-
tence. Aaron is comfortable enough with maintaining the flow of the story, especially adja-
ces such as strong (p. 6 and p. 28) and skinny (p. 14), which are not necessary to retain the structure of the sentence. But he does not omit often, only six times in a 240-word story.

By analyzing how readers respond to the same word in different linguistic contexts throughout a text, it becomes obvious that readers do not treat words that look and sound alike the same in different story contexts. Often readers produce the word as expected in one reading and not know it in another. This shows the impact of all the language cueing systems on individual words. Words are not the same simply because they look alike and sound alike. Strong without have little relation to strong warm tongues, which are in turn different than a strong baby calf, or than growing strong. Adults may be able to show some semantic relationships between the meanings of the words, but actually these words repre-
sent different meanings and concepts in each context: size and consistency of animal tongues, moving distance, and growing size.

In summary, Aaron shows his ability to use all the language cueing systems at the same time—the graphophonic, the semantic, and the
Knowing Students as Readers: Miscue Analysis

Book Note

Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read, 3d ed.

Frank Smith
1986; 264 pp.; $19.95
Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

After reading this book you may understand more about the reading process than you bargained for, but rest assured, you will never again be able to assign a language-splintering skill sheet without Smith’s deftly dismantles one of the logic behind the popular traditional approaches to teaching reading, and in uncompromising detail explains what reading is and what teachers can do to support it. Interwoven throughout is his sociopsycholinguistic theory of learning.

Book Note

Reading Process and Practice: From Socio-Psycholinguistics to Whole Language

Constance Weaver
1988; 512 pp.; $27.50
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

During the last year the faculty of Osborn School in Redwood City, Califor- nia, has been conducting a study group around one of the best com-

pendiums of whole language theory and practice currently available—Constance Weaver's Reading Process and Practice. The book lends itself beautifully as a group study, it's big and meaty and has thought-provoking exercises throughout. Each chapter ends with study guide questions as well as a very helpful bibliography for further reading. Much more than a test on reading, it includes material that embraces the entire elementary school spectrum, including developmental literacy, content area reading, and special education. An added bonus is a very complete chapter by Dorothy Watson and Paul Crowley, "How Can We Implement a Whole Language Approach?", which served as the basis of an all-day study session at Fair Oaks School.

The primary role of reading teachers can be summed up in very few words—to ensure that the children have adequate demonstrations of reading being used for evident meaningful purposes, and to help children to fulfill such purposes themselves. Where children see little relevance in reading, then teachers must provide a model. Where children find little interest in reading, then researchers must create more interesting situations. No one ever taught a child to read who was not interested in reading, and children cannot be told to be interested.

Failure to learn is explained in terms of fact rather than fact. The specialized insights of students of the brain are important in many teachers, but they do not yet explain reading or reading problems. The relating of subtle differences in learning, behavior, attitude, and personality to great differences in the architecture of the brain should not become a new phenomenon, as unscientific as mak- ing judgments about people's character from the bumps on their skull.

The Funny Side

The Sinless Señor

We bring our own experience to bear on every reading transaction. Gregg Jennings, son of a minister, proved this point.

Our family visited some friends several years ago and they took us out to a Mexican restaurant to eat. Our son, Gregg, who was seven years old, was given directions to the restroom.

He came back quickly and confessed that he could not tell which was the boys’ and which was the girls’. I thought this was strange, but being engrossed in conversation, I did not consider the problem. For Gregg’s inability to read what was on the door of the restroom.

Our friends gave him specific instructions this time, relating that the boys’ room was down the hall on the left. We were ready to leave, so while Gregg was gone, we walked toward the cashier to pay.

Gregg came back and stood beside me. He said nothing and seemed to have no particu-
lar concern. In my typical motherly chitchat, I whispered, "Do you feel better?" Gregg shook his head. "I couldn’t go, Mom.”

"You couldn’t go?” I was shocked, remembering how anxious he had been pre-vio-
ously. "Why couldn’t you go?”

"Mom, the door said ‘Sinners’, and I was afraid to go in,” Gregg replied.

We all got a good laugh and Gregg received his first Spanish lesson as we dis-

The Whole Language Catalog: Language

WHOLE LANGUAGE CAMERA

Second-graders at Alicia Ayre's classroom relax with a good book, Oakland, CA.

Consultation, Palo Alto, CA.

WHOLE LANGUAGE CAMERA

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