



# Kidwatching

## Yetta M. Goodman and Wendy Hood

### Miscues and Aaron's Reading

**A**aron, a seven-year-old just starting second 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. Buttercup the cow had a new born calf, a fine born calf, a st . . . stug . . . starn . . . soft baby calf.

page 6  
Not strong like his mother, But strong for a calf, for this baby calf was so new.  
Not sarn . . . sarg . . . like his mother, But . . . for a calf, for this born calf was so new.

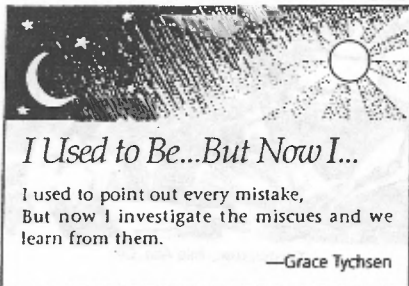
We are observing Aaron in a comfortable home setting that provides a good opportunity for miscue analysis. This procedure involves listening to the unaided oral reading of a complete story or article, asking readers to reflect and retell following their reading, and analyzing the responses they make 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 typescript 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 thorough 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 knowledge 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.

page 8 Buttercup <sup>(C) AC</sup>licked him with her <sup>soft</sup>strong warm tongue. Buttercup <sup>(C) R</sup>was had washed him with her <sup>soft</sup>strong warm tongue.

page 10 And the new baby calf liked that!



page 12 The new baby calf took

a <sup>(UL)</sup>tiny little walk, a <sup>tiny</sup>teeny little walk, a <sup>teeny</sup>tiny little walk.

page 14 Hi <sup>sk-sk-</sup>skinny legs wobbled

when he took that little walk, and the new baby calf <sup>(C) fall</sup>fell down.

*The New Baby Calf* has 31 pages with the printed text on the left hand page and fine illustrations 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 when the pictures would be helpful. He never used them when he was reading function words such as *the, with, that, had*. In fact, Aaron handles 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. 24). The miscues in this sentence are discussed later.

page 24 <sup>(C) 3</sup>everything <sup>(C) 2</sup>anything <sup>(C) 1</sup>everything She had enough for him, <sup>from</sup>and for the farmer too.

Aaron's miscue analysis provides a wealth of information about his reading. It is obvious by the tone of Aaron's voice, his continuous reading, and his use of the illustrations, that he knows he's reading a story. His predicting strategies are evident when he substitutes *new born*, a common idiom, that fits well with *calf* (p. 4). *Baby* is usually a noun and may not be as predictable 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 everything* shows an appropriate predication, but when it doesn't fit with the following sentence portion, he makes four more attempts, finally 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 *farmer* as well.

Aaron often reads to the end of the sentence with an unacceptable miscue before he decides to reread and self-correct. It seems that he is not yet confident enough to self-correct more quickly and needs the additional context to confirm or disconfirm his miscues. His confirming 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 *licked* 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 to Aaron's reading profile. Aaron reveals his knowledge of the graphophonic system in his sounding-out strategies for *strong* on pages 4 and 6 (*st . . . stug, sam, sarg*). He initially uses the *st* blend with the appropriate lax vowel, but when this doesn't work he moves to using other graphophonic information. *Strong* has an unusual English spelling with one vowel in 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 system selectively.

When he is unsuccessful using his sounding-out strategies (p. 4), he looks at the illustration quickly, and reads *soft baby calf* making use of graphophonic cues and producing a meaningful structure. The second time the word *strong* occurs (p. 6), Aaron produces two nonwords that retain sound and graphic similarity to the text (both are possible pronunciations in English). The next time *strong* occurs (p. 6), Aaron hesitates momentarily, omits it, and continues reading, leaving an unacceptable sentence. Then on page 8, without hesitation, Aaron substitutes *soft* for *strong* both times. Whenever he can, Aaron produces a real word substitution that results in an acceptable and meaningful sentence like the substitutions of *soft baby calf* (p. 4) and *soft tongue* (p. 8). Both these substitutions fit the story and allow him to continue building his meaning.

It may be that Aaron's concepts of babies and tongues interfere with his ability to infer that babies and tongues can be strong, and, therefore, he is unable to predict as expected in these contexts. On page 20, when the baby calf takes a little walk, the text says: *A little longer walk, a little stronger walk*. Aaron has no problem predicting *A little stronger walk*, even though this 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. *Strong* occurs only once more in the story (p. 28): *his legs grew strong so he could run and kick*. Aaron simply omits it here, and it results in an acceptable sentence. Aaron is comfortable omitting words to maintain the flow of the story, especially adjectives 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 context and seem to 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. *Stronger* walks 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 represent different meanings and concepts in each context: size and consistency of animal tongues, moving distances, and growing legs.

In summary, Aaron shows his ability to use all the language cueing systems at the same time—the graphophonic, the semantic, and the

syntactic—in order to construct the meaning of the text. He selects cues when he needs them, makes inferences about text meanings, and predicts and confirms continually. He changes his strategies when he needs to. He has learned, during the reading of this story, to broaden his strategies and become a more confident and flexible reader. If he can't produce something meaningful that fits the grammatical structure, he omits. If the same word occurs in a more predictable context, he is able, by the end, to use the new cues to read words that he could not at the beginning.

Prior to reading this book, Aaron had been reluctant to read past any word he was unsure of. His previous strategies were either to sound the word out until he was satisfied or to close the book.

We know much more about Aaron's reading of this story, although we don't have room to discuss it all. We not only analyzed all the miscues he made, but we also know that in his retelling, he understood the story line, reconstructed most of the events, and related the warm and caring mood.

Aaron's miscue profile allows us to plan appropriate reading experiences for him. (Goodman and Burke, 1984.) Following the reading and retelling, with his little brother safely tucked in bed, we discussed Aaron's reading with him. We focused on his strongest strategies. We talked about why omitting is sometimes a good strategy. He said it helps him "keep the story going." Looking at some of his substitutions, we also talked about reading through to the end of a sentence and substituting a "best guess" that makes sense. Aaron needs to continue reading stories that he enjoys. As his teachers, we might read *The New Baby Calf* to him at this point, have him read it silently, and then read it to the whole class. He might want to direct a puppet show about the story. Since Aaron's mother is going to have another baby soon, Aaron might write a story about the things he and his younger brother will do with the new baby. When Aaron knows the story very well and if he continues to be interested in it, the teacher might place small squares over some of the adjectives like *strong*, *born*, and *skinny* and ask Aaron (perhaps with some other students) to write on the squares other words that would be acceptable in those places. The teacher would select only some of these activities, taking into consideration Aaron's interests.

Initially, as teachers use miscue analysis, they follow the procedures as presented in the RMI. Eventually, as teachers become comfortable using miscue analysis, they internalize the miscue process and begin to understand reading in a new way. Miscue analysis not only provides a profile of the reader, but it also helps teachers develop new insights into the reading process.

As teachers work with miscue analysis, there are two common responses. Teachers become excited about what they are learning about reading and their students. Reading specialists say that they have never known as much about their students as they know when they do miscue analysis. The second common response is "I will never be able to listen to a student read in the same way again."

→ See: Goodman, p. 98; Literature Reference List, p. 429; Marek, p. 105; Rigg, p. 239.

**References**

Chase, E. N. 1984. *The new baby calf*. New York: Scholastic.  
 Goodman, Y., and C. Burke. 1984. *Reading strategies focus on comprehension*. New York: Richard C. Owen.  
 Goodman, Y., D. Watson, and C. Burke. 1988. *Reading miscue inventory: Alternative procedures*. New York: Richard C. Owen

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**Book Note**

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



Frank Smith  
 1986; 264 pp.; \$19.95  
 Hillsdale, 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 guilt. Smith deftly dismantles 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.

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“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.” (p. 182)

“Failure to learn is explained in terms of fad rather than fact. The specialized insights of students of the brain are important in many respects, but they do not yet explain reading or reading problems. The relating of subtle differences in learning, behavior, attitude, and personality to gross differences in the architecture of the brain should not become a new phrenology, as unscientific as making judgments about people's character from the bumps on their skull.” (p. 68)

**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 Orion School in Redwood City, California, has been conducting a study group around one of the best compendiums of whole language theory and practice currently available—Constance Weaver's *Reading Process and Practice*. The book lends itself beautifully to 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 text 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.

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**The Funny Side**

**The Sinless Señor**

*We bring our own experience to bear on every reading transaction. Gregg Jennings, son of a minister, proves 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 reason 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 particular 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 previously. "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 discussed the meaning of *Señores*.

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**WHOLE LANGUAGE CAMERA**



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

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Consultation, Palo Alto, CA