

Through the Miscue Window: Richard J. Meyer

Looking for Patterns

Nellie is a first-grader in Ms. M's whole language classroom. In a previous article I discussed her teacher's use of miscue analysis and an interpretation of some of her miscues. This is a final look at her miscues as she reads the last few pages of *Days With Frog and Toad* to Ms. M.

Nellie was predicting, yet as she continued to the next line she saw *said*. The meaning of the sentence would not be acceptable nor sound like language if she continued, so she regressed to where things fell apart. Things fall apart when meaning is lost to the reader. We intuit this from what she is doing with the text and from the

Expected Response (text)	Observed Response (Nellie)
28. "We must make a second try,"	"We must make a secret try,"
29. said Frog.	said Frog.
30. "Wave the kite over your head.	"Wave the kite over your head.
31. Perhaps that will make it fly."	Press that will make it fly"
32. Toad ran back across the meadow.	Toad ran back ask the meadow
33. He waved the kite over his head.	He waved the kite over his head.
34. The kite went up in the air	The kite went up in the air
35. and fell down with a thud.	and fell down with a thump.
36. "What a joke!" said the robins.	"What a joke!" said the robins
37. "That kite will never	"That kite will never
38. get off the ground."	get off the ground."

decisions she makes. In her silence, at the pause, her eyes comb the text (sampling) to search out the cause of her disconfirmation. She renegotiates with the text and arrives at something that makes good sense as it fits with her construction of meaning. She uses the three language-cueing systems, and the reading strategies of prediction and confirmation that make up the psycholinguistic

In line 26, Nellie reads *a secret try* for a *second try*. Ms. M can infer (and she confirms, these inferences with Nellie during the retelling that follows the reading) that Nellie believes that Frog and Toad are embarrassed because the robins are making fun of the unsuccessful flight of the kite. If that is the case, a secret attempt at flying the kite would avoid further embarrassment. This demonstrates Nellie's ongoing understanding of the story—an emerging understanding that might be different from her understanding at the end of the selection. Nellie's comprehension is reflected in the miscues she makes. Notice that her substitution also has graphic similarity to *second* (*secret* looks like *second*) and the two words sound alike, especially their initial and medial positions.

The miscue in line 31 shows some graphic similarity: *perhaps* and *press* look somewhat alike. There is also some sound similarity in that *pr* in *press* sounds like *per* in *perhaps*. The choice of the word *press* for *perhaps*, however, is a low quality miscue because it does not fit syntactically. Ms. M is reminded of the complexity of adverbs. A proficient reader might have regressed to substitute something with meaning or might have gone ahead, as Nellie did, in search of meaning. We do not judge proficiency by a few miscues. In fact, 25 miscues are considered a minimum number to get an idea of how a reader is processing the text.

In line 32, Nellie substitutes *ask* for *across*. Earlier in the story she substituted the nonword *askr* for *across*. Ms. M believes that following one word through a text—a word that has been miscued—offers insight into the reader's strategies. Nellie seems to consistently and deliberately use a placeholder word at the expense of meaning to keep herself going. Ms. M keeps this in mind as she builds strategy lessons for this developing reader.

Later on in the story the robins complain that the kite is not good:

Expected Response (text)	Observed Response (Nellie)
"That kite is junk," said the robins.	"That kite is just . . . just . . . (she pauses). That kite is junk, said the robins."

nature of reading.

Reading is meaning-based first, and it must sound like language. The overuse of individual letters and sounds is the least efficient and least reliable way to get at meaning. Nellie's miscues across the two articles show us that she relies on meaning and language-sense foremost in her reading. It is when things truly seem to fall apart that she resorts to dealing with individual letters and sounds. Interestingly, at times she substitutes nonwords or words that do not fit semantically. In the language-rich environment of her classroom, Ms. M will continue to model and involve the children in strategy lessons that show that reading is a meaning-making process.

The text teaches. Nellie has learned from the text. This is an integral part of the nature of the transaction. Nellie's belief in the text demands that it make sense. Ms. M shows this in strategy lessons and by the way she reads. Ms. M also demonstrates her awareness of strengths in Nellie and the text by letting them rely on each other as much as possible, rarely interfering in that relationship.

We can see the same processes at work with ourselves. Find a type of reading you don't usually do, such as Shakespeare, and tape yourself reading. Stop and examine what happens when it falls apart. What semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic strategies do use and when?

Ms. M did a self-study of her own reading that began with her earliest recollections of herself as a reader. She examined how she believed she was taught to read and how she teaches reading today. Her study continues in her classroom each day as she extends her learning as a function of her students' developing reading. Her classroom is a place for learners and miscue analysis is an important window on that learning.

→ See: Goodman, p. 20; Meyer, p. 60.

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