



Through the Miscue Window: Yetta M. Goodman

What I Know About Reading, I've Learned from Children

Evaluating readers' miscues shows not only how to evaluate readers but how to revalue the reading process at the same time. What follows are some general ideas about the reading process revealed through miscue analysis that explains the title of this article.

Miscues Related to Prediction

Miscues reveal that readers predict. They show that the reader is building meaning and is anticipating what will happen next. Not only does the reader predict subsequent meaning but alternate possible grammatical structures. I believe that is why miscues often occur at pivotal points in sentences. One such example is a common substitution miscue produced by children in the early grades—*said* for *and* and *and* for *said*. These words have graphic similarity, but they both can occur following an independent clause. When such miscues result in sentence structures which are acceptable, they are evidence of how sophisticated readers can be in building meaning for a text.

Text: "And a big hungry mouth with sharp teeth and a forked tongue!" said Antone.

Reader: And a big hungry mouth with strong teeth and a forked tooth and Antone.

Older readers' miscues also show prediction at points in the sentence where more than one grammatical structure can follow. In the examples below, the language that follows the miscue is not acceptable, so the readers regress (noted by the ellipses . . .) and correct.

Text: He was sliding the needle slowly but so firmly

10th-grade reader: He was sliding the needle slowly so that . . . so firmly

10th-grade reader: He was sliding the needle slowly and it was . . . but so firmly

Text: "I didn't mean to, but they were so beautiful."

7th-grade reader: "I didn't mean to, but then . . . they were so . . ."

The examples show the readers often correct selectively. They tend to correct those prediction miscues that could be possible but do not fit with the remainder of the sentence in an acceptable manner.

Confirmation Strategies

Readers often show their concern for constructing meaning as they read through the use of confirmation strategies. Confirmation strategies show that readers are asking themselves "Does this sound like language to me?" and "Does this make sense to me?" If it does make sense, readers tend not to correct. Their miscues are confirmed by the subsequent text, and they continue reading. Such miscues are common for proficient readers. The following was produced by a seventh grade reader and not corrected. It makes sense within the whole story.

Text: "You do not steal nor lie. Do something about this right now." It was like his own voice speaking to him.

Reader: "You do not steal or lie. Do something about this now." It was like the owner's voice speaking to him.

If a sentence is hard to predict or has too many new concepts and the reader produces too many miscues in the sentence, correction will

probably not take place. The reader may be saying: "The going is getting rough for a while, I'll keep going and maybe things will get better later on."

Text: The band of sheep that had been huddled around the stoic burros was a mass of bleating movement.

Reader: The band of sheep had been huddled around the \$toctic bureaus had a mass of bleating move . . . movement.

Some readers show by their correction strategies that they are overly concerned with accurate surface reading. Such readers will produce high quality miscues such as *can't* for *can not* but then correct immediately. Other readers persevere at a word or phrase which may have no meaning to them. They believe reading is sounding out, and they keep at it even though it is an ineffective strategy. We need to help readers know when correction strategies are helpful to comprehension and when they are ineffective and disruptive to meaning.

Using Context to Build Meaning

Just because a reader miscues on a word or phrase does not always mean that it is unknown to the reader. Readers can use their comprehending strategies as they continue to read to decide what a word or phrase is which they may not have recognized at an earlier point in their reading. Or readers build a concept for a word or phrase that was unknown and which they may still not be able to pronounce appropriately. Reading is an active, receptive, not a productive process. It is not necessary to be able to pronounce words to know what they mean. If most of the reading material is within the readers' understanding, they can use the many cues in the story or article to build an appropriate concept for an unknown or unfamiliar word.

The following example is from Alice, a fourth-grade reader. The miscue transcript is from a section of the story she read which shows her attempt to work at the word *transom* as many as three times in some cases. She finally pronounces it but splits the two syllables with equal stress on each as she does. The second example is a section of her retelling of the story in which she deals with the concept for which she was unable to produce an appropriate label in her oral reading.

look up and saw
looked at
look

Freddie, trying to think, looked up at the

closed

small window above the closet door. He had an idea. "Listen, Elizabeth," he called. "I'll fix a light and drop it

tran. som

train

\$tran

to you through the transom."

He tied a string around the end of the ruler and hurried back upstairs. Pulling the kitchen step ladder out into the hall and climbing up on it,

\$trep

he found the transom within easy reach. "Elizabeth," he called. "I'm going to drop this light down to you through

\$trans

the transom. Catch it by the ruler and let me know when you can reach it.

Retelling

Reader: He had to use . . . he had to use string to put it down the window so that she could . . . so she could have some light.

Teacher: How did he get the light in there if he couldn't open the door?

Reader: He got it through the window above the closet door.

Teacher: Oh. . . . What's that window called up over the closet door? Do you know? Did it say in the book what it's called?

Reader: Ah ha (yes).

Teacher: And what happened when it said it in the book?

Reader: I didn't know the word.

Teacher: Have you ever seen a window like that?

Reader: Yeah! There's one right over there. (Points to transom above the classroom door.)

The exciting thing about miscue analysis is, once they begin to observe miscues and understand what they reveal, teachers listen to readers with a new respect and understanding. Teachers at all levels of reading can support the language strengths readers have if they:

1. Provide for a lot of time for silent reading and wide range of reading materials.
2. Encourage risk-taking in reading. Help students realize that predicting in reading to hypothesize what the next word, grammatical structure or idea is a legitimate reading strategy used by all proficient readers.
3. Help readers appreciate the quality of their miscues.
4. Focus on meaning. Everything to be read *must* make sense to the reader.

→ See: Costello, p. 152; Goodman, pp. 20, 53, 58, 59, 72, 148; Meyer, p. 60; Weaver, p. 149.

WHOLE LANGUAGE CAMERA



I was showing the book *Homecoming*, by Cynthia Voigt, to Tamera and Daina and trying to get them to read it because I really loved it when I read it. Daina Carpenter, Heather Johnson, and Tamera Hickerson, Coronado Elementary School, Catalina, AZ.