In The PEM 3.1 Eve Bearne introduced a form of miscue analysis that could be used as an effective tool for assessing children’s writing. In her second article, she offers a case study that demonstrates exactly how she uses the techniques she has described.

Anna was 6 years 4 months when I arranged for her and her fellow pupil William to do some writing to which I would apply my miscue analysis techniques. In this article, it is Anna’s writing that I shall be looking at.

Background notes on Anna
Both Anna and William knew what they wanted to write about without any intervention from me. Anna told me straight away that she wanted to write about princesses. I explained to both of them that I couldn’t give spellings and they were perfectly happy about that, but didn’t take up my suggestion about circling words they weren’t sure of.

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Writing behaviour
Anna settled straight away and talked to herself throughout the writing. She was at some times sub vocalising the story as she wrote it, but also commenting on what she was doing — ‘oopsie . . .’. During the writing, she smiled at me and seemed very much at ease in the situation. She was able to deal comfortably with William’s excitement and questions about what she was writing. When she read her piece aloud for me, she was hesitant in some places (see below). She liked the mermaid bit best ‘because she comes and gives you a wish’. When I asked her if she usually writes stories like this, she said: ‘Mmmm mostly fairy stories about fairies and stuff. When I asked about the piece of writing she was most pleased with, she had no hesitation: ‘The Treasure Box — it’s one I’ve done pages and pages of — lots of writing . . . There’s three girls and they’re all poor and they go on a journey and they go underneath the sea and find the treasure box and they come rich’. She writes it mostly at home, although she did bring it into school once.

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The process of writing
Anna re-read her title when she had written it. She wrote one line, then drew the first of the small pictures. As she continued to write, she was re-reading. Occasionally, she would gaze upwards, then get back to writing with gusto. At one point she repeated ‘shut the door’ several times (she later altered the spelling of ‘door’), gazed into mid space, then got back to the writing. After about 10 minutes, I asked her if she had nearly finished and she said, ‘I’m getting to an exciting bit’. After about 12 minutes, she drew another picture and re-read her work. She then added another sentence and repeated it to herself. Anna had finished before William, so I asked her to re-read and she altered a word round about line 5 (’shut’). She read the piece aloud quietly to herself. When she read her story aloud to me, she read without much expression and rather haltingly. I have put in some marks to indicate how she read, and supplied punctuation where her reading suggested a pause. She had told me she wasn’t sure that she knew all the words.

Anna’s Story:
The Princess and the Unicorn
One day a princess said to the king (I s/c) Am I old enough to go into the woods yes said the king you are see she put her coat and shut the door and crossed the road and went down the little passage that led to the little wood, suddenly she heard a rattle she saw a white thing it was a unicorn wow she said she got on it she rode it to the king. Here . . . The king was cross he sent her away so he could have the horse she ran to the pond and wished for the mermaid and the mermaid came at (repeated ‘at’) the (’what’s that?’ I supplied ‘out of the water’) out of the water she said (I wish s/c) I will make your father send you back.

The end.

I asked both of the children about whether they had pictures or words in their head when they wrote, and Anna said: ‘When I think about it, I just have it in my head and I start writing it’.
She likes reading stories and poems to herself and prefers it when her dad reads to her because he reads more than her mum. ‘In Charlie and the Chocolate Factory if I ask Mummy she only does one chapter but if I ask Daddy he does two or three.’

◆ Purpose/intention
To my questions, ‘How did you know how to write the story like that? — to write ‘one day’ . . .? Anna replied, ‘I just usually put ‘one day’ but Daddy usually puts ‘once upon a time’ — he thinks once upon a time is better’.

◆ Audience/readership
When I asked, ‘Who do you think is going to read this?’, Anna replied, ‘Mum, Dad . . .’ She said that when Dad reads her stories he tells her which bits he likes best.

Summary of analysis of Anna’s writing
◆ Writing behaviour
How does this child see herself/himself as a writer?
Here is a child who emphatically sees herself as a writer. She is comfortable with the act of writing and knows the pleasure to be gained from writing lengthy stories. She also knows what she likes about her own work and something about the process going on in her own head as she writes. Much of this is based on her own experience of stories being told and read to her at home and at school.

Possible future action: It is interesting that Anna was not confident that she would ‘know all the words’ when she read her work aloud — even though she had generated the story herself I think that more practice at reading her own stones aloud might help, perhaps in pairs with a reading partner. (This would also help with punctuation.) Otherwise, since she is so assured, her teacher can build on this to prompt her to be even more adventurous (see below, ‘Purpose/intention’).

◆ The process of writing
What does the writer’s approach tell you about her/his fluency and independence in writing?
Anna has a well-developed strategy for re-reading to ensure that she’s keeping the flow of her story. Her comments indicate that she has no shortage of ideas for imaginative narrative. She has made two alterations and got them right.

Possible future action: I’d be inclined to build on her ability to re-read by suggesting strategies for checking for missing punctuation and for words which she thinks may not be correctly spelt. Again, this might best be done with a partner and through reading aloud.

◆ Purpose/intention
What does this piece show about the writer’s success in making their own meaning and intentions in writing clear?
Anna has no difficulty here. She knows the shape of the whole piece and it unwinds as she writes. She has a good sense of what makes a story interesting — the mermaid’s magic — and develops character — the greedy king and the resourceful princess. She has used all sorts of intertextual references — ‘Am I old enough to go into the wood?’ the little mermaid and the unicorn — to create her own story.

Possible future action: It’s always hard to think of ways of moving on the already capable writer, but I’d be inclined to look at her other writing and see if she is equally successful with poetry, instructions etc. At some point, her teacher might encourage her to write about something other than magic and princesses, although this would need careful judgement about how to challenge her without detracting from her satisfaction as a writer.

◆ Audience/readership
How does this piece show the writer’s understanding of the needs of a reader?
Not only is Anna aware that her parents read her stories, she indicates in the text that she knows that a reader needs detail. She creates character immediately before setting the scene, then gives delightful details of the actions of the princess in a narrative rhythm — ‘put on her coat, shut the door and crossed the road and went down the little path that led to the little wood’. She uses this to build to a climax for the complication of the plot ‘and suddenly . . .’ and introduces the magic mysteriously — ‘she heard a rattle and saw a white thing’ — she certainly knows how to hook the reader in!
Writing miscue — summary of analysis

Writing behaviour
How does this child see herself/himself as a writer?

Possible future action

The process of writing
What does the writer’s approach tell you about her/fluency and independence in writing?

Possible future action

Purpose/intention
What does this piece show about the writer’s success in making her/his own meaning and intentions in writing clear?

Possible future action
Audience/readership
How does this piece show the writer's understanding of the needs of a reader?

Possible future action

Structure/form
What does this piece indicate about the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and coherently?

How does the form fit with the intended talk?

Possible future action

Technical features
‘What features show the writer’s competence in handling the transcription elements of syntax, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling?

How effectively has the writer varied technical features in relation to intention and readership?

Possible future action

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Possible future action: Since Anna is such an accomplished storyteller, I might want to increase her chances for telling (rather than writing) stories and encourage her to make books from some of her stories and to illustrate them.

◆ Structure/form
What does this piece indicate about the writer’s ability to present ideas clearly and coherently?
Anna does this very well, using the narrative structure very surely to unfold a complicated story. She is aware of different ways to start stories, and is not afraid to plunge straight in to the dialogue before leading the reader carefully through the setting towards the problem the princess has to deal with. The resolution to the story is also sophisticated, since she leaves us knowing that all will be well, but doesn’t feel the need to give us a scene where the mermaid makes the king give back the unicorn. She has been able to work within time constraints to make a complete narrative.

How does the form fit with the intended task?
The form fits her intention perfectly! She not only uses known story structures but moulds them into new ideas for her own purposes. The illustrations follow the form of the story, echoing the introduction of the characters.

Possible future action: Since Anna is so good at intuitively structuring stories, I’d be inclined to talk to her about story structure so that she can get even better at it, perhaps trying flashbacks eventually . . . I’d also encourage her to discuss the differences between the structure of stories and, for example, instructions or poems. She’ll have some interesting things to say!

◆ Technical features
Vocabulary choice: Although Anna uses the language of fairy tales, she also uses everyday language — ‘a white thing’, ‘the king was cross’, ‘wow she said’. Nevertheless, her chosen vocabulary is well suited to the piece and is varied. Her repetition of ‘little’ is deliberate and enhances the build up to the complication in the narrative.

Punctuation: I think there are only two full stops in the piece. Anna seems to know where to put capital letters (e.g. in the title).

Spelling: In 127 words, Anna spells 85 conventionally. There are clear patterns:
1. She draws on her aural knowledge to attempt phonetically convincing words — ‘prinses’, ‘yoonicon’, ‘crosd’.
2. She is able to use phonic knowledge successfully for ‘king’, ‘cross’, ‘send’ etc.
3. She uses a simple ‘d’ instead of ‘ed’ for past participles and ‘ol’ instead of ‘le’ consistently.
4. She splits words like ‘enough’ and ‘away’. Again using her aural knowledge.

Syntax: A quick look at the sentence openers alone shows how remarkably sophisticated the syntax is. It follows the rhythms of told and heard story, using repetition and contrast between long and short sentences (e.g. the first two sentences, the second of which is particularly delightful). She builds tension with short sentences: ‘Suddenly she heard a rattle. She saw a white thing. It was a unicorn’ and balances these with ‘He sent her away so he could have the horse’ and ‘She ran to the pond and wished for the mermaid and the mermaid came out of the water’.

What features show the writer’s competence in handling the transcription elements of syntax, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling?
Syntax is complex and varied. Anna chooses a variety of interesting vocabulary but isn’t yet secure about punctuation. Her spelling depends largely on phonic strategies.

How effectively has the writer varied technical features in relation to intention and readership?
Very effectively. She knows how to invite and hold the reader’s attention by careful balancing of sentences. This comes from her developed capacity to hear the rhythms of narrative in her head.

Possible future action: I’d be inclined to encourage her awareness of punctuation by reading her own work aloud more often. Her spelling can be built on through her phonic knowledge and some patterns of word endings practised, but I think she needs more attention to word shape recognition.

The comments given in this article would normally be collected on a form such as that printed on pages 20 and 21. This form is offered to be photocopied and used only within institutions purchasing *The Primary English Magazine*.

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A version of this article on miscue analysis will be available in *Making Progress in English*, to be published in 1998 by Routledge.

Eve Bearne’s recent publications include *Greater Expectations* (as Ed.), Cassell; and *Differentiation and Diversity in the Primary School* (as Ed), Routledge.