

Miscue Analysis in the Classroom

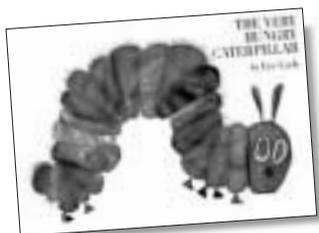
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Introduction

The first edition of this minibook was published in 1993. Much of the material included at that time remains relevant for the teachers, students, teacher assistants, learning support assistants and other classroom adults who wish to find out more about a pupil's reading development. Miscue analysis is still useful because it provides a means of considering what children are doing as they read, and the reasons that may lie behind any deviations from the text, or miscues, by the children. For example, if a young child reads aloud from Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969):



'One Summer's day the warm sun came out'
(child's reading)

'One Sunday morning the warm sun came up'
(text)

Here there are three miscues: Summer's/Sunday, day/morning, out/up, that tell us something about how the child is reading, and the three miscues give some suggestion as to the reasons why those miscues are made. We will consider such readings and miscues in this text.

Thus we can see that the nature and structure of miscue analysis substantially remains as it was. However, the use that is made of it in our classrooms has changed. At about the time that the first edition of this minibook was published, Kenneth Goodman indicated that "Miscue analysis quite easily became a part of the repertoire of British teachers" (Goodman, 1992, p.194). He suggested this was the case because in the UK teachers were accustomed to hearing children read as a regular feature of the school day. Therefore, they had been noting the mistakes/errors/miscues made by the

children, although not perhaps referring to them as miscues. However, the development of miscue analysis provided those teachers with a sophisticated means of analysing those miscues.

Of course, hearing children read might no longer be prominent in classroom activities, although it is still part of the repertoire of many early years teachers, especially when used in conjunction with parents. A reading record booklet typically provides the means for both parties to indicate what they have listened to with the child, and to indicate progress, strategies and problems.

Additionally now, part of a guided reading activity in the classroom might include a period of time when an adult listens whilst a child in the group reads aloud (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Miscues are noted in that context and miscue analysis remains very much part of the assessment procedures in primary classrooms as a child reads from a text and a running record is made. So it is still very useful to know about miscue analysis and to use that knowledge as a means of helping children progress as readers. The wish to help children become independent readers and to enjoy reading is always a key aim of adults in the classroom.

The importance of miscue analysis

- We recognise that children produce miscues as they read.
- Miscue analysis provides us ‘with a window on the reading process’ (Goodman, K, 1973).
- An understanding of miscue analysis can enable us to become more analytic listeners to children’s reading.
- Miscue analysis enables us to become more sophisticated in our response to children’s miscues.
- A detailed knowledge of miscue analysis enables us to assess and diagnose a child’s reading.
- The diagnosis derived from miscue analysis enables us to plan literacy programmes and teaching strategies for the child.

Chapter 1

Collecting and Describing Miscues

Why miscues?

In the introduction I referred at one point to the mistakes/errors/miscues that children make as they read. Yet in the title of this booklet and throughout the remainder of the pages of this minibook it is miscues rather than mistakes/errors that are noted. Why should that be the case?

When miscue is used to describe the deviations from the text made by the child, a positive view of the child as a reader is presented. It suggests that the child is using her/his knowledge of language and personal experiences to read the text. In particular it recognises that the child is using the graphophonic, syntactic and semantic language cue systems as he or she reads. In simple terms that means that the child is making use of the letters (grapho) and sounds (phonic) in their reading as well as her or his implicit knowledge of sentence structures (syntactic) and the meanings (semantic) of that which is being read. The child is not just guessing (at least in the way that guessing is typically used in our language), instead the child is making an informed judgement based on a sophisticated use of the language cue systems. It is a positive view of the child as a reader. When a miscue is produced then that is likely to be where the child has put too much emphasis on a particular cue system or has used one inappropriately. An analysis of the miscues indicates the knowledge and strategies of the reader.

Those readers of this text who already have some knowledge of miscue analysis will be aware of the debt we owe to Kenneth Goodman for his major part in developing the theoretical aspects of miscue analysis, and I already have drawn attention to two of his many articles. Additionally, Yetta Goodman with two colleagues, has developed the complex and highly detailed miscue inventories (Goodman, Watson and Burke, 1987) which forms the basis for our more simplified discussion of miscue analysis. Indeed a miscue analysis when following the more detailed process would, for

instance, proceed with a text not previously seen by the child and would include no teacher or adult input during the reading by the child. It is perhaps possible to understand the reason for that when used in a research project. However, here we are intending to look at miscue analysis as an aid in a busy classroom. It matters not whether the text is unseen or well known by the child, it is the text being read at that time and the adult will work alongside the child as a support and guide during the reading. It may not be miscue analysis as Ken and Yetta Goodman developed it but it is using miscue analysis as an important means of helping us to know more about the child as a reader and to support that child during the reading.

As a first step in any miscue analysis, we need to be able to recognise and describe the miscues that are produced by a reader during an oral reading. Therefore, we shall look first at the collection, and then at the description, of miscues.

Collecting miscues

As we have noted above, for a formal and diagnostic miscue analysis, the text that would be read by the child would be material that was new to them rather than previously rehearsed. It would also be complete with a beginning, middle and end. Additionally it should be of sufficient length and difficulty to produce about 25 miscues, in a text of about five hundred words. This means that the reader would be reading with an accuracy rate of about 95%. For a younger child two or three shorter texts might be used over a day or two.

In a formal miscue analysis the children would be informed before starting that they should read in order to be able to retell the story/text, and that they would be getting no help as the session is to see how well they were getting on with their reading. Of course, if a child hesitates over a word for an extended period (e.g. thirty seconds) then some support might be given, either by telling the word, or by suggesting that the child moves on to the next word. Normally an audio recording of the reading would be used, as it can be very helpful for subsequent analysis. However, some teachers find that with experience they are able to code the miscues directly onto a duplicate of the text. Subsequently that coded miscue sheet can provide the basis for an assessment of the child's reading.