



3-1981

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Recommended Citation

Gray, Mary J. (1981) "Miscue Analysis: Why?," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol6/iss1/4>

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Miscue Analysis: Why?

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Although much has been written about miscue analysis and many studies of children's miscues have been completed in the last ten years, it does not seem that miscue analysis is widely used by practicing teachers. This is unfortunate since one of the distinct advantages of using this technique is that attention is centered on the quality of the deviations from the printed text. It provides the observer a picture of how the reader interacts with the material. Knowledge of miscue analysis is important for all who are engaged in reading instruction, but is extremely important for preservice teachers. Whatever the cause, the preservice teacher frequently tends to be overly meticulous in correcting the oral reading of children. The accent seems to be on correct pronunciation rather than on obtaining meaning.

P. David Allen addressed this concern when he said, "It is as though teachers believe that once letter-sound relationships are learned there will be no further trouble for the reader" (Allen & Watson, 1976). The inappropriateness of this procedure is made apparent from Menosky's statement that the largest number of unsuccessful corrections occurred when readers, unable to make use of syntactic and semantic cues and confronted with unfamiliar words, attempted to "sound out" those words (Allen & Watson, 1976).

Use of the Reading Miscue Inventory serves to familiarize students with the importance of all three types of cues to be used: graphophonological, syntactic, and semantic.

Examination of a portion of a miscue passage provided by a third grade reader demonstrates the value of this technique for teachers in gaining an understanding both of the reader and the reader's interaction with the material. The passage is taken from Bill Martin, Jr.'s Sounds of Laughter, second grade level, published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966, pp. 96-101.

1 LUCKY

Old Lucy Lindy liked to bake,
She liked to bake pies,
She liked to bake cakes.

She baked many kinds of cakes:

dark cakes,

(c) light cakes,
2
layer cakes, and
white cakes.

She had no trouble with her cakes.

She knew her light cakes from her
dark cakes.

She knew her layer cakes.

3 LUCKY (c) 4 made 5

Old Lucy (baked many kinds of pies:

apple pies,

blueberry pies,
mint b
mince pies, and

cherry pies.

(c) But she had trouble with her pies.
7 She
They were all covered with crust.

She could not tell one pie from another.

After it was baked, was it a ^{8 magic} mince pie?
Or ⁹ was it an apple pie?

"My, what trouble!"
she said to herself.

One morning Old ^{11 Lucky} Lucy ^{12 discovered} decided to bake.

She decided to bake five pies:

¹³ 2 apple pies ¹⁴
1 blueberry pie ⁵
^{15 mint} 2 mince pies.

As she made the crust she had an idea.

"Now I'll know one pie from another,"
she said to herself.

She took a knife.

She put ^{16 mint} two letters in the crust.

In the mince pies she put I. M.

"That means ¹⁷ Is ^{18 t} Mince,"
she ^{19 has} said to herself.

Miscues 1, 3, and 11 involved the substitution of Lucky for Lucy. In these instances either word could be used as a first name for an individual. They are similar both graphically and in sound. In addition it is possible the student supplied Lucky instead of Lucy since Lucy is not a common name today, and it is conceivable that the child has never heard this name at all. This substitution was acceptable both syntactically and semantically.

The second miscue was an omission of the -er ending from layer. The student corrected this as soon as she reached the end of the line and realized that lay was not meaningful.

Substitution of baker made for baked many comprised miscues 4 and 5. Once again the student

corrected herself as soon as she realized her first reading was not meaningful.

Mint was substituted for mince in five cases (6, 8, 15, 16, and 18). The similarity in graphic form and sound is quite apparent. Mince is probably an unfamiliar type of pie for this child. Generally mince pie is served only at Thanksgiving and Christmas and is not a favorite of many children. Mint, on the other hand, could make one think of chocolate candy, and in all probability would be much more appealing to children. In any case the same part of speech is involved, and there is not a change in meaning.

She was substituted for they and corrected immediately. Since the next word in the sentence was were, the student undoubtedly realized that she was not correct in her first reading.

The first omission included the words was it. This actually did not make a difference in meaning as the question could have been asked without these two words. (. . .was it a mince pie or an apple pie?)

The substitution of hersife for herself was the first miscue which was not meaningful and which was not corrected. The substitution of discovered for decided, while a case of replacing one verb with another, was not a meaningful substitution. This was not corrected either. Instead of reading 1 blueberry pie, the student read 2 blueberry pies for miscues 13 and 14. While the number of pies was incorrect, she did alter the passage so that it was syntactically correct and meaningful. The substitution of isn't for is is another example including the same part of speech. It was also meaningful; therefore, she did not correct it.

The final miscue in this first portion of the passage was a substitution of has for said. It was corrected immediately.

Of the nineteen miscues recorded, only two did not make sense. One (hersife) was a nonsense word;

the other was discovered for decided. Surely this child was grasping the meaning of the passage she read. Since this is a major purpose of reading, it appears that she was doing satisfactorily on this oral reading task.

An important point for the examiner to keep in mind is that miscue analysis is only one measure of oral reading behavior. A thorough examination of reading behavior must include silent measures as well. Close examination of a reader's performance, however, is one ingredient that is missing in the scoring of most standardized reading tests. Without it, teachers are not making use of information which could serve as a guide in building an effective instructional program for each of the children in their reading classes.

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