



## Through the Miscue Window: Yetta M. Goodman

### Miscues Influenced by the Written Text

Teachers who use miscue analysis on a regular basis usually set aside a set of materials with a range of reading predictability and interests. By using the same material with different readers, it becomes evident when an aspect of the published text may be influencing the miscues. When the teacher begins to notice this pattern, it is helpful to collect different miscues from different readers and to share these patterns with the students in strategy lessons.

One story that we have used for a long time is entitled "Bill Evers and the Tigers." It comes originally from a basal reader and was part of a miscue training kit now out of print. The story is about a boys' baseball team. When they saw that a baseball star was coming to town, they decided to invite him to see them play. The baseball star came to their game and gave them some advice. Even though they lost the game, they were happy because the story was in the newspaper the next day.

I have the miscue analyses of different students, ages 7 to 23, reading this story. One common miscue suggests problems with the way in which the story itself was written, but at the same time, provides the opportunity to evaluate how readers monitor meaning.

The word *baseball* occurs in the story seven times. It is used in the following phrases/sentences:

- the Tigers' baseball team (2 times)
- the/a baseball star writes his name on a baseball to play better baseball
- wrote his name on the baseball

Not until the last page of the story after the word *baseball* had been used six times, did the story provide any context specific enough to indicate that the story was about baseball. The story could have been about any sport using a ball. The following sentences show the lack of specificity.

They wanted to show him how the Tigers could play ball. We want to talk to Bill Evers about our team. We want to know if you can come and see us play. We have a game tomorrow morning. . . .

So were the boys on the other team. . . .

Go on with the game. I want to see you play.

The four-page story has 74 sentences. It is not until the 68th sentence that there is information to suggest which sport is being played.

The sentence with the marked miscues reads:

Then, just when Bill Evers was showing  
Ben the right way to hold his bat,

a newspaper man came

It is not surprising that some of the readers of this story substitute *basketball* for *baseball* throughout the story until the last page. I will compare three such readers and indicate how each responded to the above sentence, explain why this happened, and then suggest ways to use this evaluation to plan instruction. The numbers to the right of the miscue indicate which of the three readers (compare to number below) produced which miscue.

1. Bert, a 23-year-old self-proclaimed nonreader, read the sentence substituting *while* for *when*. Prior to the word *bat* he paused for fifteen or twenty seconds. During this time, he was moving his eyes over the previous page in the text. He then read *bat* and completed the story read-

ing *baseball* the next and last time it appeared in the story.

2. Robin was a second-grade reader. When he read *bat*, he stopped, turned to his teacher and said: "I was reading basketbali all the way through and it should have been baseball."
3. When Bryan, age 11, read this story, he also substituted *Ben* for *Bill* throughout the story. He did know, verified by his retelling, that there were two separate characters, each named Ben. He read the sentence by substituting *wanted for was showing* and *come for came*, but corrected each immediately. He read *bat* in that sentence without seeming to hesitate and then read *baseball* the last time it occurred.

Selections from Bryan's retelling are also illuminating:

Baseball, at first basketball, no, baseball!

Bill Eldridge was the baseball star.

The Tigers was a baseball team.

The baseball team lost.

The other two readers also indicated during their retelling that they thought the story was about basketball. Robin actually responded to the teacher's question: "Why did you read *baseball* instead of *basketball* at the end of the story?" by saying, "When I saw *bat*, I knew that it had to be about *baseball*."

We learn a number of important lessons from these miscues:

1. If we do not interrupt readers as they are reading, we can see if the context helps the reader disambiguate any confusions represented by the miscues. In this way, we see comprehending in process. We see that even readers in trouble who may be making some very disruptive miscues are monitoring the text for meaning.
2. Use these miscues as part of the reading conference. Discuss with the student why they think they read *baseball* for *baseball*. The answers that we have received over the years include:
  - I like basketbali better than baseball.
  - It's basketball season now.
  - I don't know, I just thought it was basketball.
3. Help the reader see the miscue as logical. It is a noun substituted for a noun or adjective substituted for an adjective, and *baseball* fits in each situation semantically and syntactically. He/she was also using graphophonic cues. *Baseball* includes all the letters in *baseball*, and starts and ends the same. But more important the miscue shows they were paying attention to the meaning of the story. As soon as they read *bat*, they recognized what sport was being played and, without rereading the text, they were able to understand the story from the author's point of view. It is also a good idea to help the reader know that an author doesn't always provide the reader with enough cues until later in the story so that it is good to keep reading and use all the cues that come later to help build the meaning of the story.
4. Help teachers see that many reading materials have various flaws. We don't have to rewrite texts to eliminate such flaws because we can use these flaws to help readers learn more about reading. Readers should know that the problems they encounter aren't always with their reading ability but may be because the author didn't write well enough. This will pro-

duce more critical reading on the part of all students. All reading provides different problems to readers, and the more confidence they have in their own ability to apply various reading strategies, the more strengths they build as readers. The above material is especially difficult for beginning readers. Especially prior to the present time, editors thought that the text in many basals needed to be simplified. So, information that might have disambiguated this story for the readers was taken out of the story to make it easier. Not understanding the role of language in writing, editors have rewritten materials for beginning readers, often making the material more difficult in the process.

One other problem caused by the text is the use of two short and similar words such as *Bill* and *Ben* in a single story. The names were probably selected for use in this story to provide *B* words (*baseball* and *bat* fit this pattern as well). Using two short words and very common names adds complexity to such a story. It is not unusual for readers to confuse the words with each other, although they usually do not confuse the characters. Such evaluation helps the teacher observe the ways in which the readers are concerned with constructing meaningful text. They seem to know that there is a young male character who is part of the Tigers and an adult *baseball*/*basketball* star.

Much of reading instruction can be done during conversations such as the above as part of individual reading conferences. Or, focusing on the miscue might be treated as a small group or whole class strategy lesson. The teacher can keep a collection of such miscues on overhead transparencies. By typing the text section (always use a paragraph or more) in a triple-space format, the miscues can be added to the text in different colors. Then the teacher can lead a discussion with the class discussing the ways in which different students responded to the same text and what strategies and language cueing systems each used that helped them in their construction of meaning.

→ See: Costello, p. 152; Goodman, pp. 20, 53, 58, 59, 146, 148; Meyer, p. 60; Weaver, p. 149.

### Miscues now I have known and loved

#### Miscue Time

by Dorothy Watson and John Stansell

A young reader who had not eaten for several hours and very clearly considered her next meal well overdue produced this response:

scamburger

Jake pulled the rifle out of his scabbard.

The power of hunger to influence a reader is shown again in the example below from another young reader whose lunch hour had been encroached upon:

breakfast was served

He knew the baskets would sell well at their summer camp.

Like an overdue lunch, a delayed recess can manifest itself in the oral reading of young children, as illustrated by the following:

Mr. Dias said, "Miguel, will you help me before you go outside?"

playtime was

... and his parents talked in English.

... but she didn't relax, always being aware

RECESS

of her responsibility ...

→ See: Watson and Stansell, pp. 67, 69, 115, 151, and 170.