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ABSTRACT

A student's misreading of the word "statues" as "sanctuaries" and an application of miscue analysis show how students' egos can be boosted. The student expressed surprise when informed of his misreading, wondering how he could confuse the words. The student's reading specialist explained to the student that his "computer" brain made a quick search based on a combination of word length, initial letters, ending letters, and letter combinations to come up with "sanctuaries" for "statues." Sensing the student was still not convinced, the reading specialist added "context" as a field for the student's computer brain to search. The student was told that his computer brain worked so fast that it popped out the first word that met the search criteria, even though the word was wrong. Convinced, the student never made that mistake again and made rapid gains, possibly attributable to the boost his ego received from the application of miscue analysis. (RS)

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A Practical Use for Miscue Analysis: Building Egos

by
Don McCabe

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AVKO "Great Idea"
Reprint Series #631

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- planning to build and operate a model reading research center in a YEAR-AROUND **camp** setting that would economically and efficiently service the needs of dyslexics of all ages.
- trying to spread the concept that parent and spouse tutoring in spelling/reading skills can be successfully taught in adult community education classes and that members of a problem reader's support group can greatly assist the efforts of any volunteer tutor working in the literacy movement.
- providing newsletters and economical opportunities to pursue individual research projects and to take part in large scale cooperative research projects that have immediate practical applications.
- attempting to accomplish these goals primarily through the profits generated by the inservices, workshops and the sale of materials developed for the special needs of students, parents, and adults – but AVKO still needs donations to survive.

STATUES & SANCTUARIES OR A PRACTICAL USE OF MISCUE ANALYSIS: BUILDING EGOS/SELF-ESTEEM

The other day, one of my students misread the word *statues* as *sanctuaries*. This miscue occurred as he was "calling" words from a list of sight words[1] that I use diagnostically-prescriptively.

As is my practice, I immediately wrote the word *sanctuaries* on a piece of paper for him so that there wouldn't be a lingering connection between what he was looking at (*statues*) and what he had said (*sanctuaries*). Besides, there is always the distinct possibility that he might learn two words for the price of one.

When I told him that the word on the test was *statues*, he asked me, "How in the world did I come up with a word like *sanctuaries*?!? *Sanctuaries* for *statues*? That's ridiculous!"

The last thing I want my students to do is to feel ridiculous or dumb after having made a mistake. Not only do I teach them that mistakes are opportunities to learn, but that everyone has a fantastic computer brain that is

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[1] McCabe, Don. *Suggested Order for Diagnosis and Remediation of Type #3 Words: The "INSANE."* Clio, Mich.: AVKO Educational Research Foundation, 1982.

designed to program itself by trial and error, by making mistakes. So, I had to come up with some explanation. This was what I told him:

"It's not ridiculous. Your reading of the word sanctuaries for statues just shows what a tremendously sophisticated computer brain you have and how extremely fast it works. When your eyes saw that group of letters (***s - t - a - t - u - e- s***) it transmitted a message to the computer brain asking the basic question that computer word processing equipment asks:

1. Search in your "BIG" WORD FILE (Words of more than six letters) for a word (A) that begins with S, (B) that ends with -es (C) that has the letters "A" "T" "U" somewhere in the middle.

In computer word processing a "file" has fields that could be represented as:

Beginning Letters:	**Word Length**	**Letter Order**	**Ending Letters**	**Result**
S	**6 or more**	**ATU**	**ES**	**s-a-tu-es statues**

Note: The first letter of both *statues* and *sanctuaries* is S.

Both words have six or more letters.
Both words have the letters ATU in that order
(statues - santuaries)

Both words end in ES.

Now, if your computer brain uses some form of alphabetical order in its word search, which of those two words will it locate first? *Sanctuaries* comes before statues in the dictionary.

In any case, your computer brain popped up with the word *sanctuaries* in what amounts to a millisecond. A regular computer would have taken several seconds to run through its word files. This tells me what a great computer brain you have working for you.

My student still wasn't totally convinced. I could tell by the expression on his face. Then, reaching down into my stored "bag of tricks" I thought about using "miscue" analysis. Then, it occurred to me that I should have added one more field for his computer brain to search: The field should have been CONTEXT, the context that his computer brain last saw this combination of letters. Now I re-wrote the "computer" commands to:

1. Search in your "BIG" WORD FILE (Words of more than six letters) for a word (A) that begins with S, (B) that ends with -es, (C) that has the letters "T" "A" "U" somewhere in the middle, (D) in the CONTEXT that you last saw a word that looked like that.

Then I said, "You know and I know that you have to have seen the word *statues* before. You couldn't consciously recall the word, in fact, you might not have known that word when you were reading it, but if you were reading the word *statues* it was probably in a RELIGIOUS context.

Now, your computer brain popped up with the first word that fit all the requirements. It just happened to be *sanctuaries* instead of the correct word statues. It was wrong, but it just goes to show you how well and how fast your computer brain works, even when it makes a mistake.

My student smiled. He felt better. He even asked me what he could do to make sure his computer brain didn't make the same mistake the next time. This I couldn't promise. Computer brains are often unpredictable. However, I pointed out the c in *sanctuaries* that has the /k/ sound, and wrote under /sank/

*sanc*tify
*sanc*tity
*sanc*tuary

tue = chew! in
vir*tue* (again religious context)
sta*tue*

From that point on, my student never missed the word *statues*. In fact, he probably made the most rapid gains of

any student I ever had. And this I attribute to the boost his ego received when I applied just a simple concept from miscue analysis.

Editor's Note: Since this was written, we have confirmed that there are many students that have this type of reading problem. We also strongly feel that every supposed "Wild Guess" is not a guess at all – merely the result of the student's computer brain making a quick word search based on some combination of word length, initial letters, ending letters, letter combinations, and ***context*** in which similar words have been seen, but not necessarily read and understood.

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