

vocabulary development, comprehension, critical thinking, and fluency, also recognized as integral components of critical literacy.

THE RMA PROCESS

Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) is a simple process of organizing readers for conversations about reading miscues and retellings. It has two parts: the analysis of miscues and the examination of the retelling of text. The rest of this work explains in much greater detail the process and outcomes of RMA. The following brief introduction to RMA provides a refresher for those familiar with RMA and lays a foundation for those who are not. While we assume that readers will begin with Chapter 1 and read straight through, those who are more experienced in miscue analysis and RMA may be most interested in how Vicki harnessed the power of RMA for full class literacy instruction.

As most teachers will know, miscues are unexpected responses to text. For RMA, miscues are carefully collected and organized by the teacher to guide discussion during small reading groups. Figure 0.1 provides a quick overview of how to prepare for and conduct RMA.

Figure 0.1 Steps to Implement RMA in the Classroom

Steps to Prepare for Implementation of RMA

- Step 1: Identify students for RMA groups based on reading skills and needs.
- Step 2: Explain the words “Retrospective Miscue Analysis” and tell what it is and how a session is conducted. Why miscues are made and what they are should be part of the explanation. However, this should be brief because it can be expanded upon later while students are actually in the process.
- Step 3: Display an RMA poster (chart paper) in the classroom that identifies the common miscues, smart and okay miscues, and a reminder to make connections while discussing.
- Step 4: Set up an RMA recording literacy station in the classroom.
- Step 5: Make RMA folders for each reader. Folders include a cassette tape and a copy of the text the student will be reading into the tape recorder.
- Step 6: Model an RMA discussion using one or two students in the classroom with their prior permission.

Steps to Conduct RMA in the Classroom

- Step 1: Select text for each group of readers. Enlarge the text or retype it. Use line identification numbers in the margins.

Connecting Miscue Analysis to the Systems of Language

Examining how a reader uses the linguistic systems gives teachers valuable information about how students use knowledge of how language works in their reading. This cueing system includes information about how the reader uses meaning, the structure of the sentence (grammar), and visual information.

Making meaning is the purpose of reading and is crucial to the process; thus, the *semantic* system is at the heart of the systems of language. For example, a beginning teacher early in the school year listened to each one of her fifth-grade students read to determine individual reading abilities. One child, Sofia, read the passage perfectly, using fairly good intonation and making no miscues. However, when the teacher asked her to retell the passage, Sofia replied, “No habla ingles!” Sofia could decode—sound out the words in the passage—but since her first language was Spanish and she only spent a few months each year in the United States, she had almost no understanding of what she read. Sofia was not an effective reader. Even though she read miscue-free, she was not constructing meaning while reading (Moore & Gilles, 2005). Teaching readers to always sound out the word and pay attention to the graphophonic system’s features creates an over reliance on one system. For Sofia, proficiency in oral reading did not support her understanding of the text. This happens frequently with second language learners of English, particularly those whose native graphophonic structures are similar to those of English.

More typically, students who are not gaining meaning pronounce nonwords that may look like the text. When they read something that does not fit the meaning of the story and do not pause, a teacher can later ask, “Does that make sense?” or “Does that sound like language?” The first is an important question that relies on the semantic system, while the second relies on the syntactic system. Questions like these are asked during RMA, especially during the first few conversations to call attention to how language supports reading and vice versa.

All meaning is controlled within the structure of the language, the *syntax*, or *grammar*. Children come to school with an innate grammatical knowledge of English. They know that in the sentence, “John ran down the _____,” the word in the blank has to be a word like *street* or *stairs* (nouns). It can’t be *running* (verb) or some other part of speech. Readers use this innate knowledge as they read. Syntax includes the surface structures, “the relationships signaled by word endings, function words and word order” and also the deep structure, “the underlying relations among words of a sentence” (Weaver, 1980, p. 22). When readers take the surface structure


For example, in gathering miscues for one RMA group to discuss, Vicki selected a text about Rosa Parks (Wilson, 2001) for each group member to read that was probably too difficult—her proficient readers were producing far more miscues than normal. The students’ readings on audiotapes were noticeably halting and far less fluent, but the students were still able to retell with success. Some of that success can be credited to these students’ overall ability to continually confirm for meaning (a skill they have mastered), but largely their ability to comprehend this particular text was due to having background knowledge about Rosa Parks, segregation, and civil rights. Another group of less skilled readers would not have been so successful at comprehending a passage this far above their reading level. It is absolutely critical that the teacher take into account the skills of the readers, their ability to apply strategies they already know, and the type of text being presented to the students.

A GUIDE FOR MARKING MISCUES

Learning to mark miscues takes a little time and practice. Don’t worry about getting the markings exactly correct each time, and develop your own shorthand to help you memorize and learn the markings. After some practice, teachers naturally learn to use the markings much like the editing markings we use to guide student writings.

The following are examples of marked miscues from the students in Vicki’s classroom and possible ways to address the miscues during RMA sessions, or if deemed appropriate, follow-up lessons during guided reading or whole class instruction.

Omissions

421 next spring,”  Tom “Did you know they
not
^

Here Scott omitted the word *laughed* and ignored the period after *Tom*. Instead, he spoke as if the sentence read, “Tom did not you know they. . . .” The ® © denotes that Scott repeated, and when he did, he self-corrected his miscues.

The omission that Scott made does not affect the meaning of the text, thus a smart miscue. The repetition and self-correction present an

Figure 6.3 Burke Interview With Troy

Burke Reading Interview					
Name	Troy (pseudonym)	Age	13	Date	6/30/08
Occupation	Student	Education Level	entering 7th grade		
Sex	Male	Interview Setting	home		
<p>1. When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do? <i>I pause. If it's a word, I try to sound it out. If I didn't know the word, I would ask someone. If they didn't know, I'd ask the teacher. If I'm at home, I would sound it out, look on the computer, ask my parents if they are at home.</i></p> <p>Do you ever do anything else? <i>No.</i></p>					
<p>2. Who is a good reader you know? <i>Trevor (pseudonym). [Trevor is a classmate also entering the 7th grade.]</i></p>					
<p>3. What makes <u>Trevor</u> a good reader? <i>He uses or acts like he is a character in the book. He can spell real well. He doesn't slur words. He reads at a good tempo.</i></p>					
<p>4. Do you think <u>Trevor</u> ever comes to something she/he doesn't know? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>					
<p>5. (Yes) When <u>Trevor</u> comes to something she/he doesn't know, what do you think he/she does? <i>He asks parents, teachers, or a friend.</i></p> <p>(No) Suppose <u>Trevor</u> comes to something she/he doesn't know. What do you think she/he would do?</p>					
<p>6. If you knew someone was having trouble reading, how would you help that person? <i>Tell them, "If you are struggling reading, ask your parents to read with you, or a reading buddy, a teacher, sometimes even your brother."</i></p>					
<p>7. What would a/your teacher do to help that person? <i>Probably suggest summer school, a tutor, or take free time to go back there and help read with him.</i></p>					
<p>8. How did you learn to read? <i>Just a natural habit. From Kindergarten. From learning how to spell. Parents helping me.</i></p>					

(Continued)

Using Words We Know to Figure Out New Words: Metacognition at Work

All of the prior work that students have done to prepare themselves for reading more difficult words, like chunking or finding a word we know within a word we do not know, showed up in miscue discussions. We also discovered another important insight in the following example. Nellie knows she has miscued, but she also knows that by continuing to read, she might be able to figure out what the word is, and she has confidence in herself as a reader as she continues to read further into the text. As Autumn notes in the opening quotation, the reader is “thinking” or metacognitively processing . . . thinking about what the reading means and building meaning to alternately predict and confirm the text.

Nellie: On line 707, I said *considerate* instead of *considered*. I think I just got those two confused. I knew the word *considered*, but I didn’t know how it was spelled. So I just thought it was a different word. Then on the second miscue, 717, I recognized that word again, and I pronounced it correctly that time.

Vicki: Good, and that’s what we want. That’s what good readers do. The second or third time they see a word, they’ve got it in their brain; that’s a great thing to notice.

Nellie: I knew it was a miscue. But I tried to do my best, and then the second time I knew what the word was.

Metacognition may be present for all readers, but those who are most proficient will utilize the act of thinking about what they are reading (Davenport, 1993) to build confidence in reading for comprehension.

Discussing New Vocabulary and Using Context Clues

In RMA discussions, it is easy for teachers to engage with in-the-moment teaching, or what Yetta Goodman (1996) calls critical moment teaching. During this particular session, the tape begins with Autumn reading. Kathie stops the tape to comment on a miscue, and Vicki seizes the opportunity to discuss a new vocabulary word all of the readers miscued on with this particular piece of text. It is also the perfect opportunity for Vicki to point out the similarities in the spelling of two words.

Kathie: She said *pincher*.

Vicki: She said *pinchers* instead of *pincers*. Do you know that word? It looks like pinchers, but pincers are more like little spears.