
Preface

RMA: An Effective Design for Elementary Literacy Curriculum

Miscue analysis is a powerful tool that gives teachers and students a “window on the reading process.”

—Ken Goodman, *Miscue Analysis: Applications to Reading Instruction*

BACKGROUND

Since the early 1960s miscue analysis has been studied and used in the evaluation and teaching of reading. Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) is an extension of miscue analysis that involves readers in discussing their oral reading and retelling miscues with teachers and/or other classmates. This book is largely based on the use of RMA in Vicki Seeger’s third-grade classroom; however, it touches on the research and work of others as well.

Vicki and Rita both have a history with RMA. Vicki, once a graduate student in some of Rita’s classes at the university, is also a literacy coach and former classroom teacher. She has consistently used RMA as a procedure for teaching reading for over five years. Rita, a university professor and former K–12 reading specialist, has studied the use of RMA with struggling readers for over 10 years. We have eagerly joined the growing number of teachers who are trying RMA with success and enthusiasm in teaching reading. We believe that successful readers understand the reading process and the strategies that support it. Having the chance to articulate the process of reading with others helps struggling readers become more effective readers. We have learned that the discussion of reading miscues during RMA opens the door for informed, interesting discussions about reading that explores

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.

- Step 2: Explain tape-recording process so that students can record themselves reading text.
- Step 3: Transcribe recordings.
- Step 4: Copy transcribed miscues for each member of each RMA group.
- Step 5: Conduct RMA discussion sessions.

Prior to the group discussion, the teacher listens to previously recorded readings of the text by group members and analyzes the miscues of each reader. (The recording is conducted in literacy stations prior to the discussion.) These teacher-selected miscues are provided on paper to members of the small group who are encouraged and empowered to discuss the meaning behind the miscues in thoughtful, respectful ways with one another. The second part of RMA is the retelling. This is a comprehension check strategy during which the reader literally “re-tells” what is remembered about the text. The group listens to the recorded retelling of each of the group members, then they are invited to discuss what they heard after each retelling as the teacher facilitates the discussion. Subsequent chapters will demonstrate how to prepare a classroom and students for RMA.

AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO CRITICAL LITERACY

Both miscues and retellings are viewed as “windows into the reading process” (Goodman, 1973) by the teacher and students rather than as comprehension errors to be constantly corrected. Examining how the brain works during reading provides the genesis for RMA and leads to clarifying conversations about vocabulary and word choice, spelling, the author’s style, punctuation, background knowledge linked to the miscue or retelling, comprehension, and fluency. In short, it is exciting, scientific, and most of all, as empowering for readers who learn that miscues have meaning as it is for teachers who use what is learned during RMA to make sound, data-informed instructional choices.

RMA THE SOCRATIC WAY

We learned from previous work that all readers can benefit from RMA discussions so we wondered how we could effectively share the outcomes of individual RMA groups with the entire class. After some initial practice, we modified the method of Socratic Circles (SC) used in high

school classrooms (Copeland, 2005) to provide an organizational framework and discussion technique for elementary children. Essentially, large groups “listened in” on small group RMA discussions, and later group members constructively commented on what they had heard that gave them a deeper understanding of “what readers do” when they read. We were amazed at how seriously the third graders, a mixed group of abilities and backgrounds, carried out their responsibilities during RMA and how excited they were to have ownership in the teaching and learning process. This excitement motivated the development of classroom reading communities.

We are grateful to the children who participated in RMA throughout our work as reading teachers and have included classroom RMA conversations from the third graders to highlight the main ideas covered in each chapter of the book. We believe these conversations clearly express the thinking of the children as they learned to “speak RMA.” We invite teachers trying RMA for the first time to share the vignettes of the third graders with other young readers as they prepare them for RMA conversations.

Throughout the book, we cite the research grounding our work and include a complete review of the research in a separate section: Resource A. We feel privileged to write this book about our experiences with the third-grade readers and to share our beliefs and passion about the power of language in teaching reading. It is our hope that readers will take away some ideas for introducing RMA into their literacy curricula.

The chapters that follow are intended for teachers, future teachers, parents, or administrators who are interested in authentic, meaningful literacy education that really “works.” Chapter 1 introduces and defines RMA; Chapter 2 grounds the RMA process firmly in literacy theory and practice; Chapter 3 explains how the reading process may be connected to miscue analysis; Chapter 4 demonstrates the marking and coding of miscues; Chapter 5 explains how to organize the classroom for RMA; Chapter 6 explores the use of RMA for assessing reading; Chapter 7 suggests ways of informing instruction through RMA; Chapter 8 explains how the use of RMA groups may be integrated into all aspects of the classroom literacy program; Chapter 9 explains how Socratic Circles may assist in involving the entire classroom community in RMA conversations and learning; Chapters 10, 11, and 12 provide examples of how RMA “works” with striving, developing and proficient readers; and Chapter 13 presents some concluding thoughts and two follow-up interviews with two students in Vicki’s third-grade classroom. Resource A provides a summary of the research relative to miscue analysis and RMA.

We invite teachers, aspiring teachers, parents, and administrators to consider the use of RMA in their literacy curriculum, and as we did with the use of Socratic Circles, find new ways of managing RMA groups as communities of learners and readers. It is our hope that you enjoy the book and take from it ideas that you may use in your school or with your own children. There are no mandates and no prescribed texts—just good teaching ideas grounded in years of research.

—*Rita Moore and Vicki Seeger*