



# Cornerstone: Ann M. Marek

*Ann Marek*

## Retrospective Miscue Analysis: An Instructional Strategy for Revaluing the Reading Process

**R**etrospective miscue analysis (RMA) is a procedure that engages readers in reflecting upon and evaluating the reading process through analyzing their oral reading miscues. Many readers who do not read as well as they would like have misconceptions about good reading. They believe good readers know all the words they encounter, never make mistakes, and remember everything they read. Measured against this mythical good reader, many find themselves lacking. This awareness of their inadequacies immobilizes their attempts to grow as readers, and they become "their own worst enemies" (Goodman 1982, pp. 87-95).

Through analyzing their own reading, readers discover for themselves that reading is a process of predicting, sampling, confirming, and correcting. They become aware that graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cuing systems in language provide information to readers as they construct meaning from print. Most important, they dismantle their notion that good reading is represented by error-free reproductions of text. Research has shown (Marek 1987) that as their models of the reading process shift from "text reproduction" to "meaning construction," their reading strategies (analyzed through miscue analysis or through less formal observations) reflect an increase in miscues, are syntactically and semantically acceptable, and do not disrupt meaning.

Retrospective miscue analysis is most effectively used by teachers and researchers who understand miscue analysis and psycholinguistic theory. With these theoretical underpinnings, educators will be able to explore adaptations of the following procedures, based on their knowledge about language and about their students as language learners. Possibilities for adaptations are discussed throughout.

### RMA Procedures

#### Prior to RMA Session

1. Meet with a reader to tape-record a reading of a text. At the conclusion of the reading, ask the reader to retell what he or she remembers about the text. (See *Reading Miscue Inventory* by Goodman, Watson, and Burke for a complete discussion of aided and unaided retellings.)  
The text may be fiction or nonfiction, and the reader should read the entire chapter, short story, or article. Texts may be selected by either the teacher/researcher or the student. Although some readers may be reluctant to select materials at first, they will show greater willingness to do so as they begin to feel more confident about their reading.
2. During the next week, analyze the reader's miscues, using Procedures I, II, or III in *Reading Miscue Inventory*.  
Although it is not necessary that each reading be fully analyzed through miscue analysis, this data can provide ongoing evidence of the reader's development of efficient and effective strategies.
3. Review the miscues made by the reader, noting any patterns that exist. Select between 5 and 15 miscues for discussion during the upcoming RMA session.

The miscues teachers select will be directed by their assessments of readers' attitudes and abilities. The "Reading Interview" described in *Reading Miscue Inventory* provides insights into readers' models of the reading process. Readers for whom this technique is appropriate are likely to believe that all their reading strategies are ineffective. Selecting miscues that demonstrate effective strategies is critical for initial sessions in order to help these readers begin to revalue the reading process. Over time, teachers may have readers listen to the tape recordings and select for themselves the miscues they wish to analyze.

Ann M. Marek is an education consultant working for the State of Nevada. Her work on Retrospective Miscue Analysis as an instructional strategy for adult readers is described in Occasional Paper No. 19 (University of Arizona, Program in Language and Literacy) and in *Whole Language Evaluation* (Heinemann, 1988).

4. Prepare a list of the miscues to be discussed during the RMA session. Include the tape recorder counter numbers to find points in the text where the selected miscues occurred.

#### Conduct RMA Session

1. Approximately one week later, meet with the reader to conduct the RMA session. Play the tape recording of the previous reading and proceed through the selected miscues, discussing them one at a time. The following questions can be used as guidelines for discussion:
  - Does the miscue make sense?
  - Was the miscue corrected? Should it have been?
  - Does the miscue look like what was on the page?
  - Does the miscue sound like what was on the page?
  - Why do you think you made this miscue?
  - Did the miscue affect your understanding of the text?

These questions are merely suggestions. Some teachers do not ask whether the miscues look and sound like language, concerned that these questions may inadvertently encourage an overreliance on the graphophonic cuing system. But other teachers do ask readers to consider whether the miscues sound and look like language in order to help them explore the importance of syntax as a language-cuing system.

In the beginning the questions guide the sessions. In subsequent sessions, readers begin to "take control" of the discussions. They begin asking the questions themselves without much prompting from the teacher. After considering whether the miscue makes sense, readers and teachers engage in discussions that ultimately focus on issues like self-correction, the reasons why readers make miscues, and the effects of miscues on comprehension, though not in any particular order. Teachers can use these discussions to share with readers what they know about reading and about good readers. For example, a reader may begin to assert that all miscues do not need to be corrected. At that moment the teacher can comment, "In fact, we know that good readers tend not to self-correct miscues that fit the passage and make sense." Such "teachable moments" abound during RMA discussions.

2. The entire RMA session may be tape-recorded to document shifts in attitudes and perceptions about the reading process. Particularly

interesting discussions may be transcribed or anecdotal notes may be prepared.

3. Ask the reader to read and retell another selection for use in the next RMA session, if one is to be held.

These procedures describe an RMA session conducted by a teacher with one reader. Several teachers have experimented with RMA in small and large group settings, and with readers working in pairs. The configuration used will be guided by the purposes set by teachers for engaging readers in this kind of self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Ken Goodman (1973, p. 3) has stated that "everything we know we have learned from kids." Retrospective miscue analysis is one way of sharing what we know with readers in an attempt to help them become better readers. In the hands of knowledgeable teachers, the potential for this technique is limitless.

→ See: DeFord, p. 113; Goodman, pp. 98, 100; Peters, p. 114; Pinnell, p. 112.

#### References

Goodman, K. S., ed. 1973. *Miscue analysis: Applications to reading instruction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

———. 1982. "Revaluing readers and reading." *Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities* (January).

Goodman, Y. M., D. J. Watson, and C. L. Burke. 1987. *Reading miscue inventory*. New York: Richard C. Owen.

Marek, A. M. 1987. "Retrospective miscue analysis as an instructional strategy with adult readers." Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, Tucson.



## The Funny Side Real Conflict

This year the fifth-grade students in Leslie Mangiola's classroom are exploring issues across content area through the overarching theme of "conflict." An analysis of conflict routinely arises in their literature studies since literary plots often entail the resolution of some sort of conflict. During a general discussion one morning, Leslie asked her students if they could think of an example of conflict from literature. Not wasting a second, Omar piped up, "Oh you mean like when one kid has a book and another kid wants it!"

—As told to LBB by Leslie Mangiola, elementary teacher, Fair Oaks School, Redwood City, CA



#### Resource: Publications

##### Occasional Papers

\$3.50 from:  
Program in Language and Literacy  
504 College of Education  
University of Arizona  
Tucson, AZ 85721  
1-602-621-2211

Occasionally published but always of interest to whole language educators, papers from the University of Arizona Program in Language and Literacy, directed by Ken and Yetta Goodman, include the Goodmans' now classic "A Whole Language Comprehension-Centered Reading Program," which helped launch the whole language movement.

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