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Retrospective miscue analysis : a positive approach

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Retrospective miscue analysis: a positive approach

Abstract
Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) is an assessment and instructional tool that can be used in strengthening reading strategies, comprehension development, and positive reader self-concept. This paper discusses RMA's theoretical background and ways it empowers teachers and students, raises reader self-esteem, and teaches reading strategies such as self-correcting, re-reading and listening for syntactical and semantic cues. Next, I discuss the RMA process, which includes recording the reading session, producing a type script with all of the participants' miscues, as well as a separate script that has only the miscues to be discussed with the reader, marking the miscue analysis sheet, recording the discussion of the reading with the participant, and recording the reader's responses to the selected miscues. Some modifications to the process were made, which is not uncommon. Third, I describe my recent experiences in using RMA with two readers—one adult, and one junior high student. Both readers improved in the areas of comprehension and use of the self-correction strategy. Both participants were also encouraged to listen for disruptions in semantic and syntactical cues. This proved to be a challenge, especially for the student participant, though some progress was made. Miscues appeared to increase in quality as the sessions progressed. Specific transcriptions of interactions with participants are shown. Fourth, I discuss strengths of RMA according to the literature and how they relate to my own experience with my participants. Both participants demonstrated and increase in self-correcting and re-reading strategies, listening for syntactical and semantic cues, comprehension, and positive reader self concept. Last, I discuss my exploration of ways to extend RMA, which I believe addresses current concerns with assessment teaching of phonemic awareness and vocabulary development.
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A Positive Approach

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ABSTRACT

Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) is an assessment and instructional tool that can be used in strengthening reading strategies, comprehension development, and positive reader self-concept. This paper discusses RMA's theoretical background and ways it empowers teachers and students, raises reader self-esteem, and teaches reading strategies such as self-correcting, re-reading and listening for syntactical and semantic cues. Next, I discuss the RMA process, which includes recording the reading session, producing a type script with all of the participants' miscues, as well as a separate script that has only the miscues to be discussed with the reader, marking the miscue analysis sheet, recording the discussion of the reading with the participant, and recording the reader's responses to the selected miscues. Some modifications to the process were made, which is not uncommon. Third, I describe my recent experiences in using RMA with two readers—one adult, and one junior high student. Both readers improved in the areas of comprehension and use of the self-correction strategy. Both participants were also encouraged to listen for disruptions in semantic and syntactical cues. This proved to be a challenge, especially for the student participant, though some progress was made. Miscues appeared to increase in quality as the sessions progressed. Specific transcriptions of interactions with participants are shown. Fourth, I discuss strengths of RMA according to the literature and how they relate to my own experience with my participants. Both participants demonstrated and increase in self-correcting and re-reading strategies, listening for syntactical and semantic cues, comprehension, and positive reader self concept. Last, I discuss my exploration of
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF RMA

Retrospective Miscue Analysis is a method that allows students to listen to their own miscues during read-alouds. During school the student reads aloud into a tape recorder. Later the teacher can listen to the tape and mark miscues on the analysis sheet for further analysis. Only a few miscues are selected and shown to the student for discussion. The discussion of the miscues is also taped and analyzed. The recorded information about the student's miscues and about the discussion is meant to reveal to the student and teacher patterns in the student's miscues that may be overcome. The discussions are used to look for reasons why the miscue was made and to show the student that even though there are instances where what is read may not match the text perfectly, constructing meaning from the text as a whole is what counts. In some cases, though not here, the student can learn to use the method independently to analyze their own reading, and even mark their own miscues, thus freeing up more time for the teacher, and giving the student a sense of control over their reading improvement.

In most models of reading miscues are merely viewed as inaccuracies (substitutions, omissions, insertions, etc.) to be corrected, whereas in RMA miscues are seen as windows into the reader's processing and constructing meaning. Reading is viewed as a "transactional process and... authors and readers have various roles in composing and interpreting text." (Goodman and Marek, p.96) RMA recognizes that all readers including proficient ones make miscues and therefore miscues are not viewed
as a weakness but more of a tool to help the student strengthen their ability to comprehend meaning.

While the three cues of reading are recognized in RMA, graphophonics (letter-sound), syntax (grammar), and semantics (meaning), a heavier emphasis is placed on semantics and syntax, rather than on letter-sound or phonetic cues. An importance is placed on getting the meaning of the text rather than reading each word and letter as it is written. The basis of this lies in theoretical beliefs about the reading process itself. The reader brings their own experience and knowledge about vocabulary to the text, which shapes the reading and interpretation of the text, in other words, each reader, especially the proficient ones, do not concentrate on reading each word perfectly, but on constructing meaning from the text in a way that makes sense to them personally (Spivey, 1989).
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

RMA's purpose is to help readers rebuild their confidence and acceptance of themselves, as ability to read and achievement are linked with self-esteem (Block, 1993; Dolan, 1983; Gold, 1982). Y. Goodman (2000) demonstrates that not only does the reader's reading improve with RMA, but they develop greater confidence as readers and define themselves as better readers. Also the reading experience becomes more enjoyable, through encouragement of the teacher, and willingness to read and succeed begins to feed on itself. In working with a teacher/researcher at a juvenile corrections facility, one high school student stated that he felt that he was a better reader than before (Moore & Aspregren, 2001), felt more comfortable reading aloud, and felt more confident about himself in general. Other students have become capable of discussing their reading process and learn about the five RMA reading strategies: sampling, inferring, predicting, confirming/disconfirming, and correcting (Martens, 1998).

Models of Reading

Worsnop (1980) conducted a 3 year study using the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI), an important component of RMA, to help remedial reading adolescents. Interviews with the students and their teacher revealed that not only had reading improved with this method, but the self-image of the students as readers had transformed. Student motivation, study habits, and relationship with parents and teachers showed significant improvement.
In his study, Worsnop outlined two models of reading, one which emphasized decoding skills, and another developed by Ken Goodman in 1973 which focuses on the reader creating meaning from text. Worsnop felt these remedial students had become victims of basic skills and commercial tests that produced more failure and feelings of failure. Goodman’s model emphasized production of meaning rather than production of mere speech through decoding. Using a form of miscue analysis based on Goodman’s model, Worsnop was able to change the attitude of the students toward their reading, and the attitude of the teachers as well. “Instead of correctors, they became encouragers; they began to give more emphasis to meaning in their reading programs” (p. 19). This is an important component of RMA as well. The focus in RMA is not on what the reader is doing wrong but what they are doing right. This encourages to students to want to read.

It was important to me to accomplish this same effect of encouragement and motivation with my remedial reading students. I once heard a speaker, an extreme “phonics and phonics only” proponent, put down the use of the word “miscue,” because she felt that it was overlooking the weakness in the student’s reading and therefore crippling the reader, as if glossing over the problem. It is my opinion that the use of the word “miscue” rather takes away some of the shame associated with one’s reading not matching the text perfectly, and is therefore more liberating to the student, preserving their dignity, giving them room to take risks and explore what is happening in their reading and finding ways to solve it, rather than feeling a sense of being closed off from achievement.
Aside from the three reading cues—meaning, grammar, and graphophonics—a fourth cueing system is also presented by Goodman, Watson & Burke (1987). A fourth cueing system discussed is called pragmatics, the social context that language exists in. Most everyone speaks differently according to the social context that they are experiencing at the moment. For example, a farmer might use the word “soilbank” around other farmers, but around other persons not familiar with farming they may refer to it instead as a section of farmland preserved for non-production in return for government money, in order to reduce surplus of crops and preserve the soil. In the context of reading, a farmer’s child might be less likely to miscue the word “soilbank” since it may be part of his background. The child growing up in a more urban setting has a good chance of miscuing the word, and would most likely substitute it with a word that is more familiar to their background. A difference in choice of words also occurs during conversation according to the individual’s background and the background of those participating in the conversation.

Social context has a direct effect on a reader’s miscues. This transactional, socio-psycholinguistic view of reading is important for the RMA teacher or researcher to recognize so they can help the reader understand their miscues. Bloome & Dail (1997) emphasize the social and cultural nature of reading. Bloome recognizes the social context in which reading takes place and how it may affect miscues. He presents a new way of looking at miscues using three concepts: intertextuality, reader stance, and reader identity. Goodman and Watson (in Weaver, 1998) note that a one-to-one relationship does not exist between written and oral language, but that other factors come into play to shape miscues: intonation, lack of familiarity between author and
reader, and dialect (p. 120). They believe that when pragmatic and semantic cueing systems are aligned correctly with syntactic and graphophonic systems, readers are able to make the most of their reading.

During my meetings with my students I emphasized the transactional nature of reading by addressing their background in our discussions over the miscues. In exploring and discussing the miscues I asked them what might have made them make the miscue making an effort to draw upon their experience, taking the constructivist perspective that background shapes how meaning is derived from both the text and what the reader brings to the text. I wanted them to see that their miscues were not always nonsensical or "stupid" but that their miscues were sometimes influenced by their experience.

**Empowering Students and Teachers**

RMA empowers teachers and students (Martens, 1995). It preserves the dignity of the struggling reader in four ways: 1) it can be used independently by the student, 2) it empowers the student by leading them to evaluate their own miscues, 3) it empowers the student by leading them to discuss components of their reading process as they learn to use these components or reading cues to improve while gaining confidence (Goodman, 2000) and 4) it encourages students to take risks and provides ownership.

RMA is empowering to teachers because its uses can vary from teacher/researcher to teacher/researcher. Many have modified the use of it to make it more manageable or less time consuming, or to provide insights in a way not thought of. Some teacher/researchers have streamlined the RMA process, while others have
added technology components, or found ways to make the process collaborative and independent among several students. In my own use of RMA, I found a more streamlined approach that was easier to use in a classroom with a tight time schedule, as well as modifying the RMA response form to meet my needs (See Appendix).

RMA can be used independently by students, especially older students such as those in junior high or high school. This helps to preserve the dignity of an older reader. This intervention does not resemble more teacher-dependent methods commonly used with younger readers because the reading experience is not constantly interrupted by the teacher.

RMA can empower students by allowing them to become evaluators of their own reading through the use of reader-selected miscues and self-reflection. Goodman and Watson (in Weaver, 1998) found that self-reflection through having the student choose miscues to discuss helps students to be in control of their reading goals, understand the reading process, and gain confidence through being able to articulate elements of their individual reading process.

RMA involves the reader in the process of reading and enables them to articulate what is occurring during sessions. Ideally, students learn the terms for the four reading cues syntax, semantics, graphophonic, and pragmatic. Simpler terms may be used as well (grammar, meaning, letter-sound, and background). Knowledge of these terms gives students power and control over their reading progress and provides a deeper understanding of the reading process.

RMA provides opportunities for students to take risks in their reading. Woodley (1985) encourages teachers to provide maximum language growth in a "risk-free
environment – a setting where the students are accepted as they are while also encouraged to reach out and explore new ideas...” (p. 8). In speaking of the four questions asked during the miscue discussions Woodley notes, “It is important for the instructor to avoid an attitude that there is any ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer to any question or group of the questions utilized” (p. 9). In theory, it is in this risk-free environment of acceptance that the reader becomes more cognizant of their own reading process, and challenges to their conceptions are more readily accepted. Goodman (1999) believes that “when [students] are in environments where what they have to say about their reading and the reading of others is taken seriously, the language that is necessary to discuss the issues emerges” (p. 150). Goodman (1996) notes “helping them to achieve a sense of control and ownership over their own use of language and learning in school, over their own reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking, will help to give them a sense of their potential power” (p. 10). Having a sense of power, control and ownership over one’s reading, or any kind of learning, is always motivating. Speaking of miscue analysis in general Wilde (2000) says, “teachers can focus not on labeling and categorizing readers but on listening to and understanding them, where our role is not to process them through a program but to help them move forward based on what we know about them right now” (p. 1).
A Typical RMA Session

In an initial RMA session, the reader reads a passage into a tape recorder. Later, the reader is asked to retell what they have read as a way to measure comprehension. Goodman & Marek (1996) do not suggest any formal way to measure or score the retelling, so it is up to the teacher to create one, or use another tool compatible with RMA. The miscues from this reading are marked on a miscue analysis form (see Goodman & Marek, 1996, Appendix F) to show whether the miscue was still grammatically cohesive with the text, made sense in the text, or whether there was a break in the meaning of the passage due to the miscue, and how graphophonically similar the miscue was to the text. The teacher listens to the tape and selects miscues to discuss during the next meeting, usually miscues demonstrating that the reader has not lost the meaning of the text, even though they have not read the text exactly. This is done in an attempt to show the reader that their ability to gain meaning from the text is more important than reading it “perfectly.” At the next session these pre-selected miscues are discussed and this is also taped. During discussion of the miscues, the teacher/researcher provides an unmarked typescript or copy of the reading passage that the researcher and reader can mark together. The tape of the original reading is played and the reader can stop the tape when they hear a miscue. Later, notes from this second tape are made regarding the participant's discussion of the miscues. During this discussion four main questions are asked (Goodman & Marek, 1996):
1) Does the miscue make sense? The teacher focuses the reader’s attention on grammatical and semantic cues.

2) Was the miscue corrected? The teacher encourages the reader to correct miscues as they are reading by listening to these two cues.

3) Why do you think you made the miscue? The teacher encourages the reader to think about their own background experience and vocabulary that they are bringing to the text that would shape the text, rather than allowing the reader to feel ashamed that they did not read the text exactly.

4) Did the miscue disrupt your understanding of the text? The teacher prompts the readers to ask themselves if meaning was gained from the text in spite of the miscue.

Readers develop efficient reading strategies by attending to meaning and syntactic and grammatical cues. The reader becomes empowered by becoming actively involved in using strategies to derive meaning from text (Goodman, 2000).

My Work with Sue

The adult reader I worked with during the summer of 2003 was “Sue.” (Names in this article are pseudonyms). She was a retired woman in her sixties from the Midwest. As a child she had struggled with reading and had found school to be an unpleasant experience where her teachers were often unkind to her and made her feel inadequate for not being able to read well. One method that her teachers used to help her with reading was to memorize the word by the shape of the word. She believed her comprehension skills to be strong, and she acknowledged that she had difficulty with reading out loud and with pronunciation of words. I came to Sue’s home during the summer to conduct the sessions. She requested that we meet in the basement so that her husband would not hear her reading because she felt embarrassed about her
proficiency. I began our sessions with a modified version of the Burke Interview (Goodman & Marek, 1996, Appendix D). Sue believed that good readers knew a lot about phonics and that her struggles with reading reflected a lack of phonics instruction in school. She noted that she wanted to read more “properly,” and to have better fluency and expression. She was in a women’s book club reading the novel, Seabiscuit and later, The Nanny Diaries. I strived to build her self-confidence as a reader and to convince her that many of the things she was doing as she read that she viewed as mistakes, were actually strengths. For example, she lamented that she always had to re-read a line of text several times to make sure she understood it. I told her that this is something that good readers do to process the text, and is not something she should use to view herself as a weak reader. Self-corrections are an important part of the RMA process.

My Work with Orlando

During the school year I had opportunity to work with a seventh grader, known as Orlando. We began with the reading interview where Orlando shared with me that when he came to a word that he did not know he would ask other people for help. He did not know any other reading strategy besides this one. He related that his brother was a good reader and understood that even good readers make mistakes. He believed that his brother would ask for help if he was struggling with a word. He said that if someone he knew was having trouble, he would ask them questions about the word. He also said that the teacher would explain the word to someone who was having trouble. This revealed some of Orlando’s disempowerment as a reader as the
only strategies at his disposal were from outside sources rather than tools that he could use independently.

Orlando had been held back two grades. He had once received help from resource teachers. His ITBS scores were low, and he was diagnosed as borderline learning disabled. Orlando has some difficulty with speaking in English, apparently due to English as a Second Language issues, and perhaps learning issues in general. His articulation, pronunciation and grammar in his day to day English speaking are not as proficient as his ESL peers. He will sometimes switch words, such as referring to “graph paper” as “paper graph.” He is currently reading at grade level, and is interested in reading about sports mostly and any part of history that includes a major war such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, or World War II. Orlando works on regular daily assignments very slowly compared with others in his peer group, and is often behind in his work.
FINDINGS

Sue

After Sue’s first reading I noted that she self-corrected frequently, and re-read text. I encouraged her to continue. I began to teach her about the three main reading cues, letter-sound, grammar, and meaning, and stressed that gaining meaning from text was the most important, because that is the purpose of reading. During this first meeting I informed her that the focus of the second meeting would be to make meaning from the passage, and to catch grammatical inconsistencies to self-correct. At this second meeting, Sue seemed to be gaining a better understanding of the reading process, and realized that her ability to make meaning from the text was a legitimate reason to consider herself an okay reader. Here is a sample using a passage from the novel Seabiscuit.

Miscue: (forward down)
Text: driving his head so far downward

Sue: “I knew it was driving his head down.” She did not berate herself for not reading the text exactly.

Text: He coaxed a phenomenal amount of work out of his rigid body,

Miscue: (and labored)
Text: laboring so hard over his horses through the week

Sue: “I just put in another word in. I still had it. I wonder why you do that.”

I continued to encourage Sue to focus on meaning, to listen for and maintain grammatical sense by self-correcting, and to not hesitate to re-read.
By our fourth meeting the focus remained the same: consistency in semantics and syntax. At this meeting Sue agreed that three out of the four miscues we discussed did not cause a break in the meaning of the text.

**Miscue:**

**Text:** As Pollard felt Seabiscuit's hooves sink into the russet soil, he had reason to worry.

Lisa: “Why do you think you miscued there?”
Sue: “I don’t know.”
Lisa: “Did it affect your understanding?”
Sue: “No, because he was worried about the soil.”

Sue’s response indicated her recognition that Pollard’s concern about Seabiscuit’s hooves sinking into the soil was a major idea to the story, more crucial to the meaning of the story than the minor idea of the soil’s description.

**Miscue:**

**Text:** Pollard found another avenue and eased him outward again

Lisa: “Do you know why you miscued here?”
Sue: “I was focusing on the next word, ‘avenue.’”
Lisa: “Did it cause a break in your understanding?”
Sue: “No, he was trying to find another avenue to get through.”

Although Sue recognized that there was no meaning loss for her caused by her miscue, she did not see that it caused a break in the syntactic structure of the sentence, at least partially. She also left this miscue uncorrected. If Sue had corrected this miscue, there would have been no meaning loss, but in RMA when there is a break in syntax, there is automatically some loss of meaning counted, especially if the miscue is left uncorrected.
By the end of our sessions Sue appeared to have a better understanding of the reading process than she did at first, but her comments revealed that reading "correctly" was still important to her. I encourage Sue to continue to focus on meaning, listen for syntactical cues, and self-correct freely. It is interesting to note that in the time that I spent with Sue, she progressed from making 7.2 miscues per 100 words to 3.2 miscues per 100 words. By the end of the session her retelling score was approximately 89%.

Orlando

Orlando and I read from the book *The Art of Keeping Cool*, a novel about a boy's life experience during World War II, while his father was on a fighter pilot's mission. On Orlando's first reading he made 72 miscues. For meaning construction there was a 73 percent loss of meaning, and 51 percent of grammatical relationships revealed weakness, however 25 percent revealed strength. Both graphic and sound similarities were high showing some strength in Orlando's reading.

The two main strategies we focused on during the first semester was the strategy of re-reading and self-correcting. By re-reading I mean reading through a sentence and then going back to the beginning if there is an unknown word or a disruption in syntax or semantics. Often this will help the reader to catch the miscue or help them see the context of it so it can be corrected. Re-reading enables the reader to self-correct. At first the reader may need to be prompted to re-read and self-correct but eventually they accomplish this on their own. Towards the end of our sessions during the second semester, I noticed that Orlando was showing a marked decrease in miscues from the
number he had been making first semester. Also, he began repeating whole phrases, something I had not seen him do before with such frequency.

Miscue: $ (hurled)$

Text: I went up to Elliot's room and saw him curled in a knot in his bed with his eyes closed.

Lisa: Hurled in a knot, did that make sense?
Orlando: No, not really.
Lisa: And you corrected it.

Learning how to re-read and self-correct became an important accomplishment for Orlando. The biggest leap in his progress was noted during the fourth lesson. I was very excited that he had made ten self-corrections in one lesson. By the end of first semester miscues were beginning to drop; 54 was the count this time. Loss of meaning was beginning to spread out as well. By this time he had 28 percent no loss of meaning, 52 percent partial meaning losses, and only 20 percent full meaning losses during this lesson, so it was evident that progress was being made.

During the first semester our RMA conversations were sometimes unintelligible or inaudible. It was a challenge for Orlando to delve into reasons why he might have made certain miscues. His usual explanation was that the word looked like another word. This revealed his over-reliance on graphophonic cues. In the following example, Orlando had miscued “beginning” for “begin” just prior to this recording:
Do you mean to go through life in this utterly mindless and irresponsible manner?" “I hope not,” said Elliot, bending low before the wind as he always did...

Lisa: Why do you think you said “beginning” there instead of bending?
Orlando: Um, cause um, that words, like, look the same and probably they sound the same too.
Lisa: Could it have been that you saw it up here too?
Orlando: mm-hmm.
Lisa: Ok.

Even though he was making progress in self-correcting miscues, even grammatical ones, he was not yet able to consistently discern grammatical miscues enough to correct them and was not able to articulate the process. This would continue to be our focus during the second semester.

Improvements in comprehension occurred as his retelling scores went from 60 percent to 100 by the end of the first semester. For each passage I would pick out the main parts and Orlando would retell as many main points of the story that he could recall. I would take the number that he mentioned and divide by the number of main ideas or facts I had picked out. An extra point was given if he related a finer detail that was of importance but not on my list. It was clear that the work we were doing was enhancing Orlando’s comprehension.

It was also clear by the end of the semester that Orlando was feeling confident about his reading. When I spoke to Orlando about his progress he said emphatically, “I want to keep doing it—it’s helping me!” He mentioned several reasons for this in the closing interview. (I gave him a closing interview at the end of the semester, even though we would be continuing in the spring, and would give him a second closing
interview at the end of second semester). He mentioned that he “learned new words,” and that he understood the words. He believed that he read faster, though we did not formally time him. He believed that the sessions helped him understand that he had to go back and re-read to get the meaning. This was good, but I wasn’t satisfied with Orlando’s progress. He had made progress, in learning a reading strategy that he had not been using up to that point, but he was still having difficulty recognizing grammatical errors that would enable him to self-correct more. Although Orlando’s measure of no loss of meaning had risen from 28 percent to 36 percent, the number of losses was also rising showing that he was still having some difficulty. In his grammatical relationships, strengths had gone up from 36 percent to 48, and weaknesses dropped from 51 to 44 percent.

In the beginning, Orlando showed an over-reliance on graphophonic cues. The following example shows how Orlando recognized sound and letter similarities between his miscues and the text but then also acknowledges his background as an influence on his miscues as well:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscue:</th>
<th>(crack)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text:</td>
<td>I got there just in time to see Grandpa crank up.</td>
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Lisa: Did your miscue make sense?
Orlando: ...mmm...
Lisa: Just within the sentence did it make sense?
Orlando: Yeah a little
Lisa: Should you have corrected it—well you did correct it. K. Why do you think you said ‘crack up’ instead of ‘crank up’?
Orlando: Probably because the words sound the same.
Lisa: Ok any other reason?
Orlando: then they’re like spelled the same
Lisa: Ok. ‘Crack up’ is a phrase that you know pretty well, right, what does it mean to ‘crack up’?
Orlando: to laugh
Lisa: Ok do you think that that might have influenced your—
Orlando --yeah!

I believe that Orlando's improvement in reading accuracy was due to the fact that through his experience with RMA, he had learned to re-read and self-correct, a concept that was apparently new to him. His awareness of disruptions in syntax and semantics had improved, though progress in this area was apparently slow, and he was not able to articulate the process yet. His improvement in comprehension was due to the fact that his miscues were increasing in semantic and syntactical strength, he was self-correcting and re-reading more frequently, which showed he was more aware of semantic and syntactic inconsistencies, and his reading was slower and more deliberate with fewer omissions. His excitement about reading occurred because he could actually witness the progress he was making in his number of self-corrections which made him feel proud.
DISCUSSION

Strengths of RMA: Benefits for the Reader

Based upon my work with Sue and Orlando, I believe RMA demonstrates effective support for reading in three main areas: 1) the use of strategies such as self-correcting and re-reading 2) improvement in comprehension, because of its emphasis on constructing meaning, and 3) rebuilding the self-concept of the reader. Specifically, I saw a marked improvement in the use of self-correcting and re-reading. This was evidenced by the increased number of self-corrections that they made session by session, the increase of re-reading, and later the re-reading and correcting of whole phrases shown by Orlando. There was also an increase in the quality of miscues as defined by the RMA process. Although both Sue and Orlando were not experts at articulating the reading process by this time, their self-corrections were showing that they were paying attention to semantic and syntactical cues in a way they had not before. Also, I noted that when I started with Orlando he was making a lot of omissions in his reading. By the end of second semester his reading had become more deliberate and thoughtful with much fewer omissions, which I believe shows that his comprehension and involvement in the text were improving. Sue’s comprehension appeared to be improving according to the retelling scores. Orlando demonstrated evidence that his self-concept as a reader was improving with his enthusiastic comments about RMA and by positive comments made about his reading in his closing interview, and his desire to continue the program. Sue’s improvement in her self-concept as a reader is evidenced by her continuation in the adult reader’s circle in which
she now regularly reads out loud and takes part in discussions, whereas before she had once been afraid to read out loud even in front of her own husband. This evidence suggests that RMA enhances attitudes about reading and can be a tool for increasing motivation for the disenfranchised reader.

**Extending RMA: What I learned**

While RMA enhances comprehension, the use of reading strategies, and reader's self-concept I found that it was not designed to answer specific questions about vocabulary development and phonemic awareness (Hwang, 2001).

**Vocabulary**

Dale and O'Rourke (1986, in Osborn and Armbruster, 2001) outline the four levels of word knowledge:

1) I have never seen this word.
2) I've heard of the word, but don't know what it means.
3) I recognize the word in context—it has to do with...
4) I know this word.

Most of Sue's miscues were somewhere around the first or second level, identifying her as someone in need of vocabulary instruction. It is widely accepted that vocabulary instruction occurs best in meaningful contexts, and it seemed to me that RMA naturally provided meaningful context in which to learn new vocabulary.

I decided to experiment with vocabulary instruction with Sue during our sessions. We typically discussed these components after the second taping. One of the first discussions we had was regarding her substitution of “rustic” for “russet,” in which we discussed the meaning of both words, which helped her comprehension of the passage.
One of the most interesting substitutions Sue had was "renegate" for "negotiate."

**Miscue:** renegate  
**Text:** Seabiscuit had needed 1:48 to negotiate a mile.

In our discussion of the miscue, Sue seemed almost frustrated that she could not explain why she miscued at this point.

Lisa: Why do you think you might have miscued?  
Sue: I was thinking about how fast he had to go. I think I just mis— I just said it incorrectly. I think I saw "negotiate" and said "renegate." Put an "R" on there when I shouldn’t have.

Lisa: Could you have been thinking about the word "renegotiate?"  
Sue: (inaudible)  
Lisa: Was there any meaning lost?  
Sue: Not to me. Maybe to someone else it would have messed them up.

Sue’s miscue might have indicated her familiarity with the words “negotiate” and “renegotiate” and her miscue “renegate” may have been a blend of the two. This may show how RMA can give insights into the vocabulary development of readers, and may warrant further research into ways RMA can be used as a tool for assessing vocabulary and its use for direct vocabulary instruction.

The following example shows one of my attempts at extending RMA with vocabulary instruction with Orlando:

**Text:** For the next two hours we stamped and beat at the flames like

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<td>maniacs</td>
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Lisa: I was wondering if you knew what that word meant.
Orlando: I didn’t.
Lisa: Ok. Good, that word is ‘maniacs’. Does that make more sense to you now?
Orlando: Yah.
Lisa: ‘For the next two hours we stamped and beat at the flames like maniacs’. What did they mean by that?
Orlando: Probably um like they were looking for him like they were crazy for looking for him.
Lisa: Ok, wh-, ok they were looking for him. Ok good.

It was a word that he was familiar with but he had not made the connection between the auditory version of the word and the word in text, until I revealed it to him. It is clear this helped his comprehension of the passage. Another interesting thing to note is that when I read the word “maniac” Orlando immediately understood it to mean “crazy.” however instead of applying the meaning to the immediate sentence, the stamping out of the flames, he applied it to a broader meaning in the story, that of the men stomping through the fire to find Abel who was trapped in a burning shed in the forest. Understanding this vocabulary word enabled Orlando to rely more on semantic cuing than on graphophonic in this instance. I might not have discovered that had I not chosen to specifically address vocabulary with Orlando. There is still much research that could be done addressing vocabulary development in the context of the RMA process.

**Phonemic Awareness**

According to the National Research Council (as cited in Kame‘enui & Simmons, 2001) some research evidence indicates that phonemic awareness is foundational in reading instruction. The evidence indicates that lack of phonemic awareness is a “core deficit,” of reading difficulties (p. 4). At the same time, researchers also recognize that
instruction in phonemic awareness cannot stand alone as a reading program in itself (p. 6). Newman (1969) pointed out common pitfalls of phonics instruction before the phonics-whole language debate was at its peak in the late 1980's: using one method of phonics instruction whether or not it is helpful, teaching all of the students the same phonetic elements at the same time, and persisting in an approach whether it is effective or not. He reached the conclusion that a more individualistic and eclectic approach to phonics instruction should be used by teachers to best serve the needs of the students. With this information, I began to wonder about the role that phonemic awareness played in my participants' ability to read and how this could fit within the parameters of RMA.

As I began to examine Orlando and Sue's use of phonemic awareness, I realized that it is difficult to classify some miscues as a weakness in phonemic awareness or as a weakness in vocabulary. I realized that some of the miscues that I initially suspected to show this weakness seemed to be weaknesses in vocabulary, or semantic and syntactical continuity. For example, for Sue's miscue of "trecipication" for "trepidation" it could be argued that if she were familiar with "trepidation" as part of her vocabulary she wouldn't have miscued, but then also it could be argued that if she were able to segment the word phonetically she would be able to pronounce it but might still not know the meaning.

While I did not incorporate any specific phonemic awareness instruction into my use of RMA, I found it to be a valuable assessment tool in this area. During the third session I noticed that Orlando's miscue analysis sheet revealed a pattern in his miscues. There was a string of several words where he was leaving out the first
phoneme of the second syllable: “tramped/trampled,” “youngers/youngsters,” and “Hanock/Hancock.” He often placed an “s” at the ends of some words also, or would sometimes leave off endings. Towards the end of his sessions it seemed this was not occurring as often.

Here is a miscue that I originally thought showed where Orlando’s phonemic awareness needed support. He left off the -es ending on the word lunches. It was not uncommon for Orlando to leave off endings, but this discussion reveals that he was in fact focused on the meaning of the story.

Miscue: (lunch)
Text: She ate lunches with my mother
Lisa: Why did-Why do you think you said lunch instead of lunches?
Orlando: Probably because the story said she went to her um her house and stayed there but it didn’t say how many days (unintelligible)
Lisa: Ok so you thought that she was only going there for one day?
Orlando: yeah
Lisa: Ok.

This affirmed my belief that reading is meaning driven. Orlando’s miscue did not break the semantic or syntactic flow of the passage. I concluded that perhaps for the older non-proficient reader, phonemic awareness may not be as pressing an issue as for the younger or beginning reader and that for the older reader vocabulary may be a more eminent issue, particularly if the student is an English-as-a-second-language learner.

Although vocabulary and phonemic awareness are not specifically addressed by Retrospective Miscue Analysis, it seems plausible that teachers who place an emphasis on phonemic awareness and vocabulary development will find value in the use of RMA
and will be able to use it as a supplement to their program, especially in building comprehension and confidence in reading.
SUMMARY

I set out to explore RMA on a long term basis in order to see how it could benefit the less able readers in my circle of contact, in and out of my classroom. I found RMA to be a useful tool in helping less able readers to feel confident about their reading, for improving comprehension, for helping them to be more aware of semantic and syntactic continuity in their reading, and by giving them practical strategies they could use independently with any text. The results from the miscue analyses showed me that RMA is useful for helping the reader's comprehension and ability to make self-corrections, and to be more aware of disruptions in grammar and semantics, and to make higher quality miscues.

I also found that there is still much to be explored in the ways that RMA can be extended with instruction and assessment in phonemic awareness and vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction may be a more pressing issue for older non-proficient reader than phonemic awareness. My experience with RMA reaffirmed my belief that reading is mostly meaning driven, is transactional and constructive by nature, and is influenced by social context and experience.
Bibliography


Bonita, G. ([www.cftl.org/30years/30years.html](http://www.cftl.org/30years/30years.html))


APPENDIX

RMA Response Form
(Modified by Lisa Wright)

Session __________________________ _

Session Focus (if any) ____________________ _

READER ______________________ _

RMA Questions:

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