"Understand the Child Better"

Using Retrospective Miscue Analysis to Engage Children of Color in Meaningful Reading Conversations

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Introduction

After working with a Latina girl in a retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) session in a tutoring program, Laura, a teacher candidate, commented, "You are letting her teach you about her reading in that book." This tutoring session was associated with a reading assessment course in a Language and Literacy master's program at a southeastern university. This class was designed to help teachers broaden and deepen their understanding of the reading process and assessment so they could be helpful to an individual child as well as to the diverse children in their classrooms.

To help teachers notice minority students' reading process, strategy use, and strengths and independently analyze assessment data regarding students' literacy skills and instructional decisions the instructor introduced RMA as an assessment and instructional tool. This study investigated how teachers could encourage children from diverse backgrounds to read and build their confidence as readers, how teachers could explore the children's reading to ensure they are reading for meaning, and how teachers facilitated all students' thinking.

As of 2014, 49.5% of enrolled students in public school were White, 25.4% were Hispanic, and 15.5% were Black (McFarland et al., 2017). Many teachers like Laura, who is White and teaches students who are mainly children of color, struggle with instruction and are dissatisfied with their careers (Nieto, 2013).

This study focused on White literacy teachers using RMA with children of color who struggle with reading. The purpose was to explore what these teachers learned from conducting RMA with children of color. The inquiry questions were:

> What did literacy teachers learn about minority children's reading and learning through RMA sessions?
>
> How did RMA impact teachers' instruction with children of color?

Retrospective Miscue Analysis

RMA is an assessment and interactive instructional tool that engages readers to revalue themselves as readers through conferring about their miscues with teachers or researchers (Y. Goodman, 1996; Y. Goodman & Marek, 1989, 1996; Marek, 1987; Moore & Gilles, 2005). A *miscue* is any variation that readers make from the text (K. Goodman, 1973). An RMA session is usually conducted following a miscue analysis (Y. Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005).

Miscue analysis and RMA both build on socio-psycho-linguistic theories (K. Goodman, 1993; Smith, 1983; Tracey & Morrow, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Children learn to read "by making sense of written language" (Smith, 2006, p. 18). Readers apply both linguistic cueing systems and pragmatic cueing systems and all psycholinguistic strategies to construct meaning (Y. Goodman et al., 2005; Moore & Gilles, 2005).

Additionally, other variables of background knowledge, the purpose for reading, ability, and willingness to assimilate and/or accommodate influence the reading process (Kucer, 2005). The following procedure was adapted from Moore and Gilles (2005) and Y. Goodman, Martens, and Flurkey (2014):

1. Have a reader read aloud and retell a little challenging piece for the first visit. It could be about 500 words long and one level above the reader's assessment level. Audio record the reader's oral reading and retelling.

2. Mark the reader's miscues after the first visit. Select a few high-quality miscues that do not change the meaning of the text and a few low-quality miscues that change the meaning of the text.

3. Revisit the reader to discuss the miscues. Start with talking about high-quality miscues. Play the reader's recorded reading and pause at the preselected miscues. For each miscue, talk about whether it makes sense, if it sounds like a language, if it should have been corrected, why the reader thinks he or she made that miscue, and other topics from the discussion.

4. Start with discussing high-quality miscues and positive things you notice about your reader. Point out the reader's strengths, so the reader can build confidence and value himself or herself as a reader. Then discuss low-quality miscues and any misunderstanding in the retelling. Teach one or more strategies that the reader needs for meaning making and reading independently.

5. When conducting RMA with one or more children in one session, make sure to let the reader talk first when working in a small group. Previous RMA studies conducted with young readers, adolescent and adult readers, native speakers, and English learners found that readers explore, reflect, and evaluate their reading and value themselves as readers through RMA (Black, 2004; Y. Goodman et al., 2016; K. Kim & Goodman, 2011; M. Kim, 2010; Moore & Aspegren, 2001; Moore & Gilles, 2005; Paulson & Mason-Egan, 2007; Theurer, 1999; Wang, 2014, 2019; Wang & Gillies, 2017). In addition, RMA helps readers gain agency, empowers them to claim their learning, and supports them

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in becoming lifelong readers (Gilles & Peters, 2011; Y. Goodman, 1996; Martens & Doyle, 2011; Wilson & Gillaspy, 2011).

The RMA conversations promote learning by allowing teachers to recognize where the learners are in order to connect with them (Nieto, 2010). This instructional and assessment tool allows teachers to teach "to and through the strengths" (Gay, 2010, p. 31) of students of color, which is a critical component for culturally responsive teaching. Kabuto (2016) worked with Spanish bilingual readers and suggested incorporating miscue analysis as a culturally relevant assessment tool in classrooms. K. Kim, Chin, and Goodman (2004) used RMA to generate critical dialogues with college English learners about their reading processes and perceptions.

Previous studies have focused on the readers as participants while exploring the reading process. This study instead focused on RMA's influence on teachers and situated teachers within the learning process because teachers hold more power to impact children's lives than anyone else (Nieto, 2005). This study explored how teachers applied RMA with children of color who struggled with reading and provided implications for teacher education and professional development.

Methodology

This was a qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) utilizing social constructivism (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The study allowed teachers to construct their understanding by exploring reading processes utilizing their background knowledge and previous experiences (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Context and Participants

Teachers met three hours for this practicum course weekly. In the first hour, teachers collaborated in pairs or in a group of three to work with a pair or a small group of children of color who struggled with reading and writing. In the second hour, teachers debriefed on their teaching with their partners and planned for the next session. Then all the teachers gathered for a whole-group seminar in the third hour.

We held 10 tutoring sessions that included activities such as read-aloud, guided reading, mini-lessons on reading and writing strategies, and authentic and hands-on activities. The lead researcher was also the course instructor and interacted with teachers during the sessions.

This class was held at the media center of a suburban elementary school of approximately 550 students ranging from four years old through fifth grade, with a high number of African American and Latinx children.

Eleven teachers and 11 children participated in the tutoring sessions in the after-school program. Two African American teachers and nine Caucasian teachers signed up for this practicum course. The school's reading interventionist selected nine African American students and two Latinx students and grouped them based on their literacy skills and needs.

The African American students spoke African American Vernacular English, and the Latinx students spoke English at school and Spanish at home. Criterion-based purposive sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was adopted to select two Caucasian teachers based on their participation, involvement, and availability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Teachers voluntarily chose to co-teach, take turns leading RMA sessions, or split and work with children individually. Teachers followed the procedure described in this section in pairs and one group of three. Teachers conducted the Burke Reading Interview and Reading Interests Inventory (Y. Goodman et al., 2005) to get to know the children in the first session. Teachers then selected stories or books for the children to read based on the children's interests and interview responses. Teachers created retelling guides for the texts they selected for the children to read.

Children read aloud teacher-selected texts and retold what they read in the second tutoring session. Teachers audio recorded children's reading and retelling. After tutoring, teachers marked and analyzed children's miscues following the in-depth procedure (Y. Goodman et al., 2005).

Each miscue was analyzed for its syntactic acceptability, semantic acceptability, meaning change, correction, and graphic similarity. The lead researcher checked all the teachers' markings and analysis and responded to their questions. Then each pair or group selected approximately 10 miscues from all the analyzed miscues to prepare for their first RMA sessions.

In the third session, teachers conferred miscues with their readers. They played back the recorded reading, paused at the preselected miscues, and talked about whether the miscue made sense, if it sounded like a language, if it should have been corrected, why the student thought he or she made that miscue, and other topics from their discussion. During debriefing and seminar, teachers discussed their children's responses, suggested reading strategies for their children, and planned for their next session. Each group conducted two RMA sessions with at least one child.

Teachers kept weekly reflections on their interactions with children. Working in pairs or a small group, each teacher completed a profile of one child in order to understand that child as a reader and learner. The profiles were collected and became part of a portfolio that included an introduction of each child, responses to the Burke Reading Interview, miscue analysis data, RMA transcriptions and reflections, student work samples, and the teachers' final reflections regarding their experiences and what they learned about assessing children's literacy skills. The lead researcher kept observation notes and a research journal and interviewed selected teachers.

Data were analyzed through a socio-psycho-linguistic lens and a constructivist viewpoint (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). All the qualitative data were open-coded, and a theme emerged. The selected teachers were also involved for member checking (Stake, 1995).

The next section presents two Caucasian teachers' experiences of practicing RMA with children from different cultural backgrounds: a teacher candidate, Laura, working with a second-grade Hispanic girl and an in-service teacher, Nicole, working with two third-grade African American boys. These stories exemplify the influence on teachers while they are learning about miscues as they interact with children who struggle with reading.

Laura: "Letting Her Teach You About Her Reading in That Book"

Laura was a full-time graduate student and had no previous full-time teaching experience. She was a confident young woman and eager to learn new things so that she could apply them in her classroom in the near future. She was excited about learning RMA and conducting it with elementary school children of color who struggle with reading and writing. One of the two girls Laura worked with was named Sofia. She was a seven-year-old Hispanic girl who spoke Spanish at home and English at school. Sofia enjoyed

reading but did not see herself as a good reader and believed that she did not know enough words.

For the first reading and RMA, Laura and her partner selected the book *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby* (Parish & Sweat, 2004), based on Sofia's interests and literacy abilities they gathered from their interaction.

Sophia had never read the book before and was eager to read. After Sofia completed reading the book and left, Laura approached the instructor looking disappointed. "She read aloud fine, but she didn't understand the book at all. What shall I do next time?" The instructor suggested that she analyze Sofia's miscues and think about what the miscues reveal about Sofia's reading.

Laura noticed that half of Sofia's miscues lost meaning construction; grammatical relations were somewhat strong, and graphic similarity was very high (see Table 1). Laura and her partner discussed that Sofia relied on the graphophonic and syntactic systems while she used the semantic system; however, she was not able to monitor her reading for meaning. They assessed her retelling as three out of 10 points based on their retelling guide. Laura reported in her reflection that Sofia got distracted from retelling the story; her understanding of the book was limited, and she missed chunks of the story.

When conferring with Sofia about her miscues, Laura learned that Sofia relied on the picture clues. For example, Sofia read "Babies should have bowls" for *Babies shouldn't have bottles*. She miscued "bowls" for *bottles*. She predicted the meaning of *bottles* from the picture, though she sounded it out as "bowls." However, not all the unknown things she encountered came with picture clues.

Sofia made several attempts to read *Bedelia* throughout her reading. Laura noticed she read it differently each time as "Bobelia," "Aubelia," "Belia," and "Bobelio." After they talked about all the different substitutions for *Bedelia*, Laura and her partner helped Sofia to know that it was OK to read differently as long as it made sense because reading is meaning making and she did not need to correct this high-quality miscue.

Laura taught Sophia a placeholder strategy of reading the first letter of a word instead of the entire word as long as she understood. This lesson helped Sofia create meaningful substitutions to make sense of the known things.

Laura found Sofia was not able to relate to the story, so she taught a mini-lesson on making connections to the text. Laura reflected that she thought if the readers could sound out the words, then "they are good to go." It did not occur to her that reading needed to make sense until she did RMA with Sofia.

Laura thought Sofia needed more help with her comprehension and elaborating on her retelling. She found one of Sofia's strengths to be that she knew the stretch-out strategy. So Laura guided her to try it with a couple of words that she miscued in the text:

LAURA: So did you like that book overall?

Sofia nods her head yes.

LAURA: That's all that matters if you really like the book and you did an awesome job of reading. What were some strategies that you used while reading when you came to a word that you didn't know?

SOFIA: Stretch it . . .

LAURA: Let's look at this word.

SOFIA: Pin-wheel, pinwheel.

Sofia predicted the meaning of *pinwheel* from the picture clues in the book, and then she successfully used her strategy to sound it out. Laura valued Sofia's strength of being able to apply her own strategy.

Laura noticed that Sofia left out some word endings from the analysis of her miscues and observation of RMA. She knew these dialects were probably the influence of Sophia's first language. Laura created mini-lessons working on the word endings because she noticed that sometimes these miscues changed the meaning of the text.

For example, Sofia read *flowered* as "flower." They worked on it during RMA and created a mini-lesson for teaching *-ed* and *-s*. Additionally, Laura discovered that Sofia miscued many times on *couldn't* and *shouldn't.* In the example earlier, she read "*should"* instead of *shouldn't*, and this miscue changed the meaning. Laura embedded a lesson about *couldn't* and *shouldn't* into the second RMA session.

At the end of that semester, the first thing Laura shared in her interview was the following:

> I thought that they knew the words and they were saying like they were good to go. They were basically if they could read it, they were done. It wasn't until recently that I started to really think about that they were not getting the whole concept of reading, they were not able to comprehend at the end. So I think that was the biggest, like the biggest thing. I will always remember that.

Laura changed her beliefs about reading as meaning making after RMA sessions, and she was able to explore the reading process through the window of miscues. She confirmed some beliefs in teaching through conducting RMA. Laura learned that she should get to know students, make learning a fun process for students, and provide choices for them. She realized the importance of asking readers to retell and the significance of conferring about their retelling and miscues.

Additionally, Laura learned to make instructional decisions based on her students' needs and create lessons using their demonstrated strengths. She reflected on her instructions and continued to think about ways that she could improve professionally. Laura reflected that she would make modifications so this tool would better fit her students. She could, for example, have shorter sessions for younger students and those who can not focus for a long time,

Table 1
Sofia's Miscue Analysis Data of Reading *Amelia Bedelia and the Baby*

	Percentage
Meaning construction	
No loss	24
Partial loss	28
Loss	48
Grammatical relations	
Strength	28
Partial strength	36
Overcorrection	0
Weakness	36
Graphic similarity	
High	54
Some	38
None	8

and have one-on-one sessions with shy students before bringing them into pairs or a small group. She also provided more reading selections for students, and embedded RMA conversations into other reading conferences and group discussions. Laura wanted to embed more miscue language and improve her conferring skills with all of her students from diverse backgrounds.

Nicole: "Understanding How an RMA Process Applies to a Child Helps the Teacher Understand the Child Better"

Nicole was a third-grade teacher at a suburban school of more than 880 students. She was in her second year teaching and pursuing her master's degree at the time of the study. Throughout this class, Nicole learned the empowering effects of utilizing RMA to learn from her students and employ them with the right tools to become more confident readers.

Nicole and her partner teacher worked with two third-grade African American boys. Tommy and Sammy were good friends on the playground and enjoyed joking around together regularly. Nicole interviewed Tommy and worked with him closely. Tommy enjoyed reading Dr. Seuss books because he liked the predictability in the texts. Most of all, Tommy believed he was a good reader and was already employing effective reading strategies, such as rereading, skipping the word, and revisiting the text.

Conducting two RMAs allowed Nicole and her partner to practice the process and help their students become more confident and comfortable with the process. They started noticing the boys' dialects and learned not to count them as errors because they did not change the meaning of the texts at all. The two boys began with skipping words, lines, and phrases; relied heavily on picture support; and were often overwhelmed with the number of words on a page.

As they progressed through the RMA process, the two teachers learned to highlight the high-quality miscues with praise but to focus more on the miscues that affected the meaning-making process. A high-quality miscue they realized they could have chosen to highlight was "hunger" for *hungry* because it did not affect the meaning of the passage. The two teachers learned that they did not need to address all the miscues one by one. They decided to pick and choose the miscues they thought would help their students in the future.

For example, Nicole chose to teach the chunking reading strategy to help their tutees learn to read future words independently. Tommy read *Pulled on his sneakers-zup!* as "Put on his shirt-zot!":

TOMMY: Pulled on his, pulled on his shirt and put.

NICOLE: Let's go back here. You said *shirt*.

TOMMY: Yeah, *shirt*. You see his *shirt*?

NICOLE: Yeah. You are looking at the pictures. Pictures are a great way to tell us what the story says. But let's see if we can read this word a little bit differently. Let's separate and chunk the word together. What does that word say?

TOMMY: Snake.

NICOLE: Add the *ers* at the end.

TIMOTHY: *Er*.

NICOLE: So what word is that?

TIMOTHY: Sneaker.

After conducting RMA, Nicole noticed both boys began to borrow their teachers' miscue language. For instance, they used words like "miscue" and "self-correction." When they listened back to the recording, they learned that they skipped words and lines. They were then able to explain why they skipped the words and grew motivated to correct their miscues during the RMA sessions. After conducting RMA and practicing the terminology, the boys were able to tell their teachers where to stop the recording during the second RMA and would self-correct their miscues that changed meanings.

They were also able to praise each other for their self-corrections when their miscues did not make sense. This collaborative retrospective miscue experience helped the two boys become more confident readers because they were each able to contribute to the other's learning and to the teaching conversations. Here is an excerpt from an RMA typescript about one of Tommy's low-quality miscues that changed the meaning of the text:

NICOLE: Something I notice you did really well . . .

SAMMY, *interjecting*: You corrected yourself.

NICOLE: . . . Yeah. You noticed that too?

SAMMY: Yeah.

NICOLE: We all noticed that you corrected as you were reading you made a miscue, which means you misread a word, and then you self-corrected. Do good readers correct their mistakes?

TOMMY: Yes.

Nicole helped Tommy to realize he needed to self-correct when he made a low-quality miscue. In that way, he could monitor his reading and understand the text.

During practicing RMA, Nicole learned more about students' beliefs, strategies, strengths, and needs. In addition, she learned about the importance of building students' confidence. She learned how children could learn from each other through collaborative RMA to better build their confidence and release their reading anxiety.

Nicole has learned how to use miscue language in her classroom and throughout disciplines. After learning about RMA, Nicole reported she used RMA in her classroom with some readers and watched them become confident and strong. She found that diverse students with all abilities could benefit from RMA.

Discussion

Through working with children of color in RMA sessions, teachers changed or confirmed some of their previously held beliefs about reading through gaining an understanding of reading as meaning making. Laura helped Sofia understand the meaning of what she read, which allowed her to release the pressure she felt when focusing only on surface accuracy. Laura's experiences made her realize that reading is meaning making for every reader.

Nicole encouraged her students to self-monitor their reading to ensure they understand what they read. It is critical for both teachers and students to know that it is acceptable to make mistakes when they read, not all miscues change the meaning of the text, and readers need to make sense of the text.

These teachers learned about their children's reading processes, helped them build up their confidence, and valued their reading. They used RMA as an instructional strategy to help their children during the conversations and to suggest instructional decisions for next-step lessons.

Teachers became more reflective about their teaching and interacting with children of color through RMA conversations and about how they can empower their students with professional teaching language. Since teachers mediate their students' activity and learning through talk (Johnston, 2004), communicating is the center of teaching (Barnes, 1992).

Reflecting on their conferring with

children stimulated the two teachers to improve their teacher talk and be explicit with the language they use, such as incorporating miscues into their teaching, asking appropriate questions to lead the conversation, and asking open-ended questions to encourage more responses from readers.

Laura wanted to prepare some possible general questions for conferring with children and have them listed out on a cheat sheet to refer to when needed. Nicole reflected that her students in the tutoring sessions and her classroom acquired miscue language to talk about their reading; thus they became metacognitive about their reading.

When students use miscue language to talk about their reading, not only are they more likely to become metacognitive about their reading, but they also become more confident about their learning and take ownership of their reading. The teachers' RMA conversations with children helped them decide both what to be explicit about in their language and how to become more responsive (Johnston, 2004).

Both Laura and Nicole met the children of color where they were as readers and learners by getting to know them, observing their reading processes, and interacting with them about their comprehension. The two Caucasian teachers were able to connect with the Latina girl and African American boys through the RMA conversations. The two teachers discovered their readers' strengths and helped them value and embrace those strengths. These teachers used their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and observation of students' learning processes to make their teaching more relevant and effective (Gay, 2010). In this way, RMA becomes a culturally responsive instructional tool.

Teachers learned that they could apply RMA in their classrooms and make modifications in order for this assessment and instructional tool to fit their students' needs, especially children of color. To this end, Nicole and her partner teacher worked together with two boys during a collaborative RMA session (Moore & Gilles, 2005).

Nicole has already used clear miscue language and brief conferences about children's miscues in her classroom. She wanted to continue to use the miscue language across disciplines throughout the year. Her other plan was to use RMA with students individually or in pairs at the beginning of a year to get to know her class and plan her teaching. She wished to embed miscue language throughout grade levels so students could continue to talk about their reading while developing their literacy skills. This practice helped the teachers realize that one strategy cannot suit every child's needs in a classroom and that they are responsible for making modifications for different students.

Implications

This study provides some insights and implications for teachers, literacy coaches, literacy specialists, educators, and researchers who are interested in reading conferences, miscue analysis, and working with children of color:

1. Teachers can learn about children's reading, especially children of color who struggle with reading, through RMA conversations. Classroom teachers can conduct RMA with students one-on-one or in a small group. Conducting and analyzing RMA may be time consuming; however, teachers can conduct it along with or during a reading workshop or one-on-one conference. Students enjoy learning the "teacher language."

2. RMA could be introduced to both preservice and in-service teachers in teacher education programs, graduate programs, and professional development sessions. RMA could be integrated into both methods and assessment courses.

3. Teachers can provide a comfortable social environment for students to talk about their reading of various written materials with their teachers or peers. Older students can have collaborative RMA conferences in pairs or small groups with their teachers' facilitation and assistance (Moore & Gilles, 2005).

4. Teachers can introduce the idea of miscue to children's parents and families (Kabuto, 2015, 2016). In that way, parents and guardians can better understand and engage in their children's reading and help children of color with their identities. A stronger community built up by teachers and parents will contribute to children's language development.

Limitations and Final Words

While sharing the two teachers' stories, we know that this practice may not apply to all readers and reading teachers. Readers from various cultural backgrounds will have different beliefs and may apply different reading strategies. Our participants conducted two RMA sessions with their children, and as a result they will reflect more deeply about their teaching and foster more success in their future students utilizing RMA sessions with the deeper understanding of culturally relevant teaching they have gained.

In addition, the teachers only provided reading genres with which these students were familiar. They could challenge their children to read diverse topics and talk about various written and electronic texts of various genres, such as picture books, fables, small articles from newspapers and magazines, and ebooks. In that way, students of color would be able to connect with their reading, explore their reading with their teachers, become more metacognitive of their reading processes, and become more confident as readers across disciplines.

This study indicates that reading teachers can engage in advocacy through a RMA conversation with their learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers can stand up for learners of color who struggle with reading and help children value themselves as readers. Classrooms with a vibrant social environment for reading conversations would provide support for improved literacy learning.

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