

Eric Paulson
The Discourse of
Retrospective
Miscue Analysis:
Links with Adult
Learning Theory

This article discusses the appropriateness of retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) for post-secondary developmental readers through the perspective of adult learning theory. Through analyzing the process and effectiveness of two RMA sessions with a young adult college developmental reader, the suitability of RMA as an instructional strategy for college readers is emphasized. In addition, implicit ties between adult learning theory and college developmental reading strategies are strengthened.

Links between adult learning theories and college developmental reading instruction are, at the very least, implicitly realized by many college developmental reading programs (Vacca & Walker, 1980). Links between pedagogical methods originally designed for primary school age learners and college developmental readers are more controversial, however. For example, the whole language philosophy of reading instruction engenders debate over its suitability for adult students. Even though the approach that whole language is often contrasted with explicit phonics instruction, it hardly seems an appropriate instructional strategy for those college developmental reading students that can read aloud capably but have severe comprehension problems. As with beginning reading instruction, the adult reading field is also subject to debates about the best instructional approach; Sticht and McDonald (1992) point out that "in both fields the same debates rage about the whole language approach ver-

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sus the word recognition, decoding, or phonics approach" (p. 315). Because of, or perhaps in spite of, this debate, many adult and college developmental reading researchers have found it important to look at the usefulness of a whole language approach to reading instruction from the perspective of adult education. Through a comparison of the basic tenets of whole language and andragogy, the influential theory of adult learning developed by Malcolm Knowles, Lewis (1995) examines the appropriateness of a whole language approach in adult education. He concludes that the similarities between adult learning theory and whole language are so similar that "the two universes of discourse are one" (p. 4). Others concur that whole language and adult learning theory share common goals, methods, and philosophies (see Brockman, 1994; Harns, 1992; Keefe & Meyer, 1991; and Wartenberg, 1994).

However, while many educators are in agreement that whole language and adult learning theory have much in common, what has not been addressed is how specific methodologies arising out of the whole language philosophy hold up to scrutiny from an adult education perspective. One such methodology is retrospective miscue analysis (RMA), an instructional methodology that uses miscues, those places in a reader's oral reading that don't match the written text (Goodman & Goodman, 1994), as learning aides. Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) has been used with readers from a wide range of ages (Goodman & Marek, 1996) and has been shown to be particularly effective with secondary and post-secondary readers. But while links between whole language theory and theories of how adults learn, such as andragogy, have been made explicit, the strong relationship between adult learning theory and retrospective miscue analysis has generally remained unexplored. The purpose of this article is to explore that relationship through the analysis of two RMA sessions with a college developmental reader named Chaz (a pseudonym). Throughout this exploration the connection between adult learning theory and college developmental reading strategies is implicit.

Retrospective Miscue Analysis

Retrospective miscue analysis (RMA) is a collaborative discussion between the reader and instructor that explores the reader's miscues with a view toward improving the reader's reading skills. The use of RMA involves engaging a reader in discussing particular excerpts of the oral reading that were audio-recorded for miscue analysis purposes. Reader miscues are focused on as a means of discussing the reader's strategies and knowledge of language. A primary goal of RMA is to allow readers to discuss their own reading process to better understand and value

the complex processes of reading and thereby revalue themselves as readers and learners. In addition, RMA allows the instructor (or teacher/researcher) to investigate with the readers their reading strategies, and thereby confirm understandings held about reading and/or come to better understandings about reading processes (Goodman & Marek, 1989).

The evolution of retrospective miscue analysis can be traced primarily through studies conducted by Yetta Goodman and her colleagues (Costello, 1992; Goodman & Marek, 1996; Miller & Woodley, 1983; Worsnop, 1980). Several types of procedures and questioning techniques for RMA have been explored during RMA research. While a set of general guidelines outline recommended procedures and suggested questions (see Goodman & Marek, 1996), in many RMA studies the procedures and questions are modified in response to participants of various ages and in various contexts (Brown, 1996; Costello, 1992; Germain, 1998). Furthermore, questions are added and changed to get at reader's strategy use and to expand readers' and researchers' understandings (Marek, 1996; Miller & Woodley, 1983).

RMA Methodology and Procedures

In general, RMA procedures consist of the audio taping of a reader reading aloud a complete text that is new to him/her, followed by an analysis by the instructor of the miscues the reader produced. In a subsequent session, the reader and instructor listen to the tape recording of the reading, while following along on a marked or unmarked typescript of the text. The reader and instructor discuss the reader's miscues following general RMA guidelines (Goodman & Marek, 1996, p. 45; the questions followed in this study are given below). This discussion is directed toward understanding why certain miscues were made, what they reveal about the reader and reading in general, and how this knowledge can lead toward gains in reading skill. The entire RMA session is audio taped so the instructor can make a transcript for record keeping or analysis purposes. The process then begins again, with the reader reading a different story.

The methodology employed in this study is closely aligned with RMA methods described above (and in Goodman & Marek, 1996). The reader, Chaz, and I, as the instructor, met once a week to read and discuss his miscues. During each session, I audio taped Chaz as he read and retold a short story from *101 Mystery Stories* (Pronzini & Greenberg, 1986). We chose the mystery genre because he seemed interested in mysteries when we talked about them in class. After he read and retold a story we listened to his reading and he selected the miscues he wanted to

talk about. We focused most of our discussion on the importance of comprehension compared to word accuracy. The following general line of questions (adapted from Goodman & Marek, 1996, p. 45) was used, although the order varied.

- A. Does the miscue make sense?
- B. 1. Was the miscue corrected?
2. Should it have been?
- C. Does the miscue look and/or sound like what was in the text?
- D. Why do you think you made this miscue?
- E. Did the miscue affect your understanding of the text? Would it have affected the understanding of people listening to you read?

Other questions were posed by both the instructor and Chaz as the occasion arose, with the general focus revolving around his miscues and his reading comprehension, progress, and beliefs. Before discussing these RMA sessions, however, the reader is introduced and his views about reading are outlined below.

Chaz, the Reader

When I met him, Chaz was a first year student in my college developmental reading class. He was returning to school after being away for several years, during which time he worked as a janitor and decided further education was his key to better jobs. He volunteered to work with me before our class met twice a week in the hopes that our tutoring sessions, based around retrospective miscue analysis, would help him improve his reading skills.

At the beginning of our RMA sessions, Chaz described himself as, "an average reader. People can understand me when I read." To Chaz, reading accurately was not only the goal of good reading, but also a point of pride for him:

Because when I read I really focus and pay—I mean I try not to say different words, 'cause I notice other people in my classes like skip a word or say the wrong word or say it in the wrong way which it is. I'm not saying it's wrong, but that's one thing I'm good at, reading them right.

Throughout his secondary school years, Chaz had received positive feedback on his ability to accurately read text aloud.

In one of our early conversations Chaz asked me why, when a student was reading aloud in class and changed a word, I didn't correct him or her. I replied that most of the time the change didn't affect the meaning of the text, so "why correct?" Chaz didn't accept this view, arguing that "if it's wrong, it's wrong." While there is nothing inherently wrong with this perspective, I knew from our class and from

discussions with Chaz that he had problems with comprehension, admitting that he focused on "getting each word right," even while reading silently. His miscue analysis scores bore out that evaluation; on the first story Chaz read for me he had a very low percentage of miscues, 1.88, but only a small percentage of those miscues retained the meaning of the text (see appendix for detailed miscue analysis scores). In addition, his retellings were incomplete and tentative. As we began our RMA sessions, I hoped he might change his beliefs about the primacy of word accuracy over meaning.

RMA Sessions

While equally effective RMA sessions can center around miscues chosen by the instructor, as well as miscues chosen by the reader, I wanted to let Chaz select the miscues from his readings that we would discuss because, as Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) reminds us, for adult learners even more potent tools for raising the level of awareness of the need to know are real or simulated experiences in which the learners *discover for themselves* the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be (p. 64-65, emphasis added).

I wanted Chaz to discover his own miscues, not have them pointed out to him. This dove-tailed well with another aspect of Chaz's personality that I realized in class, that he was proud of his ability to read accurately and could be a little defensive when "corrected"—this I learned when he miscued in class and another student pointed it out, much to Chaz's irritation. Also from class I knew that Chaz enjoyed being in charge and sought leadership positions; he would frequently be a spokesperson for his group and liked having a hand in the decisions that we made as a class. The andragogical concept of a self-directed "need to know" seemed to describe Chaz's learning style:

Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction.... As adult educators become aware of this...they make efforts to create learning experiences in which adults are helped to make the transition from dependent to self-directing learners (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 65).

After talking about the definition of *miscues* in general, I told Chaz that he could stop the tape any time he heard a miscue he wanted to discuss. He wanted to discuss all of them.

As I mentioned above, in our first session Chaz focused on word accuracy and his comprehension paid the price. The first thing we needed to address, then, was Chaz's concept of good reading being ac-

curate reading. Although Chaz chose the miscues we would discuss, most of them became good places to examine the importance of accuracy. Presented below are five of the miscues we discussed and excerpts of our discussion to illustrate Chaz's insights into his reading process. In each example, I exhibit first the miscue overlaid on the text in a box, then portions of our discussion.

RMA Discussions with Chaz: First Session

In the following example from our first RMA session, Chaz begins to see that his not knowing one particular word doesn't affect his comprehension.

Shatterproof, lines 107-108

I had been making a drink in my study when I heard him and turned.
\$decaiter
 Now I finished pouring a drink from the decanter.

Chaz: I wasn't sure how to say the word.

Instructor: Do you know what it means?

Chaz: No. I never heard it before I said it.

Instructor: Do you want to take a stab at it from the context?

Chaz: Pouring? Pouring gives me a clue. Pouring from the...glass? The bottle? Container?

Instructor: Yeah. Exactly right. So how were you trying to get this word when you played it, let's play it (plays tape).

Chaz: I was thinking in my mind, what does it mean? Did I say it right, what does it mean?

Instructor: Did you get the meaning later, or not til now? When we did the context.

Chaz: Not til now.

Instructor: Do you think it's that important a word there? Did it make much difference to you?

Chaz: No, cuz...I don't know.

Instructor: Later on, do you have to know that....

Chaz: Well, what I thought at the time was, pouring gave me a good enough clue like right now but—I mean I didn't know exactly, you know, if it was a container like you said or a bottle...but more or less I knew.

Chaz had never heard of the word *decanter* before, but was so intent on saying each word exactly as it was written that he chose to "sound it

out," hope it was right, and keep going. The importance of this discussion, however, is in Chaz's realization that not knowing that one word did not keep him from understanding the sentence and didn't hinder his understanding of the story. This is an important first step in his growth as a reader who focuses on comprehension, not individual words.

In this second example, from our first RMA discussion about *Shatterproof*, Chaz realizes that when he skips a word it is not necessarily because he was "going too fast" or was careless.

Shatterproof, line 201

"There is no hurry, Mr. Williams," he ^osaid softly.

Chaz: Skipped "said." My eyes were going too fast! (Laughs) I don't know.

Instructor: Well, maybe. But is that it? I mean just cuz you're going fast?

Chaz: Yeah, I think.

Instructor: Play it again, let's hear exactly what you said (plays tape). So first you said "he softly" then you went back and said "he said softly."

Chaz: Yeah, [I] read it over so it makes sense to me.

Instructor: Do these three words have to be in that order? Could it be "There is no hurry, Mr. Williams," "he softly said"?

Chaz: That's what I was about to say. Yeah, I've heard that before "he softly said."

Instructor: What would you say if you were going to say this? Would you put "softly" in front of "said?" I mean without reading it would you put...it's hard to think when you know it's there!

Chaz: I know, I think...I don't know, I use it both ways when I'm talking, or if I would've put it...

Instructor: So if you had kept going and said "There is no hurry, Mr. Williams," "he softly said" for example, like just switched them, you stopped before you got that far and then corrected it...would that have been okay?

Chaz: Yeah, well, it would've made sense, still, but I would've went back and read it over.

Instructor: Anyway?

Chaz: Yeah.

Instructor: So if it makes sense you still want to go back and correct it.

Chaz: Read what it says!

Instructor: You like to be real accurate, I think, I've seen that.

Chaz: Pretty much. Cuz who knows, I mean I don't know if I'm really right. It sounds right to me, "softly said."

Instructor: Fine with me.

Chaz: Yeah, but, I don't know, so I read what the book says, cuz who knows what it's going to say on the next line.

Chaz sees that he might have been about to change the phrase to one that he feels is more natural, and that the change would have been alright. He is still concerned that the author may have a purpose for choosing particular words, though, and feels safer sticking to the words of the text. This is why he thinks he went back to correct a phrase that made sense and that he found acceptable.

In the following discussion from the same story, Chaz demonstrates to himself how he uses prediction. He also notes that he didn't correct the second miscue he made because it made sense, so he could keep going.

Shatterproof, line 409

fingers
fingerprints
His finger seemed to tighten on the trigger.

Chaz: I said fingerprints, huh? (Laughs). Did you hear me say fingerprints?

Instructor: Play it again. (Plays tape). Mmm. I missed that the first time.

Chaz: Then I said fingers, but I just kept on going.

Instructor: Did you correct it?

Chaz: What? Fingerprints? Yeah. And then I said "fingers" but then I kept on going.

Instructor: Kind of two miscues.

Chaz: "Fingers" makes sense to me, that's why I kept on going.

Instructor: That's a good one.

Chaz: But "fingerprints" don't. I was thinking "fingerprints" cuz he was talking about it with the glass. Yeah, he was talking about fingerprints just before that. So like again I was, yeah, trying to predict.

Instructor: So you said "his fingerprints" and that didn't make sense, so you went back and said "his fingers seemed to tighten on the trigger" and that did make sense so you left it. See, that's what I'm talking about. You're one of the most accurate readers that I know, actually, but when it makes sense, why go back?

Chaz: Unless I feel, when I can see ahead a few words, and it adjusts in my mind real quick, you know, if I feel it's gonna make sense then I keep on going. Even though I just added a letter, like "s" to finger. But fingerprints, I mean I used the whole word with another one, so I wasn't sure.

Instructor: Good prediction.

Chaz points out here that he attempted to correct his prediction of *fingerprints* when it was disconfirmed by the context, but then didn't attempt to correct the word he replaced it with—*fingers*—because it made sense.

At the end of our first session, Chaz believed that he did indeed make miscues that made sense, and that he didn't necessarily have to go back and correct them. However, he still felt that it was a good idea to correct miscues whenever possible, because he believed that the author obviously intended to write the text a certain way, so why deviate from it? We discussed that this is a perfectly fine way to look at texts, but only if being so attuned to accuracy didn't supplant comprehension.

We met again later that week to read another story, *Creature of Habit* (Gault, 1986). Mindful that Chaz respects my evaluation of his reading abilities as much as I respect his, I reminded Chaz of our discussion and suggested that he try to forget about word accuracy and focus more on comprehending the story. I explained that since he's already one of the most accurate readers I know, he can afford to ease off on the accuracy a little bit and focus on the story. The freedom to make this suggestion, even though I wanted Chaz to make his own decisions, comes from the andragogical concept that "...adult educators try to discover ways to help adults examine their habits and biases and open their minds to new approaches" (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 66).

Small Changes

That evening, when I transcribed his retelling and coded his miscues, I found some interesting changes. There were no *dramatic* changes in his retelling, but his miscues were of a higher quality. For example, an uncorrected miscue from Chaz's first reading tended to be scored syntactically and semantically unacceptable:

In his second reading, an uncorrected miscue was more apt to be

Shatterproof, line 425

have
I will leave now and you will never see me again.

Creature of Habit, line 238

After a little while, she called, "Honey, the tea is ready."

syntactically and semantically acceptable, as in Chaz's omission of *lit-tle*:

Most importantly, it was clear that he was beginning to focus on meaning over accuracy. I hoped that in our next RMA session our discussion would center around that idea.

Creature of Habit, lines 217-218

his
Fred has this thought on a Wednesday night, while working out a cryptogram.

RMA Discussions with Chaz: Second Session

When we met the following week to talk about Chaz's reading of *Creature of Habit*, he was indeed interested in talking about the miscues he made that did not affect his comprehension. In this passage, for example, Chaz shows that he is beginning to think that individual word inaccuracy is not necessarily a bad thing:

Chaz: I said "his!"

Instructor: Yeah. Did you correct it?

Chaz: No, cuz it makes sense.

Instructor: It does make sense. What's the difference? "Fred had his thought on a Wednesday night" and "Fred had this thought"?

Chaz: "His thought," well they're about the same because they're talking about the thought, and the thought would be his thought.

Instructor: Yeah.

Chaz: I didn't even notice that.

Instructor: Perfectly the same.

Chaz: Yeah, it's just, what's the difference, this is the thought, and he's the one thinking that thought.

Chaz realizes here that substituting *his* for *this* made so much sense that he actually said "what's the difference." This is a miscue that not too long ago would have seemed, to him, a "mistake," and the mark of a poor reader. This realization Chaz makes is a direct result of experiencing his reading himself, and discussing what he experienced, which echoes a central tenant of Knowles et al., (1998):

...the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques...case method, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques (p. 66).

Creature of Habit, lines 223-224

He left early, his head aching.

are you sick?

At home, Bertha said, "Honey, you're sick..."

In this next example from the same story, Chaz did not hear the miscue the first time he played the tape, but I thought it was such a good one that I asked him to play the tape again so he could catch it. Here is a good example of how Chaz is growing as a reader: first he began to see that word accuracy wasn't the most important aspect of reading, and here he starts to see that his miscues can change a text for the better:

Chaz: Oh, alright [there it is]. "Honey, you're sick?" "Are you sick?" I said. Same thing.

Instructor: Same thing. That's a good miscue. Okay, you got one word there, "you're." Well, it's...

Chaz: It's "you are"—"are you" I just turned it around. Weird, huh?

Instructor: Yeah, so what does this tell you about—are you paying so much attention to each letter, or...

Chaz: I know what they're talking about, I kinda knew what she was going to ask him. Cuz stuff that says, a few sentences before that. "His head was aching." You know, all those little things? I didn't notice it, though.

Instructor: So is this accurate reading?

Chaz: No. I...

Instructor: What do you think?

Chaz: Is it accurate to me, or...

Instructor: Is it accurate—if you're reading it out loud and somebody else does not have this (taps story), did you just mess 'em up?

Chaz: Oh, no. He would understand what I was saying.

Instructor: So is it accurate?

Chaz: I'd say yeah.

Instructor: I'd say yeah, too. Well, cuz I'm not sure that accuracy is every letter. I think it is...

Chaz: As long as it had meaning, he knows what you're talking about, huh?

Instructor: Is there any meaning change: "honey you're sick" "honey are you sick?"

Chaz: I think "honey, are you sick?" sounds better.

Instructor: I think it sounds better too.

Chaz: "Honey, you're sick." I put it more like, clearer I was asking a question. Instead of, I don't know how to say she was asking him direct, you know. "Honey, you're sick."

Instructor: Yeah, like a direct question or something.

Chaz: Yeah. Like she knows for sure he's sick, you know? That's what it sounded like to me, and then the way I said it sounds like she's not sure, she's just asking if he's sick. Huh, it [the miscue] makes more sense to me.

When Chaz says "I kinda knew what she was going to ask him," he realizes that this knowledge in part led to a miscue. Here he expresses his awareness that informed, smart reading, can lead to high quality miscues. He even asserts his ownership of the text by stating that he thinks his miscue "sounds better" than the author's version of the sentence. Chaz's idea that he can construct a text while reading that is better than the original is a significant measure of his evaluation of his self-worth as a reader—remember that at the beginning of our sessions he felt strongly that the words held precedence over even his own comprehension. And from an adult learning perspective, Van Der Kamp (1992) reminds us that "effective learning is linked to an individual's self-concept and self-evaluation as a learner" (p. 195).

Changes in Chaz

In the short time we'd been working together I'd seen a change in Chaz's attitude toward reading, notably in his perspective toward accuracy. When we began our sessions he said: "Yeah, I like being real spe-

cific and all that. And I like when somebody talks to me or I hear, see things, I like to see them right. Or else it gets me frustrated."

At first, Chaz's idea of accuracy was a word-for-word reproduction of the text. Our RMA sessions helped him discover that the accuracy that is important is meaning—if he strives to comprehend the *story* instead of the *words* he will become a better reader. Something Chaz found interesting and ironic was that when he tried to focus more on comprehension in our second session he actually had *fewer* miscues per hundred words. We talked about how focusing on the story helps him predict what is coming up, which can result in fewer miscues. The most obvious difference that focusing on comprehension had for Chaz's oral reading performance was in the categories of *Meaning Construction and Grammatical Relationships*. In his first reading, 34% of Chaz's miscues resulted in no loss of meaning, while in his second, 53% resulted in no loss. Similarly, 31% of the miscues from his first reading exhibited strong grammatical relationships versus 60% from the second reading. Small, but important, gains that show an increased focus on reading as a language process and meaning making endeavor.

RMA changed Chaz's perspective on reading, and it is this change in perspective that will shape his reading comprehension progress in the future. This idea is a fundamental concept of the adult learning theory of transformational learning, best expressed by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), below:

Meaning perspectives are the lens through which each person filters, engages, and interprets the world. Learning can consist of a change in one of our beliefs or attitudes (a meaning scheme), or it can be a change in our entire perspective. A change in perspective is personally emancipating in that one is freed from previously held beliefs, attitudes, values, and feelings that have constricted and distorted one's life (p. 320).

This change in perspective has enabled Chaz to focus more on meaning, not word accuracy, when he reads.

Summary and Conclusion

Retrospective miscue analysis is an instructional methodology that arises out of the whole language perspective of reading instruction. Specifically, RMA provides a powerful, immediate educational use for a reader's miscues. While RMA instruction has been undertaken with adults in the past, its compatibility with adult learning theories had not been examined. This article makes explicit links between RMA and adult learning theory through discussing and demonstrating the process and results of two RMA sessions with a college developmental reader. In addition, this relationship - adult learning theory being ap-

plied to a college developmental reader who benefits from an instructional methodology that has theoretical ties to adult learning theory - further strengthens implicit ties between adult learning theory and college developmental reading strategies. As the sessions with Chaz demonstrate, during RMA the reader and the instructor work collaboratively to learn together about the reader's skills and how to improve them - a textbook example of Brookfield's (1986) cycle of learning that describes adult education: "learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, reflection upon activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection, and collaborative analysis, and so on" (Galbraith, 1990, p. 6). The process and effectiveness of retrospective miscue analysis make it a wholly appropriate instructional strategy for college developmental readers.

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Chaz:
Shatterproof
1.88 MPHW

Meaning Construction			Grammatical Relationships				Graphic Similarity			Sound Similarity		
No Loss	Partial Loss	Loss	Strength	Partial Strength	Overcorrection	Weakness	H	S	N	H	S	N
10	8	11	9	15	0	5	12	0	1	9	3	1
Column Total			Pattern Total				Percentage					
29			29				13			13		
34	28	38	31	52	0	17	92	0	8	69	23	8

Appendix

Reading Miscue Inventories

Chaz:
Creature of Habit
1.44 MPHW

Meaning Construction			Grammatical Relationships				Graphic Similarity			Sound Similarity		
No Loss	Partial Loss	Loss	Strength	Partial Strength	Overcorrection	Weakness	H	S	N	H	S	N
8	2	5	9	3	0	3	12	1	1	9	4	1
Column Total			Pattern Total				Percentage					
15			15				14			14		
53	13	33	60	20	0	20	86	7	7	64	29	7