

WEBSITE RESOURCE W15. 5

How to carry out a miscue analysis of writing

A writing miscue analysis can be carried out during any routine classroom writing activity but it is best to make sure that the person carrying out the analysis does not have any other distractions (like teaching the class!) for about 20–30 minutes. A colleague or teaching assistant will need to manage the class. You will need a voice recorder and will be making notes about:

- writing behaviour
- the process of writing
- purpose/intention
- audience/readership
- structure/form
- technical features.

Make sure the child is comfortable, understands the writing task and knows that you will be talking to her /him about the writing later. Explain that this is because you are interested in seeing how they cope with writing independently and that you will not be offering any help.

Stage 1 Starting to write

The key to a productive writing miscue analysis is the initial observation: what is the child doing as he or she starts writing? Are there any signs of uneasiness or unwillingness to engage with the topic? Or is there evidence of engagement? Look for position of head, eye movements, posture, stillness, whether the child speaks to anyone. Of course, this could be filmed, but that can be a distraction and is best avoided.

The first writing might be a plan or the writer might go straight into writing. Note how hesitant or assured they seem to be as they write. Look for evidence of re-reading the first few words/ sentences. How long does it take for the writer to settle to fluent composition? (Taking time to settle may not necessarily mean inattention, but can mean a process of

gathering ideas.) During the writing, note any use of wordbook, dictionary or consulting friends. If possible, note whether these discussions are about technical matters of spelling or punctuation or about the subject of the writing (or about something else entirely). After the writing is completed, ask the child to re-read the piece and make alterations if they want to.

Stage 2 Discussing the writing

This gives the writer a chance to explain some of the decisions made when writing. You will be asking questions designed to provide evidence about the writer's view of the process of writing; a sense of the purpose /intention of the writing; of the readership/audience and of the requirements of the form/text type. When the child is satisfied with the writing, explain that you are going to have a chat about it and that you are going to record the conversation so that you can go back and listen to the interesting things they have to say. As you are listening to the child reading the piece and talking about it, remember that you are not offering any suggestions about improvement. Your aim is to hear what the writer has to say.

The process of writing

Ask the writer:

- to read the piece to you and ask if there is anything s/he has noticed and wants to change after reading it aloud.
- to tell you which parts of the piece they like best. If they are hesitant, you could identify a part you like and explain why you like it, but only offer one example because the idea is that the child should feel free to comment.
- if they feel satisfied with the writing; if so, why? If not, why not?
- if they enjoy writing generally.

Purpose/intention

- Generally, you are trying to find out why the writer chose to write this piece in this way. What was the idea behind it? The subject may be given by the teacher but children make choices within required topics about what they will include.

Audience/readership

- Ask the writer who they think will read the writing or who they imagined the writing was intended for.

Form/ text type

- You are trying to find out why the writer shaped the piece as it is. If this is a straightforward narrative, this section may not be necessary, although you may want to ask if the writer is pleased with the ending, or with the beginning or middle of the story. If it is a set of instructions or information, ask how the writer knew how to set it out.

End the session by giving the writer some positive comments about the piece and telling her/him when you will be able to give them fuller comments.

Stage 3 The analysis

Your analysis will be based on your observations, the taped discussion and the piece of writing itself. Although the analysis is divided into different sections, you may find it tricky to separate them since a piece of writing is a complete entity, for example, you may find it difficult to decide whether a comment should be entered under purpose or structure/form. Do not spend time worrying about this. What matters is that you have made a focused analysis of one child's writing with the aim of diagnosing where you may be able to help her/him overcome difficulties. One or two fuzzy areas will not prevent you making a thoughtful analysis.

You may find it helpful to put the writing on top of an A3 sheet of paper so that you can annotate it without marking the work itself. You will be making comments on:

- writing behaviour
- the process of writing
- purpose/intention
- audience/readership
- structure/form
- technical features.

[See Figure W15.4.1 for the format of the final analysis.]

Writing behaviour

From your observations, what did you note about how the writer settled to the task and how engaged he/she was? From the taped discussion, what did the writer say about how he/she feels about the piece and how satisfied they were. Summarise your thoughts about this crucial question:

How does the child see herself/himself as a writer?

The process of writing

This is analysed through:

- your observations of the child as he/she wrote and redrafted: Did they use a plan or go straight into the writing (neither is 'better' – just different approaches). How often did the writer make amendments? Seek help? What amendments were made after the child had read the piece over.
- the writer's response to your questions: particularly about which parts he/she liked best and why. What does this tell you about the writer's ability to reflect on her/his own writing?
- alterations made to the writing itself: these can be very revealing. Look at the text and note all the crossings out and other editing marks. What do these tell you about

the child's ability to self-correct and/or edit longer pieces of writing? Were the alterations made for clarity, for spelling accuracy, for logical flow of the piece, or for other reasons?

When you have considered these areas, summarise your conclusions to this question:
What does the writer's approach tell you about her/his fluency and independence in writing?

Purpose/intention

Information about this will mainly come from your discussion with the writer. When you look at the text, consider how far the writer fulfilled those intentions or purposes. What choices did he/she make in writing the piece for a specific purpose? Does the piece do the job the writer wanted it to do?

Having listened to the tape and looked at the text, summarise your thoughts about this question:

What does the piece reveal about the writer's success in making her/his own meaning and intentions in writing clear?

Audience/readership

You will find evidence for this in both the taped discussion and the piece of writing. In looking at the text, consider how far the writer shows awareness of the reader he/she mentioned. If the child did not respond to this question, you will have to look for evidence in the writing that the writer is aware of the needs of a reader. For example, does the writer address the reader directly (as in instructions)? Does the piece have explicit detail to help the reader understand the process or the events in the narrative? After looking at the text in the light of the writer's comments, summarise your analysis of the following:

How does this piece show the writer's understanding of the needs of a reader?

Structure/form

Some of the analysis of this will come from the discussion with the writer but mostly you will use the text itself for this part of the analysis:

- what structure/form has the writer chosen? – straightforward narrative or flashback technique?; letter form; explanatory brochure?
- how consistent and clear is the form? For example, is there a clear beginning and conclusion suitable to the chosen type of text?
- do the ideas link logically? Is there evidence of cause-and-effect or reasoned action by the characters? Overall, is this a cohesive piece?

When you have looked carefully at the piece, summarise your thoughts about:
What does this piece indicate about the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and coherently? How does the form fit with the intended task?

Technical features

This will all be carried out using the text itself. You will be considering spelling, vocabulary choice, punctuation and sentence structure (syntax).

Spelling

- Count the number of words in the whole piece then the number of words spelt incorrectly. Note the number of errors in proportion to the whole text.
- Look at the words spelt incorrectly. Are there any pattern, for example, use of double/single consonants; letter strings consistently but incorrectly used? If more than a third of the words in the whole piece are incorrectly spelt, select a proportion of the errors.; if less than a third, analyse all the spellings and look for evidence of graphophonic matching and attempts at visual correspondence. (See Chapter 12 for a full description of spelling strategies.)
- Look at the words spelt correctly and note evidence of successful graphophonic and visual correspondence.

Vocabulary choice

What is the range of vocabulary used? Does the vocabulary seem restricted by difficulties with spelling or is the vocabulary ambitious?

Punctuation

- Note the range of punctuation used in the whole piece.
- Is the writing organised into sentences – whether they are marked or not?
- If direct speech is used, is this marked by punctuation and/or new lines?
- Overall, is punctuation used consistently? Adventurously?

Sentence structure (syntax)

- Look for evidence of variation in sentence length and for complex sentence structures. Notice sentence openers and conjunctions particularly.
- Note any repetition for specific effect.

After considering these four areas, summarise your technical analysis by noting:

- 1. Features which show the writer's competence in handling syntax, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary.**
- 2. How effectively the writer has varied technical features in relation to intention and readership.**

This completes the analysis. Now you need to summarise your findings and think about what they tell you about how you might help this young writer move forward. Complete the form in Figure W 15.4.1 below:

Writing Miscue – Summary of Analysis

Writing behaviour

How does the child see herself/himself as a writer?

Possible future action:

The process of writing

What does the writer's approach tell you about her/his fluency and independence in writing?

Possible future action:

Purpose/ intention

What does the piece reveal about the writer's success in making her/his own meaning and intentions in writing clear?

Possible future action:

Audience/readership

How does this piece show the writer's understanding of the needs for a reader?

Possible future action:

Figure 15.4.1 Summary form for miscue analysis of writing

Structure/form

What does this piece indicate about the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and coherently? How does the form fit with the intended task?

Possible future action:

Technical features

What features show the writer's competence in handling syntax, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary,.

How effectively the writer has varied technical features in relation to intention and readership.

Possible future action:

Figure 15.4.1 Continued

Chapter 15 gives examples of two teachers' miscue analyses of writers.