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# **The Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale**

**Patrick P. McCabe**

The Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale is a formative evaluative instrument which can be used to judge the quality of reading instruction by recording the nature of the interaction between the student and the teacher along three dimensions critical to quality instruction: cognitive processes, affective processes, and management skills. Cognitive processes are those behaviors which are directed toward acquiring strategies or skills (to improve reading). Affective processes are those behaviors which influence the self-concept of the learner. Management skills are those behaviors which demonstrate ability to utilize components of the learning environment effectively.

In part a response to Guthrie's (1987) call for a quantification of indicators of quality in reading programs and McGreal's (1988) plea for specificity of focus when making observations, the Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale (MRIOS) provides specific foci for evaluating reading lessons. According to Guthrie, "process indicators should be defined as metrics rather than as principles. A vague generality such as 'teacher warmth fosters learning' is an inadequate ground for an indicator" (1987, p. 13). McGreal (1988) noted that high quality evaluations are based on a specific focus and are descriptive rather than judgmental observations.

The indicators of quality reading instruction enumerated in the MRIOS grow from other evaluative instruments in the field of reading education as reported below. For example, Burns and Womack (1979), McCormick (1979), Criscuolo (1984), and Corboy and Mangieri (1984) reported the use of checklists to which the evaluator responds with a yes or no to components of a reading program. (Corboy and Mangieri also included a column for comments by the observer.)

While these yes or no checklists are useful because they enumerate those factors which are important in reading instruction, they fail to help teachers recognize their areas of relative strength and/or weakness. For example, a yes rating on a checklist on two successive observations does not reflect progress in spite of the fact that instruction may, in fact, have improved; a *no* response to an item does not give the teacher specific enough feedback so that instruction can be modified. An improved question might be: "To what degree is the teacher using...?" A response to this question would serve to demonstrate to teachers the extent of their effectiveness in a given area, not merely to indicate if the behavior was observed.

In one example of an improved format, Bagford (1981) reported the use of a checklist on which a rating from one to ten indicated teacher effectiveness in reading instruction. In another example of an improved format, Blair and Rupley (1980) encouraged teachers to rate their classroom reading instruction by using two self-evaluation scales, noting that by connecting the x's indicating the ratings in these scales, teachers can see a graphic profile of their strengths and weaknesses. An advantage of both the Bagford and the Blair and Rupley instruments compared to the other mentioned above is that the degree to which a given behavior is

present during reading instruction is indicated along a continuum.

Although not developed specifically for evaluating reading instruction, an additional example of an improved evaluation format is Ysseldyke's and Christenson's Instructional Environment Scale (1987). While this instrument does provide a structure for recording the degree to which a behavior associated with quality instruction is present and while numerous behaviors are included, the format of the page does not provide enough space to record ratings of specific sub-categories of behavior.

### **The Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale**

The Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale (MRIOS) is an attempt to synthesize those indicators of quality reading instruction reported in the reading education literature in a format which avoids some of the problems noted above. Construct validity for the teacher and learner behaviors included in MRIOS has been established in the reading education literature through the work of Rowell (1972), Burns and Womack (1979), McCormick (1979), Rupley and Blair (1980), Bagford (1981), Rauch (1982), Criscuolo (1984), Corboy and Mangieri (1984), Hoover and Carroll (1987), and Stieglitz and Oehlkers (1989). Additionally, those behavioral indicators of effective instruction in general written by Rosenshine and Stevens (1986), Ysseldyke and Christenson (1987), and McGreal (1988) complete the rationale for the inclusion of the items in the MRIOS.

As McGreal has stated, "Evaluators can obtain reliable student information if they concentrate on describing life in the classroom rather than making judgments of the teacher"

(1987, p. 20). Since teaching should not be thought of as unrelated to learning, observation of learner behavior as well as teacher behavior during the time reading strategies are taught provides additional data on the probable effectiveness of the reading instruction. When using MRIOS, cognitive processes, affective processes, and management skills during reading lessons are observed from three perspectives: 1) teacher behavior; 2) learner behavior; and 3) time.

The MRIOS provides a framework for observation of life (the teaching/learning environment) in the classroom for one or for many learners. It is used to describe both teacher and learner behavior during one or during many formal reading lessons (such as DRAs) or less formal reading activities over a number of days, weeks or months depending upon the needs of the individual(s) observed.

In MRIOS a number of indicators of quality reading instruction and learner behavior are identified and a continuum is used to report the degree to which each is present during a reading instruction activity. Positive behaviors are listed on the left side of the continuum and negative behaviors are listed on the right side. During the lesson the observer records the behavior(s) by putting the day's date on the appropriate place between the positive and negative poles. The MRIOS can be used by teacher, student-teacher supervisors and administrators to evaluate instruction and learning.

**Teachers.** Upon completion of an activity, teachers can make a judgment about the effectiveness of their instruction as well as its effect on student learning using MRIOS retrospectively. (While this may be subjective, it does provide a baseline for self monitoring.) Groups of

teachers might also observe each other. When teachers decide to observe, the teacher observed and the observer each complete a MRIOS form for the session and comparisons are made. The teacher's perceptions are compared to the observer's recordings on the MRIOS and collegial discussions follow.

**Student-teacher supervisors.** When working within a clinical supervision framework, such as that described by Lindsey and Runquist (1983), the student-teacher supervisor can guide the neophyte teacher more effectively. By using MRIOS, expectations are clearly enumerated, strengths and weaknesses can be pinpointed, and a framework is provided so that feedback can be very specific. This is especially beneficial for student-teachers who may become so overwhelmed when assuming the responsibilities of management of actual students that they may not use skills taught during the teacher education program.

**Administrators.** A school administrator can use the results of MRIOS over a period of time with a number of teachers to determine staff needs. For example, if it is discovered that questioning techniques are an area of relative weakness for the staff of a school, then workshops can be planned to address that skill.

The use of MRIOS has two major benefits: 1) relative strengths and weaknesses of the teaching/learning situation are reported in an easily readable format, and 2) by using the original MRIOS form on subsequent observations both the teacher and the observer can immediately see progress over time in relation to a given indicator(s) of quality teaching behavior.

Dates of the observation(s) are recorded on the appropriate place on the line between the negative and positive behaviors instead of checks or numerical ratings; color coding of different dates makes a visual survey of the completed observation form(s) more graphic.

As an example, if on September 28th the teacher does not draw upon relevant experiences of the learner to provide readiness for reading specific material, the observer would put the date of the observation, 9/28, using a green marker; on part *F* of "Section I: Cognitive Processes" toward the right side of the scale. If the teacher is a skilled questioner, than 9/28 should be entered also in green in the appropriate section close to the left hand side of the page. If the teacher is an unskilled questioner, than 9/28 should be entered close to the right hand side of the page on the appropriate line. In this manner, relative strengths and weaknesses become apparent for that session. If, on a subsequent visit, that teacher was observed to "draw upon relevant experiences..." frequently, then the observer would enter the date, say 11/3 in the appropriate place on the original scale, using a different color ink.

Since these behaviors may occur with varying degrees of frequency during a single observation, the observer can quantify each of those behaviors along with the date of occurrence. An example of such a code could be 10/4-4, indicating that on October 4th, the behavior was observed four times.

The three dimensions (teacher behavior, learner behavior, and time) of MRIOS when viewed from the three perspectives (cognitive processes, affective processes, and management skills) provide the teacher, student-teacher

supervisor, and the administrator with a description of the learning environment.

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APPENDIX

The Multidimensional Reading Instruction Observation Scale

I. Cognitive Processes

The teacher...

- A. clearly states objective of the lesson \_\_\_\_\_
- B. provides an overview of the learning activity \_\_\_\_\_
- C. provides an example of strategy to be taught (context clues, metacognitive activity, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- D. uses "independent" level material to demonstrate how the strategy can be used \_\_\_\_\_
- E. provides the opportunity for transfer of the newly learned reading skill to the reader's text(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- F. draws upon relevant experience of the learner to provide readiness for reading specific material \_\_\_\_\_
- G. asks a variety of questions (literal, interpretive, applied) \_\_\_\_\_
- H. asks probing questions to follow an incorrect response \_\_\_\_\_
- I. rephrases questions which are too difficult \_\_\_\_\_
- J. asks metacognitive questions, such as "what made you come up with that answer?" \_\_\_\_\_
- K. provides "think time" \_\_\_\_\_
- L. often asks students about the accuracy of their predictions \_\_\_\_\_

- A. does not clearly state the objective of the lesson
- B. does not provide overview of the learning activity
- C. does not provide example of the strategy to be taught
- D. uses material which is too difficult to illustrate how the strategy can be used
- E. uses skill activities exclusively; does not allow transfer of the newly learned skill to the reader's text(s)
- F. ignores relevant experiences of learner when providing readiness for reading specific material
- G. asks one type of question
- H. does not use follow-up questions; goes immediately to another unrelated question without trying to elicit answer
- I. does not rephrase questions; repeats original question
- J. does not ask metacognitive questions
- K. answers own question; does not allow student time to reflect; calls on another student
- L. rarely asks students about accuracy of their predictions

The learner...

- M. demonstrates awareness of the purpose of the lesson \_\_\_\_\_
- N. demonstrates the ability to use a variety of word recognition strategies (context, structural analysis, phonics) \_\_\_\_\_
- O. demonstrates the ability to read at the literal level \_\_\_\_\_
- P. demonstrates ability to read at higher levels of comprehension \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. demonstrates ability to apply newly learned skill(s) to \_\_\_\_\_

- M. is not sure about what he/she is supposed to be learning
- N. relies upon one word recognition strategy
- O. does not demonstrate the ability to read at literal level
- P. cannot respond to reading selection at higher comp. level
- Q. does not apply newly presented skill material; continues

- reading material \_\_\_\_\_
- R. demonstrates ability to monitor learning of objectives; says "I don't get it," etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- S. demonstrates ability to monitor comprehension of passage (utilizes metacognitive strategies) \_\_\_\_\_

- to get "answer" wrong \_\_\_\_\_
- R. gives no indication of ability to monitor own learning of objective \_\_\_\_\_
- S. gives no indication of monitoring comprehension; does not stop to reflect upon what has been read \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Affective Processes**

*The teacher...*

- A. smiles; addresses learners by name \_\_\_\_\_
- B. makes eye contact with all or most learners \_\_\_\_\_
- C. treats learners with dignity (says "thank you" and "please" when appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
- D. laughs with learners; enjoys learner's humor \_\_\_\_\_
- E. demonstrates a professional interest in learners' personal well-being (asks "how are you feeling," etc. when appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_
- F. uses praise frequently \_\_\_\_\_
- G. provides regular feedback on learner success \_\_\_\_\_
- H. expresses criticism in a positive manner; is constructive (says "Can you think of another answer?" "You're on the right track," etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- I. encourages all learners to participate an express self; says "Yes that was a good question," etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- J. is enthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_

- A. does not smile; addresses learner without using name \_\_\_\_\_
- B. teaches to a small group of learners \_\_\_\_\_
- C. does not treat learner with dignity \_\_\_\_\_
- D. does not laugh at learner's humor \_\_\_\_\_
- E. does not ask questions about learners' well-being when possible \_\_\_\_\_
- F. rarely, if ever, uses praise \_\_\_\_\_
- G. rarely, if ever, provides positive feedback \_\_\_\_\_
- H. expresses criticism in a negative way; inculcates a feeling of "being dumb" (says "How could you think that?" "I never heard of such a silly answer," etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- I. is discouraging; frowns when an incorrect answer is given \_\_\_\_\_
- J. is unenthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_

*The learner...*

- K. makes voluntary contributions to the group \_\_\_\_\_
- L. accepts "corrections" gracefully; may nod head in agreement \_\_\_\_\_
- M. helps others in room (if permitted) \_\_\_\_\_
- N. asks other learners for help when necessary \_\_\_\_\_
- O. interacts with the teacher \_\_\_\_\_
- P. is not easily distracted \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. asks to do additional reading \_\_\_\_\_
- R. without being told to do so does additional reading in class \_\_\_\_\_

- K. rarely, if ever, contributes to the group \_\_\_\_\_
- L. gets angry when his/her "error" is pointed out \_\_\_\_\_
- M. refuses to help others \_\_\_\_\_
- N. does not ask others for help; does not seek assistance from peers \_\_\_\_\_
- O. doesn't interact with teacher \_\_\_\_\_
- P. is easily distracted \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. does not ask for more reading; finishes the task at hand \_\_\_\_\_
- R. never does additional reading in class \_\_\_\_\_

S. mentions "outside"reading \_\_\_\_\_

S. rarely, if ever, demonstrates "outside reading"

**III. Management Skills**

*The teacher...*

A. makes learners aware that a learning activity is about to begin \_\_\_\_\_

A. makes no attempt to make learners aware that a learning activity is about to begin

B. makes good use of at least two different types of media or materials \_\_\_\_\_

B. does not make good use of media or material

C. encourages all learners to become involved \_\_\_\_\_

C. makes no attempt to involve all learners

D. calls upon volunteers in a non-threatening manner \_\_\_\_\_

D. calls upon volunteers in an intimidating manner; learners feel "on the spot"

E. addresses the group as a whole as well as communicating on an individual or small group basis \_\_\_\_\_

E. communicates solely with group as a whole; rarely if ever communicates on an individual or small group basis

F. seats learners so that they see and hear comfortably \_\_\_\_\_

F. seats learners so they can't see and hear comfortably

G. arranges the room so that material is easily accessible \_\_\_\_\_

G. has arranged the room so material is hard to get to

H. maintains a clutter free room \_\_\_\_\_

H. maintains a room which is full of clutter

I. has clear record of test results \_\_\_\_\_

I. has no clear record

J. employs a variety of tests (formal and informal) \_\_\_\_\_

J. uses one type of test

K. moves about the room to implement instruction \_\_\_\_\_

K. remains stationary; teachers from one location

L. responds to requests for assistance in a timely manner \_\_\_\_\_

L. does not respond to requests for assistance in timely manner

M. is able to provide for developmental, corrective, remedial and accelerated readers \_\_\_\_\_

M. is unable to provide instruction for all types of readers

N. entices learners to read through the use of "advertisements," such as book jackets strategically placed, dioramas, a circulation library, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

N. fails to make reading "appetizing" through advertisements

O. uses instructional time effectively \_\_\_\_\_

O. does not use instructional time effectively

*The learner...*

P. moves around the room in a constructive manner \_\_\_\_\_

P. rarely leaves his/her seat for constructive reasons

Q. has an accurate, organized system of record keeping \_\_\_\_\_

Q. does not have an accurate, organized system of record keeping

R. consults personal records for strengths and weaknesses \_\_\_\_\_

R. does not consult personal records for strengths and weaknesses

S. appears to be involved in the learning activity \_\_\_\_\_

S. does not appear to be involved in the learning activity

T. follows a sequence of learning activities \_\_\_\_\_

T. does not follow a sequence of learning activities