

<研究ノート>

## A Cooperative Approach Toward Reading Aloud in L2 Classrooms

Harumi Kimura

### *Introduction*

This was an action research study on practicing and performing reading aloud children's books as groupwork in L2 classrooms. Students were grouped into foursomes and chose a big book for their reading performance. They read the text to enhance comprehension, to discuss how to effectively convey the story, and to practice reading aloud together. Each student then visited another group of students and performed reading aloud. The primary goal of this activity was to raise awareness of paralinguistic features such as loudness, intonation, pitch, and tempo as well as nonverbal factors such as eye contact and body language. As part of the learning process, students worked together in groups to improve their performance and in this way, reading aloud provided a goal-oriented, collaborative task.

### *Background and goals*

Research on reading aloud has historically been focused on the L1 literacy development of small children in reading comprehension and language growth in grammar and vocabulary. Reading aloud has also been shown to promote a positive relationship between parent and child (Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckerman, 2008). Typically, teachers and parents read picture books aloud and children listen, but reading aloud can also be done interactively between reader and listener, or like think-aloud by the reader. Readers can use the pauses between pages to make the experience more like storytelling or incorporate real-world connections with children's lives to enhance engagement (Reese & Cox, 1999). Although literacy development in reading aloud has also been reported in L2 learning (Elley, 1991; Vivas, 1996), little research has been done on the effects of reading aloud by L2 readers for their own L2 development.

Reading aloud has the potential to contribute much to L2 development. As Nation (2009) and Nation and Newton (2009) have proposed, a well-balanced language course

should be composed of four strands: meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. Practicing and performing reading aloud can provide all of these aspects. Students read books for meaning (meaning-focused input) to perform. When they have trouble understanding the story, they deliberately learn language items such as word meaning, language function, and structure (language-focused learning). They perform for their audience (meaning-focused output) after intensively practicing reading aloud before performing (fluency development). Practicing for reading aloud is important in balancing the four strands in the language curriculum.

The learning goals are (1a) to raise awareness of the significance of paralinguistic features and nonverbal factors of language in use, (1b) to learn English prosody, express attitudes and emotions with voice, and engage learners with eye contact and movement, (2) to develop oral reading fluency in English, (3) to make use of students' L1 knowledge of reading aloud and public performance as future child educators or music performers, and (4) to help each other through collaboration and refecation. In the following paragraphs, I look more deeply into the theoretical underpinnings of these four learning goals.

### ***Paralinguistic and non-verbal features of language***

Books represent written language, but when used for reading aloud, language becomes a spoken narrative or in some cases a spoken dialog. Readers need to transform one mode (writing) to another (speaking). They must learn and make use of paralinguistic features of the spoken language — i.e., sentence stress, intonation, speed, rhythm, tempo, and voice quality — which do not exist in the original written narrative (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). To make sense of the narrative, readers must contextualize the language and learn to express meaning, attitude, and emotions with their voices. Also, it is important to supplement reading aloud with eye contact, facial expressions, and body posture and movement — i.e., pointing and acting out. Paralinguistic features and non-verbal characteristics of language play a crucial role not only in conveying a story to an audience but also in engaging the audience into the story. Making effective use of these paralinguistic features and incorporating non-verbal characteristics into a reading aloud performance makes the experience more like storytelling.

### ***Fluency development***

Learner language has been primarily evaluated in terms of accuracy, complexity, and

fluency, but fluency development is often neglected in instructed language learning (Nation 2009; Nation & Newton, 2009). Fluent speech is generally defined in respect to speech rate, appropriate use of connected speech, lack of interruptions such as repetitions and self-corrections, as well as filled and unfilled pauses (Brown, 2012; Segalowitz, 2010). Disfluent readers cannot engage listeners into their story, so practicing fluent reading is one of the essential components of this reading aloud task. Shadowing (Wiltshire, 2007) is the most common classroom procedure to develop oral reading fluency. Other recommended activities exist in making use of repetitions such as 4/3/2 (Arevart & Nation, 1991; Boers, 2013) and retelling (Bygate, 1996).

### ***Knowledge transfer and relevance***

Past experience influences the acquisition of new knowledge or skills. In fact, this process, known as transfer, is one of the most powerful principles of human learning (Sousa, 2011). To work on the task of reading aloud in L2, students make use of their past experiences of having stories read to them by parents and teachers in L1 and/or performing in public in L1, and thus apply their knowledge in one situation (L1) to another situation (L2). Although the ability to transfer is limited, the process can be enhanced, for example, by choosing a task relevant to a student's life (Medina, 2014). What is personally relevant generates more interest, interesting things get more attention, and learning becomes more meaningful than what is not relevant (Willis, 2006).

### ***Collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding***

Students are put into small groups to work together on the task “to maximize their own and each other's learning” (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993, p. 9). As the saying goes, two heads are better than one. Students interact face-to-face in small groups, practice together, discuss how to make their performance better through reflection, and exchange feedback. Although they perform for other groups individually, they jointly construct their performance and practice performing; that is, they scaffold each other. The group activities become fruitful when the members see cooperation as a value (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002).

### ***Procedure***

Twenty-one female university students in an intact required English communication class participated in the study. Sixteen of the students were child education majors who

would acquire government-issued teaching certificates of elementary school and kindergarten at the end of their four-year college education. The other five were music majors.

Students were put into five different groups of four or five. As the classroom teacher, I arranged for each group to have one music major student to make groups more heterogeneous. Each group chose one book for their reading aloud performance. There were five major phases: (1) experiencing reading aloud by an expert, (2) understanding the story and practicing through shadowing, (3) digital recording, (4) videotaping, and (5) performing. Later in this section, I discuss each stage in more detail.

The important component of this reading aloud task was to exchange feedback for a better performance. Students reflected on their digitally recorded and videotaped performances first individually on a written form and later in groups through face-to-face conversation. At the last stage in which each student performed for another group of students, listeners gave readers feedback on a written form. After all of the sessions, students assessed their collaborations to improve their reading aloud performance.

### ***(1) Experiencing reading aloud by an expert***

A native speaker teacher (Teacher J) with experience in teaching young learners gave a model performance (Figure 1). Students took part in the performance as if they were young learners and the reading aloud audience. The teacher used the book, *Bears in the Night*, by Stan and Jan Berenstain.



*Figure 1. Teacher performance*

After the performance, students brainstormed what made the performance effective, first individually, then as a group, and finally as a whole class. A cooperative learning technique called Forward Snowball (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002) was used to make a cumulative list. First, group members worked alone to list ideas for a good performance and then made a combined list (without duplications) with the group. Second, groups contributed to a longer list with all of the ideas put into one list with the whole class. This phase was primarily designed to raise awareness on the reading aloud performance so that students could use their knowledge and apply it to their L2 performance. Students also experienced the power of cooperation when their individual lists were expanded into a group list and the group list was made even longer into a class list. After the discussion, groups chose one book for reading aloud from a collection of 15 books. Their choices were *We All Pull* (Cengage Learning), *We Love School* (Addison Wesley Longman), *What Can You Do?* (Apricot), *Where is the Dentist?* (Addison Wesley Longman), and *Who Stole the Cookies?* (Apricot).

## **(2) Understanding the story and practicing through shadowing**

In this phase, students practiced reading in two ways. First, they practiced together in class using *Spooky Old Tree* by Stan and Jan Berenstain, a sequel to *Bears in the Night*. Students were introduced to four ways of shadowing (Kadota & Tamai, 2004; Wiltshier, 2007): prosody shadowing, slash shadowing, full shadowing, and part shadowing. In prosody shadowing, students mimic the rhythm, stress, intonation, speed, and pause of the language. In slash shadowing, students cut the sentences into small chunks with pauses in between and repeat the chunks in the pauses. In full shadowing, students shadow sentences in full. In part shadowing, students shadow full sentences, or pick up keyword or key phrases and add a comment or interjection. Second, they used these shadowing techniques when they practiced reading their own book together in the group.

Before practicing by shadowing, students assembled in their groups and read the story for deep understanding (Figure 2). They referred to dictionaries to check for proper pronunciations and the meaning of difficult words (if any). I suggested that they look for repetition and contrast in their stories and discuss how these are used.

Digital recordings of the stories read by Teacher J, who conducted a model reading performance in the first phase, were distributed. Students were told to listen to the model reading carefully and practice reading by means of shadowing inside and outside of class.



Figure 2. Understanding the story

### **(3) Digital recording**

After practicing, students read their story aloud, recorded their reading on a digital voice recorder (Figure 3), listened to their reading, and reflected on their performance by themselves. They later exchanged feedback in their groups to identify strengths and weaknesses and improved their performances further.



Figure 3. Digital recording

### **(4) Videotaping**

Students prepared for videotaping by discussing how to make reading aloud more engaging, interactive, and creative. When they came up with specific ideas, they tried out the ideas while practicing reading. After practicing, each student's performance was videotaped (Figure 4). They viewed their video clips, reflected on their performance by themselves (Figure 5), and later exchanged feedback in their groups.

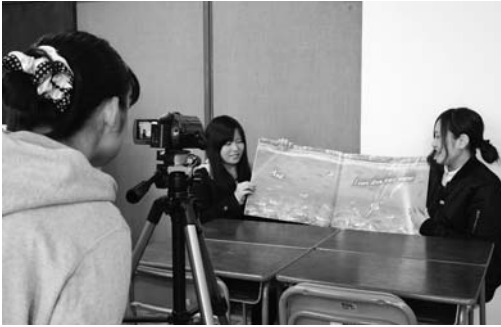


Figure 4. Videotaping



Figure 5. Reflecting

### (5) *Performing*

Students individually visited the other groups and performed using a cooperative learning technique called Numbered Head Together (Kagan, 1994). In this technique, each student has a number: one, two, three, four, (and five), and each of the groups has a letter: A, B, C, D, and E. In the first round, I asked all Student 1s to move to the group next to themselves. So, for example, Student 1 in Group A moved to Group B, Student 1 in Group B moved to Group C, and so on. Student 1s who moved performed for the group. Student 2, 3, and 4 gave their reader written feedback in Japanese. In the second round, I asked all Student 2s to move to another group, jumping one group. So, for example, Student 2 in Group A moved to Group C, Student 2 in Group B moved to Group D, and so on. Students 1, 3, and 4 gave their reader written feedback. This way, students performed for another group once and students who stayed in their group could watch and listen to different stories (Figures 6 & 7).

After all of the students performed, each one received written feedback from students in another group and shared their feedback with their own group members.



Figure 6. Performing 1



Figure 7. Performing 2

### ***Students' reflections***

Two months later, students were asked to think back on the five-week reading aloud task. They wrote a short essay on the task in Japanese. The essay prompt was as follows: Write how you dealt with the reading aloud task. What did you learn? What was the fun part of the task? Students' essays were translated into English for this paper. All the names for students used in the following discussion are pseudonyms.

#### ***(1) Reading aloud***

##### ***Pronunciation***

Students started by checking the pronunciation of some difficult words and practicing reading the individual words.

Nanami: *Checking and practicing pronunciation of each word seemed basic but essential for a good performance; otherwise listeners would have a hard time understanding the story and enjoying the reading performance.*

Ayumi: *Accurate pronunciation was key for a quality performance.*

##### ***Understanding the story***

Students discussed what reading aloud should be like and the importance of understanding the story.

Yumi: *Readers should get involved in the world of the story to be able to perform well as a reader.*

Yuka: *We cannot communicate the fun of the story to the listeners if we do not comprehend the story.*

Ayumi: *Understanding the story was fundamental in planning how to express the story.*

##### ***Paralinguistic features***

Some students referred to the significance of paralinguistic features in reading aloud and cited intonation, sentence stress, speed, and loudness most frequently.

Nao: *I was stunned to hear myself reading in the recording. I spoke the sentences in a flat intonation with no rises or falls. This is no good, I thought.*

Mayu: *Readers, including me, were very fast.*

Rio: *I was less loud in the recording than I expected to be.*



### ***Non-verbal factors***

Quite a few students wrote about posture, body movement, eye contact, and facial expressions. Although students planned and practiced before being videotaped, they experienced that “seeing is believing.”

Rio: *I watched my videotaped performance and thought that I wore a grim face.*

Momoka: *I compared my performance with the model performance by Teacher J and noticed that my performance almost lacked eye contact and body movement.*

Yui: *My eyes were hooked on the book. I did not look up even once.*

### ***Emotions***

Readers need to add emotion to their voices and students became aware of emotive power. Some students found it difficult to express emotions and others found it fun and meaningful.

Minori: *It was not easy to communicate emotion.*

Aya: *I knew emotion was important when I watched the teacher perform, but I wondered how I could do when it came to our turn.*

Momoka: *It was easy to make a plan where and how I should use body movement. We came up with a lot of different ideas. Playfulness is important.*

Wakako: *We could not be too exaggerated (in reading aloud children's stories) to help maintain the interest and attention of listeners.*

### ***Acting and getting the audience involved***

A good reading aloud performance sounds more like acting. Body movement and facial expression help demonstrate meaning and supplement the verbal message.

Hina: *Readers should create character(s) in the story and enact scenes in reading aloud.*

Mio: *When I exaggerated articulation and gestures, I felt closer to the audience. I also felt like I was telling a story or acting.*

Mayu: *Wakako, who read We Love School, asked listeners questions. I thought it was a good way to get listeners involved.*

### **Reader and listener**

Students experienced reading aloud both as readers and as listeners. This helped them develop metacognition.

Aya: (as a listener) *I was more attentive and responsive to a more animated voice rather than a monotonous voice.*

Airi: *I was able to put myself into other shoes when I listened to others reading and imagined how listeners would evaluate my reading performance.*

Mayu: *Readers should be concerned about good speed for listeners. Listeners don't know the story.*

Hina: *I realized that in a good performance the distance between the reader and the listener is narrow both physically and emotionally.*

### **Creativity and variation**

Students worked together to make their reading aloud more comprehensible, interactive, and entertaining. However, two students wrote about making their performance original and their own. Although the members in a group read the same story, each story was an original performance delivered by an individual student.

Yumi: *I wanted to make my reading aloud performance original and creative.*

Ayumi: *I thought it was important for members in the same group to try different ways of expressing meaning.*

### **(2) Recording and videotaping**

Students became sensitized to their own voice, gestures, facial expressions, and movement by listening to their recording and viewing their video clips.

Maho: *I did not understand what I was saying in the recording. I realized that I should practice articulation because reading aloud does not make any sense if listeners cannot make out what I say.*

Aya: *Watching video clips led me to notice different ways of delivering the story, effective/ineffective strategies, the importance of appropriate pause lengths, whether listeners were involved or not, and whether readers were enthused or not, among other observations.*

### **(3) Practicing and repeating**

Students practiced reading in their group in Phases 2, 3, 4, and 5. They had experienced part shadowing and full shadowing, but prosody shadowing and part shadowing were new to them. In part shadowing, students are supposed to add a comment or interjection at a pause or a stop.

Nao: *The practice was difficult but useful in learning to be creative and spontaneous.*

Ayumi: *It was important to be mindful when we practiced by reading and shadowing, or our performance would not improve.*

### **(4) Performing**

Performing reading aloud for another group of students was the high point of this reading aloud task. More than a few students shared the observation that being shy only harmed the performance. Students had deeper thoughts about reading stories aloud for listeners.

Mio: *When I performed, I imagined children listening to my reading.*

Momoka: *Being playful helped the reader to enjoy the reading performance. It was not just for the listeners.*

Mayu: *I was happy to see responses such as nodding, smiling, and laughing from the audience.*

Yuka: *When I performed for another group, I was glad to gain feedback that was somewhat different from the feedback I had received from my own group members.*

Aya: *Once I returned to the previous page in interacting with her audience, and I was happy to be able to spontaneous in my performance.*

### **(5) Language learning**

Two students reflected on reading aloud from the perspective of language learning in a narrow sense.

Nao: *Repetition was useful in learning to internalize words, phrases, and sentences, and the accompanying physical movements helped me to learn the language. I thought I would learn better this way.*

Miu: *Our group read the book, What Can We Do? My group first used an electronic dictionary to learn*

*pronunciation of some difficult words and then asked our teacher to pronounce them to be sure we could read them. Usually when I found some words difficult to pronounce, I would take it easy, but for this performance I wanted to be confident about the correct pronunciation to communicate with my audience and engage through reading aloud.*

#### **(6) Working in groups**

Most students had something to say about working collaboratively on reading aloud. The most common reaction was that it was fun to work out ways to deliver the story in groups. Other students wrote about exchanging feedback.

Yui: *Discussing how to make reading aloud interactive was a good learning opportunity.*

Chika: *The more we practiced and discussed how to improve our performances, the more we enjoyed groupwork and the better we became in communicating our thoughts.*

Nao: *Practicing (reading) alone was boring, but practicing together was fun.*

Momoka: *The feedback I received from other students was different from my own reflection. I was surprised by it and I appreciated it.*

Aya: *Exchanging feedback was helpful. I think it was constructive.*

#### **(7) Relevance to their majors**

Some education majors looked at the task as future educators who reads books to young learners either in English or in Japanese and wrote about transfer of knowledge (and skills). Music majors referred to commonalities between music performance and reading aloud.

Yuna (education major): *I imagined my future students listening to me read books.*

Natsuki (education major): *I will make good use of the skills I acquired through this task when I read Japanese books to my (future) students.*

Hina (music major): *In both music and reading books aloud for children in English, the audience is always in front of us and they will enjoy our performance.*

#### **Teacher reflection**

In this section, I reflect on how students dealt with the reading aloud task in accordance with the five learning goals. My data sources were class observation and field

notes. I also referred to students' essays examined above for triangulation. During the whole classroom procedure, I did not intervene much in groupwork unless students specifically asked me to. This gave me the time and opportunity to observe their discussion and take some field notes.

### ***Paralinguistic and non-verbal features of language***

This reading aloud task provided quite a few opportunities for students to notice paralinguistic features and non-verbal features of language such as joining a model reading aloud performance by Teacher J, discussing how to improve performances, listening to group members perform, listening to their own recording performances, observing others perform, watching their performance in video clips, and participating in the performance as listeners. Students discussed strengths and weaknesses of the performances orally as well as on paper and shared their reflections. In this way, they developed meta-language to talk about the aspects.

For example, students had a brainstorming session after experiencing a reading aloud performance by Teacher J. The combined list they later made as a whole class included not only vocal features such as accurate pronunciation, intonation, voice control, and loudness, but also non-verbal factors such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. Students identified both linguistic and paralinguistic features and realized that a good reading performance involves making effective use of these verbal and non-verbal features. However, other observations were not specific but general and vague: the reading performance was engaging, and the story was easy to understand. These students did not write the specific ways in which the performance was engaging or why the story was easy to understand.

When students exchanged feedback on later stages, they referred to specific ways of improving the performance. Rio made a suggestion to Momoka, saying, "You made good eye contact on page seven. I think you may want to do the same on other pages." Aya remarked, "Teacher J started with a big smile on her face. When we start with a gloomy face and feeling nervous, listeners also look nervous or even worried. However, if we start with a smile on our face, listeners return the smile and we have a good start." Other members in Aya's group agreed.

I would also point out that students became more skillful in describing how they would perform and how they could improve their performances, most likely due to the

development of metacognitive abilities to talk about reading aloud or performing. For example, Nanami demonstrated a combination of moving her eyes from the text to the audience and pointing to a figure in the book while watching her groups' video clips and reflecting with other group members. She said, "This way, we can make it more natural. Eye contact and body movement go together." Nanami did not use the term "multisensory input," but she noticed that this combination would make it easy to communicate meaning or that verbal and non-verbal parts of communication function together. In terms of sentence stress, Chika said, "We should say some words slowly and loudly, such as snake, shed, and skin in this sentence." As she said this, she pronounced the three words slowly and loudly. After this remark, I suggested the students listen to a digitally recorded model reading by Teacher J and consider how she read the same part. They did so and confirmed that Teacher J actually pronounced those words slowly and loudly.

### ***Fluency development***

As I discussed above, students had plenty of opportunities to develop fluency for their reading aloud performances. They practiced reading for digital recordings, videotaping, and performing, as well as in class, using mainly shadowing techniques. Teacher recordings were also provided to ensure practice outside of class.

Although they indeed made substantial progress on their performances in the course of the five-week long task, students did not report that they became more fluent. This was probably because students interpreted fluency as the ability to be spontaneous — i.e., to be able to "produce and maintain speech in real time" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 82). It is obvious a five-week reading task cannot create a fluent speaker, so the question was whether students made efforts to become more fluent in terms of speech rate, appropriate use of connected speech, and lack of interruptions such as repetitions, self-corrections, and filled and unfilled pauses. There were less unnecessary repetitions and self-corrections in the students' last performances, which signified progress, and some readers were efficient at connected speech although this was not explicitly taught as students were expected to learn implicitly from digitally recorded model readings by Teacher J. In terms of speech rate and pauses, students had to take more time and make use of pauses to deliver the story, thus we should not be concerned with these characteristics of fluent speech. Overall, it is safe to say that students became more fluent in reading stories aloud to some extent and in some respects.

It was unfortunate, however, that not many students made good use of the teacher recording. Students reported the periods in which they (1) listened to the recording and (2) practiced reading with the recording outside of class. On average, they listened to the model reading 3.2 times and they actually practiced 4.7 times. One student took it more seriously and reported listening more than 10 times and shadowing 22 times, but she was the exception. These results were disappointing considering the importance of iterative practice for fluency development.

However, we may have to prioritize by choosing whether to learn to use paralinguistic and non-verbal elements of language or to develop fluency. As Boers (2014) demonstrated, it is unlikely that fluency development and learning for complexity develop together. Boers studied the 4/3/2 activity in which learners delivered the same talk a few times in less and less time and examined whether fluency gains were compromised with improvement in complexity. He found that learner language did not become more complex under time pressure. Although paralinguistic and non-verbal elements are not often used for measuring language complexity, they can be appropriately defined as components of advanced learners' language repertoire (Thornbury, 2006) and taken as an indication of more sophisticated language use. Considering students' overall improvement in the use of paralinguistic and non-verbal features, fluency development could come second.

### ***Knowledge transfer and relevance***

It is intriguing that education majors referred to adopting this reading aloud experience in their future L1 teaching in their L1 rather than using past experiences for the present task while music majors saw the connections between music performance and reading aloud. For education majors, reading aloud was relevant to their future activities as teachers; for music majors, reading aloud was relevant to what they regularly do as music performers. This action research underscores the importance of providing learning tasks for a successful transfer of knowledge and skills that are relevant to students' situations, goals, and lives.

Furthermore, a transfer occurs more easily when students have opportunities to reflect on new learning (Sousa, 2011). In this task of reading aloud, students were given more than a few opportunities to reflect on their reading aloud experiences as well as to think and discuss what they could do to further improve their performance. In reflection and discussion, students deeply processed what they experienced and developed meta-

language to describe it, which led to an abstract understanding. These opportunities helped promote the transfer, in that students could thus connect the L2 learning with their future jobs and career.

### ***Collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding***

Through all five weeks, students worked in groups. There was active interaction among members and no one was left out as far as I could see. Groups grew closer and matured as students bonded. I observed that students became more skillful in seeking and providing help as well as pushing each other to think more deeply and creatively. They also became less hesitant to give constructive feedback and more willing to accept feedback. My observation corresponds with students' feedback as discussed earlier.

I did not tell students what comprises a good reading aloud performance. Instead, I just told them to work together through discussion and reflection and I only intervened when students asked me questions or asked for specific suggestions. In short, I stood back during the whole process (with the exception of my suggestion that they look for repetition and contrast in their stories at Phase 2). I believe that the students successfully co-constructed knowledge and developed skills through working together. In this sense, the task provided them with a chance to promote group autonomy (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002) and learner autonomy (Benson, 2011).

It is interesting to note that bigger differences existed among the five different book-reading performances than among individual readers of the same book. This might indicate that some groups functioned better than others. For example, readers of one book were more creative and each reader in that group developed an original reading performance. I do not know whether this group had a good leader, whether the book they chose was easier to express creatively, whether the members happened to be more cognitively intelligent or emotionally mature, or whether they were simply better performers. As a teacher who believes in the power of cooperation, I would like to think that the group had more quality interaction among members with different strengths that provided ample opportunities for scaffolding with each other, but I do not have any scientific evidence for this explanation in this action research.

### **Implications for the next cycle**

The reading aloud task could be improved in a few ways in the next cycle. First, the



teacher model reading aloud performance should be videotaped and available for students so that they can watch it again and compare their performances with the model. Although students experienced the model performance as listeners, they had not developed either the meta-cognition to analyze the performance or acquired the language to deeply discuss the performance at the beginning of the five-week process. Watching the performance as an outsider at the later stages would be helpful. In fact, Aya wrote in her reflection that she hoped the videotape would be available. Second, connected speech should be taught explicitly so that students can intentionally practice sound changes. Students can check pronunciation in the dictionary but they only have digitally recorded model readings to learn connected speech. Particularly in the case of some analytic learners, explicit teaching would be helpful. Third, to pursue the goal of fluency development, another class should be added to the procedure. Students can engage in another round of performances in the sixth week to further improve their performances for yet another group of students. As Nation and Newton (2009) wrote, one quarter of class time should be devoted to fluency development for balanced language learning and as Boers (2014) demonstrated, developing fluency and acquiring complexity cannot be pursued at the same time.

If I were to conduct an empirical research on the effects of this collaborative task, I would undertake the following steps: engage in more careful observation, videotape students' interactions for thorough analyses, take more precise field notes, and conduct in-depth interviews with the students. However, these actions would definitely affect the class atmosphere and change the learning environment.

Overall, the reading aloud task seemed to be engaging for students. For further development of this task, it might be possible to create a panel theater performance to make the activity more similar to storytelling (Wright, 2008) or drama (Almond, 2005).

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## A Cooperative Approach Toward Reading Aloud in L2 Classrooms

Harumi Kimura

### **Abstract**

This article reports on an action research study of a five-week collaborative task: reading aloud stories for children in an EFL class for university non-English majors. Twenty-one students, education majors and music majors, participated in the study. In groups of four or five, students chose one book for their reading performances and practiced together. In the last phase of the study, each individual student performed for another group of students. During the process, students worked on ways to further engage the listeners in the reading by practicing paralinguistic features such as loudness, intonation, pitch, and tempo, and nonverbal factors such as eye contact and body language. Students also used tape recording and videotaping for their individual and collaborative reflections. The task was evaluated in terms of (1) awareness-raising and acquisition of paralinguistic and non-verbal features of English, (2) reading fluency development, (3) knowledge transfer, and (4) collaboration. Implications for the next cycle are presented.