CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: WHAT WERE THE ATTITUDES OF THIS GROUP OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS TO READING ALOUD, AND HOW DO THESE RELATE TO THE LITERATURE SURVEYED?

4.1 Introduction

As we have seen in the earlier chapters, reading aloud is a practice which has been widely used in a vast range of educational environments, for a variety of purposes and with differing underlying assumptions, and which has attracted often conflicting attitudes about its value.

This study aimed to examine the beliefs and attitudes of some teachers and students involved in the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language in a small city in Australia, to compare or contrast these both within the sample and with the views already uncovered in the literature. The approach which was chosen combined semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, with a short written survey covering views on reading aloud. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the purpose of the interviews was to tap spontaneous attitudes to reading aloud, while the survey elicited more focussed views.

In this chapter we will discuss the attitudes and beliefs of both students and teachers in relation to the major themes which emerged around oral reading. The themes to be examined are:

The concept of a 'good reader'

Ways of improving students' 'reading-for-meaning' skills

The extent to which reading aloud is used in these ESL classes

Students' liking for reading aloud in class

Students' comprehension when they read aloud

Students' comprehension when their peers read aloud

Students' comprehension when the teacher reads aloud

The value of students' reading aloud one-to-one with the teacher

The value of students' reading aloud at home

The perceived purposes for and value of oral reading

Teacher cognition in relation to the value of oral reading in language learning and teaching.

These themes emerged from the interviews and the surveys, but also relate to the literature reviewed earlier, so this will be referred to as relevant.

4.2 The Interviews

The interviews were analysed in detail, firstly for overt content (recurrent themes, shared or individual beliefs) and later for such signals of attitude as some discourse markers (pauses, fillers), the elaboration of views and even the shifting of views. In some cases, the issues raised were later revisited in the survey; other notions were touched on or developed only during the interviews.

4.2.1 Transcription conventions in this chapter

To illustrate the points made, quotations from the interviews will often be used, to give the full flavour of the participants' ideas. However, this may create problems for the reader. Spoken language is somewhat 'loose' in comparison with formal written language, and NESB speakers in particular may use English in ways which can be confusing for the reader. In addition, a given quote may have been comprehensible in the context in which it was made, but be quite cryptic in isolation. The following conventions will therefore be used here to clarify some utterances in a range of ways:

(sic) will be used sparingly to confirm that a particularly odd usage or pronunciation was in fact uttered by the speaker - though to avoid overuse of this signal not every 'error' will be marked in this way;

(3) denotes a pause, the numeral indicating the number of seconds;

(inaud) denotes that a word or phrase was inaudible on the tape;

((laugh)) denotes a non-verbal part of the communication;

[What about now?]: the interviewer's previous comment or question will occasionally be included in square brackets, to provide a context in which to understand the interviewee's remark;

[*aloud*], [*Learning to read in L1*]: other forms of commentary in italics in square brackets may also provide a gloss on the meaning of a possible unclear word, or a brief context in which to read a specific remark, to avoid quoting very lengthy extracts;

[...] indicates that a substantial part of a comment has been omitted as not relevant to the point being made or illustrated.

(T1, S2) denotes the teacher or student whose remarks are being reported.

4.3 The Reading-Aloud Surveys

As noted in Chapter 2, the answers to the Reading-Aloud Survey questions were coded and entered into the Statview program for analysis, along with all the biographical data for each respondent. Since the numbers in this study were small, inferential statistical tests of association could not be used as the assumptions underlying such tests would have been violated; however, tables of observed frequencies are included and discussed where appropriate below.

4.4 Themes emerging from the study

4.4.1 The concept of a 'good reader'

[Interview opening question: 'What is a good reader? What can a good reader do?']

The first question asked of all interviewees was: 'In your opinion, what is a good reader?'; and because this is a somewhat abstract question, it was then glossed in more concrete terms: What can a good reader do?' The intention of this question was to ascertain at the start, before any other discussion could colour the issue, what characteristics each interviewee attributed to 'good reading' and in particular whether oral reading was spontaneously included as one aspect of skilled reading or not. The answers to this question fell roughly into two categories: answers which emphasised comprehension as the main focus of reading, and those in which oral reading occupied a central role. Both teachers and students were found in each category; and in most cases the individual fell clearly into one category or the other, to a large extent associated with the two settings of the classes. All the students in the language centre focussed first (and in most cases only) on comprehension, as did their teachers, whereas the teacher and all but one of the community class students mentioned oral reading first in their definitions. However, for a few of the teachers there was some 'flow' back and forth during the interview between reading aloud and reading for meaning; this point will also be examined later under 4.4.11.

4.4.1.1 Definitions focussing on comprehension

Six of the seven teachers and fifteen of the students - 70% of the interviewees - provided primary definitions which fell into this category.

The view was sometimes expressed in quite general terms. Teachers with this viewpoint, for example, made comments such as the following:

> Understanding what they're reading is the most important (T1).
>
> The good reader enjoys what they read (T5).

Students expressed similar notions:

> When you read something if you understand 90 or 100% you are a good reader [...] if you achieve something in second language you have to understand what you read and understanding is very important to me (S23).

> I think read fast and if they really understand I mean - all kind of book they will like to read [...] when you're alone just read it by your eyes - I think you learn more and then you can think about it (S11).

Sometimes the influence of particular instructional practices was evident:

> A good reader must answers corrects the questions in the book and understand the total of the lesson (S17).

A number of sub-themes were also expressed under this general heading: the ability to see an overview of a text or its structure and to summarise this, specific skills, reading speed, vocabulary and grammar knowledge, tackling a range of text-types, 'critical' reading, and relating one's reading to background knowledge.

The overview factor was quite salient for many of the teachers, as is clear from such phrases as the following:

> Approach a text in a holistic way [...] looking at the components of the text but not getting down to a word-for-word sort of approach (T3).

> Can discriminate between what is important and what isn't, and can choose not to read certain things (T6).

This aspect was also prominent for several of the students:

> He can catch the main point of the reading, he can explain back to person who ask her or him something about the reading (S19).

> Good reader can understand the purpose or like the more details (S12).

Specific reading sub-skills were cited on occasion. Teachers noted that a good reader has these attributes:

> I go through the different skills for reading with them, like scanning, skimming, and previewing and predicting (T5).

> Can persevere if necessary (T6).

> [*It is*] easier to say what makes a bad reader - if they're continually hindered by things they don't understand, or continually skim over everything, or so hung up on the meaning of every single word that they can't link the text (T2 .

A number of students also noted skills of this type:

> One person can read, not worry about it looking [*at a*] dictionary or something like Australian people I think [*she was thinking about how she reads a Japanese book*] (S1).

> If there was like pronoun or something refer to previous statement he can know about this (S13).

Speed was mentioned by both teachers and students. Typical comments included, for the former, 'they read quickly enough to understand and enjoy what they're reading' (T5); and for the latter, 'he takes the short time to understand a lot' (S18) and 'he can read quickly and know about many things' (S21).

Vocabulary and grammar knowledge were not mentioned very often by teachers, perhaps surprisingly; only two teacher comments related to this point: for example, a reader 'has to have a reasonable sort of basic vocabulary to begin with' (T2). Students listed these areas rather more frequently: e.g. 'good knowledge of grammar and words' (S17), 'a wide background and more vocabulary and like to read' (S14).

Being able to read a variety of types of material was another feature of a good reader-for-understanding for some: a teacher saw a good reader as one who 'can read a range of types of different kinds of texts' (T3), while one of the students averred 'all kind of book they will like to read' (S11).

The notion of critical reading, that the good reader does not simply understand but can evaluate what is read, was also hinted at by one teacher - 'they can understand a writer's interpretation of a particular issue, and it's into the critical reading (sic)' (T4) - and possibly one student - 'good reader can understand the purpose or like the more details' (S12).

Only two students, and no teachers, mentioned the value of possessing and using background knowledge for skilled reading: a good reader 'has a good knowledge of many things' (S21) and 'a wide background' (S14).

All these points reflect the sorts of emphases in much of the research literature, and in pedagogical ESL writings and the literacy debate generally in recent years (since the mid- to late eighties) which we noted in the Literature Review (especially sections 3.3, 3.7): the centrality of an understanding of text, and indeed an interaction between text and reader in which the reader approaches the text actively and critically to construct meaning rather than merely passively 'receiving' meaning (e.g. Carrell & Eisterhold 1988; Rounds 1992; Wallace 1992).

One teacher, whose description of skilled reading emphasised comprehension overall, began her definition by quite clearly eliminating oral reading as a gauge of a good reader:

> Someone who can comprehend what they're reading - that would be the main thing. Reading aloud isn't really a great judge of reading, whether they're understanding what they're reading (T1).

The fact that she brought this up at all suggests she is aware that for some people oral reading in fact is used for this purpose, but is dissociating herself from such a view.

On the other hand, another moved fairly quickly from an initial 'comprehension' definition to a mention of her use of oral reading in class, noting that some students read aloud poorly with a lack of comprehension:

> Some of them when they read aloud you know it's pretty badly (sic) and don't seem to understand a lot that they're reading (T5).

It seems probable that this teacher, unlike the previous one, does in fact link fluent reading aloud and comprehension, though she does so by unconscious association only rather than explicitly: again, we have seen that this connection is widespread in the literature on reading and on reading development. We will return to this point later in the chapter.

4.4.1.2 Definitions focussing on reading aloud

The remaining 30% of the participants in this study considered oral reading the central aspect of their spontaneous picture of a good reader, with or without comprehension. For the teacher in this category, who was clearly defining good reading in terms of the students she was currently working

with, and indeed in terms of her classroom practices, descriptions such as the following predominated (all from T7):

> They make sense out of it and read it in such a way as to convey the sense they've made from it.
>
> They're adventurous about the pronunciation of new words - even words they don't know they tackle - some of them - without hesitation.
>
> Some always stop at new words and want someone else to say them for them - 'a stip-stop-start' operation.
>
> Even if they make a mistake some people it doesn't worry.

Interestingly, however, by the end of the interview this same teacher was commenting, in relation to reading aloud:

> I often don't think it's a reading skill except for the really more advanced learner - I think it's more of a speaking skill (T7).

Another teacher who had originally defined good reading in terms of understanding shifted when asked how well her current students were reading:

> Some who practise a lot [...] depends how keen they are - some [...] read aloud pretty badly (T5).

The students in this category - all from the community class, as was noted above - provided a range of replies which situated oral reading clearly at the centre of their view of reading in English, and which moreover reflected the fact that most of their encounters with English reading had been and still were in the classroom, both in their countries of origin and in Australia. The following are some of their comments:

> At first I read just by my eye - I think this is a no good but is a habit [...] if you (sic) want to speak English very well I have to read aloud and read a lot until I read fluently [*she later came back to this and amended slightly*] If I read some Vietnamese I just read by my eyes because I don't want to improve my pronunciation, but in English I think I have to read by a loud loudly because is a help me to remember and it help me to speak, to practise the pronunciation [...] and um to speak fluently more fluently (S7).

> Like er speaking slowly [..] because this reader sometime I'm understand what it he is saying [So a good reader is someone who is easy to understand?] Yes [That listeners can understand?] Yes (S2).
>
> [*This student first gave a comprehension definition of reading but later used an interesting phrase*] Just reading around just normal, normal English [*the implication was that reading aloud around the class was 'normal' English or normal classroom practice*] (S20).

These views of reading connect with a different vein in the TESOL literature from the previous 'comprehension' definition: the sense that reading aloud is a 'normal' and accepted part of reading text, and that its value is chiefly associated with speaking skills (e.g. Alexander 1967; Rivers & Temperley 1978). Again, we have encountered similar attitudes in many of the research articles and the teaching materials noted in the previous chapter (section 3.7), particularly from an earlier period than the 'comprehension' emphasis (up to the seventies and into the eighties - but also beyond): examples include Chastain (1971) and Kern (1989).

Thus, even before the interviews were fully underway, there were some considerable differences between the interviewees in relation to the spontaneous image they had of reading, and the role of oral reading in their learning as well as everyday practices. As has been noted, this clearly parallels what we have already observed in the literature review: that there is no one generally accepted definition of 'reading', or theory relating coherently the various factors which can be attached to the construct 'reading', but rather varying theories espoused by different researchers, and, in many classrooms, often pretheoretical 'theories-in-use' or relatively unconscious underlying assumptions which inform individual teachers' practice as well as their students' perceptions.

4.4.2 Ways of improving students' reading-for-meaning skills

[Interview question: (Teacher version) 'What are some of the classroom activities you use to develop the students' reading skills?; (Student version) 'What are some of the activities you or your teacher use, in or out of class, to develop your reading skills?']

Because the researcher did not wish to alert the interviewees too quickly to the principal focus of the study, reading aloud, and because it was felt that

the interviewees too would gain from the opportunity to discuss aspects of reading of direct concern to themselves, some time in the interviews was spent in exploring what strategies teachers and students found most useful for developing skills in interpreting text. The findings will be summarised briefly here to provide a broader framework for the discussion of oral reading, but will not be elaborated upon in the present study.

Teachers emphasised principally the overall approach to reading: the importance of motivation ('even a not-so-good reader can read well if the content is interesting' - T6), the fact that different learners 'get into' reading in a variety of ways, a range of materials to appeal to different ages, interests and proficiency levels, the value of appropriate tasks to follow on from reading, and individual attention.

Students tended to focus most immediately on specific strategies they found helpful. These included: setting a text in context to provide a conceptual framework for understanding; guessing word meanings from context and ignoring what is not known so as to maintain reading fluency; rereading where fuller understanding is necessary; reading while listening (to a tape, TV); using knowledge gained from the TV news to read the current newspaper more easily; trying to translate to check comprehension; and speed reading. Because they were usually aware that they needed to read as much as possible in order to improve their reading skills, they also often noted the value of reading materials that they enjoyed, in order to want to read and to persevere even when the meaning was not easy to grasp. The range of materials read by these students included newspapers, magazines, novels and other fiction, non-fiction on various topics, movie scripts, cartoon stories, children's books, as well as 'everyday' reading texts such as catalogues, TV guides, and food and medicine packaging.

Only one student mentioned using oral reading as an occasional personal strategy for understanding something not understood when reading silently (which has also been noted occasionally in studies of adults reading: e.g. Luria 1961; Hoffman 1981; Horowitz 1991):

> If I think about the story and reading silently, I sometimes can't understand so sometimes I read loudly [*aloud*] (S12).

It was noteworthy that very few of the students seemed to recognise the terms 'oral reading', 'reading aloud' or 'silent reading'; 'reading' tended to

be used on its own for all purposes and was only made explicit by the context (and then not always). For almost all students, where it was important to distinguish between silent and oral reading, the interviewer had to explain using paraphrase and gesture (e.g. 'reading just with your eyes' and 'reading with your mouth/reading and saying what you are reading'). Despite several repetitions of the phrase 'reading aloud' students commonly stumbled over this themselves, or called it 'reading loud/ loudly'. It appears that, in classes where reading aloud has been featured, teachers have mostly asked students simply to 'read', which in the context has clearly meant 'read aloud'.

4.4.3 The extent to which reading aloud is used in these ESL classes [Survey Item 1: (Teacher version) 'I like to have students read aloud in class'; (Student version) 'We often read aloud in this centre']

Item 1 in the survey was originally intended as a mainly factual 'warm-up' item, but to some degree it also tapped likes and dislikes, directly for the teachers and possibly indirectly for the students. The observed frequency table of responses to this question follows as Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 1: 'I like to have students read aloud in class'/'We often read aloud in this centre'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	1	4	1	0	1	7
Students	3	11	2	1	6	23
Totals	4	15	3	1	7	30

Five of the seven teachers liked or strongly liked to use oral reading - one very strongly, four more moderately - while one was neutral, and one teacher strongly disliked it. This teacher answered the second question with a strong negative, too, so her 'not often' is clearly related to her own decision not to use oral reading. We will look in more detail at why and how these teachers chose to employ (or not to employ) reading aloud in their teaching under the themes which follow.

When sex is taken into account (Table 2, on the next page), four males disagreed (out of seven males altogether) while only three of a total of 23

female responses were negative. In other words, female students overall agreed that their classes featured oral reading much more often than males.

Table 2: Frequencies of responses by males and females to Item 1: 'I like to have students read aloud in class'/'We often read aloud in this centre'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	0	2	1	1	3	7
Females	4	13	2	0	4	23
Totals	4	15	3	1	7	30

The class setting overall also had a slight effect: as Table 3 below indicates, seven of the nine respondents from the community class agreed strongly or moderately with Item 1, and only one disagreed, whereas the language centre people, while still somewhat positive overall, were more evenly spread along the scale.

Table 3: Frequencies of responses by community class members and language centre members to Item 1: 'I like to have students read aloud in class'/'We often read aloud in this centre'

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	1	6	1	0	1	9
LangCtre	3	9	2	1	6	21
Totals	4	15	3	1	7	30

Slight effects were also found for students only for education level and for level of English study in their country of origin: to some extent, the higher their level of education or of prior study of English, the less the students agreed with this item, as is seen in Tables 4 and 5 following.

Table 4: Frequencies of responses by students of different levels of education to Item 1: 'We often read aloud in this centre'

Level of educ.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
AtHS	2	1	0	0	0	3
FinHS	0	3	0	0	2	5
FinDeg1	1	6	2	1	4	14
FinDeg2	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	11	2	1	6	23

Table 5: Frequencies of responses by students of different prior levels of English to Item 1: 'We often read aloud in this centre'

Prior level of English	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
NoPrior	0	1	1	0	0	2
SomeHS	2	1	0	0	0	3
FinHS	0	3	1	0	2	6
PartDeg	1	6	0	1	4	12
Totals	3	11	2	1	6	23

No effects were evident for the other factors measured (age, time in Australia, first language, or learning style).

For the students, Item 1 was ostensibly a straight information question. However, as we have observed, there was a wide range of responses, even from students in the same classes. In seeking to explain this spread of answers, it was conceivable that 'often' for the students might have been interpreted variously according to whether they liked oral reading or not, and how much they would have liked to do, just as 'I like' was seen by the teachers. The answers of the students stating that oral reading was used infrequently were therefore compared with their responses to Item 2 ('I like to read aloud in class'). Four of those who stated oral reading was 'not often' used, answered Item 2 with a mildly favourable 'it's OK', while the other three were spread through the negative half of the scale for liking. Of those who answered 'sometimes' to Item 1, three said they disliked oral reading in Item 2; the rest had both answers relatively parallel. It was therefore not possible to link these two sets of responses in any obvious way.

4.4.4 Students' liking for reading aloud in class

[Interview discussion; also Survey Item 2: (Teacher version) 'The students like to read aloud in class'; (Student version) 'I like to read aloud in class']

There was a considerable divergence of opinion on this issue both within and between the various groups of interviewees, as evidenced by comments

during the interviews as well as by the more direct measure of Survey Item 2 (as in Table 6, below).

Table 6: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 2: 'The students like to read aloud in class'/'I like to read aloud in class'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	1	5	0	0	1	7
Students	3	11	4	1	4	23
Totals	4	16	4	1	5	30

Two-thirds of the participants (20 out of 30) indicated overall agreement with this statement by marking somewhere in the left-hand half of the scale ('like it a lot' to 'it's OK'): six of the seven teachers (only one very strongly, however), and 14 of the 23 students (three of them strongly). Teachers thus seemed a little more likely to believe that students enjoyed oral reading than students. This concurs with the tendency reported in the literature (section 3.8) for some teachers to overestimate students' liking for this activity (e.g. Arnold 1982; Heathington & Alexander 1984; Wesson & Deno 1989).

During the interviews two teachers provided different reasons why students did enjoy oral reading:

> Anything that is spoken - they participate very willingly to speak [...] they just want to practise the sound of the language (T6).

> They do like the fact that you're paying attention to the way they pronounce things (T2).

Certain students also said during their interviews that they enjoyed oral reading, mostly for unspecified reasons:

> Some people like it, some not - I like it (S16).

> I think it's good for me because I like reading [You like reading aloud to other people?] Yes (S3).

A couple did offer particular explanations:

> Yes I like because I can corrects (sic) my pronunciamation (sic) when I heards (sic) other people speak [..] I myself confident (S17).

> Interesting for me because I'm practise my English (S2).

Some would even like to do more than they currently have opportunity to do; for example:

> Yeah I read aloud but to tell you the truth our class doesn't have speak loud. [So you would like to do some more?] Yeah before I suggested to speak loudly but . . . (S21).

On the other hand, five of the 23 students were neutral or slightly on the negative side of 'it's OK', while one teacher and four of the students clustered right at the most negative point of the scale ('don't like it').

As can be seen in Table 7 below, all the students indicating mild to strong dislike for oral reading were from the language centre (as was the teacher in this category).

Table 7: Frequencies of responses by community class students and language centre students to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	1	5	2	0	0	8
LangCtre	2	6	2	1	4	15
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

From Table 8 below it can be seen that two of the seven male students expressed mild or strong dislike for this activity; and three of the eight language centre females strongly disliked it too (there were 16 female students altogether in the study).

Table 8: Frequencies of responses of male and female students to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	0	4	1	1	1	7
Females	3	7	3	0	3	16
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

In the interviews, a number of teacher comments reflected this more negative attitude on the part of some students by being more guarded:

> Some people do quite like it [...] none of my students have ever said that they don't like doing it (T2).

> I would say they realise that they've got to do it and they all do it and they don't mind (T5).

The teacher who had most strongly agreed with Item 1 (that she liked to have students read aloud in class) was more hesitant on Item 2:

> I think I'd like to leave that one (5) I think they actually like doing it more than not (4) [...] some like it and find it useful and some don't (T7).

The majority of comments offered during the interviews were, however, largely negative - interestingly, even from teachers who would later respond fairly positively to Items 1 and 2 in the reading-aloud survey (it will be recalled that the interview preceded the survey in each case).

> I don't really think the students like to read aloud in class (T3).

> Some people object to it a little bit - poor readers tend to (T2).

> The high school students are very reluctant to read aloud (T6).

> They don't particularly like to hear the sound of their own voice [...] they feel a bit self-conscious [...] some who are poor readers tend to hang back (T2).

> [...] but others they just die - you know they're just made very shy about it (T4).

Certain comments provided more extensive reasons:

> It doesn't work in some groups [*due to cross-cultural/cross-sex relationships, history of the national groups concerned*] - it's not just a matter of what works well to develop the reading, it's what's going to work in that particular group (T4).

> They can feel threatened by other people [*she had already noted that many students did not listen to each other*] - they tend to moderate their tones - sort of flat, no a lot of expression - they do sort of tend to be a bit self-effacing (T2).

The teacher who was very strongly against having learners read aloud in class explained it in this way:

> Any teacher who made kids read aloud in class - our overseas kids - it would be pretty cruel [*she did not explain 'cruel'*] (T3).

These perceptions seem fairly accurate, to judge by the equivalent comments from the students:

> I'm so shy - in front of many people I can't read so much [What about the other students - how do they feel?] Two out of thirty feel excited to talk in front of people - [*practising by herself]* I don't have to worry about the others to listen and maybe they laughing (S12).

> I don't like it, to read aloud - I read silently - yes, if I reading loudly some words I don't know how to pronounce maybe I pass it (S15).

> [Why don't you like it?] Because it's like a child's game. [Not what you expect as an adult learner?] Yeah (S23).

> If the teacher ask me to read louder [*aloud*] maybe is better very good for everyone but I don't like it. [Why?] Maybe my pronunciation is not good [*but she does regularly practise privately at home*] (S15).

> [Do you like reading aloud?] No. [Why not?] I don't know but wrong for me - I can't concentrate on the details of the text, I lose concentration (S22).

> [*Experiences while learning to read in L1*] Sometimes I get scared because I can do that but I was slowly - I was a little nervous - they usually ask me to keep lookating (sic) the words if I can't say that (S19).

As we have already noted in section 3.8 in the previous chapter on affective aspects of oral reading, this practice can indeed generate a range of feelings from the very strongly aversive to the neutral, and the occasional liking (Arnold 1982; Holmes & Allison 1985; Kern 1988). However, it is noteworthy that students in this project with bad memories of oral reading in their countries of origin did not generally report such negative experiences with reading aloud in their current learning of English.

There was a slightly higher frequency of liking oral reading by students with a lower level of prior English study (Table 9 on the next page). Both of the students with no prior English study, and two of the three with only a little such study at high school, answered on the positive side, while a third of those who had completed high school English (two out of six) and half those who had studied English during their first university degree (six of a total of twelve) fell into the neutral or negative categories.

Table 9: Frequencies of responses by students of different prior levels of English to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Prior level of English	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
NoPrior	0	2	0	0	0	2
SomeHS	1	1	0	0	1	3
FinHS	1	3	1	1	0	6
PartDeg	1	5	3	0	3	12
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

Those who had spent fewer months in Australia also tended to like oral reading more, as Table 10 reveals: five out of six who had been in Australia only 1-2 months, and eight out of fourteen who had been here 3-6 months (although it is also noted that three of the latter group disliked oral reading).

Table 10: Frequencies of responses by students who have been in Australia for different lengths of time to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Number of months	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
1-2 m	0	5	1	0	0	6
3-6 m	2	6	3	1	2	14
7-12 m	0	0	0	0	2	2
12+ m	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

On the other hand, with regard to age, all the negative responses came from the two younger age groups: in particular, four of the ten 15-20-year-olds did not like reading aloud (three of them being strongly averse), as can be seen in Table 11 on the following page.

Table 11: Frequencies of responses by students of different ages to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Age	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
15-20	1	4	1	1	3	10
21-24	0	1	0	0	1	2
25-29	0	4	1	0	0	5
30-39	1	2	2	0	0	5
40+	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

In terms of education level reached, the only discernible pattern was that those students with a first degree clustered mainly in the middle response range ('it's OK') - eleven out of fourteen in this group (Table 12 below).

Table 12: Frequencies of responses by students of various levels of education to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

Level of educ.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
AtHS	1	1	0	0	1	3
FinHS	1	3	0	1	0	5
FinDeg1	0	7	4	0	3	14
FinDeg2	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	11	4	1	4	23

There were no observable effects for the first language background of the students, their years of English study, nor for the Kolb learning style types.

However, some connections did seem to obtain for certain aspects of learning style: the MBTI dimensions of Extroversion/Introversion and Sensing/Intuiting, and on the borderline, Judging/Perceiving (see Tables 13, 14 and 15 on the following pages) (Appendices 4, 5 and 6 contain more detail on the types and their attributes) However, it will be recalled that only the teachers and the language centre students completed the MBTI style questionnaire, so the total number is quite low (n=22) and hence definitive statements are precluded.

Table 13: Frequencies of responses by Extroverts and Introverts to Item 2: 'The students like to read aloud in class'/'I like to read aloud in class'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Extro	2	6	1	0	0	9
E/I	1	1	1	1	2	6
Intro	0	4	0	0	3	7
Totals	3	11	2	1	5	22

As can be glimpsed from some of the comments above on shyness and anxiety about making mistakes, and confirmed in Table 13 above, there was a slight effect for Extroverts who (perhaps not surprisingly) tended to like or strongly like reading aloud in class (eight out of nine). In general, the performative aspects may appeal to Extroverts and they tend not to be unduly self-conscious. On the other hand, while three of the seven Introverts strongly disliked reading aloud in class, four Introverts moderately liked it: the opportunity to practise speaking in a more structured and less threatening situation than conversation may have been valued by these folk. The 'mixed' Extrovert/Introvert group (six overall) were spread along the scale, but with one mildly negative and two at the very negative end. The literature similarly came up with somewhat ambivalent results in terms of Introversion/Extroversion, with a slight but not clearcut tendency for Extroverts (especially boys) to do better at this activity and like it better (Blaha & Chomin 1982; Riding & Cowley 1986).

In addition, an association was also present between the Sensing/Intuiting style and a liking for oral reading (as can be seen in Table 14 following).

Table 14: Frequencies of responses by Sensers and Intuiters to Item 2: 'The students like to read aloud in class'/'I like to read aloud in class'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Sens	3	6	1	1	1	12
S/N	0	4	0	0	3	7
Ntuit	0	1	1	0	1	3
Totals	3	11	2	1	5	22

Three-quarters of the Sensers (nine out of twelve) either liked or quite liked reading aloud, with one each neutral, mildly against or strongly against, while Intuiters or mixed Intuiters/Sensers tended to place themselves lower

on liking (none strongly liked it, and one Intuiter and three mixed types strongly disliked it). Among the characteristics held to typify Sensers are the following: 'they like an established way of doing things, enjoy using skills already learned more than learning new skills, are patient with routine details, and tend to be good at precise work'. All of these factors could contribute to a positive view of reading aloud. Intuiters, in contrast, 'dislike doing the same thing repeatedly enjoy learning a new skill rather than using it, are impatient with routine details, and dislike taking time for precision': attributes which might not favour an activity such as oral reading, which could be regarded as 'going over old ground' to some extent.

For students only, but not for the combined teacher-student group, there was a slight effect for Thinking/Feeling (Table 15 below).

Table 15: Frequencies of responses by Thinking/Feeling students to Item 2: 'I like to read aloud in class'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Think	1	1	0	1	1	4
T/F	1	5	1	0	0	7
Feel	0	0	1	0	3	4
Totals	2	6	2	1	4	15

The Thinking-style students and the mixed Thinking/Feeling students liked reading aloud more than those with a Feeling orientation: eight of these (of eleven overall), liked reading aloud, and only two were against; while three of the four Feelers held strongly negative attitudes (the other being only neutral). Perhaps the Feeler types may be too aware of other people in the situation and their possible feelings, such as shyness (for readers-aloud) or impatience (for listeners).

Table 16: Frequencies of responses by Judgers and Perceivers to Item 2: 'The students like to read aloud in class'/'I like to read aloud in class'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Judg	3	5	1	1	2	12
J/P	0	5	0	0	3	8
Perc	0	1	1	0	0	2
Totals	3	11	2	1	5	22

As may be seen from Table 16 above, Judging/Perceiving provided an interesting pattern: Judgers (and mixed Judgers/Perceivers, to a slightly lesser extent) tended to be more categorical in their judgements, and both liked (eight out of twelve) and disliked (three out of twelve) oral reading more strongly than Perceivers (one mild liking and one neutral: these numbers are very small, however). Judgers in general prefer clear-cut decisions, whereas Perceivers tend to be 'grey' and leave issues more open.

4.4.5 Students' comprehension when they read aloud

[Interview discussion; also Survey Item 4: (Teacher version) 'When students read aloud in class they understand what they read'; (Student version) 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read']

The interviews and the survey questions gave two rather different pictures of this issue. The more spontaneous opinions offered during the interviews conveyed an overall negative impression of student understanding while they are reading aloud in class, on the part of students and teachers alike, which accords with the majority of the L2 reading literature. However, to judge by the answers to Item 4 on the survey (Table 17 below), respondents generally felt that students reading aloud understand what they are reading, at least to a certain extent.

Table 17: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 4: 'When students read aloud in class, they understand what they read'/ 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	0	1	4	1	1	7
Students	5	11	3	3	1	23
Totals	5	12	7	4	2	30

Perhaps by the time interviewees reached the survey, which came at the end of each interview, they had had time to reflect a little more; perhaps they actually felt more sanguine when asked the direct question; or perhaps they felt a need to express more confidence when asked to commit themselves to a point of view on a scale. It may also reflect the fact that most interviewees commented that any reading aloud tended to be quite short (just a sentence or two per student); as well, the respondents may have been equating what

is sometimes described as 'on-line comprehending' with deeper and more lasting 'comprehension' (Bowey 1982).

As Table 17 above indicates, there were slight differences in the surveys between teachers and students, the teachers being more neutral, a little less confident about comprehension than the students. No teacher strongly agreed that students understand what they read aloud, one mildly agreed, four (including the community class teacher, who used oral reading extensively in her classes) were neutral ('some do, some don't'), one mildly disagreed and one strongly disagreed.

The majority of students seemed to believe - more strongly than the teachers overall - that they do largely understand what they read orally: 16 of the 23 fell into the more positive half of the scale, with only three mildly disagreeing and one strongly disagreeing.

The class setting had a slight effect (Table 18 below). Five of the eight community class respondents felt more or less positively about this, though only one of them very strongly, while three were neutral (including the teacher). The language centre respondents were more scattered: four were the most strongly convinced of their understanding of all the respondents, seven students and one teacher were fairly convinced, three teachers were neutral, and all those with negative views on this question were also from this group (one teacher in each of the mildly and strongly negative sections).

Table 18: Frequencies of responses by community class members and language centre members to Item 4: 'When students read aloud in class, they understand what they read /'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read' (numbers in brackets indicate the number of teacher respondents in each category)

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	1	4	4 (1)	0	0	9 (1)
LangCtre	4	8 (1)	3 (3)	4 (1)	2 (1)	21 (6)
Totals	5	12 (1)	7 (4)	4 (1)	2 (1)	30 (7)

There were some sex differences among the students, too (Table 19 overleaf). The female students were in general more sure they understood when they read aloud (four strongly, eight mildly), with three neutral, and one mildly unconvinced; in contrast, only one male was very confident he

understood, and three were mildly confident, but three of the eight gave negative answers to this item (two mildly and one strongly so).

Table 19: Frequencies of responses by male and female students to Item 4: 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	1	3	0	2	1	7
Females	4	8	3	1	0	16
Totals	5	11	3	3	1	23

Age of the learner showed some effects, as Table 20 indicates below: the younger learners were happier about their understanding in general - only one of the ten aged 15-20 years was mildly negative, while the rest were either strongly or fairly confident - and all the students in the two older groups (30-39 and 40+) also fell in the positive or neutral categories; while the middle-range age-groups (21-24 and 25-29) were more spread out.

Table 20: Frequencies of responses by students of different ages to Item 4: 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read'

Age	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
15-20	3	6	0	1	0	10
21-24	0	1	0	0	1	2
25-29	0	3	0	2	0	5
30-39	2	1	2	0	0	5
40+	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	5	11	3	3	1	23

In regard to education level (Table 21, on the following page), all those who had doubts about their comprehension (four out of 23 overall) and most who were neutral (two out of three) had studied at university - although it is also true that many of the more educated students appeared relatively happy about their understanding (nine out of fifteen in the two top groups were strongly or moderately positive). Almost all those with lower education levels felt at least fairly confident that they understood what they read orally (seven out of eight), while one was undecided.

Table 21: Frequencies of responses by students of different levels of education to Item 4: 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read'

Level of educ.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
AtHS	1	2	0	0	0	3
FinHS	0	4	1	0	0	5
FinDeg1	3	5	2	3	1	14
FinDeg2	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	5	11	3	3	1	23

There were no discernible patterns based on first language, years of English, years of English study or months of English in Australia.

In terms of learning style, only one area showed an observable effect on this item: the MBTI Judging/Perceiving dimension (see Table 22 below). Judgers were in general more confident that students understood what they read (eight out of twelve) than Perceivers (one undecided, one slightly negative), while the eight respondents in the mixed Judging/Perceiving group were more spread out along the continuum.

Table 22: Frequencies of responses by Judgers and Perceivers to Item 4: 'When students read aloud in class, they understand what they read'/ 'When I read aloud in class, I understand what I read'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Judg	3	5	2	1	1	12
J/P	1	3	1	2	1	8
Perc	0	0	1	1	0	2
Totals	4	8	4	4	2	22

During the interviews, a few positive comments were made by teachers in regard to the act of reading aloud as assisting reading for meaning, though they tended to be a little oblique. The teachers themselves rarely offered as their own view that there was a direct link between oral reading and understanding, though they sometimes remarked that students felt it was useful, which was how these teachers occasionally justified their use of this practice in class. Their comments include:

> It gives the teacher a better understanding of the help they need [*this comment was in fact at variance with most of what this teacher had to say*] (T1).

> Some of them read aloud to themselves when you ask them to read a passage silently [...] maybe they like to hear themselves speaking [...] but others would think this would slow them down (T5).

Once more, we encounter mention of individual preferences in practice, as in some of the research studies discussed previously in sections 3.6 and 3.9 (Holmes 1985; Kragler 1995; Stevick 1989).

In contrast with the overall positive student responses on Item 4, and although some students do like to read orally, as we have seen above, in the interviews none of them specifically mentioned understanding as the purpose for which they would read orally, apart from the one student mentioned above (4.4.2) who sometimes used oral reading to clarify the meaning of something read silently.

Negative comments were in fact very numerous in the interviews from both teachers and students, mainly relating to the reader's own understanding. In some cases, the feeling was that the need to focus on pronunciation prevented attention to the meaning of what was being read; a subset of respondents noted that students could sometimes read orally very well without necessarily understanding much or indeed anything. This accords with much of the L2 reading literature (section 3.7) which asserts that, for many learners, oral reading and understanding tend not to co-occur due to the overwhelming demands of oral production (Bernhardt 1983; Kern 1989; Mikulecky 1990; Rounds 1992). Comments in this category from teachers included:

> They often read without understanding (T4).

> With some people it's clearly just words (T7).

> I think it takes away from their comprehension because there's something more they have to concentrate on (T1).

> They're concentrating on the pronunciation and the sounds - takes their attention away from the meaning (T3).

> I had one little girl who could read aloud really well but she didn't understand a word of what she was reading (T3).

> If an NESB student can read something quite competently, that doesn't necessarily reflect their comprehension of it - they can sound as if they understand it (T4).

At other times, teachers suggested that poor pronunciation by a student reading aloud hindered understanding by the listeners:

> If they say it wrongly then everybody will be misled and if it's just supplied smoothly [*by the teacher*] then sometimes it facilitates understanding (T7);

or at least that there was some connection between poor pronunciation and poor understanding by the reader-aloud, though the direction of the relationship was not specified:

> Some of them when they read aloud you know it's pretty badly and don't seem to understand a lot that they're reading (T5).

Despite the students' overall confidence about their understanding when reading aloud, only two student comments from the interviews reflect the belief that reading aloud can help understanding (both were in the youngest age-group, and Judgers in style, which parallels our findings above). The first volunteered:

> [*When reading alone at home*] If I think about the story and reading silently, I sometimes can't understand, so sometimes I read read loud [And that helps you to understand better what you're reading, but only when you don't have to worry about other people?] Yes (S12).

Another student who had been saying that oral reading was not useful suddenly had second thoughts:

> But you know when I read aloud my speed of reading goes slower so that's why I can understand (S16).

This harks back to Holmes (1985) Salasoo (1986) and Swalm (1971-72) who likewise found that some of their students found the slower reading rate imposed by oral reading helped their comprehension (section 3.6.1).

Other than these, however, all the student comments during the interviews about comprehension were in the negative category, even from some who would later claim they largely did understand what they were reading. Like

the teachers, they often referred to the need to pronounce correctly interfering with memory or understanding:

> If I read aloud, I pay much attention to the pronunciation so I can't concentrate in the meaning or in the ideas and I can lost some ideas (S7).
>
> Sometimes when I read [*aloud*] I forget and have to go back and reread (S1).
>
> When I'm reading aloud I'm concentrate to make the pronounce right (S19).
>
> If I read aloud so my concentration going to just speaking - I can't understand what the sentence means - I just follow the sentence and then I have to speak I have to speak so I can't follow what's the exact meaning (S9).

Thus we are left with somewhat ambivalent findings on this question of oral reading and comprehension, just as we are in reading both the research and the professional literature in this area (sections 3.6 and 3.7). There seem to be differing perceptions on this issue from person to person, and furthermore the same person's view may shift from one situation to another. It is not even clear whether it matters that a student does or does not understand while reading aloud: many of the respondents in this study, while conceding that they or their students did not necessarily understand what they were reading as they read, did not appear unduly concerned about this. While this may seem surprising if one believes that oral reading is primarily an aspect of reading generally, of which comprehension must be a prime goal, we shall see in section 4.4.10 ('Perceived purposes for and value of oral reading in class') that for these teachers and students - as for many of the TESOL writers discussed in Chapter 3 (e.g. Griffin 1992; Zimmerman 1983) - reading aloud is a legitimate path to a number of other goals more closely associated with speaking than with reading for meaning. It is possible, then, that some of the positive responses to Item 4 reflect a sense that the individual who reads aloud understands, perhaps not fully, but as much as is needed for their own current purposes (say, pronunciation).

4.4.6 Students' comprehension when their peers read aloud [Interview discussion; also Survey Item 5: (Teacher version) 'When one student reads aloud in class, it helps the others to understand the written text better'; (Student version) 'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better']

The responses to Item 5 of the survey indicated overall that, in the view of both teachers and students, learners are not helped by listening to their peers read. Indeed, this item elicited the most negative answers of any item in the survey, particularly from students, though as usual there were opinions at all points along the scale, including the very favourable end. There was a slight effect for teacher/student status: students were less approving of this practice than their teachers, as Table 23 indicates, with over half the teachers (four of seven overall) believing the practice to be helpful, and three disagreeing mildly, while only one quarter of students agreed (six out of 23) and ten disagreed.

Table 23: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 5: 'When one student reads aloud in class, it helps the others to understand the written text better'/'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	0	4	0	3	0	7
Students	2	4	7	6	4	23
Totals	2	8	7	9	4	30

There was also a borderline connection with setting: the community class students overall were less negative about listening to each other (a quarter of them felt this was not helpful) than the language centre group (half of whom believed it did not help them to hear other students read aloud).

Table 24: Frequencies of responses by community class students and language centre students to Item 5 : 'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	1	1	4	1	1	8
LangCtre	1	3	3	5	3	15
Totals	2	4	7	6	4	23

As we saw in Table 23 above, the teachers were grouped at two points - mildly in favour (four) and rather against (three). A very few saw value for the listener:

> The others are following the words with their eyes and they're listening so they're benefiting too and the teacher's getting the chance to assess them - so everybody gains (T5).

> It's helpful, in that context it's helpful for everybody I think - the listener, the reader and the teacher (T4).

Virtually all the comments during the teacher interviews, however, were more or less negative:

> [*Silent reading is better with a good group*] because reading aloud it's not quite so helpful - it's more frustrating [*with such a group*] (T4).

> I don't think that person reading that sentence helps the next person (T2).

> I don't think they like to listen to other people struggle over reading too - they'd rather listen to me (T3).

In particular, the teachers emphasised the irritation caused by poor reading to other learners:

> It's irritating to the students [...] and high school students particularly, because their lack of they're impatient and not much compassion there sometimes [...] there is one boy in my class at the moment whose pronunciation's very bad and the other kids will turn around and they tell him he's speaking 'alien language' - 'we don't understand you' (T3).

> I don't think they're very good at listening to each other, and especially not across the nationalities they don't listen very much, and once somebody's branded not very smart they don't listen at all [...] they're hard to make listen to each other (T2).

> To some it's really agitating - they want to correct others - they get annoyed - they twitch [...] they're learning - but sometimes I wonder whether the learning is all that effective when it's taking place in an atmosphere tainted by something else (T4).

Referring again to Table 23 above, two of the students in the surveys felt strongly that they gained from listening to fellow-students read orally; both

of these were women, both in the 30-39 year age group, and both of Vietnamese background (see also Tables 25 and 26 below).

Among the remaining students the tendency was somewhat more negative (Table 23): four were slightly for, seven neutral, and ten slightly or strongly against. As Table 25 shows, the female students were a little more positive than the males: two of the sixteen female students were very keen, one slightly so, seven neutral, and three each were slightly or very against (i.e. less than half held negative views); while among the males, none was strongly favourable, about half fell into the slightly positive category (three of seven), and half were against this practice (three slightly, one strongly).

Table 25: Frequencies of responses by male and female students to Item 5: 'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	0	3	0	3	1	7
Females	2	1	7	3	3	16
Totals	2	4	7	6	4	23

Like their teachers, students had little to say during the interviews in favour of listening to peers read aloud, though their comments are perhaps a little kinder than the image of them given by the teachers:

> Sometime I don't understand my friend from different country (S3).

> Someone reading very loud [*aloud?*] can stop my concentration [*when trying to read silently for comprehension*] (S1).

> 'cause the way of Australian speaker and the way of another oversea (sic) student speaker speaking - I don't understand - if I didn't see and read this I don't understand (S14).

There were as ever exceptions, nevertheless:

> Listening to other students is useful because I can understand they speak easier than teacher (S5).

Students sharing a first language often seemed to cluster together at two or three adjacent points in their responses on this item (Table 26, next page).

Table 26: Frequencies of responses by students of different first languages to Item 5: 'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

First language	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Indon	0	0	3	2	0	5
Jap	0	2	1	1	0	4
Thai	0	2	2	0	1	5
Chin	0	0	1	1	2	4
Viet	2	0	0	0	0	2
Mong	0	0	0	1	0	1
Kor	0	0	0	1	0	1
Turk	0	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	2	4	7	6	4	23

From the table it can be seen that, as we have already noted, the two Vietnamese students were the only respondents who were very happy to listen to their peers read orally; four of the five Thai students were mildly in favour or neutral; the four Japanese students ranged from moderately for to moderately against; the five Indonesian speakers were all neutral to mildly against; and the four Chinese students clustered fairly closely from neutral to slightly negative to rather more negative. The speakers of each language were relatively homogeneous in terms of cultural background and the educational system to which they had been exposed in their countries of origin. Hence, although the numbers in each group are small, these patterns suggest that cultural (including educational) background might have exercised some influence on the attitudes to this item.

Age too made a slight difference to preferences here. As can be seen in Table 27 on the next page, students in the three younger groups were often intolerant of listening to fellow-students read aloud (half of each group held negative views); whereas the older age groups were more spread along the scale.

Table 27: Frequencies of responses by students of different ages to Item 5: 'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Age	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
15-20	0	3	2	3	2	10
21-24	0	0	1	0	1	2
25-29	0	0	3	2	0	5
30-39	2	0	1	1	1	5
40+	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	2	4	7	6	4	23

However, higher education level years of English, level of English study and months in Australia did not demonstrate any clear associations with this item.

When we look at learning styles, different patterns emerged for each type in the Kolb model, as can be seen in Table 28 following.

Table 28: Frequencies of responses by participants with different Kolb learning styles to Item 5: 'When one student reads aloud in class, it helps the others to understand the written text better'/'When other students read aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better' (numbers in brackets indicate the number of teacher respondents in each category)

Kolb style	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Diverg	0	1 (1)	2	0	0	3 (1)
Assim	1	1 (1)	1	2	0	5 (1)
Converg	1	2 (2)	0	2 (2)	0	5 (4)
Accomm	0	4	4	5 (1)	4	17 (1)
Totals	2	8 (4)	7	9 (3)	4	30 (7)

The two Diverger students were neutral, with the one Diverger teacher fairly positive. No Convergers (n=5) were fully neutral (Convergers are typified as preferring black-and-white decisions): the single Converger student was strongly positive, the mixed Converger/Accommodator was rather negative, with two of the Converger teachers somewhat positive and the other two somewhat negative. The Assimilators (n=5) were spread almost right along the scale from very positive: one student very positive,

the teacher slightly positive, one student neutral, and two students rather negative. The Accommodator group (n=17) ranged along the scale too, but only from slightly positive (four) to neutral (four), to slightly against (five, including a teacher), to very negative (four): i.e. half held negative views here.

So while the two individuals who liked listening to other students read aloud were a Converger and an Assimilator, the most apparent group trends were that, while the Divergers were fairly tolerant of others reading orally, the Accommodators were less accepting of this (nine out of sixteen were either strongly or fairly negative in their responses). This fits with the characteristics Kolb attributes to these two groups. Divergers are often other-people oriented, view situations from many perspectives, and value reflective observation and learning from situations in which they can play the role of impartial objective observers, so one could expect them to be more tolerant of others having their turn and indeed value the chance to observe others' attempts and to learn from these. Accommodators on the other hand dislike passive learning situations, preferring active engagement in their own learning, which could make them impatient of other learners' performances, especially when these are not skilled.

On the MBTI Inventory (23 participants), only one student and no teachers were strongly in favour: the single student was Extrovert, Sensing, Thinking and Judging, but this does not necessarily reflect these types overall.

From Table 29 (on the next page) it can be seen that Extroverts in general and mixed Extroverts/Introverts tended towards the negative end of the spectrum (two-thirds of the respondents, or nine out of fifteen) when it came to listening to others read, as one might expect from a type which tends to prefer active performance in the external world; while Introverts were slightly more positive (four out of seven were moderately in favour).

Table 29: Frequencies of responses by Extroverts and Introverts to Item 5: 'When one student reads aloud in class, it helps the others to understand the written text better'/'When other students read aloud, it helps me to understand the written text better'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Extro	1	2	0	5	1	9
E/I	0	1	2	2	1	6
Intro	0	4	1	1	1	7
Totals	1	7	3	8	3	22

Table 30 below indicates that Sensers were also somewhat negative overall (two-thirds, or eight out of twelve, were against this practice), while the Intuiters were more spread out. The standard descriptions of these types (as given in Appendix 4) do not immediately suggest why this should be so, except that possibly Sensers' preference for obtaining information through the senses may be frustrated when that information is inaccurate or at the least risky, as is likely when the reader-aloud is an unskilled fellow-learner.

Table 30: Frequencies of responses by Sensers and Intuiters to Item 5: 'When one student reads aloud in class, it helps the others to understand the written text better'/'When other students read aloud, it helps me to understand the written text better'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Sens	1	2	1	7	1	12
S/N	0	4	2	0	1	7
Ntuit	0	1	0	1	1	3
Totals	1	7	3	8	3	22

In contrast, neither Thinking/Feeling nor Judging/Perceiving exhibited a clear pattern.

The very negative response to this item overall thus seems to be at least partially understandable in terms of learning style and age/experience. A two-thirds majority of the students (16 out of 23) in this study came out as Accommodators on the Kolb survey. One can see that Accommodators, with their typical preference for an active approach to learning, would feel relatively impatient having to sit quietly and listen to other students read orally, especially if the latter stumbled and made errors. Younger learners

also tended to be less prepared to listen to others have their turn: both responses to the survey item and teachers' comments in the interviews about the younger students bear this out.

The overall impression gained from the research literature (section 3.5) concurs with the negative attitudes found in this study, and offers some possible explanations: that better readers are distracted from reading at their own (relatively fast) silent speed when they are forced to keep pace with a slower and less skilful reader (Holmes & Allison 1985; Miller & Smith 1990), perhaps because their eyes have to regress and refixate more often, leading to a jerky and repetitive sensation rather than a smooth sweeping flow (Allington 1984; Rayner & Pollatsek 1989). It may also be the case that, if correct pronunciation is the goal, a faulty model would not be regarded as helpful, except by those who like to compare their pronunciation with that of others and learn by negative as well as positive example.

These negative attitudes create a problem for the teachers: if they wish to use oral reading in class for the benefits gained for the readers, how can they also cater for the needs of the rest of the class while one student is reading? We will see that alternative suggestions such as reading one-to-one to the teacher, or oral reading when alone, were not very positively received in this study either, though this was partly due to unfamiliarity with these procedures. Perhaps teachers need to confront this issue directly with their classes, to explain the benefits to all from listening to each other and supporting each others' learning - or alternatively why other non-whole-class modes are used - so as to make students conscious of the range of ways in which they can each potentially learn from this practice.

4.4.7 Students' comprehension when the teacher reads aloud [Survey Item 6: (Teacher version) 'When I read aloud in class, it helps the students to understand the written text better'; (Student version) 'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better']

In contrast to the previous issue, attitudes to the teacher reading aloud were overall very positive, as we would have expected overall from the research in the previous chapter (section 3.5). Item 6 tapped attitudes to this issue, and answers (recorded in Table 31 overleaf) indicated that both teachers and

learners were in favour of this practice: indeed, there were no very negative responses at all (although one teacher did not respond here), and only two slightly negative scores. The six teachers who replied to this item ranged from very positive (one) via rather positive (four) to neutral (one).

Table 31: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 6: 'When I [teacher] read aloud in class, it helps the students to understand the written text better'/'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	1	4	1	0	0	6
Students	12	6	3	2	0	23
Totals	13	10	4	2	0	29

In the interviews, however, teachers had stated that they were often reluctant to use this technique with their classes, for a variety of reasons:

> I don't want to be hearing my voice [...] they don't need to be hearing me all the time (T6).

> I'm very conscious at the moment of speaking too much in class and not getting them to speak enough - so I'd much rather they read aloud and I just corrected the words that are very badly pronounced (T6).

There were certain (somewhat limited) circumstances in which they might read aloud:

> I would only do that with a short passage (T5).

> [*It helps bridge a gap*] Kids can read and appreciate literature in their own language but can't immediately do this in English at the same level - I hope they will eventually read for pleasure (T3).

> I rarely read aloud, but [... occasionally I'll read something [*a short poem etc*] to create an atmosphere or feeling [...] - I don't read so's they can listen to the sound of my voice or how something's communicated because they never do anyway [*but see following quote from same teacher*]- so I think they follow the text better (T2).

> I might read something aloud if it's something they're fairly familiar with so's they knew what I was saying and they were just listening to my pronunciation - I wouldn't read an unfamiliar text to them (T2).

The teacher reading aloud can even seem the lesser of two evils:

> They don't like to read or hear others struggling - they'd rather listen to me (T3).

If they do read aloud, teachers are careful about the way they present this:

> Try to make it interesting with your voice, and put a lot of expression into it [...] I think that can make it a lot clearer (T5).

> I'll try to read the whole text through first and then go back and discuss it [*students get confused about what is happening otherwise*] (T3).

In their survey answers (Table 31 above), the 23 students were overwhelmingly positive about listening to their teacher read aloud, with 18 strongly or rather in favour, three neutral, and only two mildly against.

From the student interviews, however, came only two comments, one positive and one negative, though perhaps only indirectly related to the teacher's actual reading:

> [*It is useful*] because the teacher not only reads aloud but also explains the topic, new words or so on (S20).

> [*It doesn't help because this student has already understood from his/her own reading*] and if I read it by myself as I listen to the teacher as well [...] Yeah it's nothing (S22).

The two moderately negative students were both from the language centre, but otherwise, as Table 32 shows for the two settings the numbers were largely in favour: at the language centre, eight were strongly positive, five were fairly positive and two fairly negative; while in the community class, four were very in favour, one slightly in favour and three were neutral.

Table 32: Frequencies of responses by community class students and language centre students to Item 6: 'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	4	1	3	0	0	8
LangCtre	8	5	0	2	0	15
Totals	12	6	3	2	0	23

The two students who did not much like the teacher to read aloud were also both in the youngest age-group (15-20), were aiming at a first degree, had studied English for six to seven years (i.e. to the end of high school or a little beyond), and had been studying in Australia for three to four months. They were both Extroverts, both Intuiters, both Feelers; but differed on the Judging/Perceiving dimension and on their Kolb type. They also came from different language backgrounds, and in each case four compatriots had more positive attitudes to their teachers reading aloud.

As far as sex is concerned, Table 33 indicates that the two negative views were held by a male and a female; otherwise, the men were either very positive (two) or fairly positive (four), while the women were even more in favour overall (ten very positive, two moderately so and three neutral).

Table 33: Frequencies of responses by male and female students to Item 6: 'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	2	4	0	1	0	7
Females	10	2	3	1	0	16
Totals	12	6	3	2	0	23

Education level displayed some relationship with Item 6 (Table 34, following page): those with the two lower levels of education and the highest level were the happiest about listening to their teacher read aloud: all nine in these groups were very or largely positive. The only neutral or negative (mildly) views came from one-third of the group who had completed a first degree, though this still means that almost two-thirds of this group were positive.

Table 34: Frequencies of responses by students of different levels of education to Item 6: 'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Level of educ.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
AtHS	3	0	0	0	0	3
FinHS	3	2	0	0	0	5
FinDeg1	5	4	3	2	0	14
FinDeg2	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	12	6	3	2	0	23

Level of English also showed a similar association to some extent (Table 35): here, however, it was the most advanced students in terms of English level who were somewhat divided in their views (though three-quarters - nine out of twelve - were still positive).

Table 35: Frequencies of responses by students of different prior levels of English to Item 6: 'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

Prior level of English	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
NoPrior	1	0	1	0	0	2
SomeHS	3	0	0	0	0	3
FinHS	4	1	0	1	0	6
PartDeg	4	5	2	1	0	12
Totals	12	6	3	2	0	23

One can hypothesise that those with a less extensive experience of English, and presumably a generally lesser level of confidence in their own knowledge and performance, would be more appreciative even than their colleagues of the opportunity to listen to a skilled native-speaker bringing a text to life via intelligible oral reading and indicating the pronunciation of both familiar and unfamiliar words, and that they might be particularly inclined to value the teacher's authority and modelling of behaviour in this way. However, interestingly, years of English study and length of time studying in Australia did not show as clear an effect of this type.

In terms of learning style, there were some relationships of interest between Item 6 and both the Sensing/Intuiting and Thinking/Feeling dimensions. The Senser and mixed Senser/Intuiter groups generally were very positive about listening to a teacher read aloud, as can be seen in Table 36 below: indeed, this was one of the strongest patterns obtained in this study, and contrasts with the Sensers' strong dislike of listening to learners' oral reading noted in 4.4.6 (Table 30) above.

Table 36: Frequencies of responses by Sensers and Intuiters to Item 6: 'When I [teacher] read aloud in class, it helps the students to understand the written text better'/'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Sens	6	4	1	0	0	11
S/N	3	4	0	0	0	7
Ntuit	0	1	0	2	0	3
Totals	9	9	1	2	0	21

Sensers tend to trust the information coming in through their senses when making decisions (in contrast with Intuiters who often make 'leaps' of judgement), so perhaps the dual visual-auditory route of credible, accurate information in this case is particularly satisfying to Sensing individuals. Other typical Senser descriptors ('they like an established way of doing things' and 'they enjoy using skills already learned more than learning new ones') may also help explain this liking for hearing the teacher read orally.

Table 37: Frequencies of responses by Thinkers and Feelers to Item 6: 'When I [teacher] read aloud in class, it helps the students to understand the written text better'/'When the teacher reads aloud in class, it helps me to understand the written text better'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Think	3	2	0	0	0	5
T/F	4	4	0	0	0	8
Feel	2	3	1	2	0	8
Totals	9	9	1	2	0	21

As Table 37 above shows, Thinkers too were in favour of listening to the teacher read (as were the mixed Thinker/Feelers). The typical Thinker attributes do not clearly suggest why this should be so, nor why Feelers

should be a little less positive: perhaps the Thinkers' 'orientation towards analysis and putting things into a logical order' may be satisfied by the idea of listening to a good model and deriving their own lessons from this.

In the research and educational literature (section 3.5) we found both supporters and critics of listening to skilled reading by others. Those in favour saw reading while listening to text as valuable especially for developing the learners' feel for the prosodic as well as the phonemic aspects of understanding (Breznitz 1990; Fletcher & Pumfrey 1988; Lynch 1988; Reutzel & Hollingsworth 1993); while other writers cautioned as to rate of delivery (both too fast and too slow) (Holmes 1985; McMahon 1983), lack of exact fit between oral reading and natural speech (Blaauw 1994; Howell & Kadi-Hanifi 1991), and the possibility that students could take too passive a role, missing out on more valuable active practice (Meyer et al. 1994). In the present study, the students overall were clearly more aware of benefits than of drawbacks.

The very positive response from most students of whatever subgroup to listening to their teacher read aloud should be encouraging to teachers. In this study, most of the teachers expressed a reluctance to read to their classes, but this position is worth reconsidering in the light of these findings. It would of course be necessary to use the technique as sparingly and judiciously as any other in the repertoire, to have recognisable purposes for it, and to share these with students so that they know what their role is to be and what benefits they will gain, but teachers should not believe they must avoid the practice unduly.

4.4.8 The value of students' reading aloud one-to-one with the teacher [Survey Item 7: (Teacher version) 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud individually to their teacher'; (Student version) 'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher']

Item 7 addressed this one-to-one mode directly; however, only 19 of the 30 participants answered this question, so that any findings are very tentative indeed. Three of the teachers, for instance, did not feel they could answer this question, as it was not something they had previously considered (contrast this with the frequent mention of this practice in L1 reading classrooms). However, if one compares responses to this Item (Table 38

below) with those to Item 2 (Table 6 above), there is a shift towards the positive end of the spectrum for this item: that is, respondents were generally more in favour of having students read aloud one-to-one with the teacher than having students read aloud in class generally (perceived overall as reading to the whole class). For example, of the four teachers who gave a response here, all considered it valuable (two very strongly so); whereas for Item 2, only one teacher was strongly in favour, five were moderately positive, and one was strongly against.

Table 38: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 7: 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud individually to their teacher'/'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	2	2	0	0	0	4
Students	4	3	3	3	2	15
Totals	6	5	3	3	2	19

During the interviews, only two teachers referred to this explicitly, and both felt it was useful:

> They like it one-to-one (T4).
>
> I think that they did find it useful to read to the teacher - more useful than many of the other things - because you could sort of deal with it on an individual basis and they don't feel threatened by other people listening to them (T2).

None of the students in the community class responded to this item: it seems not to be a practice they have experienced either in their countries of origin or in Australia (their teacher here was neutral on this issue). The language centre students (n=15) were a little less enthused than their teachers overall (see Table 38 above), though overall still a little more positive on this item than on Item 2: four students strongly approved, another three were somewhat in favour, and three were undecided, with another three rather negative and two at the extreme negative end. Both the extremely negative students on this item were also very against reading aloud in class generally; but of the other two who had recorded strongly negative views on the earlier item, one shifted on this item to strongly in favour, and the other to somewhat favourable.

The only student comment during the interviews indicated anxiety in this mode:

> [*If*] I only speak to teacher I don't think it's good because sometimes I don't know what she's speaking [*wanting? saying?*]. [*Later this student indicated there is more stress in a one-to-one situation.*] (S10)

Both Indonesian students who gave a response indicated mild dislike, while the three Japanese students were mildly in favour or neutral, but the numbers were small for all the languages, so no particular pattern emerged.

In terms of sex, as Table 39 below shows, the female students tended to favour this practice slightly more than the males. Four of the eight female students liked this mode (three strongly), with two neutral and one each moderately and strongly disliking it. The men were ranged quite symmetrically along the scale: one strongly liked and one strongly disliked the practice, two were moderately in favour and two moderately against, and one was neutral.

Table 39: Frequencies of responses by male and female students to Item 7: 'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	1	2	1	2	1	7
Females	3	1	2	1	1	8
Totals	4	3	3	3	2	15

There were no evident links between answers to this question and the students' age or education level, nor years studying English, level of English, or time in Australia.

When we turn to learning style, we find three slight relationships between Item 7 and Sensing, Judging and the Kolb styles. Sensers were slightly more in favour of reading aloud one-to-one with their teacher than Intuiters, all the negative views coming from the Intuiting or mixed Sensing/Intuiting groups (Table 40, on the following page); and Judgers liked this mode proportionally more than Perceivers or mixed Judgers/Perceivers (Table 41 overleaf).

Table 40: Frequencies of responses by Sensers and Intuiters to Item 7: 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud individually to the teacher'/'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Sens	4	3	2	2	0	11
S/N	1	2	1	0	1	5
Ntuit	1	0	0	1	1	3
Totals	6	5	3	3	2	19

Table 41: Frequencies of responses by Judgers and Perceivers to Item 7: 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud individually to the teacher'/'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Judg	5	2	2	1	1	11
J/P	1	3	1	1	1	7
Perc	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	6	5	3	3	2	19

For the Kolb styles, there was a slight but not strong contrast between the four styles (Table 42 below), though no clear pattern emerges. The three Convergers were all positive on this item (two strongly so); of the two Divergers, one was strongly in favour and one neutral; the two Assimilators were quite far apart (one very positive, one moderately negative), and the Accommodators - by far the largest group (n=12) - had two respondents at every point along the scale except mildly positive, where there were four.

Table 42: Frequencies of responses by participants with different Kolb learning styles to Item 7: 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud individually to the teacher'/'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to the teacher'

Kolb style	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Diverg	1	0	1	0	0	2
Assim	1	0	0	1	0	2
Converg	2	1	0	0	0	3
Accomm	2	4	2	2	2	12
Totals	6	5	3	3	2	19

Interpreting these findings is difficult, as the numbers were small and as it was by no means certain that even those who did respond had really had much experience of reading one-to-one with the teacher on which to base an opinion. There were positive signs, though: first, most students seemed to view it at least potentially favourably; second, it has the perceived value of personal attention and (as we shall see later) personalised correction for many students; third, it could provide a useful alternative to the kind of 'round the class' oral reading which many students did not enjoy, either because of their own shyness or because they got tired of listening to others while awaiting their turn. Such techniques as shared or paired reading, widely used in the elementary school (Arnold 1982; Campbell 1990) (sections 3.5, 3.6), could be attractive and useful to older students too.

For all the above reasons, it could be worth the teacher's while to try this sort of procedure occasionally, at least with certain students. It would clearly need to be presented to the students in such a way that they interpreted it in terms of 'special attention to learning' rather than as 'testing': the one-to-one situation could be quite stressful where the student felt under constant pressure to respond.

4.4.9 The value of students' reading aloud at home

[Survey Item 8: (Teacher version) 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud to themselves'; (Student version) 'I like/find it useful to read aloud to myself'. 'To themselves/myself' was glossed by the researcher during each interview as 'at home/in private']

Here again, as in section 4.4.8 above, we have a mode of oral reading with which many respondents were not familiar. The responses to Item 8 reveal a spread of attitudes to at least the potential use of reading aloud to oneself; although once again, the numbers being small (especially with two teachers failing to respond), any findings can only be thought-provoking rather than conclusive.

Relating the setting and Item 8 (Table 43 on the next page), we see that, in the community class, the teacher and four of the students felt very or quite happy about this practice, three were neutral, and the remaining student was very against it. On the other hand, only six out of the 15 language centre students and one teacher were at all in favour; two of the teachers

and one student were neutral; while eight students and one teacher were quite or very strongly against.

Table 43: Frequencies of responses by community class members and language centre members to Item 8: 'The students like/find it useful to read aloud to themselves'/'I like/find it useful to read aloud to myself' (numbers in brackets show the number of teacher respondents in each category)

Class setting	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
CommCl	2 (1)	3	3	0	1	9 (1)
LangCtre	2	5 (1)	3 (2)	4	5 (1)	19 (4)
Totals	4 (1)	8 (1)	6 (2)	4	6 (1)	28 (5)

Comparing status (teacher vs. student) with this item (Table 43 again - refer to numbers in brackets), we have already noted that two of the teachers did not feel they could express an opinion on this question at all: it was not a practice they had considered before and they could not answer for students on this. Of the other five, one was very strongly in favour of encouraging students to read aloud to themselves, one moderately so, two neutral, and one very strongly against.

One of the teachers noted during the interview that she had suggested to her students that they might try this, though perhaps not meeting much response:

> I've encouraged them to talk aloud and to read aloud, I've encouraged them to listen to tapes being read aloud and then listen again and record themselves - they don't really do it very much (T2).

As can be seen from Table 43 above, students were scattered along the spectrum of views, with three strongly approving, seven moderately for, four neutral, four mildly against and a further five strongly negative.

Some students had in fact developed this as a personal strategy:

> [*She doesn't like it in class but does practise at home*] If is a conversation I want to say what did they say, how did they say this sentence - so I want to be the actor or something - maybe more interesting - it's funny [*but not if it's just a narrative or description*] (S15).
>
> When I listen the tape, special tape, and I copy - that's useful (S14).

But in fact, few students had tried this, and some could not see the point:

> If I can read it silently but so why should I [*read aloud*]? (S18).

Examining the specific attributes of the students more closely reveals some weak trends (Table 44 below). For instance, six of the seven male students were against reading aloud privately, with one only mildly for, while over half the female students (9 out of 16) were in favour, four were undecided, and only three were against this practice.

Table 44: Frequencies of responses by male and female student to Item 8: 'I like/find it useful to read aloud just to myself'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	0	1	0	3	3	7
Females	3	6	4	1	2	16
Totals	3	7	4	4	5	23

Younger students were slightly more extreme in their views than other age-groups, and mostly less in favour of this practice than older students: as Table 45 indicates, half of the 15-20-year-olds (five out of ten) and both the 21-24-year-olds were quite or very strongly against this practice, with only one 15-20-year-old strongly in favour, three moderately so and one neutral. The middle group (25-29-year-olds) were fairly evenly spread across the spectrum, though none was very positive, while the two oldest groups (30-39 and 40+) were largely in favour (four out of six) or at worst neutral (two).

Table 45: Frequencies of responses by students of different ages to Item 8: 'I like/find it useful to read aloud to myself'

Age	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
15-20	1	3	1	3	2	10
21-24	0	0	0	0	2	2
25-29	0	2	1	1	1	5
30-39	2	1	2	0	0	5
40+	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	7	4	4	5	23

However, no particular pattern was apparent for first language, education level, years of English, level of English, time in Australia, or any of the learning styles.

Reading aloud to oneself is not a widespread practice in everyday life, in either L1 or L2; there normally has to be a particular stimulus, such as a performance of some kind for which one has to prepare, although we have seen that it occasionally occurs as a personal strategy. The more generalised performance of everyday speaking does not automatically suggest structured practice like oral reading to students. As we have seen from references to mumble-reading and reading for oneself in the literature, however, those who engage in this type of rehearsal do often find it valuable (Holmes 1985; Kragler 1995; Taylor & Connor 1982) (section 3.6), so perhaps this is a form of independent language work which teachers could suggest to their students more often - and also follow up on the suggestion systematically, as with other homework, to encourage learners to really try it out. This can be linked particularly with the discussion which follows under the next theme.

4.4.10 The perceived purposes for and value of reading aloud [Interview discussion; also Survey Item 3: (Teacher version) 'The students find it is helpful to them to read aloud in class'; (Student version) 'It is useful to me to read aloud in class']

In their answers to Item 3 of the survey, the majority of respondents agreed that reading orally in class was useful to the students. Even those who did not like oral reading tended to concede its value: when we compare Table 46 on the following page (the usefulness of oral reading) with Table 6 above (a liking for oral reading), there is an evident shift to more positive responses overall. The specific purposes were discussed during the interview rather than at the time the survey was answered, and will be presented later in this section.

Table 46: Frequencies of responses by teachers and students to Item 3: 'The students find it is helpful to them to read aloud in class'/'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

Status	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Teachers	3	1	3	0	0	7
Students	5	9	6	2	1	23
Totals	8	10	9	2	1	30

Only one student, a female, strongly disagreed, and she disliked oral reading as well as not finding it useful, while two other students mildly disagreed. Over half the students (fourteen out of 23 in all) considered it to be useful for them. All the teachers strongly (three) or mildly (one) agreed, or were neutral - even the teacher who did not favour oral reading herself ('it's OK'). There was thus a slight relationship between status and this item, teachers being more inclined to affirm the usefulness of oral reading.

Sex too showed a small association (Table 47 below): five of the seven males were inclined to find reading aloud useful, and only one was (mildly) negative; whereas about half the women (nine out of sixteen) believed reading aloud was useful, a third (five of sixteen) were undecided, and two held negative opinions (one strongly so).

Table 47: Frequencies of responses by male and female students to Item 3: 'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Males	2	3	1	1	0	7
Females	3	6	5	1	1	16
Totals	5	9	6	2	1	23

Students' level of education also had a slight relationship with Item 3 (Table 48 overleaf), suggesting that, to some extent, the less prior education the students had experienced, the more they perceived a utility for oral reading. All those in the lower two groups (eight) felt that reading aloud was useful, while only a third of those who had completed a first degree (five out of fourteen) were positive, six were undecided, and three expressed negative views. It must also be acknowledged, however, that the single student who

had finished a postgraduate degree also felt very positively about the value of oral reading.

Table 48: Frequencies of responses by students of different levels of education to Item 3: 'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

Level of educ.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
AtHS	1	2	0	0	0	3
FinHS	1	4	0	0	0	5
FinDeg1	2	3	6	2	1	14
FinDeg2	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	5	9	6	2	1	23

Similarly, the students' level of English was associated with believing oral reading to be helpful, as Table 49 indicates: again, generally speaking, the lower the level of prior English study, the more value was attributed to oral reading, with the only negative opinions occurring in the group with the highest prior level of English (a quarter of these - three out of twelve - believed that oral reading was not helpful).

Table 49: Frequencies of responses by students of different prior levels of English to Item 3: 'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

Prior level of English	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
NoPrior	1	0	1	0	0	2
SomeHS	1	2	0	0	0	3
FinHS	1	4	1	0	0	6
PartDeg	2	3	4	2	1	12
Totals	5	9	6	2	1	23

No connection was apparent for setting, age, first language, years of English, or months in Australia.

Looking at the Kolb learning styles in Table 50 overleaf, we can note that Assimilators and Convergers generally were more positively disposed towards reading aloud as a useful activity (all these respondents were either positive or neutral), while the three Divergers were all neutral and the

Accommodators, while mostly positive (eleven out of seventeen), were scattered through the range, with three negative to some degree.

Table 50: Frequencies of responses by participants with different Kolb learning styles to Item 3: 'The students find it is helpful to them to read aloud in class'/'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

Kolb style	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Diverg	0	0	3	0	0	3
Assim	3	0	2	0	0	5
Converg	2	2	1	0	0	5
Accomm	3	8	3	2	1	17
Totals	8	10	9	2	1	30

On the MBTI dimensions, it is only for the Thinking/Feeling dimension that any pattern is observable (see Table 51 below).

Table 51: Frequencies of responses by Thinkers and Feelers to Item 3: 'The students find it is helpful to them to read aloud in class'/'It is useful to me to read aloud in class'

MBTI type	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Totals
Think	3	2	0	0	0	5
T/F	2	2	2	2	0	8
Feel	2	2	4	0	1	9
Totals	7	6	6	2	1	22

The Thinking group were more positively disposed towards the value of oral reading (all five were very or quite favourable), the mixed Thinking/ Feeling group a little less so (responses were evenly spread over the first four categories, though there were none strongly negative), and the Feeling respondents somewhat similar (one very against, and four neutral, with four in the two more positive categories). Thinkers may be able to concede a function even for an activity which they personally do not enjoy, while Feelers may not be able to grant any value to an activity which engenders negative emotions in themselves or even in others.

The lack of clear patterns for different groups on this item is in part due to the fact that the study participants were generally in agreement that oral

reading can serve useful purposes in the learning of English. We now turn to the interviews to discover in what ways exactly they considered that it was of value.

4.4.10.1 Assisting comprehension

We noted above (section 4.4.5) that respondents tended to believe that students reading orally do understand the meaning of the text to some extent at least, with the students in general more confident than their teachers, though both groups made many more negative than positive comments during the interviews Whether reading-for-meaning is a **purpose** for oral reading, or a reason for utilising this practice, however, is a different issue. Most interviewees seemed to feel that enhancing comprehension was not an outcome of oral reading, and that they would not use it for this purpose. Teachers commented:

> I can't see that there's a purpose in it (T3).

> I really discourage my own children from doing it [...] it slows down their reading (T4).

Students' views were generally very similar:

> Speaking [*reading*] aloud is not useful to me for reading (S9).

> [*Learning L1:* Did you like reading aloud?] No really [Was it useful or not useful?] Maybe no useful because we can, maybe you can understand it faster [*if you read silently*] (S18).

As was noted earlier, however, some did find it helpful on occasion:

> If I think about the story and reading silently, I sometimes can't understand, so sometimes I read read loud [And that helps you to understand better what you're reading, but only when you don't have to worry about other people?] Yes (S12).

> But you know when I read aloud my speed of reading goes slower so that's why I can understand (S16).

Such remarks parallel some of the views in the literature, that oral reading assists comprehension because it forces one to slow down one's reading and/or allows one to hear as well as see the text (section 3.6.1). These beliefs are exceptional in the current study, though.

We have also seen (4.4.6) that students' oral reading is not regarded as beneficial to their fellow-students who are listening.

However, just because oral reading is not considered valuable for fostering the comprehension of either reader or listener does not preclude it from having other useful functions in the learning and teaching of English as a Second Language. Indeed, almost all the interviewees could see roles for oral reading in domains other than comprehension or reading for meaning.

4.4.10.2 Developing speaking skills and general language 'feel'

A great number of references were made by teachers and students during the interviews to the value of oral reading in enhancing learners' English speaking skills. This fits very closely with the emphasis in the L2 teaching literature which views oral reading as a form of speaking practice (section 3.7). Teachers in the current study clearly agreed, as the following comments illustrate:

> More of a speaking skill (T7) [*this teacher's views shifted from time to time during the interview*].
>
> Anything that is spoken - they participate very willingly to speak (T6).
>
> Students who feel they read and write better than they speak and listen, and reading helps to concentrate on improving their speech - but they feel, all this reading and writing, I can do that at home [...] they really feel very strongly that they've got to improve their speaking skills (T5).
>
> There's the continuity of it being spoken and heard as well as read (T4).
>
> They are actually speaking without getting quite so threatened because they know they're not going to make any other mistakes than pronounciation (sic) - they've got the words in front of them [...] they don't have to find the words in their mind (T5).

Students also clearly saw this practice of speaking skills as a major advantage of reading aloud:

> To be clear - slow and correct (S8).
>
> Interesting for me because I'm practise my English (S2).

4.4.10.3 Improving pronunciation

Speaking skills generally were often alluded to as above - but even more comments emphasised specifically that pronunciation skills benefit from oral reading practice. Teachers and students alike made numerous references to the role of oral reading for this purpose - all favourable. This parallels many suggestions in TESOL handbooks (Broughton et al. 1980; Corbel 1985; Rivers & Temperley 1978; Stevick 1986) and research (Kern 1989); and particularly the findings of Willing (1988), Mccargar (1993) and Little & Sanders (1990) that adult learners as a group regard practising the sounds and pronunciation of their target L2 as their most valued activity, and that error correction is an important and generally highly-valued role for a teacher (sections 3.7, 3.9).

Among the teacher comments which illustrate this viewpoint are:

> The main purpose was pronunciation (T4).
>
> They just want to practise the sound of the language (T6).
>
> They don't mind me - I'm correcting quite a lot [...] they thrive on it (T6).
>
> So I do use it for pronunciation at all levels (T2).

As we have seen above, the students similarly expressed a desire for pronunciation practice and feedback:

> [*Student had been saying he didn't like reading aloud before in his home country because it divided his concentration - but now in Australia*] But the meaning is different because the teacher ask us ask me to read aloud because she knows about pronunciation for right speaking (S18).
>
> I like the teacher on one way pronounce is not good - I want she tell me because I don't want speak wrong English (S10).
>
> I think it's more like to speaking skill because teacher sometimes make you (sic) correct me when I'm pronounce words wrong you know (S19).

At least one student did not agree with this, however. The very support which to others made oral reading so helpful for speaking practice seemed to her to be a disadvantage:

> If I want to practise my accent, something like that, I think it's better to practise speaking to each other than to read aloud - because when we read from the [*materia.*] is not our own words so we may have trouble - all that is maybe very useful for some people but [*not for me*] (S22).

4.4.10.4 Affective value (cor fidence, progress, attention, enjoyment)

Another dimension of language development which was seen by many to gain from reading aloud was the affective side: feelings and attitudes about using the English language. The se benefits are perhaps less tangible and measurable than pronunciation, out they include such recognisable and crucial factors as student confidence, sense of making progress, having attention paid to them and enjo ment.

The teachers expressed these not ons in a variety of phrases:

> There are some people are very shy - I think reading aloud helps them [...] they're hearing themselves speaking aloud in front of the class and that boosts their confidence a bit (T5).

> They become conscious of progress [...] a sense of progress is very important (T7).

> B. read so beautifully - better than anyone in the class - they're delighted he could do som ethi ng and now he helps others - he doesn't really understand what he's reading [*but the other things will catch up to his oral readin*] (T1).

> They like the way you're paying attention to the way they pronounce things - they like the pers nal attention (T2).

The students made similar remarks:

> Confidence (S3, S11, S17 a nong others)

> Usually we read aloud bec ause we want everybody to pay attention to us (S18).

> [*Better in whole group tha one-to-one*] because in the group we do it just the group all back me, not like a English I think [*she seems to mean not like a group of English speakers who might be more critical*] - we come study together very interesting (S10).

I enjoyed this [*reading aloud in English*] (S13).

We have also met a number of supporting views in the L2 education literature (Rounds 1992; Griffin 1992; Zimmerman 1983) (section 3.7).

4.4.10.5 Accommodating a personal learning style

Many respondents were conscious that what suited some learners did not benefit all, and that perhaps certain ways of using oral reading (for example 'mumble-reading' while someone else is reading aloud) are very personal strategies.

Teachers described some of these individual practices of their learners:

> S. always reads out loud while someone else is reading - she actually needs to hear herself say it (T7).

> I do think some students find it useful to read aloud to themselves, depending [*left undefined*] (T3).

Students also recognised and commented on their own habits:

> When I read something funny, so then I don't think, just fun [*she finds herself reading aloud when relaxing, reading something fun or funny*] (S1).

> [*Student doesn't like oral reading in class but does practise at home*] If is a conversation I want to say what did they say, how did they say this sentence - so I want to be the actor or something - maybe more interesting - it's funny *[but not if it's just a narrative or description*] (S15).

> [*Useful to read aloud at home*] When I listen the tape, special tape, and I copy - that's useful (S14).

Interestingly, several interviewees, teachers and students, mumble-read the survey questions aloud as they answered them, but when asked they had not been aware of doing this and could not say why they had done so. Maybe they felt themselves to be in a sort of conversational mode with the interviewer, and did not like to stop the stream of oral communication even momentarily; or perhaps they were using this means to focus their attention, concentrate, or even reassure themselves that they were getting

the right meaning. Given the support for this practice in a number of other studies, teachers could perhaps promote it more explicitly.

All these examples also link back to references in the literature review (sections 3.6, 3.7, 3.9: e.g. Holmes 1985; Stevick 1989; Swalm 1971-72), where individual learners develop particular learning preferences or strategies which, while powerful and indeed essential for them, may not be universal. Both teachers and learners gain from becoming more aware of preferences and developing these (if helpful), or (if they inhibit learning in some way) shaping them towards even more productive strategies.

4.4.10.6 Improving listening skills

As we observed in section 4.4.6, listening to other students read aloud is not regarded as a benefit by most participants in this study. For some learners or in certain situations, however, the listening dimension to reading aloud - listening to themselves or to others - can bring advantages.

Some of the teachers had ideas for this:

> I get them to prepare something like a news report, then they'd read that onto a tape - and they'd listen to themselves and [...] listen to it in class to get them to focus on listening to what they sound like (T2).
>
> It's helpful to everybody I think: the listener, the reader and the teacher (T4).

For at least one student, there was a clear benefit in listening to others read:

> Listening to other students is useful because I can understand they speak easier than teacher (S5).

This as we have seen went against the general feeling of the group, but, as we hinted in the previous section, if we are interested in the individuality of learners and their learning strategies, even an idiosyncratic opinion is worth noting. Furthermore, if it assists learning for one, it may well have potential for more learners.

We should also recall that the majority of the participants - especially the students, and in particular the less proficient ones - highly valued the strategy of listening to the teacher read aloud (section 4.4.7).

4.4.10.7 Aiding study/learning skills

In this regard, one potential value of oral reading is as a proofreading technique, which is not a suggestion much noted in the teaching manuals (section 3.7; Rounds 1992 is an exception), but is a strategy for the current writer and also for at least one teacher in this study:

> They're better if they read it to someone else because then they're aware of an audience and they're actually seeing it and hearing it through someone else's eyes, so they pay more attention to expression and [...] have a better sense of whether their punctuation or their grammar is correct (T4).

One also saw reading rate as gaining from such practice (cp. section 3.6):

> To speed up their reading [You don't think reading aloud would contribute to the problem of the speed of their reading?] Any kind of reading's going to improve their reading speed (T5).

Students focussed more on oral reading to reinforce vocabulary through the auditory as well as the visual mode (e.g. Eskey 1988; Griffin 1992).

> To remember words (S1).

> Reading words aloud while studying (S11, S21).

4.4.10.8 Allowing teacher assessment of student skills

As we saw in the review of literature relating to oral reading (sections 3.6, 3.7), hearing students read has a long history as a means of assessing student 'reading skills' (variously defined) (e.g. Goodman & Goodman 1977; Hoffman 1981; Zimmerman 1983, Griffin 1992). This was an aspect mentioned mostly by the teachers - and by only some of these, given the doubts of many as to just what oral reading shows about student understanding of what they are reading. In one sense, this runs counter to the heavy emphasis, at least in the recent past, on this role of oral reading in

the literature on developing L1 reading skills. By contrast, in line with many of the suggestions in the L2 teaching material, most teachers in this study emphasised the fact that oral reading allows teachers to check pronunciation in a fairly structured situation. When asked whether they thought reading aloud was of most benefit to the teacher or the student, some teachers acknowledged (with a little surprise) that it was possibly of more direct use to them than to students.

> I can see where they need correction [...] so it's going to give the teacher a better understanding of the help they need (T1).
>
> And their pronunciation is actually appalling, so you get a chance to sort of pick up the mispronounced words (T2).
>
> It helps us to make a judgement about their proficiency (T4).
>
> The teacher's getting a chance to assess them (T5).

As we saw in 4.4.10.3 above, however, many students also made favourable mention of the feedback they gain on their pronunciation in oral reading sessions. Perhaps this exemplifies the assertions in the literature (section 3.9: e.g. Mccargar 1993, Little & Sanders 1990, Willing 1988) that teachers feel they should not do too much correction, while students in fact value this quite highly.

4.4.10.9 Reading aloud as a springboard to other activities

Reading aloud is often not an end in itself; very often it serves as a lead-in to some other activity, whether this is focussed on the text itself, or related to the general topic of the text.

As the teachers in this study suggested:

> I have a set of cards and the reader reads the card and a writer writes down what they thought the reader said (T1).
>
> A conversational thing (T4).
>
> Whenever we have a certain set of instructions or a certain passage [...] I get them to take turns in reading a sentence or a paragraph (T6).
>
> [*To start a lesson on a text*] I generally get them to read in turns around the class - I jump around so they never know who's going to be next (T5).

> {*During an oral reading of a text*] I'll say 'what could follow next?' so in a sense they're not doing a reading exercise but they're trying to predict what might fit in w th that part (T7).

At least one student too was aware of this role of reading aloud:

> Sometime is too boring [*if*] reads by myself - if reads (sic) with each other we can argue with other readers in that topic (S20).

4.4.10.10 Aiding classroom management

Oral reading helps focus a group, which may be considered in some ways related to the previous point. This again was a concern for the teachers only, who referred to it in such terms as:

> If it's appropriate to do it with the group, given the group dynamics and so forth, and if they're not really proficient readers, I would get them to read a paragraph each and go round the room and get them focussed (T4).

> I feel that it gets people on task - they will actually read through the text [...] at least their mind has come from outside the classroom to the text [...] I think they follow the text better if they're reading themselves and they are going to be suddenly called on to read (T2).

This is a function for oral reading which tends not to be mentioned explicitly in the literature, though Wagner (1991) (section 3.7) regards it as the real but covert reason why the teachers he observed utilised this practice (their overt reasons were more educational). Perhaps it is considered a somewhat unworthy purpose in comparison with others which are more directly pedagogically-oriented, but it is clear from discussions with many teachers and teacher education colleagues that classroom management (some say 'control') is a widely-recognised reason for having students read aloud - though such an intention is more frequently attributed to others than to oneself. It is probably when oral reading is utilised simply as 'busy work' to keep a class occupied, without other learning purposes, that the poor outcomes of this activity which have made it so suspect in the eyes of many (boredom, anxiety, meaninglessness) do occur most commonly. The teachers in this study, however, openly acknowledged that focus on learning is an important characteristic of the class that 'means business', that such a focus is valuable to students, and that an occasional (but not the

only or main) role of oral reading can be to establish this businesslike learning environment.

These teachers were also conscious that class oral reading provides a routine or a framework which gives a certain security for speaking, even for reluctant students:

> It really pushes them into a corner where they absolutely have to read [...] they know they're going to have that turn and they're often just as good as everyone else - it's just their shyness that keeps them from doing it all the time [...] they all do it and they don't mind (T5).

4.4.11 Teacher cognition in relation to the value of reading aloud in language learning and teaching

One of the most striking aspects of the interviews (and in some cases later informal conversations) with the teachers was the fact that in general they did not seem to have previously formulated an explicit conceptual framework for the role of oral reading in English language teaching. Despite, or perhaps because of, the ubiquity of oral reading in language classrooms, they had rarely examined the relevance or otherwise of this practice in their work - the 'why' - though they had in many cases thought through aspects of how it should be approached. This was apparent sometimes from their comments of surprise as they did recall past experiences or discovered present views; from some of the hedging or cautious language used as they explored their ideas; from the paucity of links made between related practices; and in some cases from inconsistencies of viewpoint or changing perceptions during the course of the interview.

In terms of coming to a new awareness, for example, some of the teachers were quite explicit that oral reading was not an activity whose role they had hitherto thought much about. This does not mean they had not developed strong ideas about **how** to use it in class - many had quite definite views on this - but that its purposes had tended to be somewhat assumed.

> Surprising how often we do it [*but don't think of it as a strategy*] or do it deliberately even (T4).

[*Talking like this*] It's clar fied a few things - there's so much that you do that you don't [*pause*] you do it as a sort of gut reaction (T4).

I suppose I've always thought that reading was, you know, so useful and helpful and everythir g - so you've made me take another look at reading - what's really happening when I do oral reading [...] what strategies are involved in reading and what useful things are coming out of it it may be that they can have, that they can be uselessly (sic) (T2).

Even where teachers did not state explicitly that they were rethinking the role of oral reading, as they answered the questions or elaborated on their ideas they often used language markers (modals, hedges, hesitations, false starts, modifiers of various sorts indicating uncertainty, caution, or that they were thinking on their feet:

so I suppose yeah I s'pose I s'pose I did it (T4).

no I I mean I don't really think the students like to read aloud in class - um I mean you do get kids - well I mean whenever they're supposed to be just quietly reading (T3).

er oh well no it'd be both wouldn't it well I'd put it I'd say both (T2).

and yet but yes I would like to build it up but I would like their reading to improve specifically but I don't know that as yet I would know how to do it but I would look up how it could be done (T7).

they're really they're they're they're practising both at the same time (T5).

no but it's an active - it's a part of the process of reading - well I mean I don't know about the process of reading - it's part of the process of learning to speak English - I think if they can if they they do need to read aloud when they're learning that they um they they (T1).

right so um I well to be a good reader I dunno they'd have to have a certain level of comprehension (T2)

yes as part of the as part of the not a separate thing it's not a separate issue (T6).

In addition, oral reading was not always recognised or defined as such even when it was utilised among the classroom activities - just as we have seen in many of the TESOL handbooks and coursebooks (section 3.7: e.g. Doff 1988; Doff & Jones 1980; Hill & Dobbyn 1979; Hubbard et al. 1983; Nunan & Lockwood 1992). Teachers occasionally stated that they did not use oral

reading much or at all in their classes, then later realised - often with some expression of surprise - that in fact it was a part of their classroom repertoire to a greater extent than they had been aware. Among this category of remarks are the following:

> I don't do much reading aloud with the students although I've just remembered [*she then recounted a particular incident going over a brochure with a student*] I suppose I did it [...] Surprising how often we do it (T4).

> That's one thing I completely forgot that I encourage them to do all the time in terms of self-editing [...] I believe it's good reading aloud in that situation (T4).

It seems that 'reading aloud' or 'oral reading' in general conjured up a picture for many of these teachers (and students) of a fairly fixed procedure: the whole class reading aloud in turn from a common text. Other possible ways of using oral reading - for example, reading aloud in short bursts during a phase of the lesson when the main focus is on something else, such as having a student read to the group the instructions for an activity, or the questions to be answered, or their own answer, or the part of a text which justifies their answer - are very widespread and likely to be utilised by these teachers too; but they did not always think to refer to these, nor was this point followed up directly in this study.

A further indicator of practices which were not consciously fitted into a conceptual framework was an inconsistency in views expressed in the course of the interview: 'local' coherence tending to be pursued to the detriment of 'global' coherence (Agar 1982, cited in Woods 1996: 79). For example, the following shifts were noted in the interviews of three teachers (the comments were often separated by several minutes of intervening discussion):

> [*After defining and elaborating on 'reading' originally in terms of oral reading*] In my view it's generally a reading exercise [...] So in a sense they're not doing a reading exercise but they're trying to predict [...] I don't really think until you're very competent reading helps the speaker the reader very much - I often don't think it's a reading skill except for the really more advanced language learner - I think it's more of a speaking skill - the reading is going along silently isn't it, well I think it probably is, and what's coming out is the speaking skill (T7).

> Reading aloud is maybe more practice for reading - reading helps to concentrate on improving their speech - they feel they can read and write anywhere - they feel very strongly that they've got to improve their speaking skill - so when they're reading aloud sort of should be directed towards opportunities for speaking afterwards and reading aloud is giving them speaking opportunities already while they're doing the reading [...] they're practising both at the same time (T5).
>
> Occasionally I'll read something [*atmospheric*] - [*later*] I wouldn't read an unfamiliar text to them (T2).

Of these three teachers, the first (T7) was a teacher new to TESOL and working independently of other teachers, so it may be surmised that she was still in the process of developing her views, and had not had much opportunity to discuss and reflect on her ideas with others. Although she came out as an Assimilator on the Kolb survey - strengths on reflective observation and abstract generalisation are typical of this style - she was probably still more in the phase of collecting experience from which to induce her theoretical stance, hence the exploratory and at times self-contradictory nature of some of her remarks.

The second teacher (T5) had had a long experience of teaching foreign languages in schools, and had more recently moved into adult TESOL at the language centre. She expressed her views very definitely throughout the interview - as might be expected both of an experienced teacher, and of a Converger type (as were most of the other centre teachers), which typically prefers clear, 'right' answers - and she did not seem to notice her own shifts in viewpoint.

The third teacher above (T2) had had quite a long career in TESOL, though mostly with high-school-aged students prior to this, and, like the second teacher, she is working in the language centre with other teachers - almost all of whom came out as Convergers on the Kolb survey. This third teacher, however, scored as an Accommodator: Accommodators have strengths, according to Kolb, in concrete experience and active experimentation, value new experiences and (experiential) facts above theory, and often proceed in an intuitive trial-and-error manner to evolve their practice. This tendency is perhaps the source for some of her apparent inconsistency: she draws ideas from a variety of experiences but to some extent compartmentalises these and has not yet felt the need to reconcile them into a single theory.

Several of the teachers were conscious of the development of a rationale for or against oral reading during their career, and more especially in relation to class management strategies for oral reading sessions. The conscious influences on these developments tended to come from their experience in classes - often one very powerful incident - rather than from formal training or books; they were evolving their own theory of practice in a very pragmatic way. This may mean that a similar experience could have differing outcomes for different teachers, depending on the particular impact it has on the individual.

> I have in the past had kids read aloud and I remember one little girl who could read aloud really well but she didn't understand a word of what she was reading [*this was clearly perceived as a negative*] (T3).

> When B. stood up to read everyone was just totally amazed because he read so beautifully [...] he doesn't really understand what he's reading [*but this teacher was confident that everything else would follow in due course*] (T1).

All the above appears to confirm the impression gained from the examination of the TESOL professional literature and from discussion with colleagues that oral reading is to a large extent 'taken-for-granted' in many classrooms, by teachers and students alike. They have been involved in the practice for so long both at home and at school that it is not readily available for reflection and analysis, at least at the level of purpose. Given the major emphases in recent years on both communicative language teaching in 'authentic' situations, and on reading for meaning, one might expect that oral reading could fall out of favour in second-language classrooms as not satisfying criteria either of 'genuine communication' or of 'supporting meaning-getting from text'. However, even in educational settings where the new emphases are endorsed in many aspects of the program and of the methodology, we do not see much waning of oral reading nor much evolution in the manner in which it is used.

Such a state of affairs does seem to exemplify the assertions of Osterman and Kottkamp (1993), Woods (1996) and others noted in the first chapter: that teachers 'espouse theories' but in reality are influenced in their actual practice more by 'theories-in-use resulting from deep acculturation'. Certainly a number of features of the interviews and survey responses of the present study gave the impression that the respondents had not often reflected upon these issues and had certainly not as yet found it necessary to

develop a thorough conceptual framework in this regard. On the other hand, when challenged to describe and explain their attitudes and practices, they appeared willing and indeed interested to explore this area fairly openly and honestly, and were able to articulate many aspects of what they did and why.

It is noteworthy that there was a very broad consensus between these TESOL teachers and their students that, despite some anxieties and a lack of understanding often associated with reading aloud, reading aloud is valuable, and that its value relates largely to developing speaking skills and particularly pronunciation. In this case, the acculturation seems to be one which is acknowledged as both shared and productive.

4.5 Summary and Conclusions

The views emerging from the interviews and reading-aloud surveys show certain commonalities as well as certain subgroupings and idiosyncrasies among these respondents; many of the trends are congruent with the literature examined in Chapter 3, although some of the links between particular attitudes and attributes of the participants (such as learning style) do not appear to have been investigated previously.

First of all, as we would have predicted from the literature (especially sections 3.3, 3.4), there was a split between those for whom the term 'reading' spontaneously triggered an image of 'reading aloud' and those who understood 'reading' in terms of 'interpretation of meaning'. This was mainly linked to prior experience in learning and teaching English, and to current institutional culture: both teachers and students at the language centre, where reading is fostered largely through approaches based on genres and strategies, with an aim to develop reading for academic purposes, tended to fall into the 'comprehension' category, whereas the teacher and students in the community class, with its more 'social' agenda, generally indicated that reading aloud was most salient for them.

It was clear, though, that despite the differing definitions of reading in the interviews and particularly in the reading-aloud surveys, very few individuals did not accept both reading aloud and reading for meaning as useful aspects of ESL learning. However, given the concerns raised by

Devine (1984, 1988), Fagan (1988), Kamm (1990) and Hudelson (1983) (section 3.8) - that learners with a pronunciation-focussed model of reading risk misinterpreting the purpose of reading, may not use the full range of interactive strategies when dealing with text, and hence may not access meaning as easily as they need to do - teachers have a responsibility to clarify the distinction for their students both explicitly and through the classroom tasks they set up.

The other side of the coin from the dual interpretation of 'reading' was the fact that 'reading aloud' tended to be defined rather narrowly by most respondents in the first instance - limited to the practice of students taking turns in reading around the class from copies of the same text - whereas other related practices were not always grouped as part of this concept (e.g. a brief reading aloud of questions to be answered, or students' answers to questions, or instructions to an exercise or game). It seemed that, to qualify spontaneously as 'reading aloud' the reading had to have a certain duration and a particular type of text (a fairly extended text) as the focus. While this more 'fragmented' manifestation of oral reading is not problematical in itself, and indeed fulfils a number of functions (such as focussing attention, and providing quick and probably relatively unthreatening practice of spoken English), if teachers are unaware of the total extent to which they are using oral reading in their classes, it may become counterproductive.

The connection between oral reading by students and their concurrent understanding elicited mixed views: in the survey, a majority of students (especially in the youngest age-group) believed they did understand what they read aloud, whereas the teachers were either neutral or negative; while in the interviews virtually all the comments were negative from students and teachers alike. This negative tendency reflects the overall impression gained from the literature on L2 learners reading: that it interferes with comprehension and so should be avoided, at least in that role (section 3.7).

In regard to liking oral reading as a language learning activity, results were also mixed (just as in the literature: see especially section 3.8). On the reading-aloud survey, a majority indicated some degree of liking (though teachers were a little more likely to believe their students enjoyed this than the students themselves), whereas during the interviews most comments on this issue were negative. Respondents were however able to

differentiate between liking oral reading and believing it was useful in language learning: whatever their response to the 'liking' item, virtually all agreed that reading aloud could be helpful to them or their students. These contrasting questions do not seem to have been juxtaposed in previous studies.

Turning to specific possible roles for reading aloud, the respondents as a group were enthusiastic about two uses of reading aloud in their learning of English: the value of listening to the teacher read aloud, and the value of students' oral reading for developing their speaking skills, especially pronunciation. These both find confirmation in the literature: listening to more skilled readers is generally regarded as helpful for developing both L1 and L2 readers' sense of written language (section 3.5); and, although many writers on L2 development are not much in favour of L2 readers themselves reading orally, as noted above, those who do support it do so largely as an adjunct to speaking (section 3.7). In addition, many participants in this study alluded to the value of gaining confidence, getting attention, and the sense of progressing, all being associated with reading aloud. Error correction by the teacher is also allied with this role of oral reading: as here, previous studies have indicated that L2 learners often value this - perhaps more than their teachers (3.7, 3.9) - though clearly if such correction is not done sensitively it can heighten anxiety (3.6, 3.8) or 'other-dependence' (3.7) and hence may be counterproductive.

Again as a group, the participants in this study reacted quite negatively to the idea of students listening to each other read aloud: both students and teachers considered that this was not generally useful. This is also a theme which recurs in other research in both L1 and L2 classrooms with a range of age-groups (3.5, 3.6): unlike listening to skilled readers, listening to a poor reader while following the text forces the listener to slow down and use regressive eye-movements, which is irritating. The teachers often felt that the listening by students to each other did have potential, but conceded that it frequently failed to work because of the social dynamics in the class. If this is the case, perhaps it needs to be sold to the learners more explicitly as a learning opportunity.

Reading one-to-one with the teacher and oral reading to oneself were largely new ideas to these respondents, but they appeared attractive to several. Research cited earlier suggests quite strong potential for both these

activities: reading along with someone else supporting and discussing understandings, difficulties and strategies as one goes is a powerful model of reading behaviour (3.5); and reading aloud at home provides reinforcing practice of speaking in an unthreatening environment which can build fluency and confidence. Quiet 'mumble-reading' in class, while not specifically addressed in the reading-aloud survey, was mentioned by a couple of teachers as an individual strategy for some students, and several participants used this unconsciously as they read the survey questions; likewise, the research literature has occasionally noted this as a helpful adjunct to reading for both understanding and speaking (3.6). All three of these practices seem to merit systematic trialling with a range of students.

A number of factors had been posited from earlier research as possibly accounting for differences in attitude among the participants. When the results were examined, there were slight effects for some of these, the main ones being the following:

Teacher vs. student perceptions: Teachers were a little more likely to believe that students enjoy oral reading than the students themselves, but more cautious about whether students understand what they read aloud. They were slightly more in favour of students listening to peers read, and more in favour of one-to-one reading aloud (though the students' low positive response rates here may have been because many students had never experienced this activity).

The setting: The community class group liked oral reading more than the language centre group; moreover, they were slightly more confident that they understood what they read aloud, and more in favour of listening to peers read.

Sex: Females were slightly more sure they understood what they read aloud.

Age: Younger students were also more confident they understood what they read aloud, but more intolerant of listening to peers read.

Education level reached: More highly educated students were fairly confident about their understanding when they read aloud, whereas the less

educated were especially happy to listen to their teacher read, and also saw more purpose in their own oral reading.

Highest level of English study before this course: Those with a lower level of prior English study were especially happy to listen to the teacher read, and also saw more value in their own oral reading.

Learning style: MBTI
Extroverts tended to like oral reading, as other research has also shown.
Sensers also tended to like oral reading, and very much approved of hearing the teacher read.
Thinkers also liked to hear the teacher read, and saw value in their own oral reading, too.
Judgers were fairly confident they understood what they read aloud.
These characteristics do not appear to have been examined in relation to oral reading in other research.

Learning style: Kolb/Willing
Accommodators were even less tolerant than other respondents of listening to peers read aloud.
Divergers in contrast were more tolerant of listening to peers read aloud.
Again, this seems to be the only study to look at these factors in connection with reading aloud.

Using reading aloud as a class management strategy was mentioned or hinted at by several of the teachers: this too is mirrored in some of the literature (3.7), in a rather negative way (implying that other people do this, and that it is not a valid function of reading aloud). The teachers in this study who mentioned using oral reading in this way saw the more positive implications of helping students settle down, focus and participate in the life of the group - and of using this activity as a gateway to other activities.

Several of the teachers in this project explicitly stated that having students read aloud was not a practice they had previously thought to query. It was such a normal part of their picture of a language class that they were often not aware of how often they did use it until, in response to interview questions, they began literally to 're-view' in their minds what they had done in recent lessons. They recognised that they routinely utilised this practice in many classes, not only in obvious ways such as introducing a

new reading text or to check students' pronunciation, but also for such purposes as reading out the instructions to an exercise, or the comprehension questions following a listening or reading text.

In some cases at least it did appear that getting students to read orally was a 'default' decision rather than a deliberately motivated one; that frequently teachers were not even aware of using reading aloud at such moments; and that *post hoc* explanations related more to approximate effects than to pedagogically-related prior intentions. Given that there are many alternative ways to begin to focus a class on a reading text or to answer a set of written questions, for instance, the routine use of reading aloud for this particular function is likely to be the one most salient to observers and hence most open to the criticism of overuse.

Although such functions of reading aloud are of course perfectly legitimate in themselves, if teachers admit that they 'fall back' on these rather than consciously selecting them for the learning outcomes that they will provide, then it is valid to raise the issue of whether oral reading is being overused at the expense of better or at least more varied practices. Furthermore, there is the risk that too much oral reading may 'fix' some learners in a sound-based model of reading, to the detriment of the development of strategies for comprehension.

The study concentrated on self-report by the teachers and students, which provides insights into how the participants perceive and articulate their own experience and practice. It did not attempt to compare self-report with actual practice, which would be a necessary next step in a process of describing congruence and gaps between what practitioners do and what they say or think they do: an important focus in teacher cognition and in teacher professional development. Moreover, the possibility that the interviews and surveys may have helped shape the views expressed by the participants must always be taken into account. In addition, the total sample of teachers and students in this study was small, and the students were all young or youngish adults, from mostly Asian countries, living temporarily in Australia; so any findings would need to be checked against other age-groups and ethnic backgrounds for greater generalisability. Even so, the findings bear out some earlier research and suggest possible future directions for research, teaching practice and professional development.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION:
WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, TEACHING PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ?

5.1 Overview

This study has highlighted - through analysing the research and pedagogical literature, and through interviewing and surveying a number of TESOL educators and learners - the generally unexamined perceptions of reading aloud on the part of both teachers and students of English as a Second Language. Though widely used in TESOL classrooms at all levels and in all countries, and triggering a variety of emotions, reading aloud rarely seems to be analysed carefully for its benefits or its drawbacks as a language learning procedure.

As it is normally practised in the classroom, oral reading by L2 learners is of dubious value for enhancing their skills in interpreting text. When they are reading aloud, almost all the students in this study claim they must concentrate on pronunciation (and the L2 literature confirms this); so they can not at the same time attend to meaning. Further, there is a real risk (Devine 1984, 1988) that continuing to demand of students that they read aloud in lessons ostensibly focussed on reading for meaning will result in some students at least retaining a sound-based (decoding) model of reading which will hamper them in developing good L2 reading-for-meaning strategies.

Yet this research has also indicated that, although reading aloud may be misused and counterproductive on occasion, and although it seems to play little if any role in fostering reading comprehension with ESL learners, it may also offer positive advantages in developing a range of skills and competencies in the ESL learner - particularly certain types of learner - if it is employed thoughtfully.

The participants in this study were almost unanimous both in valuing reading aloud by teachers to their classes, as a means of bringing text to life

and of providing an accessible model to imitate, and in believing that oral reading by learners can be helpful in enhancing speaking skills, especially confidence and aspects of pronunciation.

On other issues related to reading aloud, opinions were more diverse: some of these differences related to age, level of English or background experience, while others appeared linked to certain learning style characteristics. There has recently been a great deal of interest and research initiative directed at learning styles, particularly in relation to language learning. Yet the question of learning styles is still an open one: differing measures do sometimes seem to converge, but are equally often at variance, so that one is loath to place too much dependence on these constructs at this stage.

What may be more productive, at least in the short term, is a **learning-strategy** perspective on reading aloud. Like all learning strategies, reading aloud will immediately appeal to some students and seem neutral or even negative to others, and analysis of learning styles may provide an initial, tentative explanation for such preferences. However, in the more dynamic perspective of achieving **learning goals**, explicit discussion of possible benefits of reading aloud and systematic trialling of this as a strategy for a range of purposes may open up its potential to benefit many more students and classrooms.

5.2 Implications for educational research

The numbers involved in this study were small, so the present findings can therefore not be seen as conclusive, but can only suggest areas which seem worthy of further research. Some of the directions which would benefit from continuing investigation are the following:

1. The role of reading aloud (by teacher and learner) in the very beginning stages of learning to read: that is, of 'cracking the code (cipher)'. Even in first-language development, the exact value of reading aloud to and by the learner is still not evident; it is even less clear in the context of second-language learning. As yet we lack a fully convincing theoretical model of learning to read which takes account of both first- and later-language reading development and includes the social as well as the cognitive, and within the latter both the visual and the auditory aspects.

2. The role of reading aloud in reading comprehension at various stages of competence, in both first- and second-language development. To what extent does oral reading reflect comprehension, assist this, or conversely hinder it? Again, we have a number of interim theories of comprehension which go some way towards explaining the process and the observed variants within this, but much refinement remains to be carried out.

3. The role of reading aloud in other domains of second-language development: for instance, affect (e.g. confidence, liking for the language), memory, pronunciation (sounds, rhythm, intonation), and speaking skills more generally. Some students believe that oral reading assists them in these areas, but can this be confirmed by research? Conversely, does time spent on such practice reduce or dilute other more powerful means to achieving these ends?

4. The definition and clarification of the notion of 'learning style' and the development of a framework of types and their implications. These concepts appear to offer explanations of individual motivation and achievement, some of which have been loosely confirmed by research, but their potential value demands more and rigorous examination.

5. Assuming that the previous goal is achievable, we would wish to investigate the role of learning style and other learner traits in influencing the utility of reading aloud for a particular learner: can one broadly generalise for the majority of learners in these areas, or would we expect very individual responses? In either case, what are the educational implications, both for the teacher with a whole class to manage, and the autonomous learning of the individual student?

Both experimental research and classroom research (including systematic observation) are likely to shed light on these issues, in differing ways, so investigations of all sorts must be encouraged.

5.3 Implications for teaching practice

Meanwhile, even before we have definitive answers to the above queries, life goes on in the TESOL classroom, and teachers still have to make daily decisions about their teaching as rationally as they can. From this research,

even though small-scale, we can derive some implications for educational practice:

1. Teachers need to become as aware as possible of their own classroom practices and the 'theories-in-use' which underpin these. Without this conscious knowledge, they do not have an adequate framework to judge whether their teaching is effective, and why or why not.

2. Teachers need to understand as far as possible the rationale for and the potential use of all their classroom practices, as well as those of others.

3. Teachers need to determine clearly their priorities for a given group of learners, program, or lesson, in the light of the above, and hence plan the balance of activities, materials, groupings and so on, to fulfil these priorities.

4. Teachers need to find out early in any course the 'learning baggage' (past experience, expectations, skills, preferences, hates) of their students, and use this knowledge in their planning. This does not necessarily mean that teachers or students are 'locked into' a limited set of activities - on the contrary, the teacher may quite explicitly aim to expand the learning-strategy repertoire of all concerned during the course - but it does imply that teachers should be conscious of possibilities and constraints in this domain as part of their planning.

5. Teachers need to help students themselves become more aware of their learning preferences, styles, and developed strategies - however defined - and help them extend these where possible throughout their contact. Although these aspects are as yet only hazily captured in the literature and in professional practice, it does seem that attention focussed on these assists learners to develop more autonomy and independence, which must enhance their language development.

6. Teachers need to take students into their confidence about why they are using each learning strategy/activity, try these out systematically in a variety of ways, and get feedback from students as to the effect, and effectiveness, of these. Not all students should expect to benefit equally from all activities, and certainly not at once, but as learners mature they may learn to profit from a wider range of strategies.

Teacher cognition and metacognition, and the value of **reflection on practice** as a stimulus for professional development, are areas of very considerable concern in the language teaching professional literature at present (Freeman & Richards 1996; Nunan & Lamb 1996; Woods 1996). Such an emphasis acknowledges the fact that the way in which teachers interpret their role and make decisions, both in pre-course and pre-lesson planning as well as 'on line', minute by minute during classes, is a crucial factor in their students' learning and in their own professional satisfaction, and that this merits close study. Simply telling teachers to modify their practice has been shown to be ineffective (Freeman & Richards 1996; Osterman & Kottkamp 1993; Woods 1996). Teachers need to experience 'hotspots' or 'productive disharmonies' in their practice - and feel supported by the social interaction with their colleagues - before they will feel a need for change (e.g. Woods 1996: 294), or the confidence to carry this through.

5.4 Implications for teacher education and professional development

1. Teacher education courses will not succeed if they employ a simple 'top-down' information-transmission model. However progressive and relevant the 'methods' they purvey, these will not supplant what Woods (1996: 175ff) terms 'experienced structures' (those into which teachers have been socialised through long exposure) unless the teachers become deeply aware of both an internal need to change and (ideally) a social network of support for change.

2. Preservice teachers must be given many opportunities to 'understand the dynamic of how they think and act as they learn to teach' (Johnson 1992, cited in Nunan and Lamb 1996: 110). Part of this process is to learn to articulate their experiences using the professional language or discourse, 'enabling them to rename their experience, thus recasting their conceptions and reconstructing their classroom practice' (Freeman 1996: 238).

3 Experienced teachers too need to update their own awareness of the effectiveness of their own practice and of new options, constantly, systematically and in a range of ways: reading, attendance at professional workshops and conferences, consultation with students and colleagues, observation of others and of themselves (via audiotapes, video or a 'critical

friend'), and reflection on all this, leading to action research in their own classes and possibly collaborative research with others.

Even with the knowledge gained from such sources, however, life-long professional development will only occur if teachers are excited about their own ongoing learning. The result of such reflective professional learning will not necessarily be change - and certainly not change for its own sake - but on the other hand there will be a deeper satisfaction as teachers' espoused theories and their actual practice are better integrated. Moreover, teachers with their classes have unequalled opportunities for experimentation with and observation of so many facets of actual language use for real purposes, and their findings can add immeasurably not only to their own expertise but to the whole TESOL profession's knowledge of how learners learn. As Jarvis (1973: 399) wrote:

> We have hardly begun to ask the questions and we have yet to answer those questions . . . then question the answers . . . and then question the questions.