

# Revisiting Reading Aloud Through the Lens of Holistic Reflective Practice: A Trioethnographic Inquiry

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| <b>Article information</b>    | <b>Abstract</b>  |
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| <b>Article history:</b>       | <i>Interest in Reading Aloud (RA), once considered outdated in modern English language learning classrooms, has recently seen a resurgence.</i>  |
| Received: 24 Sep 2024         |  |
| Accepted: 5 Jun 2025          | <i>Based on a review of the trajectory of RA over the past seventy years, Available online: 12 Jun 2025 this article identifies a research gap regarding current practising teachers' beliefs about its usefulness. To address this gap, the authors embarked on a collaborative reflective journey to examine their experiences and perspectives of using RA for second language literacy across various teaching contexts. Employing a trioethnographic approach, they shared narratives about their diverse RA practices with different ESL/EFL learners, then engaged in critical dialogues. The narratives were analysed in terms of the five aspects of Farrell's (2015) Holistic Reflective Practice, comprising philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. The findings revealed the teachers' evolving beliefs in relation to their RA practices, the dynamic relationships between beliefs and practices, and some useful practical techniques in utilising RA for second language literacy. Implications for teachers and researchers are discussed: teachers are encouraged to engage in systematic, holistic reflective practice while researchers are invited to further investigate this seemingly old-fashioned pedagogy using both quantitative and qualitative methods for new insights.</i> |
| Available online: 12 Jun 2025 |  |
| <b>Keywords:</b>              |  |
| Reading aloud                 |  |
| Holistic reflective practice  |  |
| Trioethnography               |  |
| Teacher beliefs               |  |
| Narratives                    |  |

## INTRODUCTION

Reading aloud can be best understood as the deliberate, planned oral rendering of written text by a proficient reader to an audience, during which the reader models fluent, expressive reading and scaffolds listeners' construction of meaning through purposeful interaction (Bus et al., 1995; Johnston, 2016). Over decades, RA has been widely used and much researched for its role in the development of second language literacy (e.g., Chang, 2019, 2023). However, what remains largely absent in the RA literature is teachers' understanding about their RA practice in relation to their personal backgrounds and the sociocultural contexts. Responding to this gap, the present study examined three English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

teachers' reflections on their RA practices and the underlying, dynamic belief systems that were shaped in their historical sociocultural contexts. The study addressed the following two research questions:

- 1) What beliefs underpin the teachers' engagement of RA for second language literacy?
- 2) How have the teachers' beliefs evolved over time and shaped their RA practices?

The study followed Norris and Sawyer's (2012) duoethnographic research design; however, the term trioethnography was adopted to reflect the collaborative involvement of three researcher-teachers. The trioethnography comprised the teachers' individual narratives regarding their employment of RA with various learners across diverse contexts; the teachers then engaged in critical dialogues to collaboratively reflect on and examine their RA practices and the underlying beliefs. Farrell's (2015, 2017) Holistic Reflective Practice (HRP) framework was employed as the key analytical tool. Highlighting the holistic need for teacher reflection, the HRP framework covered five levels of reflection: teachers' personal background from where they had evolved (*philosophy*); conceptions and assumptions of general teaching and learning (*principles*); pedagogical choices related to certain skills (*theory*); visible teacher behaviours and actual classroom happenings (*practice*); and the sociocultural aspects that influence teachers' practice (*beyond practice*).

The purpose of this study is not to evaluate RA practices as effective or ineffective but rather to provide a comprehensive, contextual understanding of how teachers utilise RA to support second language literacy development in their respective contexts. More importantly, it is hoped that the bottom-up insights generated through this approach will foster positive changes, both in the visible actions of teachers and in the underlying beliefs that significantly shape their pedagogical decisions. Ultimately, such changes aim to create optimal opportunities for student learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Reading aloud: Respected, rejected, revalued

In the field of second language learning, the practice of RA has been subjected to extensive attention since the 1950s. Cartledge (1952) was one of the early scholars in the ELT field who elaborated on the working mechanism of RA and its relationship with silent reading. Describing RA as "the commonest language exercise", he stated that "with most people, even so-called silent reading is a form of reading aloud" (p. 94). By this, he emphasised that reading is an audio-visual as well as an intellectual comprehension activity which involves engagement with the eye, the brain, and the kinaesthetic activity of speaking. West (1953) saw the value of reading aloud to a class and examined the technique involved in it, emphasising that effective RA lies in capturing ideas rather than words, retaining the ideas in the mind, and then re-expressing them. Moody (1974) went into greater depth, scrutinising RA as both a technique and an art to realise its full potential in educational settings and the wider community. Griffin (1992) reported strong support for RA from practising teachers who acknowledged it as a

powerful tool for both English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and teachers. According to Griffin, the benefits claimed for learners included expanding their vocabulary, developing sound awareness, facilitating meaningful chunking, and building their confidence. Many ESL teachers found RA a useful tool for evaluating learners' knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and syntactic structure, measuring their reading comprehension, and understanding their cognitive processes when dealing with written information. Amer (1997) presented positive effects of RA on ESL reading comprehension. Gabrielatos (2002) reinforced the phonological contribution of RA for ESL learners and added that it facilitated the production of spontaneous speech and communication. Gibson (2008) further emphasised the value of RA for graphemic-phonemic correspondences and prosody in English. She added that RA also served as a proofreading tool beneficial for ESL learners' writing.

However, there have also been objections to RA reported in the existing ELT literature even in the works of RA supporters (e.g., Gabrielatos, 2002; Gibson, 2008; Rees, 1976). To summarise these works, first, RA focuses excessively on the pronunciation of words, which hinders higher-level information processing and comprehension. Second, because RA is an artificial way of speaking, it is likely to cause stress-induced errors therefore it discourages natural fluency. Third, RA is a more teacher-centred approach, which discourages, or at least limits, individual practice and motivation. Finally, RA can be a dull and boring reading practice, which is hard to perform well and sometimes demotivating for learners (see Gibson, 2008 for more details). In short, due to these various shortcomings of RA, its educational value in foreign language instruction has been much questioned.

Facing the various criticisms, Gibson (2008, p. 35) argued that "it is not RA in itself that is bad practice, but its misuse", based on which he provided guidelines for RA good practice. These involved how to avoid boredom, reduce learners' anxiety, and use RA for objectives that align with its strengths while shifting to other forms of reading (e.g., silent reading) as pedagogically needed.

More recently, RA has been applied in a wide range of linguistic, educational, and cultural contexts, with people of almost all ages, and for various purposes; for example, studies by: Lennox (2013) on interactive RA for pre-schoolers; Batini et al. (2018) on the incorporation of RA in a primary school curriculum; Roessingh (2020) on RA in the upper elementary classroom for the development of academic vocabulary; Rasinski and Hoffman (2003) on RA in a secondary curriculum; Warner et al. (2016) on high school teachers' practice of RA; and Cushing and Bodner (2022) on the effects of RA on proofreading in a university context. Such studies are evidence of a renewed interest in the potential of RA.

Furthermore, Layne (2015) defended RA as "sustaining best practice" for "all of the grade levels" (p. xv); and Gurdon (2019), in her book subtitled "the miraculous power of reading aloud in the age of distraction", commended the value of RA for both teenagers and adults in deepening their intellectual and emotional lives in a time when rapidly advancing technology distracts people in various ways. Nation and Waring (2020) pointed out that reading aloud to the teacher or to a peer is a very important step towards gaining fluent decoding and comprehension skills which are necessary preparation for fluent silent reading. Chang (2019)

reported students' enjoyable experience of orally practising their class content; and Chang (2023) added positive effects of repeated oral reading on the retention of high-frequency multiword items. In short, at least in some quarters, there is evidence that the once discouraged pedagogical practice of RA has been rehabilitated and promoted.

Notably, given the strength of RA in developing sound-symbol connection, a particular population that may benefit from RA are adult ESL learners with limited literacy in their first languages. Bensemann (2012, p. 26) has pointed out the significance of foundational "learning blocks" that learners acquire during their school years and highlighted that failure to cross these early thresholds may lead to a slow and challenging learning process for emerging literacy among ESL adult learners. These "learning blocks" include basic skills such as knowing how to hold a pen, distinguishing between questions and answers, working cooperatively with classmates, and understanding that written symbols represent sounds and meaning (Bensemann, 2012). Reading aloud short texts that are highly relevant and meaningful to learners' real lives may create a response to these challenges by modelling key reading behaviours, reinforcing the connection between oral and written language, and providing repeated, scaffolded exposure to sound-symbol relationships. In doing so, RA offers potential to support such learners in building their essential "learning blocks".

### **Teacher beliefs and their practices**

Teachers' beliefs play a vital role in the implementation of RA, as in all other educational practices, because what teachers believe significantly influences their instructional judgements, classroom behaviours, and lesson outcomes (Farrell & Guz, 2019). Borg (2015) identified important influences on teacher beliefs, including schooling, professional coursework, classroom practice, and various contextual factors; he summarised five characteristics of teacher beliefs as being personal, practical, tacit, systematic, and dynamic. When it comes to teaching reading, these teacher beliefs characteristics are particularly relevant. For example, teachers' personal beliefs about the importance of reading fluency may lead them to adopt specific teaching practices that focus on building fluent reading skills. Their practical beliefs about classroom management may also alter the way they structure reading activities and manage student behaviour during reading time. Tacit beliefs about student ability or motivation may impact the teacher's expectations for student performance in reading and their approach to reading assessment. The systematic nature of teacher beliefs about reading means that they are often interconnected and can reinforce one another. Finally, the dynamic nature of teacher beliefs means that they can change over time as teachers gain new experiences and perspectives.

In short, teachers' beliefs and practices about reading are a very complex matter, requiring in-depth investigation. According to Farrell and Ives (2015), however, little research has been conducted in this direction. Furthermore, despite the burgeoning interest in RA among scholars, RA remains controversial because practitioners from various backgrounds may hold a range of beliefs about what constitutes effective reading strategies and the role RA plays in these. To date, few studies have examined teachers' underlying thinking about their use of RA, and to the best of our knowledge, none have explored this issue using a duo/trioethnographic approach that centre on ESL practitioners telling their own stories and reflecting on their lived

experiences. The study reported below aimed to address this research gap by investigating teachers' RA practices, their underlying beliefs, and the complex dynamics between these elements.

## METHODOLOGY

As outlined in the Introduction, this study followed Norris and Sawyer's (2012) research design. Highlighting the collaborative nature of the work among three researchers, it opted for the term *trioethnography*. It presented authentic teachers' voices through personal narratives, which were then collaboratively interpreted through the lens of Farrell's (2015, 2017) HRP framework.

### The participants

The participants were the three co-authors of this paper, who worked in a polytechnic in New Zealand. Their respective learners in varied contexts have been extremely diverse in terms of first language, cultural origin, age, and education. Also, the participants' own educational and professional backgrounds as well as their current roles are diverse.

Joy Yi Wang obtained her BA and MA from China in English education and a PhD from New Zealand in applied linguistics. She has taught a range of English language courses in both countries, including intensive reading, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and IELTS preparation. She is currently teaching ESOL and literacy courses as well as conducting research in related areas.

Anna Mischefski holds a BA, Graduate Diploma in teaching, CELTA, and an MA in applied linguistics. Born in New Zealand, she has taught in primary schools in New Zealand, and her ESOL experience includes teaching in tertiary institutions in Australia, Japan and currently in New Zealand. She has recently transitioned from being an ESOL classroom teacher to supporting vocational tutors to embed literacy and numeracy into their technical instruction.

Jia Rong Yap obtained a Bachelor of Education and a master's degree in TESL, and was a deputy principal, ESOL teacher, and teacher trainer in rural schools in Malaysia. Having completed a PhD in New Zealand focussing on multiliteracies pedagogy, Jia Rong's current role is as a Centre Manager for English Language Partners Rotorua.

In terms of working relationships, the three participants have worked with one another at different times as teaching partners and/or research collaborators without any power relationships. All three have at least ten years of second language teaching experiences, during which they have engaged with RA to various degrees and in various ways.

### A duo/trioethnographic inquiry

Sawyer and Norris (2013) described duoethnography as "a juxtaposition of contrasting narratives", in which participating researchers construct, deconstruct, and "simultaneously

reconstruct [their narratives] with more complex and layered perspectives" (pp. 5–6). Duoethnography focuses on the interactions and dialogues between the researchers themselves, during which they engage in a reflective and reflexive practice to gain a deeper understanding of their shared experiences and generate new insights (Norris & Sawyer, 2012).

Regarding the practical operation of duoethnography, the founders of the methodology Norris and Sawyer (2012, 2017) offered a set of tenets as guiding principles and dispositions for duoethnographers to adhere to. These include using one's life as frame for investigation and transformation; having conversations/dialogues; respecting differences without seeking solutions; questioning the past and inviting reconceptualisation; acknowledging subjectivity and intersubjectivity without seeking universal truths; taking a form of praxis in which theory and practice converse; allowing a negotiated space for vigilant deliberation; and deep trust between participants (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Breault (2016) discussed emerging issues in duoethnography and emphasised three methodological considerations: avoiding being prescriptive, clearly defining the roles and relationships of the participants, and maintaining transparent conversations and research processes.

In reference to the guidelines outlined above, we charted our own trioethnographic course, which ultimately aligned closely with the approach taken by Thomas et al. (2023). We started with informal meetings and conversations, refining and unpacking the research questions and discussing ways to proceed, particularly regarding the first round of storytelling. To allow individual voices to be explicitly heard, we decided to each write in our own way without following any particular rubric or criteria. We then drafted the narratives of our respective experiences and beliefs about RA; upon completion, we uploaded our stories into a shared folder on Microsoft Teams.

We subsequently read each other's stories, made comments, and asked critical questions. Bearing in mind our intention to explore beliefs about various RA practices, some questions naturally emerged to elicit more background information or pedagogical thinking related to shared factual experiences. To illustrate, some of the questions were: *Did you have any experience of RA (in what language/s?) in your childhood/schooldays? Did you learn anything related to RA during your postgraduate/doctoral study? Did you think of any long-term benefits (whether in class or out of class – i.e., in their 'real' lives) that your ESOL students in NZ could have gained from the RA they experienced?*

We then had a face-to-face meeting, during which we responded to the questions we asked each other and clarified/further elaborated some points. To incorporate the conversations into our initial storytelling, we subsequently went back to our respective narratives and revised them. To maintain individualities, we agreed not to delete any personally meaningful points from the original writing. However, for better readability of the narratives, we allowed polishing or modification at the level of language or writing style. Importantly, we added reflective notes, some of which labelled different types of RA practices (e.g., independent vs shared RA) and highlighted their underlying rationales. Our communications remained open until we finished analysing the narratives.

Throughout the process, we engaged in back-and-forth dialogues, storying and re-storying, actively negotiated and co-constructed meanings, challenged our thoughts, and refined our understandings (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). This dialogic process allowed us to deeply reflect on, and carefully examine, our diverse thinking which underpinned our various practices of utilising RA and related techniques/activities.

### **Holistic Reflective Practice (HRP)**

During our collaborative reflections, Farrell's (2015, 2017) HRP framework emerged as a useful tool which facilitated our discussions. As outlined earlier, the framework contains five stages/levels of reflection, encouraging teachers to systematically examine their personal and professional lives as well as factors that shape their professional knowledge and beliefs. The five stages/levels relate to teachers' personal backgrounds that influence teachers' practice, macro educational principles, specific teaching theories, actual classroom practice, and external factors that impact teachers' actions both in and outside class (see the Findings section for further elaboration on the framework). We found the framework an appropriate fit for our project because it provides a comprehensive approach that "focuses not only on the intellectual, cognitive, and meta-cognitive aspects of practice, but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledge the inner life of teachers" (Farrell, 2017, p. 12). By engaging in this reflective practice, we critically analysed our own beliefs and our use of RA as an instructional strategy to consider the wider sociocultural and institutional influences at play.

Because of its fitness for purpose, the HRP framework was applied *during* the critical dialoguing stage and *subsequently* in the presentation of the findings. Consistency in interpreting the narratives using this framework was ensured through the three teachers reading and re-reading the data, identifying and collating data relevant to each element, first individually and then comparing and cross-checking each other's interpretations before working together in drafting and refining the findings.

## **FINDINGS**

Following this framework, the findings are presented below in five subheadings: philosophy; principles; theory; practice; and beyond practice. Excerpts from our personal narratives are included to illustrate the findings.

### **Philosophy**

Farrell (2017) sees philosophy as "a window to the roots of a teacher's practice" and suggests that reflection at this stage is to examine the "teacher-as-person" and for the teacher to obtain "self-knowledge", contemplating such aspects as their "heritage, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, family, and personal values that have combined to influence who [they] are as language teachers" (p. 12).

In this regard, Joy's narrative revealed a deep-rooted belief in the value of RA across cultural, educational, and linguistic contexts. It combined cultural heritage, personal experiences, adaptability, and a commitment to equity to create a well-rounded approach to teaching and learning that places RA at its core. She reflected:

*RA was an integral part of my entire schooling and tertiary education in China, in which I utilised RA for literacy development in both Chinese and English languages. My massive exposure to and positive experiences with RA laid a firm foundation for my strong beliefs in its benefits, which resulted in the fact that RA became 'part of me' and 'part of my way of teaching'. These integral parts, shown or hidden, have carried on with me throughout my professional journey as an ESOL practitioner in diverse contexts in China and New Zealand.*

Like Joy, Anna has also been a firm advocate for RA, but her philosophy with this respect has been distinctly influenced by her upbringing. She recounted that her journey with the practice of RA commenced during her childhood, as her mother read to her. These early instances of shared literary engagement planted within her a firm belief in the value of RA.

*My teaching philosophy centres around cultivating an environment that not only nurtures a love for reading but also promotes a mindset of exploration and openness to new experiences. This approach steers me away from confining students to just silent reading. Instead, I adapt the reading experience to align with each individual's preference and comfort level. Whether it involves engaging in repeated reading, quietly absorbing the text, or participating in RA, I actively foster and encourage this adaptable, inclusive approach to reading.*

Additionally, during Anna's primary school teaching experience, RA was a common practice. Despite the fact that RA was somewhat discouraged at some stages of her career, Anna consistently applied this technique in her role as instructor of ESOL for adults, reflecting that "RA was useful for many reasons". Moreover, she has built RA into her personal life, as a mother reading aloud to her children.

Jia Rong engaged with RA differently from Joy and Anna, viewing teaching as an ongoing process of growth and adaptation to the professional environment. Persuaded by ESL colleagues that RA was a waste of time, Jia Rong reported, "I avoided this technique in my classrooms for years". However, after reading more deeply into RA and shadow reading, Jia Rong's perception about the strategy eventually changed. She reflected:

*Vivid and deeply entrenched in me was the assertion that RA is not an effective way to teach reading. It was claimed that RA only develops speaking skills, and the attempt to process and articulate the words while attempting to comprehend them simultaneously is not possible. Consequently, I avoided this technique in my classrooms for years. However, upon engaging with the literature on reading aloud and shadow reading (e.g., de Guerrero & Commander, 2013), I realised that I had only a limited understanding of these techniques and frequently used them thereafter – so much so that they have become an integral element of my professional identity.*

Together, these narratives illustrate how the teachers' personal histories and values shape their RA-related beliefs and practices, aligning with Farrell's (2017) call to examine teachers' pedagogical decisions from a whole-person view.

## Principles

The second level of the reflective framework refers to teachers' reflections on their "assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning", which he views as "three points along the same continuum of meaning" (Farrell, 2017, p. 13).

Joy conceived language learning to be both a cognitive and a physical activity, and highlighted RA as a powerful tool to tackle both. She elaborated:

*Like learning a sport or playing an instrument, simply knowing about a language and understanding its working system are not enough: learners have to actually operate the language. As Duncan (2021) emphasises, as a teaching tool, RA is part of the scaffolding process of oral production of the language, which involves a range of subskills linking phonemes with graphemes; and this is a crucial process for all learners, particularly those second language adults who either have not had opportunities to build such a system in any language, or those who have had a well-established but very different system.*

Anna believed RA to be an invaluable strategy during the trajectory of reading development, playing a pivotal role in bridging the transition from emergent literacy to independent reading. She said that:

*Given that students may have diverse levels of reading proficiency and engagement, I have utilised RA as a supportive practice for low-level learners, disengaged readers and those struggling with focus. On reflection, I can see that adapting my teaching methodology to recognise, and cater for, individual needs is a crucial principle for teaching in general and the use of RA as a strategy in particular.*

Jia Rong's early participation in professional development courses reflected a central principle of commitment to integrating theoretical insights from background reading with personal experience and thereby enhancing instructional practice. Jia Rong did so by connecting this principle to classroom context:

*Following this new 'revelation' from my reading and a reflection on my ELT teaching practices, I realised that reading is not merely a matter of pronunciation, but a complex activity that involves multiple processes, including word recognition, comprehension and critical thinking.*

The stories shared here reveal how the teachers' evolving assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning are intricately woven into their RA practices, reflecting the interconnected nature between beliefs and practices that Farrell (2017) emphasises.

## Theory

The third aspect of reflection in Farrell's (2017) framework focuses on "the different choices a teacher makes about particular skills taught (or they think should be taught) or, in other words, how to put their theories into practice" (p. 13). Essentially, teachers construct their own personal theories of practice based on reflecting on their experience, philosophy and principles.

Joy integrated both explicit theories that she learned from literature and implicit theories that she developed from her own reading, study, and practice. She reflected:

*Two overarching theories guided my general pedagogical choices of learner-centredness and scaffolding: humanistic learning and social constructivism. My doctoral study into the role of control shift in the development of learner autonomy refined and deepened my understanding of the complexity and delicacy of scaffolding (Wang, 2016; Wang & Ryan, 2023). Additionally, the Māori concept of manaakitanga (kindness, respect and responsibility for others) prevailing in my current work context further enhances my practice of facilitating reciprocal learning in, and through, caring and trusting teacher-learner relationships (see Kaa & Willis, 2021). These theories interweave and integrate, informing and guiding my classroom decisions regarding the tactics for effective operation of RA.*

Anna's narrative also underscored her inclination towards a constructivist pedagogical approach. She drew particular attention to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and shared the concept of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976).

*My primary education training in New Zealand has equipped me with theoretical knowledge and teaching approaches for children's reading acquisition. I discovered as a primary school teacher, that books, texts, and reading content needed to appeal to students. They also needed to be at the right level, or as I've learnt now, within the child's ZPD in order that they can be scaffolded to a high potential level. On transitioning to adult ESOL education, I became familiar with applied linguistic theories and approaches to intensive and extensive reading. This has led me to think that by identifying commonalities and integrating instructional techniques from both primary and adult ESOL education, educators can effectively harness strategies to enhance reading acquisition across diverse age groups.*

Jia Rong's narrative explained that personal engagement with educational theories changed from a "narrow understanding" of RA to a more comprehensive approach. On reflection:

*I discovered that correct pronunciation constituted only a small part of the notion of RA. According to Massaro (2017), RA helps develop fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. It also provides an opportunity for students to hear proper pronunciation, enunciation, and intonation of words and sentences, which can help improve their own speaking skills.*

These examples demonstrate how the teachers enact their personal theories in their classroom practice, making intentional choices that align with their evolving theories and experiences.

## Practice

Practice consists of “the more visible behaviours of what we do as teachers”, and “what actually happens in the classroom” (Farrell, 2017, p. 14). This involves both teachers’ actions while teaching and learners’ reactions (or non-reactions) during their learning.

Joy recounted her implementation of RA in China and New Zealand at different stages of her professional journey. Noticeably, she had abandoned RA in her early years in New Zealand, when she perceived RA as a traditional Chinese way, and somewhat rote learning, therefore suspected its applicability to the new environment where communicative language teaching dominated. However, she has picked up RA again since 2018 in supporting learners with limited L1 and/or L2 literacy. She emphasised that her most recent use of RA was purposeful, theoretically informed, and carefully operated. She reflected that:

*For the practice of RA to be effective in the long run, engagement is the key; and to effectively engage the learners, particularly adult learners with only emerging literacy, the reading materials must be relevant and meaningful to them, addressing their wishes and needs. Provide choices, let them think, choose, and be committed. Allow enough time to accommodate individual paces. With RA being the focused activity, allow diverse preparations beforehand (e.g., read silently first, use mobile phones to look up unknown words) and optional follow-ups (e.g., read to the teacher or a peer learner, voice record or not). Give meaningful, encouraging, and empowering feedback. Make sure the reading environment is safe and relaxing and the entire reading process and experience positive, pleasant, and rewarding.*

There were a number of key issues emerging from Anna’s narrative on incorporating RA in teaching practice. She utilised the technique of RA for assessing students’ reading abilities and building their confidence. She also employed it as a tool to support reading acquisition and development in learners of various ages. For successful implementation of RA, Anna emphasised the importance of selecting appropriate texts, considering student interest, language levels, and maintaining their engagement.

*In my role as an educator, I have always prioritised ensuring that my students participate in activities where they feel comfortable and willing. When I have a student who struggles to focus on a reading task (sometimes a low-level student, with limited English), asking them to read aloud to me has been a way of supporting them to stay on task and to complete the reading. For these learners, sometimes I will say, “if you read that sentence, I’ll read the next” and in this way they don’t feel overwhelmed.*

Jia Rong’s teaching philosophy, principles, and explicit and implicit theories fostered a holistic approach to reading instruction. This was achieved by incorporating reading aloud and shadow reading techniques and demonstrated through the shift from solely correcting pronunciation

to incorporating comprehension tasks. This exemplified the application of Farrell's principle of adapting practice based on reflection and learning.

*Upon a reflection on my ELT teaching practices, I realised that I used reading aloud and shadow reading as part of a lesson on reading comprehension. After reading a text out loud to the class, I would have students shadow read the text silently, underlining key words or phrases as they go. I would then ask a series of comprehension questions, encouraging students to refer to the text as they answer. This helps to reinforce the idea that reading is a process that involves both word recognition and comprehension, and that these skills are interconnected.*

The above narratives illustrate the complex thinking that underpins the teachers' operational procedures for effective RA practices. This reinforces the idea that effective teaching and learning depend not only on the method or approach chosen, but also on how it is implemented in context.

### **Beyond practice**

The final stage of critical reflection addresses the sociocultural dimension of teaching and learning, which explores and examines "the moral, political, and social issues that impact a teacher's practice both inside and outside the classroom" (Farrell, 2017, p. 15).

At this stage, Joy examined who, and/or what, in the broad sociocultural context, had positively affected her RA beliefs and practices, through which she also enhanced her understanding of the impact of RA on adult learners' lives beyond the classroom. She recounted:

*Apart from the initial beliefs deriving from my cultural backgrounds and personal learning experiences, I learned a great deal from working in teams with colleagues who share the interest (as the three of us did) and belief (including temporary disbelief) in the value of RA. I also greatly benefitted from, and was empowered by, engagement with scholarly works discussing and exploring ways to make RA effectively work for diverse users. My recent reading of the work of Duncan (2015, 2021) has opened my eyes to the ubiquitous nature of RA in day-to-day adult life domains.*

Anna contended that the efficacy of RA hinges on the congruence between educational objectives and pedagogical intent. She stressed the importance of reflection, encouraging educators to consider the reasons behind their teaching methods:

*Recently transitioning from[an] ESOL teacher to a supporting role in the Vocational Education Department, I find that my experience with low-level learners has been invaluable in preparing me for this new position. It has equipped me with the understanding necessary to enhance vocational tutors' awareness of the challenges some individuals face in learning to read. While the specific strategies I used in language teaching might not directly transfer to vocational programs, the principle of learner-centeredness remains paramount. It's essential to recognise that reading can be a*

*unique experience for different individuals. As such, incorporating RA in the classroom can serve various purposes, adapting to the needs and preferences of each learner.*

Jia Rong's reflection also extended to the wider educational environment. Recognising the challenges faced by young learners in a rural area, Jia Rong embraced a proactive role in using RA (and shadow reading) to address educational disparities:

*Reading is a complex activity that involves multiple processes, including word recognition, comprehension, and critical thinking. Reading aloud and shadow reading are two strategies that can be used to help improve students' reading skills in the classroom, and their overall literacy skills. In my classroom of young learners located in a rural area, children were at risk of falling behind their urban peers in age-appropriate reading acquisition (Yap, 2015) and thereby endangering their overall educational progress. I feel that, to some extent at least, my pedagogical approach to RA mitigated this danger.*

These reflections reveal how broader sociocultural contexts influence teachers' long-term practices, underscoring the importance of ongoing professional development and reflective practice.

## DISCUSSION

The HRP framework (Farrell, 2015, p. 12) provides a "lens" to describe and examine in depth the three teachers' beliefs and how they were formed. The narratives, integrated into the findings, provide an authentic glimpse into classroom practices and illustrate which RA-centric activities have proved most effective. Moreover, these stories trace the ongoing professional growth of each educator, underscoring their evolving understanding and application of RA throughout their careers. This section discusses the key findings in relation to the current literature on RA and teacher beliefs and practices.

### Teachers' evolving beliefs about RA

To the first research question regarding the teachers' beliefs underpinning their engagement of RA for second language literacy, a short answer is that the teachers hold a mixture of beliefs with temporary scepticism about certain aspects of RA but with strong final appreciation of its value.

The scepticism revealed in the narratives relates to the application of RA to certain contexts, to certain skills, and to users of different age groups. These concerns resonate with certain critical perspectives found within the literature on RA. To illustrate the point, Joy's concern about the receptiveness of RA in the New Zealand ESOL context precisely reflects that RA had been "discouraged in communicative teaching methodology, which tended to react against perceived traditional methods" (Gibson, 2008, p. 29). Anna's experience of being questioned about the fitness of RA for adult literacy mirrors the much-held assumption that "RA is not

a 'natural' 'real life' adult practice" (Duncan, 2015, p. 84). The reluctance and avoidance in Jia Rong's case is not at all uncommon because many doubt the possibility for learners to simultaneously tackle decoding, articulation, and comprehension in the RA process (see Gibson, 2008).

Nevertheless, the degree of scepticism that the teachers experienced was, sooner or later, resolved; and all the three teachers clearly stated their current appreciation of RA for its numerous benefits. Their lived experiences illustrated multiple strengths of RA such as in nurturing an intuitive feel for a language, in building up the significant foundational "learning blocks" referred to by Bensemann (2012), and in enhancing general communication, self-confidence, and even critical thinking skills. The stories that the teachers collaboratively constructed provided concrete evidence for the wide applicability of RA to a range of learners in terms of educational contexts (primary or tertiary, rural or urban, Asian or Western), age groups (children, adults, or seniors), and literacy levels (from pre-literate to advanced learners). Anna's experience in her current role also expanded potential RA users to vocational tutors who need to embed literacy into their technical instruction. The extensive use of RA shared by the three teachers corresponds closely with the numerous advantages of RA documented in the existing literature (e.g., Duncan, 2021; Gabrielatos, 2002; Gibson, 2008; Layne, 2015).

### **The dynamics between beliefs and practices**

The next research question sought to provide insights into the developmental trajectories of teachers' beliefs and the dynamic relationship between teachers' evolving beliefs and their RA practices.

Borg (2015) posited that sources of teachers' cognition include personal schooling experiences, professional education, contextual factors, and classroom practice, and that some of these factors interact with each other and/or with an individual's comprehensive cognition system. These various sources and interactions make teacher beliefs a complex, dynamic, evolving process, which constantly impact teachers' classroom application of RA in various ways (Farrell & Guz, 2019). Starting with the teachers' initial beliefs about RA, Joy's experience illustrated influence from a deeply-held Chinese belief that RA is an effective reading strategy and from her extensive positive learning experiences with RA throughout her schooling and professional education; while for Anna, it was her childhood experience of family education. Different again, Jia Rong's initial professional stance – that RA is ineffective in teaching reading – was first shaped by professional development courses and interactions with fellow educators.

These initial beliefs about RA resulted in the teachers having significantly divergent professional practices. Anna's case was a smooth transition from a pleasant experience with RA as a child to its application with other children with clear purpose. Clearly, it demonstrates a *doing-with-knowing* type (Wang, 2016), as she articulated well why she was undertaking her teaching in this way (e.g., for phonological awareness, decoding abilities and vocabulary knowledge). By contrast, Joy's initial practice with RA falls into the *doing-without-clear-knowing* type (Wang, 2016) as she employed RA in her early teaching without clear rationales or theoretical basis. Jia Rong's case adds a third type of belief-practice relationship, that is,

*not doing due to not believing.* Feeling that RA misaligned with the primary goal of teaching reading (to develop comprehension), she avoided it for years.

Despite the varied initial experiences of RA, a common finding among the three teachers, as has been illustrated earlier at multiple points, is that they all eventually found value in the RA strategy through their classroom experiences. Jia Rong's integration of RA with shared reading techniques illustrates how her belief evolved, recognising the link between comprehension and word recognition. Anna and Joy constantly reflected on their classroom application and took measures – such as creating a learning environment and accommodating individual needs – to enhance learners' experiences with RA. Their experiences have shaped the teachers' beliefs to value RA not only for fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary but also for overall literacy development and many other positive effects (Duncan & Freeman, 2020).

Additionally, the findings also reveal other contributing factors to the teachers' evolving RA beliefs. These include their ongoing reflections, continued professional education, engagement with RA literature, and interactions with peer colleagues. In their classroom practices and reflections, the teachers engaged in an open-ended process of doing, thinking, adapting, improving, and gaining a deeper understanding. In this process, both their beliefs and their practices evolved. For example, Joy described her recent application of RA as "purposeful, theoretically informed, and carefully operated"; Anna carried her repertoire of knowledge and skills from an ESOL classroom to supporting vocational tutors; and Jia Rong's PhD study has upgraded a knowledge and understanding of literacy to multiliteracies development. These findings align well with established research on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (Borg, 2015; Ferguson & Lunn, 2021), which underscore that teachers' beliefs are not static but undergo changes as educators gain experience.

### **Moving forward with RA for second language literacy: The know-how**

Along with recognition of various strengths of RA, findings also reveal the teachers' knowledge of how to appropriately implement RA for its optimal value. In this regard, Young (2000) stressed that RA should be used "in combination of a variety of classroom activities" in an environment "as unthreatening as possible" (p. 44). Evidence of these considerations have been reflected in the three teachers' RA implementations. Other effective measures that the teachers underscored are accommodation for individual needs, enhancement of learner engagement by offering choices, and meaningful and empowering feedback. Through these efforts, the perceived value of RA was fulfilled, and multiple learning goals were achieved. In practices as such, RA was by no means "dull and boring, anxiety-provoking, and of negligible benefit for the students" (see Gibson, 2008, p. 29).

Close examination of the teachers' knowledge behind their RA operations demonstrates two levels of *know-how*: firstly, how RA works internally to realise different linguistic functions related to various sub-skills as elaborated in detail in established ELT literature (see Cartledge, 1952; Duncan, 2021; Griffin, 1992); and secondly, how it best works externally between learners and their facilitators (whether a teacher, a peer learner, or a parent) for its targeted purposes and optimal benefits. Now with understanding of RA operation at both levels, we

join Gibson (2008) to call for more, and finer, reflections – in, on, and for actions (Schön, 1983) – focusing on *how* to appropriately use RA, *not whether* to adopt or abandon it because it is a good or bad practice.

Overall, the teachers' engagement in RA is grounded in their beliefs and principles, shaped by a number of internal and external factors ranging from personal memories, academic and professional learning as well as classroom practices and reflections, to interactions with colleagues and scholarly literature. While scepticism or concern may exist, careful consideration about the effective operation of RA can lead to its successful implementation in L2 classrooms, with each teacher tailoring their approach based on their beliefs and principles. This highlights the importance of considering individual teaching philosophies (beliefs, conceptions, perspectives, values) when presenting and encouraging teachers to adopt RA as a strategy for L2 reading (Borg, 2015; Ferguson & Lunn, 2021). Equally importantly, it is crucial for practising teachers to have a sound understanding of their own cognitive world regarding the pedagogical medium which they choose to adopt, for the benefit of their learners. The understanding involves not only what they think, know, and believe about their practice as Borg (2003) has advised, but also the developmental process of their cognitions – horizontally and virtually – in the socio-cultural and historical contexts (Wang, 2016).

For teachers to achieve such dual understandings – understanding *themselves* and *others*, *socio-culturally* and *historically* – the trioethnographic approach adopted together with Farrell's (2015, 2017) HRP framework, has proved to be instrumental and commendable. As writing allowed opportunities for thoughts to be articulated, both the process of writing and revision of the narratives and the actual stories that were told turned out to be effective reflections in the first place. Meanwhile, the multiple critical dialogues that the authors held with each other enabled deeper thoughts which might have been previously unknown or unclear to be revealed. Finally, Farrell's framework channelled the various stories and thoughts into a holistic system; this was ultimately presented to the readers as one whole re-story of multi-dimensional and -layered sub-stories, which displayed both commonalities and contrasts in relation to the teachers' evolving beliefs and practices about RA.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude this holistic reflective journey, we draw on Dewey's (1933) four essential attributes that teachers need for effective reflection, namely, open-mindedness, responsibility, wholeheartedness, and directness (cited in Farrell, 2012, p. 15). These attributes have been an integral part of our collaborative reflections. Holding a shared belief that RA is “something worth doing” (directness), we investigated multiple aspects of RA from our contrasting experiences, and we acknowledged and embraced different perspectives (open-mindedness); we carefully considered the implications and impacts of our actions on our learners (responsibility); and working towards meaningful changes, we challenged ourselves to critically examine our individual experiences and beliefs in relation to the use of RA thereby developing deeper, more holistic, and more nuanced understandings (wholeheartedness).

In terms of implications of this study, we have recommendations for teachers and for researchers. To practising teachers: If you have experienced a well-used technique or discovered something useful, no matter what, and for whichever skill, as long as it works for you and benefits your learners, you should explore and refine it through constant trial and reflection. Stay open to other voices, but do not let them put down or destroy your own beliefs. You have an insider's pedagogical knowledge and understanding of a range of techniques such as reading aloud. To help you to check the validity of your current pedagogy and as a means of autonomous professional development, you can use the standard cycle of reflection for-, in- and on-action (see, for instance, Barnard & Ryan, 2017). However, this cycle is largely restricted to the immediate classroom context (Farrell, 2022). For a much deeper understanding of the key sources of your beliefs and practices, we recommend that you engage, as we have done in our study, in Farrell's (2015, 2017) holistic reflective practice.

More research is needed about the relevance of "old" and perhaps discarded techniques – reading aloud among others. In particular, carefully designed quantitative research should present more concrete specific measurements in relation to the effectiveness of any instructional technique that is in question. Also, it would be important to capture the experience of practising teachers by creating opportunities for them to express their values and beliefs in narrative form. In addition, it would be valuable to capture the cognition and experience of learners by asking them to write stories in their first languages, perhaps in the form of narrative frames (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). Such research could be carried out by the participants acting as their own investigators, that is, autoethnographers (Adams et al., 2017) or perhaps engaging in face-to-face or mediated duoethnographic dialogues (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, 2015), or even as a trioethnography, as we have illustrated in this article.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Roger Barnard for his valuable expertise in editing and providing feedback on this paper. They also sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, which helped to enhance the clarity and overall quality of the manuscript.

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