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Bringing pronunciation instruction back into the classroom: An ESL Teachers' pronunciation "toolbox"

PSLLT, Ames, Iowa
September 17, 2011

Overview of presentation

- Description of the IEP and the learning outcomes

- Challenges in teaching pronunciation

- Bringing pronunciation into our curriculum
  - Five guiding principles
  - The curricular component

- Conclusions and Discussion

Intensive English Program at Indiana University

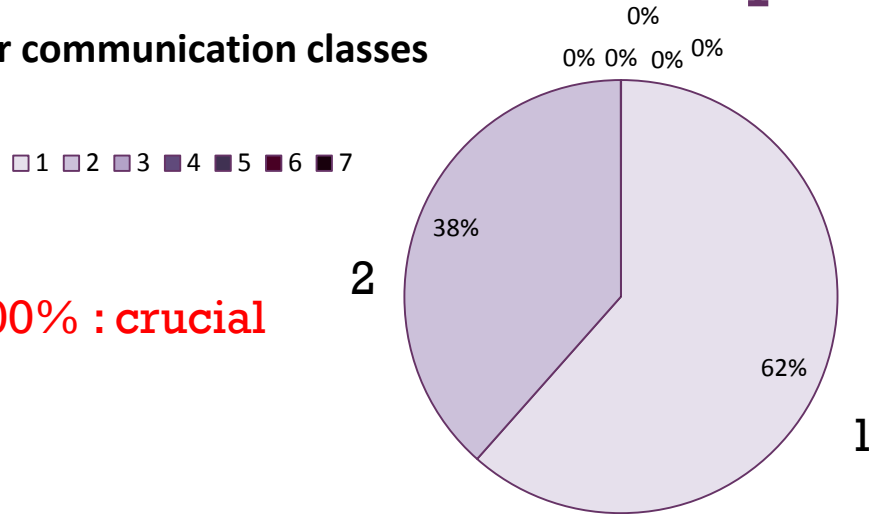| 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Oral Communi-cation	Communi-cation	Communi-cation	Communi-cation	Communi-cation	Communi-cation	Reading and Writing
Oral Communi-cation	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Choose 2 or 3 ELECTIVES
Reading and Writing	Reading and Writing	Reading and Writing	Reading and Writing	Reading and Writing	Reading and Writing	ELECTIVES
200-250 minutes per day **33 days per session** **6 sessions per year**			Extensive Reading	Optional Research Writing ELECTIVE	Optional ELECTIVE	ELECTIVES

IEP Curriculum

- English for General Academic Purposes

- Literacy and Oracy Outcomes-based

- Currently, no specific pronunciation outcomes

- Pronunciation outcomes embedded in successful accomplishment of oral communication outcomes.

- Pronunciation is addressed haphazardly in textbooks, tasks, and teacher awareness for Levels 1-5

- Pronunciation Elective offered for Level 6-7 learners

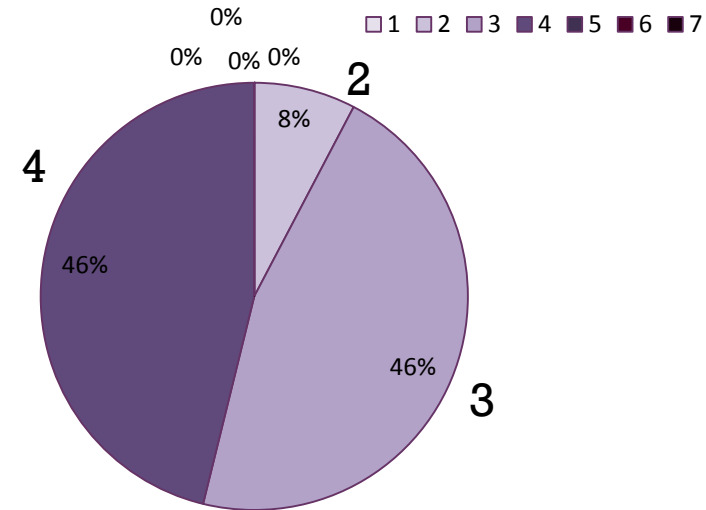# Bringing Pronunciation into our Curriculum: How important is it?
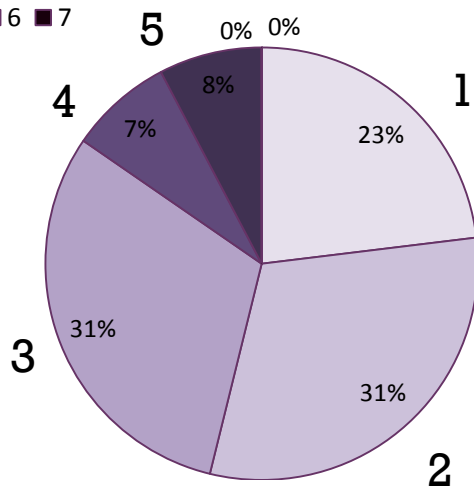
For communication classes

100% : crucial

In daily life

92% : crucial or important

100% : crucial or important

Global importance (across all situations)
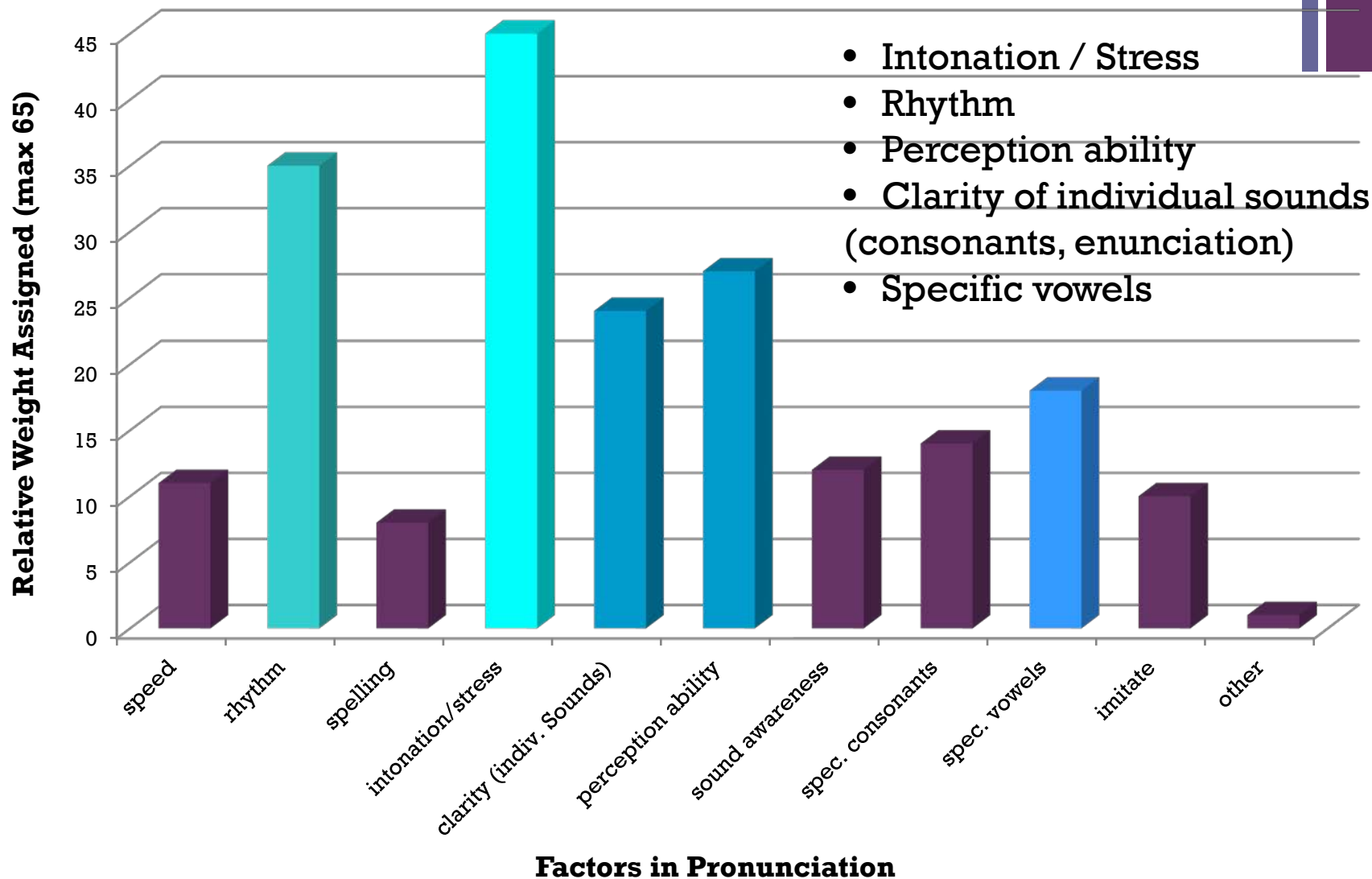

1-2 = Crucial / Very important
3-4 = Important
5-6 = Somewhat important
  7 = Irrelevant

Survey: Top 5 elements to master
(regardless of level)

- Intonation / Stress
- Rhythm
- Perception ability
- Clarity of individual sounds (consonants, enunciation)
- Specific vowels

Relative Weight Assigned (max 65)

Factors in Pronunciation

speed, rhythm, spelling, intonation/stress, clarity (indiv. Sounds), perception ability, sound awareness, spec. consonants, spec. vowels, imitate, other

Relative importance by level
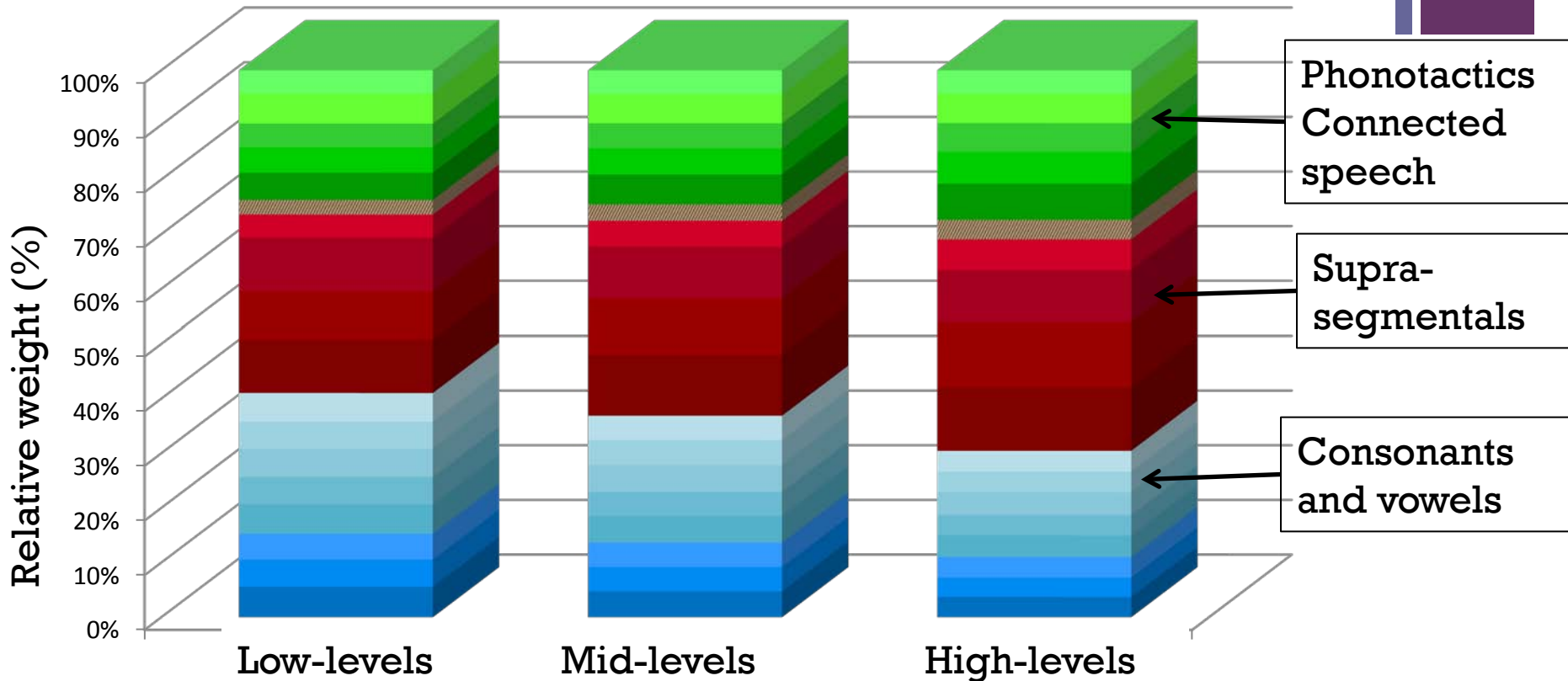
Segmentals receive proportionally more weight than other domains in the beginning. As level increases, connected speech and suprasegmentals become proportionally more important

How much do we actually do it?

- How often do you teach pronunciation?
  - Very sporadic, inconsistent across level, skill, and teacher

- Do you teach pronunciation as much as you think you should?
  - Only 2 respondents (14%) reported being satisfied
  - Teachers reported they needed more time, training, and/or institutional support
  - Several teachers needed to be assured that their pronunciation teaching would be effective

Do you Diagnose Pronunciation?

- No
- Pre-Test
- Pre and Post Test
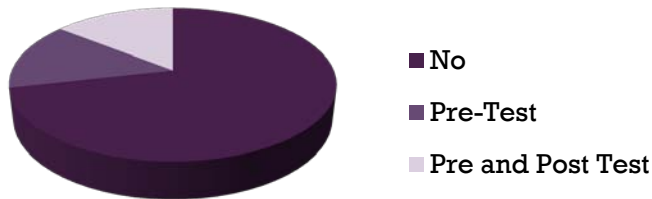
Are you Satisfied with your Pronunciation Teaching?

- Satisfied
- Time needed
- Training needed
- Institutional Support Needed
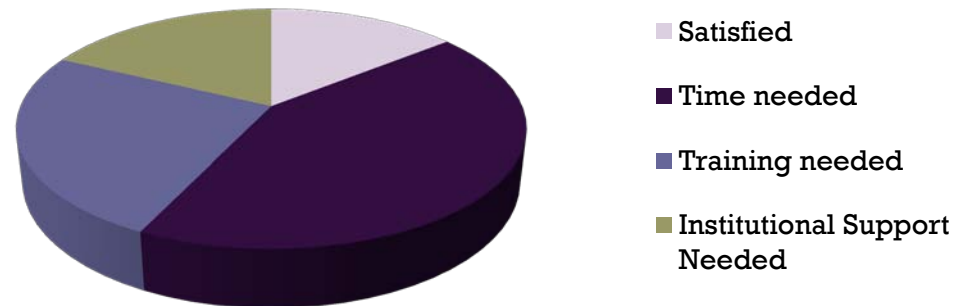
Why is pronunciation difficult to teach?

- No well-established systematic way of deciding **what** to teach, and **when** and **how** to do it (Derwing & Foote 2011)

- Problems include:
  - Selection and ordering of essential pronunciation features (Prator, 1971; Jenner, 1989; Derwing, Munro & Wiebe 1998)
  - Addressing production and perception
  - Distribution in the curriculum in terms of learner proficiency
  - Lack of carry-over (Bowen, 1972)
  - Limited materials for instruction
  - Lack of teacher training (low confidence) (Derwing, 2010)

Different needs at different stages

- Our survey results showed that teachers believe that different levels have different pronunciation needs

- Some research also argues in favor of instruction that adapts to level
  - Jenner (1989) recommends to focus on consonants in the early stages
  - Murphy (1991) offers a level-sensitive curriculum for the four skills (speaking, listening, production, discrimination)

- However, guidelines that distinguish by level are almost non-existent. Most materials are written for high-level learners

Five Guiding Principles
corresponding to specific problems

- **Research- and experience-based**
  - Selection of materials and priorities

- **Adaptive**
  - Different selection / priorities at each level

- **Embedded**
  - Within lessons, and within the existing IEP curriculum

- **Practice makes perfect: start early**
  - For students --> practicing pronunciation is normal

- **Attention to both Perception and Production.**
  - Developing perception is an important component

Low-Level Needs: Survival

- Beginners need the basic phonemic inventory in order to start parsing the speech stream

- Segmental features that have "high functional load" are prioritized (/θ/ /ð/ /ʒ/ are more peripheral)

- Understanding of the basic stress-timing and intonation arc of declarative and simple interrogative sentences can help shape discourse and give listeners basis for repair

- Foundation upon which other elements build

Low-level Instruction: Fully Contextualized

- Metalinguistic speech is avoided, as they don't have that vocabulary

- Each element derives from real-world, survival function

- Goal is basic intelligibility and negotiation of meaning

- Lexical items are introduced with their stress pattern

- Phoneme-grapheme correspondence should be addressed because:

  - Much of their input is through written media
  - Spelling for clarification is necessary

Low Levels: Level 1 & 2 Example of Integration into LOs

Pronunciation element	Learning outcomes (1)	Learning outcomes (2)
Element of phonics (spelling)		4,5
Practice alphabet; consonants of English	*1a*, 1c *1e*,	4,8
Vowel length	1a, 1c, 3	
Final consonants and clusters	1d, 3	4,8
Basic intonation	*1b, 1d*, 2, 5	
Intonation: declarative, question, request vs. apology		1,2,8
Sensibilisation to stress-timing; stress perception		7

Segmental practice: level 1

- **Learning Outcome 1a** : **Spelling for Clarification**

- **Learning Outcome 1e** : **Asking and Getting Directions**

- 1. During shopping unit, focus on foods with the sound in isolation, and then in a sentence where students fill in the gap.

Part 2 – Listening

___ips   Pea___   Radi___

Spina___   ___orts   ___oes

A   B

1. My tea**ch**er is from _____. / My T-**sh**irt is from _____.
2. I was **ch**opping _____. / I was **sh**opping _____.
3. I bought some **ch**erries for _____. / I bought some **sh**erries for _____.

1. Sh / Ch   2. Sh / Ch   3. Sh / Ch   4. Sh / Ch
5. Sh / Ch   6. Sh / Ch   7. Sh / Ch   8. Sh / Ch

- 2. The teacher listens to student production, and they check comprehension

- 3. Real-life examples are used in a listening discrimination task:
    - "University East apartments are on 'Mi**tch**ell St.'"
    - "CS apartments are on 'Wa**sh**ington St.'"

Mid-Level Needs: Clarity

- Goal remains minimization of pronunciation's negative effects on intelligibility

- Assumption of basic phonemic inventory, with only minor / isolated L1-dependent difficulties.

- Vowels and reduction are required for ease of comprehension

- Stress and intonation play a central role in ensuring that gaps in specific segments interfere minimally with overall discourse

- Production and perception of strings of sentences is the focus of class, and becomes focus of pronunciation teaching. Word-level elements are still important, but less relative weight.

Mid-Level Instruction: Context-specific

- Elements might be introduced with metalinguistic speech, but focus is still on embedding pronunciation as a component in the function being addressed

- Focus on making students *aware* of phonotactic and connected speech phenomena.

- Presentations, conversations, listening activities have secondary focus of suprasegmental awareness and imitation

Mid Levels: Level 3 & 4
Example of Integration into LOs

Pronunciation elements	Learning outcome (Level 3)	Learning outcome (Level 4)
Phonics		
Tense and Lax vowels		3
Final consonants and clusters (review of levels 1 & 2)		
Word stress		
Sentence stress, Intonation	1,2,3,4,5	1, *2*, 5,9
Vowel Reduction (Schwa)	6	10
Rhythm		
Linking	6	*2*, 10

Phonotactic practice at Level 4: Reanalyzing text for speaking

- **Learning Outcome 2:** Summarize orally someone else's personal story

1) Students first read a text to summarize (from their classmates or another source) and select the most important sentences

2) Students look at the key sentences and attempt to form a concise, one-sentence synthesis

3) That sentence is divided into groups of words such that it can be memorized and read to the class aloud for its understanding
    1) The need to memorize necessitates grouping of words
    2) The teacher's direction will focus students to connect sounds together in short groups

4) The teacher reminds students to think of larger thought groups when interacting with and reproducing texts

High-Level Needs: Accuracy / Attention

- Shift from simple intelligibility → comprehensibility

- Adjust to academic register for better participation in the academic community

- Address individual difficulties through common resources outside class time

- Expect phonological accuracy even when focus is not on pronunciation, to enhance carry-over

High Level Instruction: Independent of Context

- Providing students with the tools to analyze their own speech
  - Metalinguistic terminology
  - Metacognitive awareness
  - IPA

- Using activities (i.e. debates, presentations, interviews) which focus on meaning, with attention to form to enhance carry-over

- By Level 6-7, all major elements of English pronunciation should be in place

High levels: Level 5 & 6 Example of Integration into LOs

Pronunciation elements	Learning Outcome (Level 5)	Learning Outcome (Level 6)
Vowels (+phonics), or individual needs		
Intonation patterns, sentence stress	**6**,7,8	4,5,7,9
Stress	4,6,7	4,**6**,7
Linking , phonotactics	2	
Register awareness		

Suprasegmental Practice for Level 6:
Peak/Valley distinctions and thought groups

- **Learning Outcome 6: Present clear, detailed descriptions on varied topics**

- A text is selected (either students' work, course materials, etc.) and students subdivide the speech into thought groups on strips of paper

- Students fold the paper at the points of major stress, thus making a visual intonation contour

- Pairs read one strip at a time to other pairs, comparing results and getting practice reading in thought groups

- Can be used as presentation rehearsal, or as practice method

The take-home message

- While the specifics of our toolbox are not generalizable to other programs, the **principles** behind its development are:

    - Bring the research and the experience of the teachers in your program together (Research- and experience-based)

    - Create sets of activities appropriate for specific levels of proficiency (Adaptive)

    - Implement throughout the curriculum (Embedded)

        - In low level lessons: fully contextualized (Start Early)
        - In mid level lessons: context-specific
        - In high level lessons: independent of context

    - Attend to listening and speaking skills (Perception and Production)

+ Benefits

- Students learn from the beginning that attending to pronunciation *for intelligibility* is normal and necessary

- Teachers learn more about pronunciation and its instruction

- Teachers become more confident about teaching pronunciation and giving pronunciation feedback as a regular part of language instruction

+ Thank you!!

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Special thanks to

- Nisha Brown
- Josh Gordon
- Vance Schaefer
- Sun-Young Shin
- And all the teachers who participated in our survey!

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Suprasegmental practice: level 2

■ Learning Outcome 1 : **Requests and polite refusals**

■ 1. Students: Can you do X for me?
Teacher: Sorry?--- students: repeat
        Sorry. --- students: ask why

■ 2. Student A asks other students for
information: can you tell me:
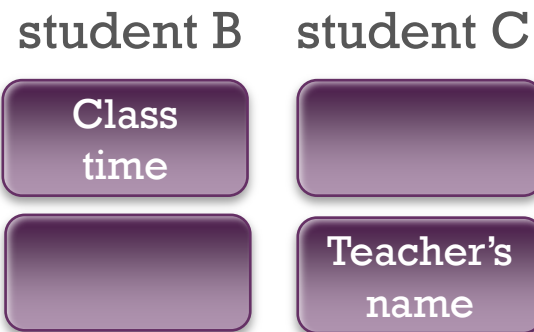1) when we have class?
2) what the teacher's name is?
…
1) if student B has info→sorry?
(can you say that again?) Then give the answer.

2) if student C doesn't have the answer →sorry! (I don't know)

student B   student C

Class time	
	Teacher's name

■ Students can only say sentences in parentheses if communication breaks down. They don't get a point if they say it.