## Reflective and metacognitive activities

The last suggested technique for organizing task repetition in the list above requires learners to reflect on the speaking they have just done. It need not be followed by a repetition of the task. Self-evaluation work of this kind may be accompanied by worksheets that ask the students to focus on particular aspects of their speaking. These may include accuracy, fluency and complexity, but also their planning and their feelings about the task they have performed.

Goh and Burns (2012) suggest that such reflective tasks should form an important component of classroom approaches to speaking, and they provide examples of self-assessment checklists, self-observation worksheets and ideas for organising a 'speaking diary' (see Appendix). Since communicative tasks involve both speaking and listening, reflective tasks should also focus on the students' roles as listeners. Reflection on the listening experience may (1) help learners notice aspects of their own speaking performance, and (2) make them more aware of the importance of considering their audience. Learners may benefit from training in being supportive listeners. Nation and Newton (2009: 119–120) suggest one technique where students work in groups of three: one is the primary speaker, one is the listener and the third monitors, with a checklist, the degree to which the listener acted in a supportive manner. After the speaking, the three students discuss their experiences.
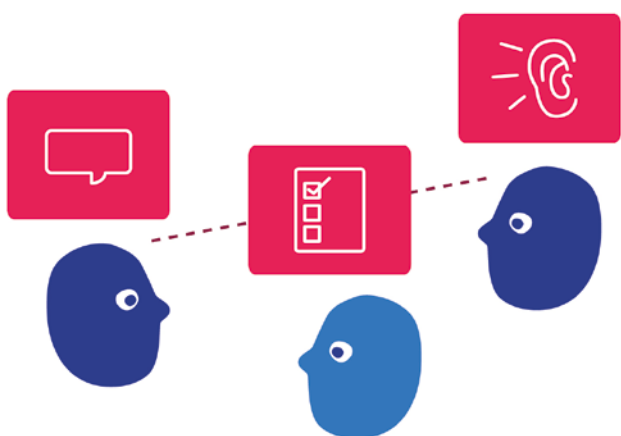
The value of activities like these is demonstrated by research. They can lead to improvements in performance and in learners' strategic approaches to communicative tasks, as well as enhanced motivation and self-confidence (Goh & Burns, 2012: 246). They will require time.

Time limits

In most situations where learners need to speak English, they are under time pressure. They need time to decide what to say and how to say it, to say it, to check they have got their message across, and to take remedial steps if there is any breakdown in communication (Bygate, 1987: 14). Proficient speakers can deal, more or less, with these time pressures by deploying features of spoken language that allow them more processing time. These include the use of automatized chunks of language, dropping unnecessary words (ellipsis), hesitations and repetitions, paraphrases and self-corrections. These features help people to speak fluently, but they also help learners to *learn* to speak more fluently (Bygate, 1987: 20). Learners will therefore benefit from training in the use of specific features.

The problems caused by time pressure will not, however, be alleviated by allowing students unlimited time in which to perform a task. This may lead to gains in accuracy and complexity, but this is usually at the expense of fluency (Ellis, 2003: 149–150). The provision of planning time and opportunities for task repetition are likely to be much more beneficial to fluency. Fluency will also be more in focus when teachers set a time limit for communicative tasks. The greater the time pressure, the more probable it is that students will concentrate on the content of what they are saying, and that they will prioritise their lexical resources over their grammatical resources (Skehan, 1998: 176).

The automatization of language is best promoted when students do not have the time or inclination to think too much about grammatical accuracy. Engaging tasks with non-linguistic outcomes (see 'The value of immersive speaking activities for language learning', another paper in this series), coupled with time limits, create these conditions. Experienced teachers set time limits in order to focus students' attention on task completion, and it is usually better to underestimate than to overestimate the time that will be needed. Activities can always be briefly interrupted and a time extension can be given or negotiated. Activities can also be stopped so that students can return to planning mode for a few minutes, before returning to the task. Activities can be repeated with progressively decreasing time limits (see the discussion above of the '4/3/2 technique'). Different groups or pairs can be given different time limits. More proficient students, who require less time, can be vvdirected towards reflective activities while the others continue with the task.

In the management of communicative activities, teachers need to allow enough time to be flexible. The use of time limits usually means that more overall time is needed.