Readers Theater in Our Classroom
I. Introduction

Our school divides students into four classes according to our academic records. Top 30 students make up Class A, and the others belong to Class B. We have three B classes with 40 to 41 students in each class. We are in one of the three B classes. In other words, our class is made up of low-achieving students. Naturally, most students don’t do well in English. What’s worse, some even give English up. Over half of our classmates get less than 60 points in English monthly exams. As a matter of fact, one of our researchers flunks his English every semester. Still, very few, about five students, can get better grades, including one of our researchers. As a whole, seventy percent of our classmates take no interest in English.

In spite of previewing a lesson can make us learn better, few students will do. Since over two thirds of the students are not interested in English, how can our English teacher make us preview a lesson? At the end of last semester, she made it. She applied RT (Readers Theater) in our class. Thus, this research aims to investigate our classmates’ viewpoints toward the RT activity. Through the questionnaire and our observation, we intend to explore how it worked to make us preview the lesson and dare to speak English in front of classmates.

II. Thesis

A. Something about Readers Theater (RT)

1. Definition

(1) Tsou’s definition

“Lines in the play are read instead of being memorized.” (Tsou, 2006) Consequently, students don’t have to keep lines in mind. “With a script at hand, a group of people sit or stand on a fixed spot to tell a story to the audience.” (Tsou, 2006) Namely, they don’t have to remember their positions on stage.
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(2) Lin and Huang’s definition

“Without memorizing the lines in the play or preparing any props, what actors have to do is hold the script and read lines in it.” (Lin & Huang, 2005) That is to say, actors perform with their voices.

(3) Tseng’s definition

“With a minimum number of props and actions, participants read a story fluently and emotionally to the audience.” (Tseng, 2006) Therefore, all that readers need to do is read their lines more smoothly and more expressively.

Based on the definitions above, RT has two vital elements: voices and tones. Props and actions can enhance the presentation of the story, but they are not essential.

2. Why to apply RT in the classroom

(1) To improve students’ reading ability

RT is “purposeful reading”, which is designed to “increase reading fluency and reading comprehension.” (Tsou, 2006) It’s because readers have to practice reading over and over again. Thus, their reading ability is improving with the frequency of practice. That’s why “RT can motivate students to read a number of times.” (Tseng, 2006) By doing so, students increase reading fluency.

(2) To improve students’ listening ability

As is mentioned above, students need to practice reading time and again, so one will listen to the others’ reading repetitively, too. “Unconsciously, every student’s listening comprehension is improving.” (Tsou, 2006)

(3) To have a chance of cooperative learning
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“RT also provides different levels of students with a chance of cooperative practicing.” (Tsou, 2006)

When grouping students, a teacher should make sure each group is made up of different levels of students. In this way, high-achieving students can help low-achieving ones. “In order to wait for your turn to read lines, you must concentrate while others are reading.” (Lin & Huang, 2005) In the process, students learn others’ pronunciations and tones. In addition, “RT is the most useful for shy students… Everyone reads by turns, which makes shy students less stressed.” (Tseng, 2006) Most of all, students learn social skills by interacting with each other.

(4)To help low-achieving students learn English

Most students of low achievements in English lack chances to practice. “RT offers students numerous opportunities to practice repeatedly.” (Tsou & Hsu, 2009) During the process, students acquire enough time to practice their English.

3. How to apply RT in the classroom

RT is a kind of group storytelling. A teacher should group students and choose a proper story. (Tsou, 2006)

(1)Grouping students

There are 5 to 8 students in one group. Each group is composed of high and low achievers.

(2)Choosing a story

The teacher had better choose a simple story with fewer characters and lots of dialogues.

B. Our RT activity

1. Our RT material
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(1) Textbook

Our material is adopted from our textbook *Lesson 12 One More Chance, Please* (John Berrio, 2009). It says a seventeen-year-old adolescent died from a car accident. He asked God to give him a chance to live once again.

(2) Handout

See *Attachment*. Everyone has a handout with twelve lines from the lesson three days before the in-class presentation. Besides, grading evaluation is listed on the paper. We students can clearly understand how to perform to get a good grade.

2. Our in-class RT activities

(1) Grouping

There are 41 students in our class. Our English teacher divided us into eight groups. Hence, there were five or six members in one group. In order to make us feel at ease, she allowed us to find our own partners. Everyone seems to have a myth that students of high achievements will get together to get a high score. However, things didn’t go that way. In our opinion, good friends would do everything joyfully and successfully. We would help each other and overcome all difficulties. According to our observation, every group was made up of both high and low achievers.

(2) Practicing

Take our group for example. First, we assigned lines on the basis of the member’s level. Easy lines were assigned to low achievers, and high achievers would volunteer for difficult ones. Then, we decided to read the last line together because it would make our reading powerful. Next, we started to read lines in turn. When detecting one member’s mistake, we
stopped to correct his pronunciation. In addition, we would give some suggestions such as body
languages or intonation, which would make our lines more vivid. At times, someone was absent-minded,
so he couldn’t follow us. Luckily, we became better and better by practicing. Indeed, our teacher would
spare ten minutes at the end of the class. In other words, we could practice at least three times because we
got the handout three days before. Indeed, to make our presentation better, we even practiced after school.

(3) Presentation

Each group had to stand in a row on stage. Indeed, most
of our classmates were too nervous to face the audience
or to do their body languages. Take our group for
example again. Look at the picture on the right. One of
our members was so worried that he got extremely
close to the other. Another member was so afraid that
his voice was as low as a mosquito. I, as a leader, who stood in the middle, was not frightened at all. I was
brave enough to have eye contact with the audience. What’s more, I read my lines expressively.

3. Our after-class RT activities

After presentation, our RT didn’t come to an end. The following are our after-class RT activities.

(1) YOUTUBE

In fact, our English teacher recorded our presentation in class. After that, she uploaded it to YOUTUBE. The following are our videos on the YOUTUBE website:

◆ Group 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4-ZOkg957M&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL
◆ Group 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YG3-gOSAbpw&feature=autoplay&list=ULgouHNC_jhPw&index=8&playnext=1
◆ Group 3: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTEuXbLSzAA&feature=related
◆ Group 4: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AGkXdL4Dmk&NR=1
◆ Group 5: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDg66xjbtks&feature=related
◆ Group 6: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRDIVafngJ0&feature=related
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◆ Group 7: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nr79XmTB6k&feature=related
◆ Group 8: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMsC-fWpeTs&feature=related

(2) Class Weekly

Our English teacher is our homeroom teacher, too. She issues Class Weekly. After the RT activity, she awarded three prizes: the best team, the best actor, and some potential actors. Then, she explained why these guys were worth the prizes. She meant to give us good examples to follow. As we had expected, we didn’t win the best team. But much to my delight, I won the best actor because of my excellent pronunciation, emotionally speaking and eye contact. Besides, one of my members won the potential actor because he punched on the platform to ask God for one more chance, which impressed everyone a lot. Anyway, by reading her comments on our performances, we learned a lot.

C. Data analysis

(1) Does RT help you learn English better?

![Figure 1. RT Effect](http://example.com/figure1.png)

According to Figure 1, 78% of the students agree that RT helps them learn the lesson better. Namely, the activity is successful. Some say RT helps them pronounce better, so they will apply the rules to learn more words. Others say they do learn what the lesson is talking about in such an interesting way. Still others say they are more acquainted with the lesson than with the other lessons due to practicing a lot and listening to the other groups’ presentations. That’s why RT will “increase reading fluency and reading comprehension by reading and listening repeatedly.” (Tsou, 2006)
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As to 22% of the students, they are high achievers, so they regard RT as a fun activity. They don’t think it is of any use. That’s why both Tsou and Hsu think “RT is the best way for students of low achievements to learn English.” (Tsou & Hsu, 2009)

(2) Have you ever watched our RT show on YOUTUBE?

![Figure 2. YOUTUBE](image)

Based on Figure 2, over 68% of students have visited the website. However, nearly one third haven’t yet. Indeed, we are some of 32%. To perform is one thing, but to see our own performance is another. How embarrassing it is to see one’s own stupid performance! Yet, we will watch it in the future when we are graduated from senior high. Whether our classmates watched it or not, these videos are our best memories.

(3) Other opinions and suggestions

Only one classmate offers one suggestion. He says our teacher doesn’t have to prepare the handout for us. She should let us create our own RT. It’s a great idea. Our teacher promises that she will find another lesson for us to make our own RT.

III. Conclusion

We have much fun in the RT activity. As far as we are concerned, RT is of great help in three ways:

1. Another way to preview a lesson
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With the help of RT, we will know how the reading goes along before the teacher lectures. When the teacher teaches the lesson, we can move along more smoothly. Teachers can teach efficiently. Similarly, students can learn thoroughly. What a win-win activity!

2. Learn by doing

As Maria Montessori says, “I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.” Undoubtedly, RT offers a way for us to do and understand a lesson better. In my group, two classmates were afraid of English because they were afraid that they couldn’t say the word correctly, let alone the whole sentence. During the process, they had the chance to learn from others and could say the word better and become more confident. After that, they are less afraid of English. RT is a way for us to learn by doing.

3. Team work

At first, we regarded RT as an easy job. Yet, difficulties arose when we did it. One not only had to read his own correctly, but also had to concentrate on listening to another’s reading. Otherwise, he would miss his turn. Doing one’s own job was not enough. Team work played a key role. After helping each other, we performed much better. What’s more important, our friendship improved.

In a word, RT “can be used to break the monotony of normal class reading and allow students to read in a fluent and lively manner.” In this way, “students not only establish a solid reading foundation, but also cultivate their ability to appreciate literary works.” (Cheng, 2011) As a result, RT did work in helping us learn English.

IV. Reference

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Lesson 12  One More Chance, Please

★Lines
(1)_________: Hey, don’t pull that sheet over my head.
(2)_________: I can’t be dead. I’m only 17.
(3)_________: I haven’t lived yet. I can’t be dead.
(4)_________: Please----somebody---wake me up!
(5)_________: Get me out of here.
(6)_________: Please don’t bury me! I’m not dead!
(7)_________: I have a lot of things to do!
(8)_________: I want to laugh and run again.
(9)_________: I want to sing and dance.
(10)_________: Please don’t put me in the ground!
(11)_________: Oh, God, all I want is one more chance.
(12)_________: Please, God, I’m only 17.

★Evaluation

| Members | | | |
| Lines | | | |
| Pronunciation | 50% | | |
| Expression | 30% | | |
| Cooperation | 20% | | |

★Bunny’s Comment & Suggestion

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