

Readers Theater in ELT classrooms: How it can be used in Taiwan elementary school

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to explore the implication of Readers Theater (hereby known as RT) in ELT classrooms. The main concerns of the researcher were the reasons for integrating RT into ELT classrooms, the best timing of using RT and the most suitable procedures of conducting RT in a regular ELT classroom. In this study, three competent teachers with RT experience were the participants. The research design of the study was a multiple-case study. The methods of data collection included classroom observations, teachers' interviews and gathering printed teaching materials, such as scripts and evaluation sheets. Then, these data were analyzed.

The findings of this study were:

1. In regular ELT classrooms, RT could be applied to review taught lessons, help the less-proficient students learn better English and help all students improve.
2. RT can have superior teaching effects if teachers and students had some preparation.
3. Based on the interviews and the RT instructions of the three competent teachers with RT experience, the most suitable procedures of integrating RT into normal ELT classrooms in Taiwan could be: (1) teachers' and students' pre-teaching preparation; (2) scripts creation or adaption; (3) supporting activities; (4) teacher modeling and explanation; (5) grouping and role assignments; (6) practice and checking; (7) rehearsal and preparation for performance; (8) performance and evaluation; and (9) post-RT activities.

Finally, suggestions about the educational implications of RT and for researchers who are interested in similar topics are also provided at the end of the paper.

Keywords: competent teachers with RT experience, multiple-case study, Readers Theater

1. Introduction

Readers Theater is a well-known method of instruction in English as Second Language (ESL) countries and English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries because it is an effective method for all students, especially beginners and low-achievers (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Hsu, 2009; Keehn, 2003; Lengeling, Malarcher & Mills, 1995; Tsai, 2009; Tsou & Hsu, 2009). The low achievement of Taiwanese English learners encouraged Taiwanese English teachers and English educators to apply RT in their English teaching and teachers' training courses. However, only few years ago (around 2000) was RT be systematically introduced to Taiwanese English teachers, and it was found that, in spite of the advantages of RT, many teachers encountered difficulties in conducting RT in their English classes because it was used as a new type of English drama and subsequently began to appear in English competitions. The lack of training in RT prevented English teachers in Taiwan from transferring the

theory to authentic teaching instruction, and inconsistent application led to little reflection in revising RT to become a more effective method to English teaching and learning in Taiwan, which resulted in RT not being as widespread as many teachers would have expected. Moreover, in the videos of RT competitions, the performances were so good that many English teachers felt unable to integrate RT into their regular English teaching because they did not enough high level students in their classes (interviews from participating competent teachers: Teacher D, Teacher J and Teacher R). What's worse, many English teachers expected that their RT teaching should be as good as the performances in the RT competition (interviews with participating competent teachers: Teacher D and Teacher R). Finally, teachers who could not reach this high goal simply gave up using RT in the classroom.

In fact, RT was originally designed for classroom practice because it could improve students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing

performance. For example, students benefited from RT on word decoding and recognition (Keehn, Harmon & Shoho, 2008; Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, 2003; Rinehart, 1999), oral fluency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Keehn, Harmon & Shoho, 2008; Kozub, 2000; Rinehart, 1999), reading comprehension (Flynn, 2004; Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, 2003; Worthy & Prater, 2002) and writing (Latrobe, 1996; Liu, 2000; Prescott, 2003; Stewart, 1997; Syu, 2008). Some reasons why RT had so much success are: (1) repeated readings of the rehearsals for RT performances is a useful strategy to focus the students' attention on reading (Chen, 2006; Tsou, 2005; Tsou & Hsu, 2009); (2) RT integrates some teaching skills, such as cooperative learning and student-centered teaching, thus making it more suitable for English teaching, especially in an EFL setting (Chang, 2008; Huang, 2006); and (3) RT performance made boring repeated readings or memorizations funny and attractive, and involved different proficiency level students because they were only asked to do easy tasks and remember a few lines (Tsou, 2005; Tsou & Hsu, 2009). Therefore, the researcher believed that a well-designed RT instruction could promote the learning performance of elementary school students, especially students who had difficulties in English learning. But how can RT instruction be well-designed to fit into a regular English classroom and have maximum teaching effects?

The major problems that teachers encountered in designing superior RT instruction were: (1) there were no formal courses or degrees regarding RT teaching in Taiwan and the training programs held by educational administrators were always scattered over a semester. The effects of this kind of RT training was so limited that most teachers who knew the benefits of RT instructions still had little confidence in applying RT in their English teaching; and (2) the unclear concepts might cause the misuse of RT instruction, such as conducting RT more like a drama or excluding the less-proficient students from RT practices. Because of a lack of useful training and having unclear concepts about RT instruction, many English teachers in Taiwan hesitated to integrate RT into their English teaching. However, the practical suggestions that were given by the experienced teachers was believed to have the effect of helping novice RT teachers develop clear concepts about RT in order to fully understand the procedures of conducting RT instruction and successfully introducing RT into their classrooms (Hsu, 2009). Nevertheless, the history of RT instruction in Taiwan is too short to be able to define experienced RT teachers. Based on the characteristics of teachers in different professional stages that Berliner (1988, 1994) and Henry (1994) had mentioned, the term, "competent teachers with RT experience," was used to name the competent English teachers who had more RT experience and could conduct more

successful and skillful RT teaching than other teachers. Moreover, these competent teachers with RT experience were chosen to be the participants of this study because they are the best informants who could provide thoughtful RT concepts and skillful practices that could help novice teachers to learn how to design successful RT teaching.

Due to the researcher's concern about applying RT in regular elementary classrooms, the goal of this study was to explore the teaching purpose, better timing and suitable procedures of RT instruction among competent teachers with RT experience. Based on the goal of the study and the researcher's interest in RT instruction, this study asks the following questions:

1. Why do the competent teachers integrate RT into their English teaching?
2. When is the appropriate time for competent teachers to integrate RT into their English teaching?
3. Based on the RT procedures of the competent teachers' teaching, what are the suitable teaching procedures to integrate RT into a regular English classroom?

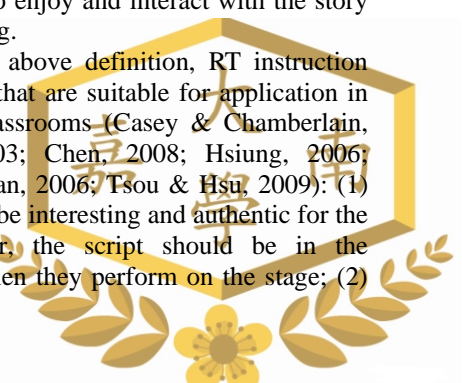
2. Literature Review

In order to understand what previous studies have contributed to this field, it was decided that this section should be divided into three parts. First, a review of RT is presented. Secondly, the effects of RT instruction in classrooms are examined. Finally, the criteria used to define a competent teacher with RT experience are investigated.

2.1 Reviewing of RT

According to Corcoran and Davis (2005), Shepard (1994), Walker (1996), Worthy and Prater (2002), and Yordon (2002), RT is a teaching method composed of two concepts: readers and theater. "Readers" refers to the students who repeatedly read a variety of literature, such as short story, folk tales, passages in the textbooks, etc., using their oral expression, facial expression and necessary bodily movement, with no props, action or costumes involved, to allow the listeners (also a kind of readers) understand and follow the script. "Theater" refers to the readers who have to perform in front of a crowd of people and entertain them using voice, facial expressions, gestures and timing which are all important aspects in terms of entertainment. More importantly, these vital entertainment techniques allow the readers to enjoy and interact with the story that they are reading.

Based on the above definition, RT instruction has some features that are suitable for application in regular English classrooms (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Chang, 2003; Chen, 2008; Hsiung, 2006; Huang, 2006; Moran, 2006; Tsou & Hsu, 2009): (1) the RT script must be interesting and authentic for the students; moreover, the script should be in the students' hands when they perform on the stage; (2)



in RT, students use their voices to convey meaning and make the character come alive through expression, intonation, and inflection; (3) gestures and bodily movement are only used when they are really necessary, such as to express the meaning of sentences or words; (4) repeated reading during the practice and rehearsal period of RT instruction is a crucial activity because students can facilitate their language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing via repeated reading; (5) RT performance needs only a simple stage, such as the front of a classroom, pathway in a park or a temporary stage, decorated only with stools; and (6) RT is a teaching method that place students in the center of curriculum design, teaching activities and evaluation; therefore, students can learn cooperatively within and between groups and are encouraged to perform in their own way.

According to the related literature (Chen, 2006; Chen, 2008; Huang, 2006; Liu, 2008; Rinehart, 1999; Walker, 2005; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Yun, 2008), a commonly used procedure in RT can be presented in Figure 1.

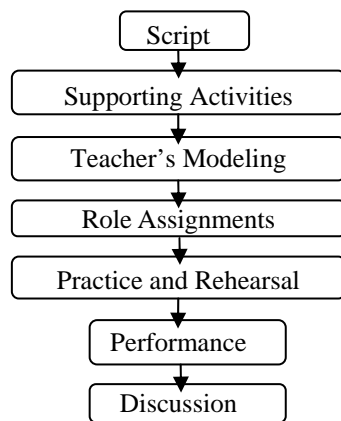


Figure 1. The most commonly used procedure of applying RT in a classroom

1. Script: The first step of conducting RT instruction is to select RT scripts or adapt RT scripts. All types of literature can be used in RT (Walker, 1996). However, texts that are suitable for students to read and understand are the best materials for RT.

2. Supporting activities: Teachers should discuss the script with students in order to give the students a clear picture of the story, help them to read the script well and to know what role is more suitable for them.

3. Teacher's modeling: Teacher's modeling helps students become more involved in the reading process prior to practice and rehearsal and lowers students' affective filters about speaking unfamiliar sentences in English.

4. Role assignments: After the modeling, teachers have to introduce each character and the lines they read because it can help students choose a suitable role for their final performance. Sometimes, teachers may have to assign students to take a part in

the script because the students cannot decide.

5. Practice and rehearsal: In this stage, students practice the script in groups through repeated reading and they can try to rehearse their RT before the actual performance. Meanwhile, teachers should also provide suggestions about the practice and rehearsals for students.

6. Performance: Students' small groups show the results of their practice in this phase. During the stage, students take their scripts in hands and stand in a row to deliver their understanding or interpretation of the text in front of a crowd of people, including the students' peers, parents and students from other classes.

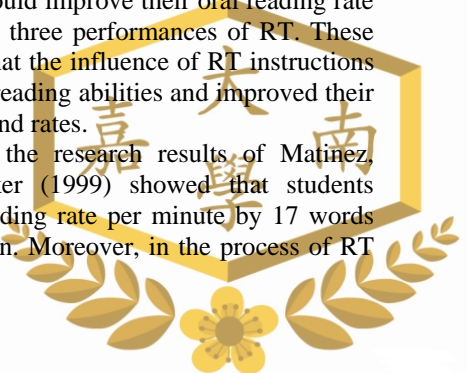
7. Discussion: Post-performance discussion offers students and teacher an opportunity to discuss individual efforts in the process of practice and the cooperative learning of each group. If possible, teachers should encourage students to think about their RT performance and try to put on a better show later.

2.2 Effects of RT instruction

Numerous studies have shown that RT has significant effects on students' English learning and abilities. First of all, Rinehart (1999) indicated that students could clearly express and interpret their reading script to the audience when they were performing RT. Moreover, Marcus (2002) found that the student audience benefited from RT in listening and appreciating the intonation (such as expression, stress and pitch) and rhymes (such as phrasing, linking and tempo) of the words. In Taiwan, Chen (2008) found that the listening performance of students in the experimental group (with RT teaching) had more positive progress than those in the control group (with regular teaching). Therefore, RT activities could improve students' listening skills by encouraging students to interact with what they have read and listened to, especially for triggering students to use their imagination in reading and listening.

Secondly, Kozub (2000) found that the participants of his RT experiment (3 students from the third grade) had developed their oral fluency in terms of phrasing, smoothness, pace, juncture, intonation and stress after the RT teaching. Furthermore, Keehn, Harmon and Shoho (2008) found that the students in RT class made statistically significant growth in their reading level, as well as significant gains in fluidity and expressive measures of oral reading. In Taiwan, Yang (2006) reported that English learners could improve their oral reading rate and accuracy after three performances of RT. These results indicated that the influence of RT instructions did help learners' reading abilities and improved their reading accuracy and rates.

Additionally, the research results of Matinez, Roser and Strecker (1999) showed that students increased their reading rate per minute by 17 words after RT instruction. Moreover, in the process of RT



teaching, students' word recognition and text comprehension were raised because of the purposeful and fun rereading of the same script. In Taiwan, Huang (2007) found that after receiving a 12-week implementation of RT, most students achieved a significant improvement in reading comprehension. In Huang's study (2008), the results showed that most of the participants had improved their reading comprehension and adapted the script writing after the RT instruction. And furthermore, Peng (2009) found that most students made prominent improvements in their English reading ability, word recognition and reading comprehension after a 12-week RT experiment. According to these findings, RT is believed to be an effective way to strengthen students' reading accuracy, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

According to the literature, RT instruction appears to help students appropriately express their own thoughts orally as well as help their writing through the words and sentence patterns that they have learned in the text. Forsythe's study (1995) asserted that adapting RT scripts could allow students to improve their writing skills because students can choose their favorite stories, work on the scripts with their peers, have qualified reading comprehension to choose the important details that carry the storyline, and write down the suitable lines for all the characters and the narrator. Finally, students are asked to read other groups' works, then appreciate and revise the script for each other. In Taiwan, after a 9-week study period, Syu (2008) found a significant improvement on both high-achievers' and low-achievers' English writing ability, although the gap between the English writing ability of high-achievers and low-achievers did not narrow significantly. This means that both groups writing abilities had improved after involvement in RT activities.

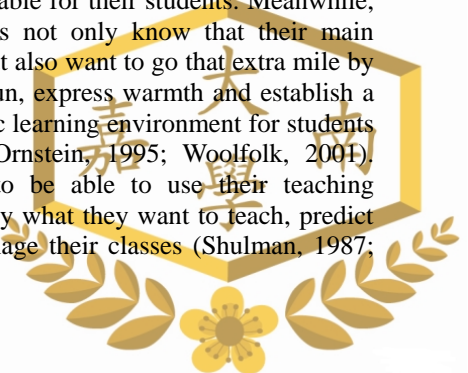
Finally, studies of Corcoran and Davis (2005), Miller and Rinehart (1999) and Rinehart (1999) confirmed the positive impact of RT instruction on students' affective factors. Moreover, in the study of Hung (2004), the results showed that most students changed their learning attitude toward English after the study, and additionally, many students thought that RT facilitated them to be more confident and less anxious when learning English. From the questionnaire and in-class discussions, Huang (2006) found that RT helped enhance students' motivation to read because the students perceived self-competence in the process of repeatedly reading scripts. In Chang's study (2007), she reported that after applying RT, students gained a positive attitude toward English learning because they thought it was fun and non-threatening to speak English in an RT environment. Therefore, RT is believed to have prominent effects on students' English learning attitude and motivation.

2.3 Competent teacher with RT experience

Berliner (1988) and Henry (1994) stated that the skill development of teachers could be divided into five stages, which were novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. The teachers in the five different stages differed according to teachers' knowledge structure, problem solving, teaching behavior, teaching efficacy and teaching regulated ability (Berliner, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Henry, 1994; Ornstein, 1995; Shulman, 1987; Wu & Chang, 1997). According to Berliner's and Henry's definitions, a competent teacher is one who has experience and motivation to succeed. However, experience alone is not enough to get a teacher to the competent stage. There are a few characteristics that distinguish the competent teacher from other teachers in different stages. First, they make conscious choices, such as deciding on plans and having rational goals about what they are going to do. Second, while enacting their skills, the competent teacher can determine from their experience what is and is not important. At this stage, teachers also learn to make curriculum and instructional decisions, such as when to stay with the topic and when to move on, based on particular teaching contexts and particular groups of students.

Therefore, the competent teachers are rational because they can make conscious choices about what to do and how to do it, set priorities based on experiential knowledge, make instructional decisions within a specific context, and take personal responsibility for classroom results (Berliner, 1988; Henry, 1994). Furthermore, the competent teacher understands the central concepts and structures of the disciplines, understands instructional planning so that they can design instruction based upon knowledge of the discipline, and creates learning experiences that make the content meaningful to all students (Berliner, 1988; Berliner, 1994; Henry, 1994). Moreover, the competent teacher is also a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates how choices or actions affect students' learning and well-being, and actively seeks opportunities to grow professionally because they know that education is a profession (Berliner, 1994).

In conclusion, competent teachers are experienced teachers who have comprehensive, integrated, and systematic knowledge of their main field. They can utilize materials that are curriculum-based and age-appropriate, motivate all students to learn, reflect on their teaching behavior from the students' point of view and make their teaching more suitable for their students. Meanwhile, competent teachers not only know that their main goal is to teach, but also want to go that extra mile by making learning fun, express warmth and establish a fair and democratic learning environment for students (Berliner, 1993; Ornstein, 1995; Woolfolk, 2001). They also need to be able to use their teaching strategies to convey what they want to teach, predict problems and manage their classes (Shulman, 1987;



Wu & Chang, 1997).

In this study, the chosen participants were competent teachers in English teaching and had more RT teaching experience than other teachers. Two reasons are provided to elaborate why the competent teachers with RT experience were selected. First, despite the fact that the history of English teaching and RT teaching in elementary school has not been long enough for this study to include expert RT teachers, the chosen teachers' performance in English teaching and RT instruction confirmed that they would be competent English teachers who had RT experience. Secondly, because the chosen teachers had only 2-3 years of RT teaching experience, the RT teachings in these competent teachers' classrooms were more plan-based, which is what a competent teacher should do. Therefore, the chosen teachers in this study couldn't be called competent RT teachers yet, but competent English teachers with RT experience.

3. Method

This section includes four parts. First, the definition and the concept of a multiple-case study will be introduced. Following that, information about the participants and the research sites will be presented in the second and third parts. Finally, how data was collected and analyzed is described.

3.1 Multiple-case study

A case study is an inquiry that put its focus on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, where the context in which phenomenon occurred is not clear to the investigator (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994). Then, the investigator has to study the case or participant in detail to find out meaningful cues about the issue that the investigator is interested in. Moreover, a multiple-case study is a special kind of case study because it investigates more than one case and tries to compare the similarities and differences within these cases. In addition to making a clear investigation about an issue with some cases, the goal of a multiple-case design is also to confirm a theoretical framework about a phenomenon that was already found or to represent some unique or extreme cases. Therefore, in multiple-case studies, each individual case study consists of a "whole" study in which facts are gathered from various sources. However, the conclusions of a multiple-case study can be drawn from those facts found in these selected cases and the conclusions could help researchers obtain a better understanding regarding what they want to know.

3.2 Participants

In this study, three competent teachers who had RT experience and taught English in public elementary schools in Tainan (Teacher J) and Kaohsiung city (Teacher D and Teacher R) were selected as the participants. First of all, the English teachers in Tainan and Kaohsiung city are certificated by the MOE (Ministry of Education), which means they all major in English and are trained as teachers. Then, based on the suggestions of Palmer, Stough, Burdinski and Gonzales (2005), the quantitative criteria (screening criteria) of having competent teachers with RT experience included: (1) they had more than 5 years of English teaching experience and over 2 years of RT teaching experience; (2) they are members of the Compulsory Education Advisory Group (an organization that has very experienced and skillful teachers who are the mentors of novice teachers) in Tainan and Kaohsiung city; and (3) these teachers all had earned an MA degree in English teaching and/or majored in RT.

Finally, from the researcher's pilot observation of another experienced RT teacher, the qualitative criteria (performance indicators) of having competent teachers with RT experience in this study were: (1) the experienced RT teachers had better or appropriate decision making during RT teaching; (2) they had clear ideas about what they were doing; (3) these teachers had more related training and learning experience than other teachers; and (4) their students' responses to RT instruction were positive. According to these qualitative criteria, and after observing the provided RT teaching videos and having some previous individual interviews, three competent teachers were selected to be the participants of this study because their RT teachings in the teaching videos were goal-oriented, smooth and successful. Moreover, in the interviews, the three teachers showed that they really knew what RT is, what the purposes of RT teaching are, and how a teacher can implement RT teaching well. Then, the researcher confirmed these competent teachers' expertise in terms of their related RT learning experience and if they had been involved in RT training. Additionally, student interviews and feedback were positive and they reported that they had really benefited a lot from these competent teachers' RT teaching.

3.3 The research sites

In the study, the research sites were all normal English classrooms in Tainan and Kaohsiung city. In addition, the three classes that are taught by the three competent teachers with RT experience and observed by the researcher had their own unique characteristics. These features are listed in Table 1.



Table 1. The three English classrooms that the researcher observed

Class	Class D	Class J	Class R
English teacher	Not Teacher D	Teacher J	Teacher R
Homerom teacher	Teacher D	Teacher J	Not Teacher R
Grade	3	5	5
English learning experience	From Grade 3	From Grade 1	From Grade 3
Students' RT experiences	First time	Not first time	First time
Teaching periods in total	6 classes	3 classes	3 classes

In Table 1, there are some differences that should be highlighted before the data collection and analysis. First, only Class D was in the third grade and the other classes were all in the fifth grade. Secondly, the duration of English learning for these students varied from one year to four years. Another important difference was that, for the students in Class D and Class R, this was their first contact with RT in a classroom setting. In contrast, Class J had more experience with RT. Finally, the teaching periods of RT instruction in Class D were 3 periods more than those of the other two classes.

3.4 Data collection and data analysis

In this study, the data were collected by three methods: holding individual interviews, making classroom observations and collecting relevant printed materials. The collected data were analyzed by the use of Grounded Theory (gathering findings inductively from a corpus of data) and the Constant Comparative Method (a major method of analyzing significant cases in Ground Theory). The content, data collection method, and data analysis conducted will be discussed below.

1. Individual interviews: The three competent teachers with RT experience had to complete a planned semi-structured interview (the researcher asked the major questions first, then asked related questions based on the teachers' answers) before their RT teachings. This prior interview with each competent teacher focused on their goals, beliefs and steps of RT teaching. Then, the three classrooms were observed. Right after the RT teaching, the researcher made a post-teaching interview that focused on the teachers' behavior and decision-making in their RT instruction, such as why they used a certain method and what could be done next. After the interviews and classroom observations were transcribed into text, the three teachers were asked to read them and make some clarifications or corrections of their transcriptions before the recall interviews. Finally, a stimulated recall interview was held after the three competent teachers had read their own transcriptions. The goal of the recall interviews was to confirm whether the researcher's findings were similar with the thinking of these competent teachers or not.

These interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Then, these data were initially coded into three categories defined by the three research questions: (1) why do the competent teachers integrate RT into their English teaching; (2) when is

the appropriate time for the competent teachers to integrate RT into their English teaching; and (3) based on the RT procedures of the competent teachers' teaching, what are the suitable procedures to integrate RT into a regular English classroom. Finally, they were compared to elucidate deeper meanings.

2. Classroom observations: During the study, the three teachers had to design a RT lesson for their students, where the RT teaching could be based on the competent teachers' understanding of RT. According to the teachers' best estimation, the total time of their RT teaching was 120 minutes to 240 minutes (3-6 classes). In these RT classes, whole lessons were videotaped and notes taken during the teaching. After the RT classes, the contents of the RT teaching were transcribed. The transcriptions and the field notes were also analyzed in accordance with the categories that were derived from the interviews. These data were then compared with the teacher's ideas and actions.

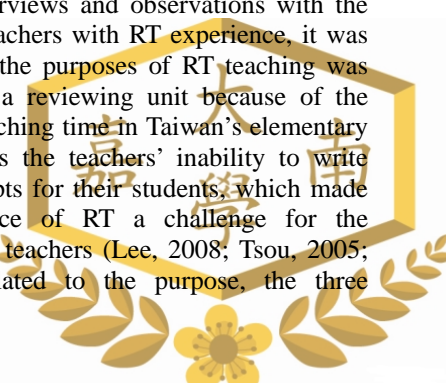
3. Relevant printed materials: The original stories, the adapted scripts, the evaluation sheets used in the RT lessons and the reading passage of pre-test were all collected as they can later be used for interpreting these competent teachers' considerations about RT instruction.

4. Findings and Discussions

In this section, the results are presented and then discussed in order to answer the three research questions. In the first section, the findings about the purposes of RT instruction are presented, analyzed and discussed. Then, in the second section, data about "when is the appropriate time to use RT instruction?" is presented, analyzed and discussed. Finally, data from the teachers' interviews and classroom observations are used to discover the best procedures of RT teaching.

4.1 The purpose of integrating RT into English teaching

From the interviews and observations with the three competent teachers with RT experience, it was found that one of the purposes of RT teaching was that RT could be a reviewing unit because of the limited English teaching time in Taiwan's elementary schools, as well as the teachers' inability to write many suitable scripts for their students, which made the regular practice of RT a challenge for the Taiwanese English teachers (Lee, 2008; Tsou, 2005; Wang, 2008). Related to the purpose, the three



competent teachers also proposed that an RT script was best adapted from students' learning materials.

Teacher D: *For me, due to limited time, I revised my textbook to be a script as a method of reviewing. ... If the content of RT could be combined with lessons, it became an extended learning for students. In another words, RT was a tool for reviewing. ... If you wanted to teach with RT, you had to carefully choose a script that met your students' current proficiency. So I adapted the lessons from the textbooks.*

Teacher J: *For me, RT was a way of reviewing because I had to finish my lesson before the tests and I had no more time to do a new RT. ... So, RT is a review activity related to my teaching. ... When I adapted scripts for my students, I had a clearer concept than my students, and I would put my focus on the content of the lessons. Moreover, I would integrate the sentence patterns in textbook into a script.*

Teacher R: *Three read short stories were combined to become the script. For me, a script was an examination of students' learning. ... I combined the three stories and made it as a review lesson. When we were ready to review, I transferred the learned lessons to RT, which was a teaching strategy in the last learning stage. ... But if your purpose was to achieve the learning goals, the script needs to be adapted from the lessons in textbook.*

Additionally, most of the less-proficient Taiwanese students have given up on their English learning because they aren't willing to participate in the English classes and they have no confidence in learning English (Hsu, 2009; Tsou & Hsu, 2009). In the competent teachers' mind, RT is a good way to raise students' learning interests and motivation through its dramatic features. Moreover, in addition to raising students' learning motivation, RT can also build up the less-proficient students' self-confidence in English learning by repeated reading (Chen, 2008; Yun, 2008). Therefore, the three competent teachers argued that RT was well-suited to helping the less-proficient students learn English.

Teacher D: *I think the goal of English education in elementary schools was to maintain students' high interest in English. So, the students' interest was a key concern in my classes. ... After RT was introduced to Taiwan, I agreed with RT's teaching concepts because the middle-level and low-proficient students benefited from it. ... I found that my low proficiency students improved and gained confidence through the interaction with their*

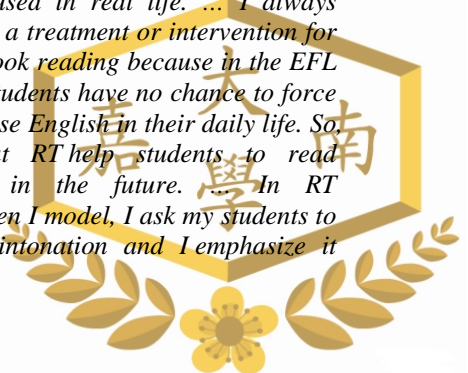
peers when they involved in RT instruction.

Teacher J: *My purposes for conducting RT were to promote students' self-confidence and their motivation of English learning. I think the most important thing of English teaching of elementary schools was hold on students' enthusiasm for English learning. ... In RT activities, less-proficient students were not asked to read and remember all the sentences in a script. The minimal requirement was to read your lines well. I think it could be achieved by less-proficient students.*

Teacher R: *I hope that my students are happy learning English in elementary school, even though they may not learn so much English as we expected. ... I expected that they would not be scared by English or hate English via RT. ... Another motivation for me to conduct RT was students' self-confidence. ... The most important purpose of RT instruction was to help those low-achievers in my classes because they were willing to learn English and they could learn many words before they graduated from elementary school through RT activities. It was better than learning nothing in English classes.*

Finally, even though the whole language learning approach and the communicative language teaching approach were accepted by many researchers and teachers (Cheng, 1998; Lin, 1998; Shih, 2005), students' English learning in Taiwan was still fragmental because the textbooks focused on sentence patterns and ignored the contexts of English usage (Wang, 2008). In these teachers' opinions, RT teaching could promote students' English learning because RT scripts were constructed to have a meaningful context and practical language usage. That means the RT teaching was no longer a method of reviewing learned materials, but also a way of helping students learn English well and give them a holistic perspective about language learning.

Teacher D: *It's better to create the scripts from textbooks because I use RT as a way of reviewing. ... But the English textbook is always topical and fragmental. It is not authentic or related to students' daily life. For me, the content of students' textbook is strange because its usage is totally different from the language we used in real life. ... I always consider RT as a treatment or intervention for students' textbook reading because in the EFL environment, students have no chance to force themselves to use English in their daily life. So, I suggest that RT help students to read independently in the future. ... In RT instruction, when I model, I ask my students to focus on the intonation and I emphasize it*



because when students can pronounce sentences well, have suitable intonation, stress on the right words, and have correct pauses, they really understand what they have read. ... After they are able to do RT well, the next step of students is the independent reading via these skills learned in RT instruction.

Teacher J: Now, RT is a way to help me and my students learning English. I will try to use RT in language learning. Language learning means a deliberate framework and grammar of English. I think RT could focus on sentences. ... That means students should understand the meanings and the usage of sentences. ... Another part is grammar. ... We can teach students grammar rules via RT and the sentences within the script because the sentences in teacher's script were more related to students' daily life.

Teacher R: I believed that teaching is related to students' life. However, the materials in textbook had nothing to do with daily life. Language is alive and it includes words, sounds and interaction with other people. ... The next step of RT should be the language learning. Language learning refers to the use of English, such as the language rules and emotional expressions. ... RT is a chance or a way to help students to use the sentences or language knowledge in English classes.

In conclusion, the purposes of RT teaching were that RT could be a review unit, was used to help the less-proficient students to better learn English, and was believed that it could help Taiwanese students with holistic English learning.

4.2 The best timing for integrating RT into English teaching

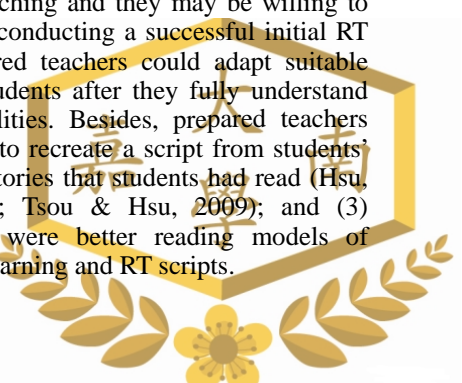
Among the interviews with the RT teachers and observations of their teaching, it was found that these teachers believed that the appropriate time to integrate RT into their English teaching was after their students had prepared for obtaining a successful RT experience, and moreover, after the teachers had also this kind of preparation. First of all, RT should be conducted after students have some concepts about RT that make students feel safe to learning English through a different teaching method. Then, RT could be applied to a regular English classroom once students have basic reading abilities, such as phonics, sight words, sentence patterns, dialogues and reading with expression, because a basic reading ability empowered students to read words and sentences aloud in the script, understand the meaning of what they have read as well as that which their team members read.

Teacher D: I planned to do RT at the beginning of the semester. But I didn't use RT right away when I first met these students. RT should be conducted when students had prepared for it well. ... I started from phonics. Until I had more confidence in RT teaching, I conducted RT. ... In other words, I taught the students phonics first. Then, I taught them sight words and passages. Finally, I used RT script to conduct RT instruction. ... In the first class of RT, I used a video of a RT competition to show my students what RT was. This class was also part of the preparation for RT activities because they needed to know what RT was. My purpose was to show a good example of RT to my students.

Teacher J: At the beginning of the semester, I announced that there would be RT instruction after two units. ... I prepared my students about RT. ... The preparation was to educate my students what RT was. Then, let them know the relationship between RT and their daily life. ... Before RT teaching, they had known the procedures of RT. ... Then, they could know how to do and what to do in the RT teaching.

Teacher R: Before RT teaching, a teacher should prepare his / her students well. That is, you have to prepare them to have basic reading skills, at least they could read words. ... An important element of RT was that students could recognize words and read them out. ... What was my preparation for students? They had to start from the emotional expression, then phonics, sight words, words' chunks, short sentences, mini dialogues, skit of stories in textbook, RT and drama as a final part.

Then, all competent teachers agreed that if English teachers want to use RT in their classes, they need to pay attention to understand their students' English abilities and problems. In addition, English teachers also need to strength their English abilities, such as adapting suitable scripts and offering better modeling. Therefore, they could involve their students in RT practice and have them experienced the process and success of RT teaching. The reasons that teachers should have some preparation may be: (1) prepared teachers might help them and their students have a positive experience when they were involved in RT teaching and they may be willing to try RT again after conducting a successful initial RT session; (2) prepared teachers could adapt suitable scripts for their students after they fully understand their students' abilities. Besides, prepared teachers also had the skills to recreate a script from students' textbook or from stories that students had read (Hsu, 2009; Tsou, 2005; Tsou & Hsu, 2009); and (3) prepared teachers were better reading models of students' English learning and RT scripts.



Teacher D: Before teachers used RT in their classes, they should know their students' reading development, such as their knowledge of the alphabet, phonics, sight words and reading. ... Second, teachers should be able to meaningfully phrase the sentences of a script. ... Third, teachers have to practice their pronunciation and intonation, such as linking, stress and intonation. ... Finally, teachers must be competent at converting students' lessons into RT scripts.

Teacher J: Preparation for RT instruction could be defined in different ways. First, teachers should learn to adapt RT scripts. ... Second, teachers should understand the proficiency levels of their students. ... Third, teachers need good speaking skills, such as pronunciation, segmental and linking. ... Finally, if the script was created by students, teachers should be able to give them suitable sentences or replace the erroneous sentences with easier or suitable sentences.

Teacher R: Teachers have to know what you can do and what you want to do. First, teachers have to know how to model the script, such as intonation and the pronunciation. ... Second, teachers should be willing to spend their time adapting scripts for their students. ... Third, teachers should know their

students' proficiency level. Then, teachers could decide what materials meet their students' level and what they want their students to learn. ... Next, teachers should be able to deal with change because students will be different in different situations. ... Finally, teachers could organize a team to help each other use RT in classrooms or adapt suitable scripts.

In conclusion, RT instructions should be used in regular English classrooms after students had some preparations, such as having basic reading abilities and knowing how to involve in RT, and teachers also had preparations, such as knowing their students well and having the abilities to make a better modeling.

4.3 The suitable RT teaching procedures in regular English classrooms

Procedural data obtained from the interviews with these competent teachers and the observations of their RT teaching are listed in Table 2. The obvious difference among the RT teachings of the three competent teachers was the pre-test held by Teacher D and according to Teacher D's interviews, the goal of having a pre-test before RT instruction was to measure the students' English proficiency and thereby gauge how to start an RT session.

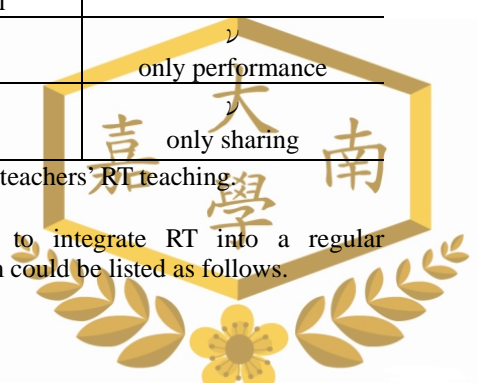
Table 2. The individual RT teaching procedures of the three competent teachers

RT procedures	Teacher D	Teacher J	Teacher R
Preparation	✓	only announced coming RT	✓
Pre-test	✓ followed by grouping		
Script	✓	✓	✓
Supporting activities (introduction of RT & reviewing)	✓	introduction of RT followed by storytelling	followed by storytelling
Modeling, explanation, choral reading and instant reading	✓ modeling, explanation and choral reading	✓	✓
Grouping and role assignments	✓ only role assignments	✓	✓
Practice and checking	✓	✓	only practice
Rehearsal and discussion of how to perform	✓	only rehearsal	✓
Performance and evaluation	✓	✓	only performance
Discussion and sharing	✓ only discussion	✓	only sharing

Note. The descriptions within the cells feature the specialty of the competent teachers' RT teaching.

After the comparison within the procedures of the three competent teachers with RT experience, a

better procedure to integrate RT into a regular English classroom could be listed as follows.



1. Preparation: It was found that all three teachers valued that the pre-teaching preparation for RT instruction could benefit the teachers as well as their students. The teacher's preparation included knowing students' proficiencies, having the abilities to adapt a suitable script and conduct a successful RT instruction. These preparations help teachers' motivation and confidence to conduct RT instruction. On the other hand, the preparation of students included knowing what RT is and its procedures, and having the basic reading skills, such as phonics, sight words and emotional expression. These preparations help students feel confident and safe in RT instruction and maximize the possibility that they will have a successful and enjoyable RT learning experience in the future.

2. Script: The three competent teachers agreed that the RT scripts could be adapted from passages in students' textbooks or stories from extensive readings. This is because RT was used by the three teachers as a method of reviewing and the difficult scripts would raise the learning anxiety of students and cause them to fail in English and RT teaching. In addition to the teacher-written scripts, these competent teachers also said that teachers could help their students to create their own scripts because the students' scripts could really meet their needs and abilities. However, before students created their own scripts, the students' English abilities had to be emphasized and improved because writing scripts needed some more advanced skills than listening and reading.

3. Supporting activities: After the preparation of scripts, the three teachers argued that teachers should offer their students some supporting activities, such as an introduction of RT and reviewing related materials, to lower their anxiety and help them have successful RT experiences. In addition, the teachers also used some specific related activities to facilitate their RT instruction, such as storytelling and watching RT videos of other students.

4. Teacher's modeling and explanation: During this phase, the three teachers all agreed that teachers should give their students a better reading modeling and explain any unknown words or unfamiliar sentences to their students. The three competent teachers found that teachers' modeling could help their students have better readings during the RT instruction and make their English learning more effective. Moreover, teachers should explain the meaning of their scripts to students because it could give students a holistic and clear picture about the script in their hands. Besides, students can better perform when they have a holistic picture about the script, therefore, the competent teachers suggested that teachers should model and explain the whole script for their students. However, students may feel bored if the teachers' modeling and explanation lasted too long. Then, after the teachers' modeling and explanation, competent teachers always asked their students to do choral reading and/or instant

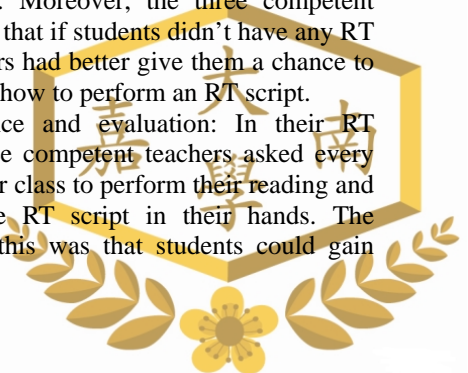
reading several times.

5. Grouping and role assignments: These teachers found that the phase of grouping and role assignments should be placed after the teachers' modeling because students had to pay more attention to the teachers' modeling before they decided what role they would like to take. Moreover, students could learn better English when they were integrally involved in teachers' modeling of the whole script. Then, students formed their small groups and allocated suitable roles for each student. At this point, because the competent teachers believed that heterogeneous groups could foster successful RT instruction and help less-proficient students learn more English, they applied some useful strategies to help their students make a better grouping. For example, Teacher J and Teacher R helped their students group with the "golden men" strategy that places students who needed help in each group and any group that helped the low-proficient students have a better performance could earn higher scores for themselves. However, the competent teachers considered that teachers shouldn't be involved in students' role assignments because students knew there was a performance and they achieved higher scores when they each had a suitable role to act out. Therefore, teachers could be involved in students' groupings, but had better not exert influence when students are assigning the roles within their small groups.

6. Practice and checking: More practice makes students' RT performance better and practice was accepted by all three teachers as an effective way to improve students' English abilities via reading accurately and fluently. In addition, the three teachers all agreed that checking the students' preparation for the performance during the practice phase was important because checking helps teachers recognize the weaknesses and the improvements of their students. "Pull out" strategy which checks students' reading alone and checks their reading with their group mates is a good way to determine students' preparation level for the final performance.

7. Rehearsal and preparation for performance: After practicing for a while, students had to rehearse for their on-stage performance. Teachers could make their students rehearse in public or just within their small group. Rehearsals with group mates in small groups are the normal way. However, teachers could courage students to rehearse in public when they have different scripts or when confronting RT performance for the first time. Moreover, the three competent teachers suggested that if students didn't have any RT experience, teachers had better give them a chance to discuss or observe how to perform an RT script.

8. Performance and evaluation: In their RT teachings, the three competent teachers asked every small group in their class to perform their reading and preparation of the RT script in their hands. The reason for doing this was that students could gain



confidence in reading English aloud in public and be motivated via RT and the reactions of their audiences. At the same time, an evaluation of students' preparation and performance could be conducted and the RT evaluation could be done by these teachers and their students (peers' evaluation).

9. Post-RT activities: The last step of RT teaching was the discussion and sharing among the teachers and their students. The three teachers all agreed that discussion and sharing between them and their students were the most needed activities in this phase because students could have a clearer idea about RT, have an advanced understanding of English learning, and have the chance to re-design their

present RT performance. Therefore, the three teachers always gave their students opportunities to share freely and encouraged their students to praise their peers onstage because that could increase their peers' confidence in English learning. Moreover, the competent teachers also suggested some related post-RT activities that could expand students' English learning or RT learning, such as having the chance to perform in another class or perform their RT script again after their discussion and re-design.

Finally, the better RT procedures that were deemed suitable for application in regular English classes are listed below.

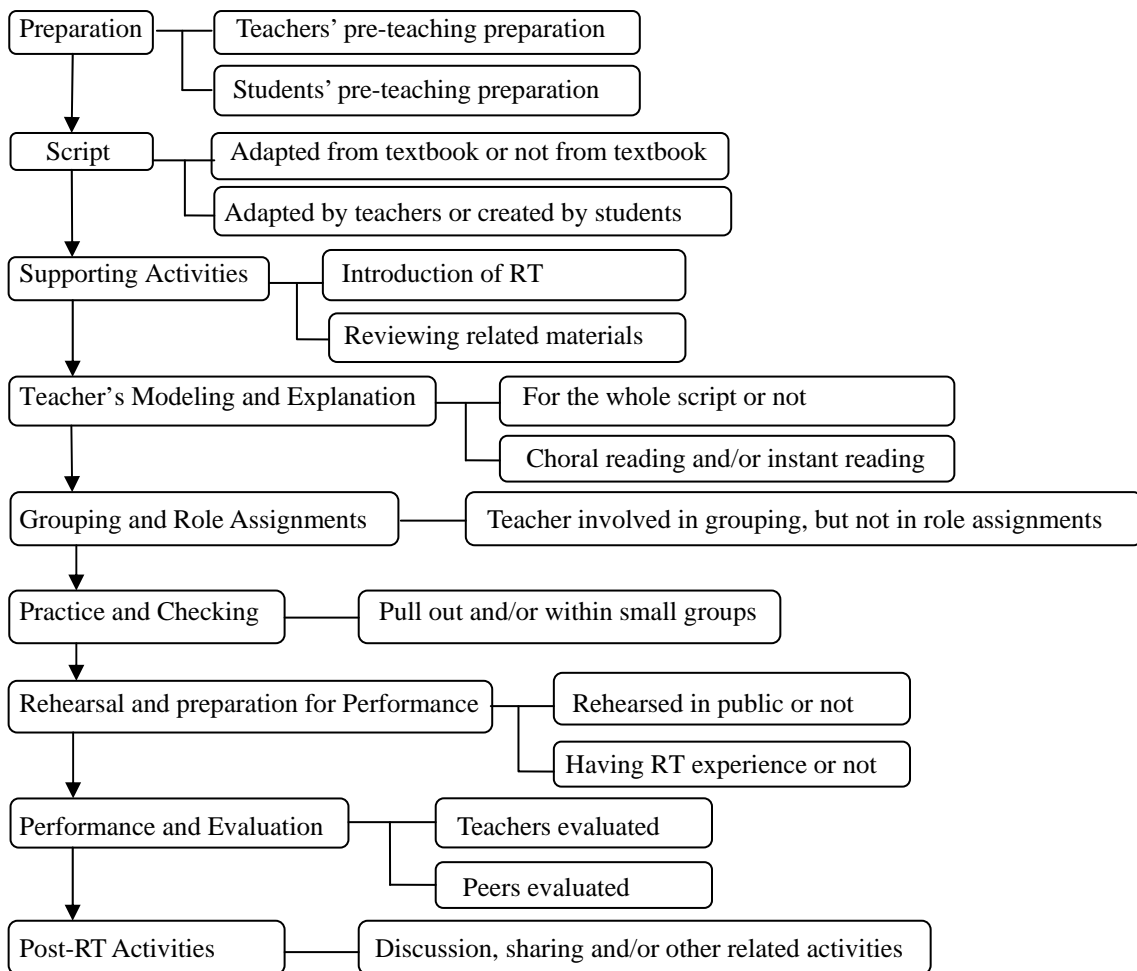


Figure 2. The RT procedure that is suitable for use in regular English classrooms

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of this study could be listed as follows:

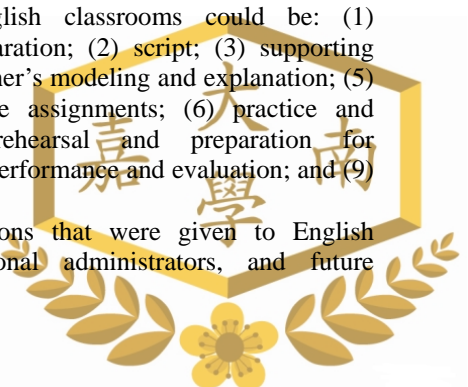
1. Readers Theater is applied to review previous lessons and help less-proficient students learn English well as well as contribute to improvements for all students.

2. In the three competent teachers' opinions, RT could be conducted when students and teachers had prepared.

3. Based on the interviews and the RT

instruction of the three competent teachers with RT experience, the suitable procedures for applying RT into normal English classrooms could be: (1) pre-teaching preparation; (2) script; (3) supporting activities; (4) teacher's modeling and explanation; (5) grouping and role assignments; (6) practice and checking; (7) rehearsal and preparation for performance; (8) performance and evaluation; and (9) post-RT activities.

The suggestions that were given to English teachers, educational administrators, and future



researchers could be:

1. For English teachers, the better timing for teachers to conduct RT was to use it as a review unit while superior RT scripts were a combination of dialogues, passages or sentence patterns from previously taught materials. In addition, teachers should prepare themselves and their students well before they conduct RT instruction. However, a basic level of preparation was often enough for RT instruction and the advanced abilities would emerge or be gained through the RT teaching. Then, to help less-proficient students, teachers had to pay more attention to the supporting activities, modeling, grouping, role assignments and practice. Finally, the procedures of RT teaching in every teacher's English classroom were a bit different, therefore, it is suggested that teachers who want to conduct RT instruction in their classrooms should not simply copy the procedures or scripts from other teachers' RT instructions because these procedures or scripts might not be suitable for their students and their individual needs.

2. For educational administrators, the researcher suggests that the professional group (such as the Compulsory Education Advisory Group) and the Bureau of Education should provide more financial support or manpower to hold more RT seminars for successful RT instruction and better English education. Moreover, the best support from government, administrators and teacher trainers was to establish a bachelor or master degree of RT instruction and to design or support a long-term RT training program for willing in-service English teachers.

3. For future researchers, it is suggested that more time be spent on qualitative research and then, a better understanding could be achieved based on the collected data and in-depth inquiry. Then, enlarging the sample of participants (competent English teachers with RT experience in the study) should be also a crucial concern in future studies because a holistic picture about RT instruction in a regular classroom should be based on more meaningful and significant data.

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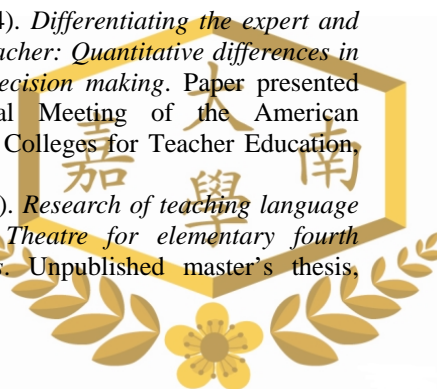
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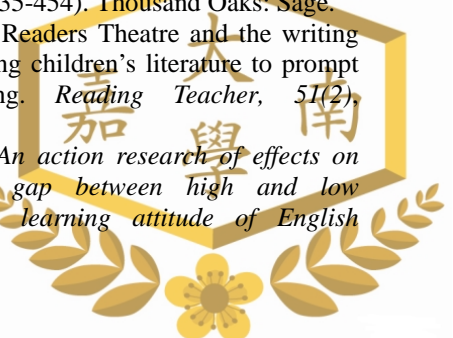
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ELT 教室中的讀者劇場：如何運用 RT 於台灣的國小英語課堂

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摘要

本研究的目的是在於了解讀者劇場實施於台灣國小英語課堂中的目的、最佳時機及教學流程。研究對象是三位有許多 RT 教學經驗的國小英語老師，研究方法是以文件分析、教室觀察與訪談，來進行多重個案研究。

研究結論有：

1. 讀者劇場的應用目的，在於複習教過的課程、幫助英語低成就學生把英語學好及用來提升所有學生的英語能力。
2. 讀者劇場最佳的教學時機是在老師及學生雙方均有準備以後。
3. 讀者劇場的教學流程為教學前的準備、創作或改寫劇本、支持性教學活動、老師示範與解釋、分組與選角、練習與檢查、排演與演出的準備、表演與評量及延伸活動。

關鍵字：多重個案研究、專家教師、讀者劇場

