

**A Review of “Readers Theatre in The Classroom: A Manual for Educators”**

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The readers of this Special Issue of INYI Journal will have acquired a basic understanding of Readers Theatre as an arts-based research methodology and its effectiveness and conduciveness in shedding light on sensitive topics such as mental health and racialized youths’ identity experiences. Arts-based approaches, including Readers Theatre (RT), embody substantial potential as a research approach and also allow educators to embrace RT as novel teaching and learning methodology. From a pedagogical perspective, RT is a transformative instructional tool for experiential learning (Ranisinski, 2017) that uses literacy-based activity to benefit students across diverse content areas (Ratliff, 2006). RT engages students through group learning in the classroom while complementing traditional pedagogical approaches. While RT may be seen as a fun activity, where learners perform authentic and engaging scripts, share and interpret stories with their peers (Ranisinski, 2017), it is also impactful, as it explores sensitive topics (Shapiro & Cho, 2011) and connects students to others’ real-life experiences (Artioli et al., 2025; MacRae & Pardue, 2007).

Arts-based approaches have significant potential to enhance teaching, learning and research with and for youth. There is ample literature on applying RT in the classroom (Holloway, 2014; Savitt, 2002), and its potential value in student education through process,

discussing issues of power, and engaging students actively in their own learning. Despite the numerous benefits, integration of RT to health andragogy, such as in nursing, has been quite limited.

This review paper provides an overview of an andragogical resource titled “Readers Theatre in the Classroom: A Manual for Educators” that presents a step-by-step guide for applying Readers Theatre in the classroom in post secondary settings (Khanlou, Ross, Oraziotti and Vazquez, 2026). The Manual is an excellent model that explains how educators can implement RT in the classroom, without needing to have a background in the arts (Weil, 2010) or training in acting (Shapiro & Cho, 2011). The Manual draws on a review of the literature on RT and drama-based teaching, the results of which were presented at the Teaching in Focus Conference (Khanlou et al. 2018). On a broader level, the Manual presents the authors’ ‘first-hand experiences’ of implementing RT in their classrooms, specifically in the School of Nursing and Sociology Department at York University.

The Manual is thoughtfully divided into five sections each discussing a different aspect of incorporating RT into classroom teaching. The sections include the: 1) Background, 2) Introduction, 3) Steps to implement RT, 4) Implementing RT in remote teaching, and 5) Key resources including samples of students’ fictional

scripts. The first section, the *Background: The Focus in Teaching Project - "Readers Theater"* is personally penned by Dr. Nazilla Khanlou and outlines what led to the development of the RT Manual, and the sources the Manual draws on to create the knowledge. Professor Khanlou notes that no previous skill in the arts is required by educators to apply RT in their classrooms.

The second section *Introduction* of the RT Manual draws on the literature to enumerate the benefits of RT; for example, it facilitates knowledge transfer from theory to practice, offers alternate methods of learning, improves student understanding of course content, promotes student engagement and critical reflection.

The third section *Steps to Implement Readers Theatre* describes the steps to implementing RT in the classroom. This section is divided into four subsections each describing the relevant RT step (Introduction to RT in the classroom, Writing the Script, Readings the Script, and Evaluation), the questions each section addresses, and summary of key activities involved in each step. *The first step* introduces RT and explains how to organize the students in the classroom. It then describes the various activities involved in this step such as selecting a topic, preparing the script, reading and practicing of scripts and duration of each activity session. The section also provides examples of RT topics students have presented on in previous classes. *The second step* focusses on the structure of the script and how a narrative can be transformed into a RT script. *The third step* outlines the key activities of presenting RT script to an audience of peers. The section also outlines important features of RT, such as it does not require elaborate settings, use of props, costumes, performance or movements or memorization of scripts, thus it provides low stress learning activity for students. The *step* includes what students need to be mindful of while they present their scripts. For example, they should be facing the audience, and their oral expression should convey meaning to the script without looking at other performers in their group. The RT Manual also shares the experiences of RT, of the script readers and the listeners (peers as audience) in a Post-reading Discussion. *The fourth step* focusses on how students' presentations can be evaluated and which aspects

need to be considered when student feedback is sought. A template of an Evaluation Sheet and students' feedback questions are also included in this section.

The fourth section *Implementing RT in remote teaching* explains how RT can be applied in remote virtual settings, while ensuring all four steps are addressed. In the fifth section *Key Resources*, Readers can review four examples of students' written fictional RT scripts on a wide range of topics including: Media and Women (Script sample 1), The Intergenerational Cycle of Violence amongst Indigenous Women in Canada (Script sample 2), Reader's Theatre: A Transgender Women's Health and Life Experience's (Script sample 3), and The Effect of Incarceration on the Mental Health of Women Prisoners: A Reader's Theatre Script (Script sample 4). In this section readers will also find helpful, a list of resources they can refer to as educators and draw more information on RT.

The growing wave of evidence on the benefits of arts-based methods has been discussed in the RT Manual. Using concrete examples from their own experiences, the authors demonstrate that RT fosters a vibrant classroom community for shared learning. Moreover, the RT processes and activities help students bridge the gap between theory and practice. On a broader perspective the authors' share positive experiences implementing RT in their courses and classroom teaching. The authors mention that RT was an effective teaching tool, not only did it increase student engagement, but it also enhanced uptake of complex course content in accessible ways. RT also promoted empathy, a crucial skill for nursing students and other healthcare professionals for building trust and improving patient outcomes. The authors also note that RT was a fun activity among learners as it helped them to discuss complex course content choosing different situations and using oral performances. Learners also shared positive experiences with RT, for example the RT process facilitated group work.

In conclusion, for the educators, the Manual demonstrates that RT has positive potential to be utilized in class-based courses, through active group learning, and in the application phase of knowledge acquisition. For the learners, RT provides a venue for

students to discuss their views in an alternative setting (fiction) and also in skill development (e.g., group work, script writing, and oral communication). For educators, RT can be applied successfully both to health teaching and research, while drawing from interdisciplinary and innovative epistemologies.

The Readers Theatre Manual is available on the Office of Women's Health Research Chair in Mental Health's website and can also be downloaded here: <https://nkhanlou.info.yorku.ca/files/2026/05/2-Readers-Theatre-Manual-Khanlou-et-al.May2026.pdf>

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