A Research on Status Quo of Multimodality and Multiliteracies Cultivating

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Abstract. On the basis of multimodal discourse theory, from several aspects including the teachers, teaching and online interactive teaching, this paper conducts an investigation on how to improve college English teaching so as to cultivate students’ multiliteracies. Through questionnaires about the current textbooks and teaching methods, the paper tries to learn and find more information on effectively cultivating students’ multiliteracies. The survey results are as follows: Teachers should compile enlightening and practical textbooks which can reflect the historical culture and times. The teaching is not just to teach language, but to improve the comprehensive quality of students and cultivate students’ multiliteracies. In the process of cultivating students’ multiliteracies, the traditional way of teaching has been challenged. In addition to the language, teaching content should also include multimodal measures such as photos, video, audio materials, PPT and network laboratory. Multimodal teaching methods are widely recognized by the students. PPT teaching is just one way of multimodal discourse teaching which is different from multimodal discourse teaching. Teachers should pay attention to the practical appropriate principle when using PPT. Online interactive teaching is a trend of education in the future, which is beneficial to students’ multiliteracies cultivating.

Introduction

In the world of globally cultural exchanges and growing developments of information technology, people’s multimodal exchanges have become increasingly frequent. Multimodality conducts multi-angle, multidimensional interaction, expresses meaning and achieves communication through language, pictures, sound, animation and other interactive multimodal signs. Thus, the multimodality brings a new way of reading—multiliteracies. In multimedia era, multimodal communication contributes to the focus on cultivating multiliteracies. New London Group [1] believed that cultivating students’ multiliteracies is one of the main tasks of language teaching. Hu Zhuanglin [2] also believed that the traditional reading ability was not enough in the multimedia era because it ignored the importance of the vice-language, neglecting the constructing meaning of the other symbols except the language system. Multiliteracies are the inevitable trend of the times. However, Chinese students’ multiliteracies awareness is relatively weak. To change this situation, Professor Zhu Yongsheng [3] has emphasized that cultivating students’ multiliteracies should be raised to the level of national strategies and national interests.

Multiliteracy

New London Group [1] suggested that by contacting existing multi-modal discourse, transforming the existing text and designing the new texts to cultivate students’ science and technology literacy, media literacy, cultural literacy and political literacy, critical reading and writing skills to help students deal with multiculture and diversification of human expressing and thinking methods. Williamson [4] believed that multiliteracy is the ability of reading information provided by a variety of media and modalities. Gentle, Knight and Corrigan [5] argued that multiliteracy was made up of five compositions such as linguistic component, visual component, audio components, gestural component and spatial component.
A university in Jiangxi Province in China designed a multiliteracy standard which undergraduates should achieve in one-year English studying to improve students’ overall quality, cultivate students’ appreciating reading and critical thinking skills, and carry out creative reading and writing purposes.

1. Students should be familiar with the various modes and various style; and identify a variety of style in a variety of modes of reading, writing and can write a variety of simple style;
2. Students should have the ability of getting information from various channels including paper, media., networks and other modes.
3. Students should have a certain cultural interpretation ability for the information acquired from multimodality. They should have recognition and appreciation ability for culture, subculture and language differences with the help of books and reference materials and other media.
4. Students should have critical reading skills and the ability to identify certain information to selectivity and critically retrieve the required information from a variety of media.
5. Students should have creative reading and writing skills to writing certain numbers or comments on the multimodal information.

**Questionnaire Survey**

To make students meet the above standard, the first step we take is to conduct a questionnaire survey to learn about the existing textbooks, teaching methods to find more information and problems and training methods from the students about their multiliteracies.

**Data Collection**

In October, 2015, 300 first-year undergraduates in Jiangxi Science and Technology Normal University in China took part in the questionnaire. 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 280 were retrieved with the retrieving rate 93.3%. Then, qualitative analysis was used mainly by students’ questionnaires and interviews to collect data and information. The collected data were summarized and analyzed to reveal how multimodality in teaching fostered students’ multiliteracies.

**Survey Results**

In the five questions of the questionnaire, Likert Five Scale is employed with five options from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing for each question. These five questions are as follows:

1. My current textbooks can help to cultivate my multiliteracies.
2. The current teaching methods can help to cultivate my multiliteracies.
3. Using multimedia teaching can improve my multiliteracies greatly.
4. PPT teaching can improve studying efficiency compared with the traditional classroom teaching.
5. Using network resources and network technology for online interactive teaching will help me to improve my writing skills, critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

The following table shows the results of the survey:

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<th>Questions</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<td>7.5%</td>
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<td>Question 4</td>
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<td>36.4%</td>
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<td>26.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 5</td>
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<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of the Survey Results

Textbooks and Students’ Multiliteracies

From the survey results, 72.7% of the students believe the current textbooks cannot meet the demand of cultivating students’ multiliteracies. Problems of the current textbooks exist in the following aspects:

The current textbooks are rich in literature whose content is difficult to understand completely. Therefore, most students pay much more attention to understanding and absorbing the content of the textbooks, neglecting expression and discussion of the content. Some textbooks are separated from life and reality without meeting the requirements of students. Lack of practice after studying, students’ studying interests cannot be stimulated effectively.

Some textbooks introduce some related websites; however, low efficiency results in disconnection between network and textbooks. Students usually have no idea about how to take advantage of the Internet to better serve them. The current textbooks seldom involve the topic of cultivating students’ ability to use the new technologies, not to mention multiliteracies. Teachers should compile enlightening and practical textbooks which can reflect the historical culture and times. Whatever textbooks they choose, the selected textbooks should be interesting, informative and enlightening, reflecting the science and technology, history, culture and times, which will be close to students’ daily life and enable students study the commonest knowledge happily.

Teaching Methods and Students’ Multiliteracies

The Teaching Methods. From the survey, we can find that more than half of students are dissatisfied with the current teaching methods. The existing problems cannot be ignored. Some teachers have no enough enthusiasm and passion for the classroom teaching, and they simply impart knowledge of the course, neglecting the teaching objects—the students. More teacher-student interaction in classroom should be strengthened. Students should be taught to utilize the internet and search the information and to explain the text at the platform. Then, teachers are supposed to evaluate and point out the mistakes. English teaching methods should be diversified, vivid and multi-dimensional, not just reading aloud textbook knowledge, which is not easy to make students utilize the knowledge. Teacher should research how to give students guidance at the right time in an appropriate way to make them collect internal and external knowledge autonomously in their spare time through the network to strengthen their mastery of knowledge, and enable students to think actively.

PPT Teaching Method. PPT, a new thing with the development of modern science and technology, has obtained the recognition of most teachers and students because of its vivid, informative, convenient features and other advantages. The survey shows that 57.6% of the students like PPT teaching method. However, some disadvantages arise with its spread use in teaching. Important teaching points are written on the PPT, which saves much time in writing on the blackboard. Such acceleration is not conducive to the students’ understanding and memorizing, and students’ taking notes. The whole class seems to have a large amount of information. However, due to insufficient understanding and memorizing, students gain the incoherent knowledge. In addition, in using PPT teaching, students may pay more attention to the medium itself, easily distracted, not achieving the desired effect. Some students are worried that there may be some problems in their expressing because sometimes they just enjoy something visual. The current PPT courseware places more emphasis on the visual effects, neglecting visual, auditory, tactile and other sensory stimulation. Gu Yueguo [6] pointed out that multimodal and multimedia learning is like double-edged sword. If properly handled, it can focus the learners’ attention on knowledge to strengthen the role of memory, improving learning effect. If improperly handled, it will distract students’ attention to interfere with memory of the knowledge, resulting in instant jollification in class and empty feeling afterwards.
Constructing Multimodal Teaching, Cultivating Students’ Multiliteracies

**Changing Teachers’ Role.** English teachers should change from be the dominant role into the guiding role in the classroom, encouraging students to become autonomous learners. The learning behavior includes three components: information acquisition, information processing and information sending. Teachers should make good use of text, images, color, sound, movement, taste and other modes to construct meaning and scenario simulation, and stimulate learners’ vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste and other senses, and guide students to process information acquired from various sense organs, such as visual information and auditory information, so as to gain a thorough understanding of the meaning. Teachers make use of multiple symbolic resources to build open task-based teaching scenarios. Collaboration, strengthening and complementing of different modalities to impart knowledge not only can stimulate students’ interest, but also enhance what they learn, and improve memory persistence. Knowledge storage is not enough, the more important part of learning behavior is the information sending. Teachers should help students understand the various modes of meaning potential and work collaboratively when creating a sense of their own advantages and characteristics, and provide a lot of practice opportunities, such as writing, speaking, reports, debates, etc., to improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation ability, body capacity, and many other skills in order to become an effective multimodal sender, not just passive recipients.

**Making Multimodal Presentation PPT Courseware.** Multimodal PPT presentation, classified as the Multimodal Discourse Category, achieves the compound discourse of the overall meaning through a variety of interactive symbol system [7]. With the increasing popularity and widespread of computer network technology, more and more multimodal PPT presentation becomes popular with teachers and students. In the design of multimodal PPT presentation, firstly, English teachers should understand the various advantages and features of the modality in terms of meaning expression. Then, teachers should integrate voice, video, color and other elements to achieve the best teaching results. Multimodal PPT presentation helps active teaching atmosphere, improve students’ learning attitude and enthusiasm and initiative and improve their class participation. However, PPT teaching is just one way of multimodal discourse teaching which is different from multimodal discourse teaching. There are some misconceptions in the traditional ideas of making and using PPT courseware. Thus, teachers should pay attention to the practical appropriate principle when using PPT.

**Making Good Use of Network Resources.** Modern society is characteristic of plentiful network resources and quick updating. Making good use of network resources can play a significant role in promoting teaching. Through the Internet which is powerful resource library, teachers can obtain video, audio, images, graphics, animation and other forms of creative modes to prepare courseware. Network teaching platform can be built to upload a large number of teaching materials, improve the capacity of knowledge and update dynamic knowledge. Students can conduct independent learning at any time through the network. In addition, teachers can also create teaching forum to learn students’ demands, and exchange opinions with students. Online interactive teaching is a trend of education in the future, which is beneficial to students’ multiliteracies cultivating.

**Summary**

From several perspectives including teachers, teaching materials, teaching method, and online interactive teaching, this thesis conducts a survey on cultivating students’ multiliteracies. The survey shows that teaching should develop students’ multiliteracies to improve the overall quality of students. In the process of cultivating students’ multiliteracies, the traditional teaching methods have been challenged. In addition to the language, the teaching content may be taught through pictures, sound and videos. Various modalities such as PPT, laboratory, and network can be utilized to achieve the satisfied effect. Online interactive teaching is a trend in the future of our education, which can cultivate students’ multiliteracies. Teachers should also build a multimodal classroom to cultivate
students’ multiliteracies by making use of different modes of collaborating, strengthening and complementing to impart knowledge, improve teaching effectiveness, to guide students to learn and think creatively in a multimodal environment.

Acknowledgement

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References