

Multiliteracies in the English Reading Classroom of Senior High School in China

Tianmei Yuan¹, Xiaodong Zhu^{2*}

School of Foreign Languages, Gannan Normal University, Ganzhou, 341000, Jiangxi, China

**Corresponding author e-mail: gnuzxd @ 163. com*

ABSTRACT. *Multiliteracies pedagogy transforms the traditional way of teaching and is in line with the English reading instruction in the new curriculum of China. The article explores how to develop students' multiliteracies in English reading class using the learning by design framework within the multiliteracies pedagogy. By taking an example Module1 Unit 1 Teenage Life: Reading and Thinking: Compare school life in different places, English teachers are suggested to take full advantage of multimodal resources and chains of problems to develop students' multiliteracies when drawing up and executing English reading instructional design.*

KEYWORDS: *Multiliteracies, Learning by design, English reading instruction*

1. Introduction

The new information and communication technologies bring about the changes in education, which means the traditional pedagogy no longer meets the needs of the 21st society, requiring to develop all-round students with critical thinking. In order to satisfy the new learning and new teaching, the pedagogy of multiliteracies comes into being, first coined by New London Group in 1996. According to New London Group (1996), multiliteracies pedagogy includes four teaching procedures: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. With the guidance of multiliteracies pedagogy, students' interest in learning can be greatly improved as well as their multiliteracies, such as information literacy, multimedia literacy and so on (New London Group,1996; Kalantzis & Cope, 2005, 2010). With the aim of developing students' multiliteracies, this article used the multiliteracies pedagogy to plan an instructional design in the four knowledge processes: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying.

2. English Reading Instruction in Senior High School in China

Since the comprehensive reform of the National Matriculation English Test(NMET) in China, English instruction has been guided by the English

Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (Curriculum Standards) . Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education, edited in 2017 and modified in 2020) advocates an English learning activity theory (ELAT) integrating with Six Elements, that is, theme, discourse, linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic skills and learning strategies. Specifically, English instruction, which aims to develop students' core competencies, should be based on multimodal discourse with thematic meaning running through. By integrating linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, linguistic skills, and learning strategies, teachers should create comprehensive, relevant and practical English learning activities, leading students to adopt independent and cooperative learning methods as well as participate in thematic inquiry activities, with the ultimate purpose of improving students' linguistic ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and optimizing learning strategies (the Ministry of Education, edited in 2017 and modified in 2020: 8). What's more, 'viewing' is prescribed as one aspect of the important linguistic competence after 'listening, speaking, reading and writing', for the first time written in the Curriculum Standards. Although Curriculum Standards has been implemented for nearly three years, the current situation of reading instruction is still far from satisfaction (Wang, 2017; Ge& Hong, 2018; Cheng, 2018; Shi, 2020). English language classroom teachers still regards reading materials as a form of teaching linguistic knowledge, which is embodied in teacher-centered teaching, heavy reliance on vocabulary, grammar, and drilling and lack of language thinking ability (ibid). This kind of teaching is not conducive to the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents and contrary to the goal of cultivating students' multiliteracies and critical thinking.

3. The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and Learning by Design

Multiliteracies means integrating print, image, video, and digital texts to make meanings (New London Group,1996). New London Group explained the pedagogy of multiliteracies from four dimensions: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice.

Situated practice involves the process of situating meaning-making in real-world context, which is built on students' life-world experiences, such as students' background knowledge, experience and so on. *Overt instruction* provides students with scaffolding in order to guide students to integrate form, content, and function with metalanguage, thus achieving meaning construction in communication and negotiation. *Critical framing* encourages students to analyse and evaluate what they read critically by using their own knowledge system of historical, social, cultural, political and ideological values. *Transformed practice* happens when students use what they have learned to solve real-life problems.

In order to apply these theory into curriculum practices, Kalantzis and Cope (2010) refined it to more specific and operable 'Knowledge process' in the Learning by Design Framework: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying. Different from traditional teaching methods, learning is at the center of the teaching process in the Learning by Design Framework. Later Cope and Kalantzis (2015:5)

mapped it against the ‘Knowledge Processes’ (as in Figure 1). More details of the Learning by Design Framework are described in Table 1.

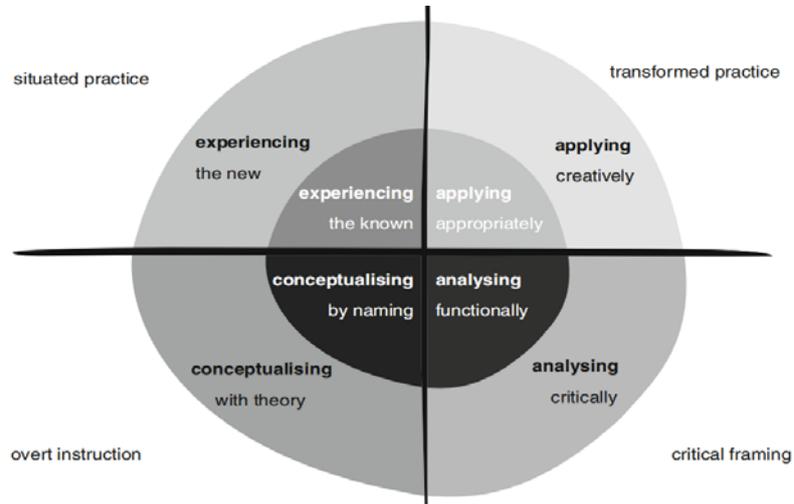


Fig.1 Mapping Multiliteracies Pedagogy Against the ‘Knowledge process’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015:5)

Table 1 Learning by Design Framework. Adapted from Cope and Kalantzis (2015:18-22)

| Dimensions | Knowledge Processes | Description |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Situating practice | Experiencing the known | Draw on learner’s life-world experience: prior knowledge, community background, personal interest, individual motivation... |
| | Experiencing the new | Immersed in an unfamiliar domain of experience, either in real or virtual. |
| Overt instruction | Conceptualizing by naming | Use abstract, generalizing terms to categorize, classify and define similarities and differences. |
| | Conceptualizing with theory | Link concept names into a language of generalization, i.e., in visual, diagrammatic forms. |
| Critical | Analyzing | Exam the function by using reasoning, |

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| framing | functionally | drawing inferential and deductive conclusions, and establishing functional relations. |
| | Analyzing critically | Interrogate human intentions and interests by evaluating formative experiences, perspectives, and motives critically. |
| Transformed practice | Applying appropriately | Learn in a predictable or typical way by way of transformation, reinventing, or revoicing the world ; replicating exactly or reproducing precisely. |
| | Applying creatively | Transfer knowledge and capabilities from one setting to quite a different setting, result in imaginative originality, creative divergence or hybrid recombination and juxtapositions. |

4. Classroom Instructional Design in Senior High School

In classroom teaching, teaching procedures are an important part of instructional design (Zhang, 2015). Based on multiliteracies pedagogy and the learning by design framework, this article probes how to develop students' multiliteracies by analyzing the discourse of Module1 *Unit 1 Teenage Life: Reading and Thinking: Compare school life in different places*, published by People's Education Press in 2019.

4.1 Material Analyses

The theme of this section is '*Compare School Life in Different Places*', which guides students to explore and compare the lives of Chinese and foreign senior high school freshmen, and to understand their peers' living conditions and emotional world, especially the mental journey of overcoming difficulties and striving for progress in the process of growth. Through comparison and contrast, students will be able to develop an optimistic and open-minded attitude, focus on the future, and live a down-to-earth life in senior high school every day when meeting the challenges of high school life.

The theme of this discourse is 'The Freshman Challenge', which aims to broaden students' horizons beyond the classroom, cultivate students' optimistic and positive attitude towards life to meet the challenges in senior high school by comparing school life in different places. The author narrates the three challenges he faced as a freshman: how to choose courses, how to join his favourite football team and how to

adapt to school life. This article is well structured and layered in the first person, totaling four paragraphs. The author introduces the topic in the first paragraph, talks about his confusions when choosing courses in the second paragraph, then tells his choices about extracurricular activities in the third paragraph, and ends with ways to adjust to his school life in the fourth paragraph. The content of the discourse is close to the real life of senior high school students, which meets their cognitive needs and can easily resonate with them. Students will naturally compare their own situation with Adam's and think about how to adapt to the school life of senior high school as soon as possible.

4.2 Teaching Procedures of Learning by Design

Chains of questions refer to the transformation of textbook knowledge into a series of interrelated questions with a certain systematic hierarchy and relative independence, which are based on teaching objectives and teaching content as well as students' existing knowledge and experience (Pei, 2011). Through questioning, students can understand the underlying meaning and synthesize discourse of academic discipline areas, thus leading to deep learning (Pei, 2011; Li, 2015; Shen, 2019). Therefore, chains of questions will be set throughout the teaching process.

1) Situated practice/ experiencing

Experiencing the known: Multiliteracies should be developed not just by linguistic symbols but also by non-linguistic symbols, such as sound, music, videos and so on (Zhang, 2015). After appreciating some pictures about school life, students will be asked to talk about their school life so as to activate their background knowledge.

Experiencing the new: In order to connect 'the old and the new', A video about the differences between students in foreign countries and those in China will be played so that students can compare their differences and similarities. In this way, students can reach what Vygotsky calls the 'the zone of proximal development', which is the level students can arrive at with teachers' scaffolding. The following reading tasks will be less difficult for students to accomplish after students' existing schema is triggered and expanded consciously. With the help of the picture and the title of the passage, students can easily glean the main idea of the passage. So the next thing students need to do is predict the main idea of the passage.

2) Overt instruction/ Conceptualizing

Conceptualizing by naming: Having understood the main idea of the passage, Students will be guided back to the title by asking 'what does 'challenge' mean in the title? What kinds of challenge did Adam meet?'. Then the main idea of each paragraph will be easily generated by students.

Conceptualizing with theory: In order to know more detailed information of the discourse and develop their reading literacy as well as thinking ability, students will be asked chains of questions, for example: '① What courses did Adam choose?

Which one do you think would be his favorite? Why? ② What does ‘make the team’ in Paragraph 3 mean? ③ What is Adam worried about? ④ Is Adam confident that he will get used to senior high school life? How do you know?’ The first question is set to train their ability of searching for factual information and No.2 is aimed at guessing word meaning from the context, consistent in form and meaning while the rest two are designed to uncover implicit and underlying meanings.

3) *Critical framing/ Analyzing*

Analyzing functionally: The outline will be asked to complete as so to have a whole picture of the passage (Table 2); Then students will be asked to draw a mind map of the text structure according to the main idea. As for some students who are not qualified for this task, the teacher can give them some hints such as by asking questions ‘Which paragraph is the main part? Which paragraphs are the supporting parts?’ in order that those in low proficiency can also engage in the task (like Figure 2).

Table 2 the Outline Of Each Paragraph

| Para. | Challenge | How Adam feels | Solution |
|-------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |

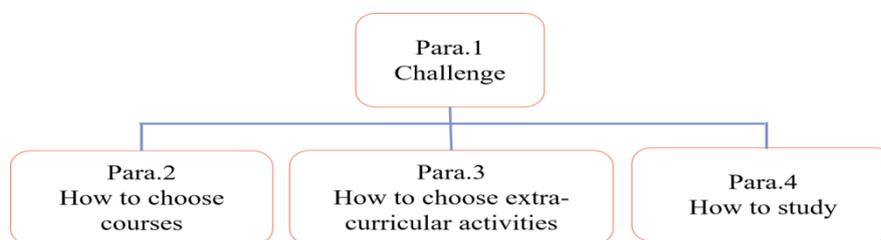


Fig.2 Mind Map of the Text Structure

Analyzing critically: In order to cultivate students’ ability of inference and critical thinking, the following questions will be asked: ‘① What kind of person do you think Adam is? Why? ② What are some differences between Adam’ s school life and your school life? ③ Do you face the same challenge as Adam? What other challenges are you facing? How do you deal with them?’ The first question is to interrogates their stances that motivate knowledge claims; the second one to compare and contrast; and the rest ones set with the purpose of bringing students to the ‘real-world’ situation and developing their cross-cultural awareness.

4) Transformed practice/ Applying

Applying appropriately: The underlying epistemological orientation of applying appropriately is pragmatism (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015). So a situation will be provided for students to role play aiming to transfer what they have learnt into practice: 'If a freshman turns to you for help in his/ her senior high school, what suggestions will you give?' By discussing and experiencing the joy of helping others, students will not only learn to help each other but also know how to solve problems.

Applying creatively: In this stage, learners are requested to take their knowledge and capabilities to quiet a different, or unfamiliar setting, i.e., to affect the world in a new way (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015). Students will be assigned to write an advice letter: 'You hear from your friend Li Hua, who is confused about how to select courses for college entrance examination after entering senior high school. Please give him some suggestions to reply to his letter.' In this way, students will be able to learn to put themselves in others' shoes and apply what they have acquired in class to helping others who meet some challenges in different situations.

5. Implications

5.1 Integrate Varieties of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Symbols

Multiliteracies framework is useful for curriculum teaching (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015). Therefore, teachers should step out of their traditional comfort zone to adopt multiliteracies pedagogy. In the English reading classroom, teachers should take full advantage of multi-modality such as pictures, videos, audio, body movements, etc. to enhance students' learning efficiency. When carrying out multiliteracies pedagogy, teachers should mindfully take into account the four 'knowledge processes' so as to engage students in learning. In Multiliteracies framework, both teachers and learners are designers, i.e., they co-design the whole learning process. On the one hand, teachers become designers as they have to select activities that are suitable for students to participate in, plan their sequence, and reflect on what will happen during and after the learning; On the other hand, for learners, they have to use their cognitive and meta-cognitive knowledge to deal with these knowledge processes, so in this respect, they are designers of their own knowledge and have more initiative in their learning (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015).

5.2 Make Full Use of the Artistry of Chains of Problems to Achieve the Effective Teaching

Students' enthusiasm for probing into deep meaning can be stimulated through chains of questions (Pei, 2011). In addition to train students' logical thinking, chains of questions can also activate and develop students' critical thinking and creative thinking (Tang, 2016). In order to realize its function '1+1>2', teachers should fully mobilize students' agency, design appropriate chains of questions which helps students connect prior knowledge and new knowledge, and pay attention to the

continuity and hierarchy of the problems leading to the connotation of discourse (ibid). That's to say, the questions raised should fit into students' cognitive process: from lower thinking to higher thinking.

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