Incorporating Sociocultural Theory Into English Reading Instruction: A Unit Plan for Chinese EFL Learners

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The paper incorporated the sociocultural theory into a unit plan of an EFL (English as a foreign language) reading course. The researcher first introduced the definition and relevant studies on the sociocultural theory and L2 (second language) reading, and summarized some interactive studies between the two subjects. Then, the researcher designed a unit plan, which covered several themes of the sociocultural theory, e.g., collaborative scaffolding, self-regulation, and MLE (mediated learning experience). Five successive lesson plans within the unit were then elaborated, with various tasks embedded in each one. All the tasks were designed according to the selected themes, namely, matching game, final word game, and jigsaw activity served as the examples of collaborative scaffolding; tasks like scanning and skimming information in the timeline involved self-regulation; and activities of read-with-songs and read-by-role-play embodied the tenet of MLE. After the five lesson plans, the researcher made the reflection and explained the reasons for the design of the tasks in each lesson plan. Implication for the future studies suggested more experiments be implemented to prove the effectiveness of sociocultural theory in the EFL reading classroom.

Keywords: sociocultural theory, L2 reading, a unit plan, lesson plans

Introduction

Scholars from the “cognitive” and “sociocultural” camps used to debate on what plays a more important role in L2 (second language) learners’ literacy improvement. Cognitive linguistics held that mind plays a crucial part in one’s reading, and reading competence can be improved through reading skills, which can be isolated, tested and taught without an understanding of sociocultural context; however, recent developments on language learning have paved a new way of investigating mind, language, epistemology, and learning through the lenses of cultural and sociopolitical processes. Scholars embodying sociocultural theory have argued that cultural and sociopolitical factors are central to cognitive development (Watson-Gegeo, 2004).

The present study incorporated the sociocultural theory into a unit plan of an English reading course. The tentative plan aims to prove that a language socialization paradigm would be more appropriate to shape language learners’ reading abilities.

Literature Review

Sociocultural Theory

It is Lev. Vygotsky who first proposed and synthesized sociocultural theory in the 1920s and 1930s. Vygotsky lived in a politically repressive environment, when the dictator Joseph Stalin announced the
accession to power of brutal communist in 1922. Therefore, his most scholarly works was not released until 1934, the year when he died of tuberculosis. However, that did not stop people from chasing his thoughts. Based on his tenets, his followers like Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991), Lemke (1990), Rogoff (1990, 2003), and Wertsch (1991) further developed sociocultural theory.

Sociocultural theory describes learning and development as being embedded within social events and occurring as a learner interacts with other people, objects, and events in the collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1978). It stemmed from social constructivist paradigm, which perceives that knowledge is constructed socially through interaction and shared by individuals (Bryman, 2001). As Vygotsky worked originally as a developmental psychologist, sociocultural theory has explored four aspects of human cognitive development, namely, mind, tools, ZPD (zone of proximal development), and community of practice (Mantero, 2002; Nuthall, 1997; Palincsar, 1998; Wertsch, 1991).

First of all, according to Vygotsky (1978), mind is socially distributed and moving beyond people. Mental habits and functioning depend on our interaction and negotiation with others, which are also affected by factors like environment, context, and history (Mantero, 2002). Studies on mind can also be explored in terms of schema theory, which explains the role of past experiences, or background knowledge, in comprehension (Hauptman, 2000). Schema theory proposes that experience is organized in people’s minds or schemata, and stored in our brains at all levels of abstraction (Rumelhart, 1977, 1980).

Second, Vygotsky proposed that the need for control the nature led to the creation of tools, technical and mechanical as well. Based on the role of technical and mechanical tools human used to conquer the nature, Vygotsky (1981) then extended the notion of instrumental mediation to what he termed psychological tools. Such tools include language, various systems of counting, algebraic symbol systems, works of art, writing, diagrams, maps, drawings, and so on.

In the third place, as psychological tools help people develop their minds or schemata to a higher level of thinking, Vygotsky (1978) then coined the term ZPD. He believed that learning always precedes development in the ZPD, that is, through the assistance of a more capable person, a child is able to learn skills or aspects of a skill that go beyond the child’s actual developmental or maturational level. This is the prototype of scaffolding. In this sense, ZPD provides a prospective view of cognitive development, as opposed to a retrospective view that characterizes development in terms of a child’s independent capabilities.

The fourth aspect of cognitive development lies in community of practice, a group of people who are recognized as having a special expertise in some areas of significant cultural practice (Nuthall, 1997). While people can develop their minds or cognition with the psychological tools and then reach their ZPD, the higher order of thinking, their learning process actually takes place with the help of collaborative learning. A community of practice regards learning a subject domain as a process of becoming a member of a community of practice (Mason, 2007, p. 2). Cognitive development of a child strongly depends on the human and symbolic mediation provided by the community through parents, peers, teachers, and other mediators (Kozulin, 2002). The idea of learning in the community of practice shed light on themes in cognitive science, child development, and linguistic studies, and served as the origins of tenets like activity theory and mediation learning experience (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, pp. 3-8).

L2 Reading

While reading research for the L1 (first language) has been fruitful for decades, L2 reading research lags
comparatively behind. The primary reason is that the majority of theories and tenets in L2 reading used to be originated from L1 reading research. According to Koda (2005), “L1 experience embeds habits of mind, instilling specific processing mechanisms, which frequently kick in during L2 reading” (p. 9). Therefore, an L2 reading research necessitates a prerequisite study on L1 reading. With reference to L1 reading research, researchers concluded the major findings in the L2 reading development. According to Grabe (1994, p. 277), the findings can be: (1) the importance of discourse structure and graphic representations; (2) the importance of vocabulary in language learning; (3) the need for language awareness and attending to language and genre form; (4) the existence of an L2 threshold in reading; (5) the importance of metacognitive awareness and strategy learning; (6) the need for extensive reading; (7) the benefits of integrating reading and writing; and (8) the importance of Content-Based Instruction.

Although there are additional insights, the above findings represent the fundamental foci in L2 reading research. However, the research achievements in those aspects are not evenly distributed: Some of the aspects have been prolific in works, such as reading strategies and content-based instruction. Some of the findings are comparatively deficient in research, like the necessity of extensive reading and the benefits of integrating reading with writing. Meanwhile, even though scholars have been working on some aspects for decades, they remain dwelling on parts of the field with the rest lying still. For example, reading strategy has been an old horse, as researchers have been studying it since the 1980s. However, among the three primary types of strategies, namely, metacognitive, cognitive, socio/affective strategies, and publications on the former two types are comparatively more than the latter one. Even in terms of socio/affective strategies, papers on learners’ motivation are far more than those on learners’ attitude, anxiety, and beliefs.

A further analysis on the precedent or contemporary scholars’ masterpieces on the L2 reading is also necessary for a better understanding and exploration on the future research. For the last decade, four books shed light on the L2 reading research. Koda gave researchers useful insights and implication in her *Insights Into Second Language Reading* (2005). She highlighted three key distinctions between L1 and L2 reading: L2 readers’ prior experience, limited L2 knowledge, and ongoing influences from both L1 and L2. She then applies those three crucial differences frequently throughout her book. Hudson’s *Teaching Second Language Reading* (2007) is definitely a good book incorporating a variety of approaches from classroom and studies have been used on teaching reading. The book focuses more on the teaching strategies and methods. In 2009, Grabe published his book *Second Language Reading: Moving From Theory to Practice*. Grabe is actually a great analyst rather than a theorist, so he summarized and analyzed the current theories, tenets, and issues in the L2 reading research. However, a little different from the subtitle, the book does not provide researchers and practitioners with direct practical methodologies. Instead, Grabe pointed out the pedagogical insights behind the state of art theories. The last book worthy of mention is *Second Language Research and Instruction: Crossing the Boundaries* (Han & Anderson, 2009). As the name suggests, the book intends to bridge the gap or cut cross the boundary between reading research and instruction. Therefore, the two-section book focuses on the analysis on L2 reading research in the first part, and on the suggestions and explanations for reading instruction in its second part.

**Incorporating Sociocultural Theory Into English Reading Teaching**

With the advent of sociocultural theory, scholars merit more attention to apply it to L2 reading. Several figures in this field are Coughlan (1995), Coughlan and Duff (1994), Donato (2000), Lantolf (2000, 2001),
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Lantolf and Appel (1994), Kozulin (2002), Frawley (1992), and Frawley and Lantolf (1985). These people are scholars who are primarily interested in the sociocultural theory and then extending the tenets into the field of foreign language acquisition. In an opposite way, scholars like Ellis (1997) and Swain (2000) who had a strong research background in SLA (second language acquisition) are also developing their SLA theories with an incorporation of sociocultural factors into their tenets. These two types of scholars skillfully embodied the sociocultural theory and interweaved its tenets with SLA.

Generally, interdisciplinary research between sociocultural theory and SLA is categorized according to the different themes or sub-theories in sociocultural theory. For example, Coughlan and Duff (1994), from a perspective of activity theory, differentiated “task” from “activity”, and revealed “a fixed (reading and retelling) ‘task’ is really variable, not only across subjects but also within the same subject at different times” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 174). Similarly, Ellis (2000) made a comparison on task-based research and language pedagogy between psycholinguistic perspective and sociocultural theory. He further summarized that while psycholinguistic approach provides teachers with more information on planning the task, it is sociocultural theory improves teachers’ engagement in students’ L2 acquisition. As a way to elicit comprehensible input, a task of reading is necessary for L2 learners.

Donato and MacCormick (1994) and Kozulin (2002) all focused on the role of mediation in L2 learners’ learning process. The former aimed to prove that learning strategies are by-products of MLEs (mediated learning experiences), and the latter identified the interfaces between sociocultural theory and MLE, and analyzed how they compensate each other to guide the learning and teaching. While more work should be done on the classification of mediators, three primary types of mediators are objects, symbols, and persons. Reading textbooks as an object with language symbols plays an important role to transform natural, spontaneous pulses into one’s higher order of thinking.

Gutierrez (2006) and Chou and Min (2009) proved that appropriate use of online instruction as a way of collaborative scaffolding helps L2 learners improve their literacy. Gutierrez (2006) investigated the value of the tasks as pedagogical instruments can facilitate collaborative scaffolding in the foreign language classroom. Computers, if used properly, can be regarded as effective object-regulators. Chou and Min (2009) proved that students are more likely to achieve task closure in multimedia setting than in social presence, when they meet with a relatively complex task. However, online instruction might be impractical in some situations: for one thing, it requires teachers to have a good command of the technology and the design of the course; for another, not every student is fond of the learning style.

While many scholars embodied tenets of sociocultural theory into SLA, they mostly focused on language learning or acquisition. There remains a lack of research, which may specifically focus on L2 reading. The study aims at incorporating some tenets of sociocultural theory into a tentative unit plan, which is designed for an ESL (English as a second language)/EFL (English as a foreign language) reading course.

Design of the Unit Plan

Participants

Subjects. Students are the Chinese EFL learners in their second year, who major in Maritime Law, in Dalian Maritime University, China. English is their foreign language, and is taught at least three times a week in college. Before entering into college, they had already learned English for almost six years, and attended the entrance examination to college in China, a similar exam like SAT in America. Maritime Law as the top major
in Maritime University requires students to have a good English proficiency; therefore, the average score of the students’ English in their entrance exam is approximately 100 on a scale of 150.

**Instructor.** Instructor graduated with a master degree in applied linguistics, with the research interest in SLA. He has been teaching the course *College English* for more than three years, and he is now teaching *Intensive Reading*, a course aims at improving students’ English reading.

**Course**

*Intensive Reading*, which is designed to improve Chinese EFL learners’ English reading skills, is a sub-course of *College English*. *College English* is an integrated course, which consists of listening, speaking, reading, and writing sections.

**Context**

The course is instructed in the Chinese EFL context, where English is taught as a required course for students in the urban cities. Most students in urban cities start learning English since they come into junior middle school. Before the college, they are required to learn English for at least six years. Students in some cosmopolitans in China even start learning English since their primary school.

Students in this course are in both EAP (English for academic purposes) and ESP (English for specific purposes) programs. In an EAP program, they learn the course *College English* twice a week, for sake of improving their English skills; In an ESP program, they learn their core major courses, such as Maritime Law, in English once a week. While they are not learning English in an authentic English-speaking context, they remain exposed to English input on a regular basis.

**Teaching Materials**

**Textbooks.** *Northstar Reading and Writing* (2nd edition) (L. M. English & A. English, 2003a) is the textbook used in the course. It is co-authored by L. M. English and A. English, and is designed for ESL/EFL learners at the high intermediate level. It consists of 10 units, covering topics in life, technology, and education. A striking feature of the book is that the topics it covers are not only for improving students’ academic success, but also for shaping their moral development.

*Northstar* is a product of skill-based instruction, and it acts as a representative of integrated skills series. In this way, critical thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are also involved in the book. Through the topic and exercise in each unit, students are likely to develop their abilities in those five aspects as a whole, thus shaping their learner autonomy.

**Supplement materials.** *Teachers’ Manual and Achievement Tests* (L. M. English & A. English, 2003b) for the textbook is the supplement for the student book. The book provides teachers with specific suggestions for each unit, which at best facilitates the instruction. Besides, as the book series is published by Pearson Longman, teachers may also track teaching resources from Pearson ELT (English language teaching) official website. In addition, the instructor also offers more teaching materials like reading passages or assessments to the students.

**Selected Unit**

**Unit 2: dreams never die.** This unit consists of two reading passages embodying the theme on how to overcome the obstacles in one’s life. It incorporates successful but disabled celebrities’ narratives into the text, with the aim of encouraging students to fight against difficulties in their lives. There are several reading and critical thinking tasks in the unit, which can be at best combined with sociocultural theory. For example, the
tasks of making prediction and inferring word meaning from context can be completed by the students in groups, who are collaboratively scaffolding each other and thus developing their ZPD.

**Prior lessons.** Students who are going to learn Unit 2 have already completed Unit 1, and have been given an assignment to think about an unforgettable difficulty they have ever experienced, and prepare to share their solutions with classmates.

**Analyses of the Lesson Plans**

**Lesson 1**

**Objectives.** Teachers in Lesson 1 aim to meet the following objectives: (1) Get students to learn how to make prediction based on their background knowledge (schemata) and the information in the text (object-regulation); and (2) Guide students to negotiate and learn how to face the difficulty in their lives.

**Rationales for the objectives.** Students in this lesson try to achieve the following goals: (1) Students need to know how to make inference and prediction, as it is a basic cognitive strategy they will use in their reading; and (2) Apart from reading ability, students are also required to know how to solve the difficulties in their daily lives.

**Tasks involved.** Certain tasks are designed for teachers to operate the lesson plan, and they are: (1) Matching game: Students work in groups and match the pictures with relevant information. Tell others how they match the pictures using clues in the text; and (2) Final word game: Each group selects a timekeeper and participants. Participants share their ideas individually in one minute; the timekeeper controls the time and summarizes the final word.

**Procedures: (90 min.).** The class is suggested to be operated in the following process: (1) Teacher guides the students to look at the picture of Helen Keller and the title of the unit in the textbook, and leads them to discuss the questions listed below the picture (five min.); (2) (Matching game) Students in four groups read the text on p. 24, and complete the exercise 1 in section B: “match the people with obstacles he/she has overcome”. Each group is given one picture as the task, and they should negotiate with their peers to match the picture with the information (15 min.); (3) Teacher reveals the answers (two min.); (4) Students within the same group correct and share their answers with other groups, and tell others how they infer the information from the text; for example, how they use their background knowledge, and text clues to make prediction (25 min.); (5) Teacher summarizes the students’ answers (eight min.); (6) (Final word game) Students talk with their group members to complete exercises 2, 3, and 4. These exercises include how to conquer different kinds of obstacles in their lives; tell stories about famous people who have overcome their difficulties (20 min.); (7) Teacher summarizes the students’ answers (10 min.); and (8) Teacher leaves the assignment to the students: preview and read the passage on p. 25 (five min.).

**Lesson 2**

**Objectives.** Teachers in Lesson 2 aim to meet the following objectives: (1) Lead the students to review what they have learned in the previous lecture, and ask them to summarize the qualities one should have when facing difficulties; and (2) Guide the students to learn how to infer word meanings from text.

**Rationales for the objectives.** Students in this lesson try to achieve the following goals: (1) A reviewing task is a way to use students’ schemata to help them learn and reinforce what they learn; and (2) Making inference and guessing words’ meanings are basic reading strategies students should learn, and these strategies can be mastered through self-regulated and peer-regulated tasks.
**Tasks involved.** Certain tasks are designed for teachers to operate the lesson plan, and they are: (1) Collaborative scaffolding to solve problem: Students work in groups on solutions to the problem in the reading; and (2) Making inference to learn new words: Students use the context and text information to infer and learn the new words.

**Procedures: (90 min.).** The class is suggested to be operated in the following process: (1) (Collaborative scaffolding) Teacher assigns a reading task to the students, and asks the students to help the hero in the reading text figure out solutions for his problem (five min.); (2) Students discuss with their group members to conclude their solutions (five min.); (3) Teacher summarizes the students’ answers (five min.); (4) Teacher asks the students in groups to share their understandings on the reading that has been left as their assignment in the previous lecture, and tell each other the main idea of the reading text (10 min.); (5) Students are required to answer the questions on p. 25, which are concerned with the reading text. In this way, teacher evaluates the students’ understanding on the text (10 min.); (6) (Making inference) Students in groups work together on the exercise on p. 25: “vocabulary for comprehension”. They should discuss with each other on how they infer the word meanings from the text (10 min.); (7) Teacher reveals the answers for the exercise (two min.); (8) Students in one group correct and share their ideas with other groups, and summarize the best practice (10 min.); (9) Teacher concludes the strategies used in inferring the word meanings from the text, and explains the uses of the new words in the text with specific examples (20 min.); (10) Teacher gives students a reading passage with a similar exercise and asks the students to complete the reading task (10 min.); (11) Teacher asks the students to change their papers with their group members, check and discuss the answers (five min.); and (12) Teacher assigns the homework for the students: preview the reading passage on p. 26 (three min.).

**Lesson 3**

**Objectives.** Teachers in Lesson 3 aim to meet the following objectives: (1) Teach students to grasp information through skimming the text according to the chronological order; and (2) Get students to read and understand a reading passage through group work.

**Rationales for the objectives.** Students in this lesson try to achieve the following goals: (1) Scanning and skimming is an effective reading strategy for students, and it is also a constructive approach, which requires the students to use transitional words or phrases to locate the information they need. In this sense, students also use objects (words or symbols) to mediate their learning; and (2) Group work is an embodiment of collaborative scaffolding.

**Tasks involved.** Certain tasks are designed for teachers to operate the lesson plan, and they are: (1) Scanning and skimming in time line: Students use transitional words or phrases which indicate the time to locate the information; and (2) Jigsaw activity: Students in groups make their reading pieces into a whole story.

**Procedures: (90 min.).** The class is suggested to be operated in the following process: (1) Students are required to complete the exercise on p. 29: “reading for main ideas” on their own (five min.); (2) Teacher gives the answer (two min.); (3) Students discuss and share their ideas with their peers, summarizing the main idea of the passage and also the strategies they have used when they read (five min.); (4) Teacher explains the main idea of the passage and discuss with students about what they have learned from the reading (10 min.); (5) Teacher then highlights the steps for accessing the information in a text according to the chronological order (10 min.): (a) skim and highlight the time and figure in the questions, (b) match and pinpoint the time and figure in the text accordingly, (c) underline the keywords in the text, such as subject, predicate, and object, and
(d) fill in the blank with the underlined keywords; (6) (Scanning and skimming) Teacher chooses one supplement reading to evaluate the students, and asks them to complete the exercise according to the time line (10 min.); (7) Students discuss with their peers and share their answers (three min.); (8) Teacher reveals and explains the answers (three min.); (9) (Jigsaw activity) Teacher divides students into groups and gives each group a reading passage which has been made into pieces. Individual in each group is given a slip of reading with a year number in it. Then, students are required to work together to make them into a whole reading passage (10 min.); (10) Students in each group share their reading passage with other groups (10 min.); (11) Students complete the exercises on pp. 34-35: “focus on vocabulary” (10 min.); (12) Teacher explains the answers and highlights uses of the new words (eight min.); and (13) Teacher leaves an assignment to students: complete the exercises on pp. 35-37 (two min.).

Lesson 4

Objectives. Teachers in Lesson 4 aim to meet the following objectives: (1) Lead students to complete the exercises after the reading texts; (2) Guide students to read with songs; and (3) Teach students how to read, compare, and summarize the readings.

Rationales for the objectives. Students in this lesson try to achieve the following goals: (1) After three lectures’ reading and learning, students are required to complete the textbook exercises to evaluate their understanding on the reading text; (2) Students need to read by listening to songs, and read with the help of computers. Songs are good means students can use to read and learn, especially when students learn some famous people’s narratives. CALL (Computer-assisted language learning) helps students read with media as mediators. This is also an embodiment of object-regulation in sociocultural theory; and (3) Students should learn how to read and understand the reading texts by comparing the texts with others. Comparing is a process helping students associate their background knowledge (schema) to new understanding (ZPD).

Tasks involved. Certain tasks are designed for teachers to operate the lesson plan, and they are: (1) Exercises: Students need to complete their exercises and discuss with their peers and teacher; (2) Read with songs: Students watch the MTV (music television) flips online and then read the text to get better understanding of it; and (3) Reading-writing connections: After reading the text, students are required to compare their reading with the text they have read in the previous lecture. Summarize the difference and similarities of the texts.

Procedures. The class is suggested to be operated in the following process: (1) Students are divided into three groups and work together on exercise 1 on p. 35. Each group discusses and selects the words for their themes. Three themes are: facing an obstacle, dealing with an obstacle, and overcoming an obstacle (five min.); (2) Teacher gives the answers and explains the uses of some words (five min.); (3) Students work in pairs on exercise 2: “Circle the letter of the best explanation”. They should talk and explain reasons for their decisions (10 min.); (4) Teacher reveals the answers and explains grammar and word usage in difficult sentences (10 min.); (5) (Read with songs) As students have read in the previous lecture is about Diane Schuur, they are required to watch an MTV online and listen to the song performed by Diane Schuur. Enjoy the song and try to experience her feeling (10 min.); (6) Students discuss with their partners and talk about the lyrics in the song (10 min.); (7) After enjoying and talking about the song, students share their new understandings on the reading passage that have been learned in the previous lecture (10 min.); (8) Reading-writing connections: students have read and learned two reading passages. One is about Frank McCourt and the other is about
Diane Schuur. Students now are required to compare their readings and summarize the differences and similarities of the texts (20 min.); (9) Teacher concludes the two reading passages (eight min.); and (10) Teacher gives homework to the students: review the two reading passages, including the words, grammar, content, and reading skills they have learned (two min.).

Lesson 5

Objectives. Teachers in Lesson 5 aim to meet the following objectives: (1) Assess students’ mastery of the words, content knowledge, reading strategies, and grammar they have learned in this unit; and (2) Guide students to play a scene in a disabled person’s life, and then try to solve some problem without speaking, listening, and reading. More importantly, encourage them to respect the disabled people and cherish what they have owned now.

Rationales for the objectives. Students in this lesson try to achieve the following goals: (1) Unit evaluation is necessary for students in the last lecture of the unit; and (2) After the assessment, students need some relaxation and they can also learn some knowledge by playing.

Tasks involved. Certain tasks are designed for teachers to operate the lesson plan, and they are: (1) Assessments: dictation and reading comprehension; and (2) Play and learn task: students learn by role-play.

Procedures: (90 min.). The class is suggested to be operated in the following process: (1) Students are given a dictation test: teacher dictates the new words which have been learned in this unit, asks students to use some words to make sentences, and explain some usages of the words (20 min.); (2) Students are then given another assessment, which evaluates their reading comprehension and reading strategies (20 min.); (3) Students are divided into three groups: one member in group 1 cannot speak nor write; one member in group 2 cannot listen nor write; and one member in group 3 cannot see nor write. However, they should try their best to communicate with their team members and complete a task under the guidance of their members (30 min.); (4) Students are required to summarize their performance and talk about their ways to solve the problems (10 min.); and (5) Teacher summarizes the unit and leaves homework for next week (10 min.).

Reflection on the Unit Plan

Several recurring themes occur in the five successive lesson plans: first of all, they all involve task-based instruction, which embodies sociocultural theory in that learning happens in the form of MLEs. Tasks are seen as the external means by which teachers can influence the students’ mental computations (Ellis, 2000). Different tasks involve different mediators, of which objects, peers, and teachers may all be part. For example, for the final word game and jigsaw activity, students are all required to read some texts first. The texts serve as object mediators, which consist of language and symbols; in the read with songs activity, students read and learn with the help of songs, which also act as object mediators made of lyrics and music.

Second, collaborative scaffolding is also incorporated into different activities. Collaborative dialogues that emerge from students’ activity can lead to the co-construction of linguistic development and meanings (Donato & MacCormick, 1994). For example, the final word activity requires students to work in groups and differentiate their roles to read and learn; the role play activity also needs students to work together to communicate the meanings. Participants’ learning occurs when they interact with others in their groups.

Third, the teacher in the classroom uses different kinds of mediators and regulations in different tasks and activities help the students develop their ZPD. For example, students learn how to scan and skim the
information they need according to chronological sequence. After teacher’s instruction, students may better understand the steps to read for information. Assessments and evaluations in class assist students to test whether they have mastered what they have learned.

Last but not least, apart from the content and language knowledge, the unit also teaches students how to face the challenges with courage, master the skills in solving problems in their daily life, and show their respect and love to other people. Education is not only about how teachers teach their students to live and learn, but also about how they can help their students live better and learn better.

Conclusions

In the paper, the researcher first introduced the definition and relevant studies on sociocultural theory and L2 reading, and then summarized some interactive studies between the two. Then, the researcher designed a unit plan, which incorporated sociocultural theory into an EFL reading classroom. Five successive lesson plans then were elaborated in the paper, with different meaningful tasks embedded in each one. In a further step, the researcher reflected on the unit design and explained some recurring topics involved in the tasks, such as task-based instruction, collaborative scaffolding, MLEs. The researcher also suggested incorporation of empathy and courage into the teaching of the unit plan. The tentative plan can be put into practice, and developed as the basis for further studies.

References