

Multimodal Synergistic Strategies in High School English Teaching

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This paper focuses on the multimodal synergistic strategy in high school English teaching. It first briefly reviews the relevant concepts and theories of multimodality and multimodal teaching. On this basis, it employs cases from text books published by People's Education Press to illustrate how to exert the synergistic effect of multimodal teaching to guide English teaching practice from the perspectives of the English core qualities—listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing. The introduction and application of multimodal theory into English teaching practice is conducive to further promoting the “student-centered” English teaching reform, and plays a positive role in the cultivation of high school students' thinking and the improvement of core literacy.

Keywords: multimode, high school English teaching, synergy

Introduction

The development of information technology, multimedia technology, and multi-educational thoughts has put forward new requirements for the reform and development of English teaching, pointing out a new direction and providing a new method and means. Integration, diversity, real-time, interactivity, and digitalization are the prominent features of information technology and multimedia technology. Based on single mode, such as text, the traditional English teaching has been increasingly unable to meet the needs of social development and of students for acquiring knowledge and develop skills. From the results of teaching experiments at home and abroad, the effect of multimodal teaching is better than that of single-modal teaching. The application of multimodal teaching mode breaks the shackles of traditional teaching forms and is of great value for the reconstruction of middle school English teaching ecology in the basic stage. It can help teachers effectively integrate teaching resources, create a multimodal teaching environment, stimulate students' learning interest, cultivate students' self-multimodal cognitive ability, and improve English teaching efficiency (Huang, 2016). The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools in China (revised in 2020, 2017 edition, hereinafter referred to as the “New Curriculum Standards”) develops students' language ability, cultural awareness, and learning ability. Language ability refers to the ability to understand and express meaning by listening, speaking, reading, watching, and writing in social situations. And the language consciousness and language sense are acquired in the process

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of learning and using language. It emphasizes the cultivation of the four major skills of “listening, speaking, reading, and writing” for many years, and transforms it into “listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing”. The additional “viewing” to the skills further emphasizes the “multimodal” characteristics and importance of the learning environment. In essence, it aims at guiding students to make use of multimodal elements in a multimodal environment to obtain all-around development of English learning. Therefore, how to push the all-around development of students’ English skills with the help of multimodality is an urgent problem to be solved at present, and it is also an urgent need to further implement the “student-centered” teaching concept and promote the reform of English teaching.

Multimodal Theory and Multimodal Teaching

Multimodal Theory and Multimodal Collaboration

Language, in essence, is a social symbol system and a meaning resource (or meaning potential), that is, a signifying system. Painting, sculpture, music, dance, gestures, etc., can also be regarded as signifying systems, which together with language achieve the function of transmitting the social meaning of symbols (Halliday, 1978). These symbols can be called “different forms of ideographic modes”. In a sense, the modes are the signifying systems that can be compared. Forceville (2009) also believed that “mode” refers to a concrete perceived and interpretable symbol system. On the basis of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics, many scholars put forward the theory of multimodal discourse. The most representative ones are Kress and van Leeuwen, who believe that modes include all channels and media of communication, such as sound, movement, gesture, image, etc., and multimode refers to the use and integration of several symbolic modes in the design of symbolic products or symbolic events (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In addition to language, the symbol system includes sound, tone, font, layout, and other accompanying language symbols, as well as body language symbols, such as eyes, facial expressions, gestures, and non-body language symbols are composed of modern science and technology, such as PPT, sound amplification, and the Internet (Zhang, 2009). Multimodal discourse refers to the phenomenon of using multiple senses, such as hearing, sight, touch, and taste to communicate through various means and symbolic resources, such as language, image, sound, and action (Zhang, 2009). The multimodality of modern discourse communication is manifested by the use of one or more other modal symbol systems in addition to the traditional word symbols. For example, the mainstream self-media short videos at home and abroad have become a modern, representative, and popular multimodal discourse, which integrate text, images, dynamic videos, background music, spoken words, emoticons, colors, fonts, and many other discourse symbols. As pointed out by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), multimodality in the contemporary world is an important feature of modern discourse.

The construction and expression of meaning generally involve a variety of modes, which are not independent of each other, but “complementary” (Zhang & Wang, 2010). Moreover, in different contexts, each mode is not in the same “status”, but has a primary and secondary division. For example, the traditional Chinese “crosstalk” program is mainly based on oral discourse, supplemented by expressions, sign language, music, props, etc. These auxiliary modes complement and strengthen the overall effect of “speaking” crosstalk. This is the synergistic effect of multiple modes.

Multimodal Teaching

In the 1990s, Kress and Leeuwen combined the multimodal theory with the field of education and teaching

and put forward the idea of multimodal teaching, believing that the process of language learning is not only the connection process of the stimulation and response of language symbols in the individual brain, but also the result of the joint action of multiple symbols. They also believe that language teaching should change the single symbolic modal form composed of words, etc., and employ multiple symbolic types and multiple teaching modes to cooperatively stimulate learners' various learning sensory mechanisms. The New London Group applied multimodal theory to teaching practice and developed the concept of "multimodal literacy" (O'Toole, 1994). They believe that in the era of rapid development of information technology, it is extremely important to cultivate students' diverse literacy skills (including the ability to identify cultural differences, subcultural differences, regional differences, national differences, technical differences, and contextual differences) and the ability to read and write multimodal meanings. Multimodal teaching mode means that in a multimodal environment, teachers integrate language, pictures, sounds, actions, and other construction forms to form the most effective meaning expression, and instruct students to use multiple models to construct and communicate with people (Zhang & Wang, 2010). The teaching tasks in the multimodal teaching mode are all centered on "learning", urging students to change their ideas from "Teachers require me to learn" to "I want to learn", from "passive learning" to "active learning". That in essence conforms to the "student-centered" education concept. After experiencing the practice of multimodal teaching, students will have the awareness of recognizing modes and modal combinations, and improve their language input and output ability of modal symbols.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategy in Senior High School English Teaching

The above multimodal theory and its application provide theoretical guidance and scientific basis for the multimodal teaching behavior of education informatization. Through the application of multimodal theory, teachers can integrate verbal communication modes, such as spoken and written language with non-verbal communication modes, such as body language, images, videos, and music to promote each other and build a lively, interesting, and dynamic overall teaching situation. The following will discuss the multimodal cooperative strategies in English teaching from the core contents of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategy in the Teaching Practice of "Viewing"

First of all, there are two main reasons for exploring "viewing": One is to highlight that it is a new skill of "4+" skills, and the other is that "viewing", as a micro-skill, is usually integrated in the other four skills. The "viewing" skills in the "New Curriculum Standards" is actually not a simple visual behavior, but contains the meaning of "thinking", which not only helps to train students' ability to observe things, but also helps to train students' thinking qualities, such as understanding, analysis, criticism, and innovation. In the curriculum, the skills of "viewing" are also expounded, that is, understanding and recognizing non-verbal symbols, such as images, charts, sounds, and colors in multimodal discourse and their meanings. These skills can be called micro-skills of "viewing". Take for example Unit 6 of the textbook Book 3 published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), one of famous foreign language publishing house in China. In this unit, an article "Hot! Hot! Hot!" tells the story of the author's experience of riding a subway train without air conditioning and it is very stuffy, which leads to thinking about global warming. In response to the theme of this article, teachers can first ask students to show pictures of themselves taking subway or bus and ask them to describe their feelings of taking these means of transportation in hot weather, then introduce the illustrations of the article, and ask

students to compare the differences between the two pictures, so as to arouse their attention and thinking and guess the meaning conveyed by the pictures. Secondly, teachers can continue to show such videos, pictures, and charts as melting glaciers due to climate warming and polar bears who have no place to live as well as eat garbage. By “viewing”, students can not only further think about the seriousness of the problem of global warming faced by mankind, but also students have a clearer understanding of the concept of “a community with a shared future for humanity”. In this way, we can cultivate students’ abilities of criticism and creation, and improve students’ core quality of the discipline.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategies in English Listening Teaching

Multimodal context is the basis of multimodal listening teaching activities, so teachers need to create multimodal context suitable for teaching content. In the traditional listening teaching process, the teacher first asks the students to read the text material before listening, and then plays the audio once or repeatedly; teachers check the answers to the listening questions to know the effect of students’ comprehension after listening; the teacher explains the important and difficult contents of the listening materials according to the feedback of the students (in this process, the teacher may play the listening materials repeatedly). In addition, due to the influence of exam-oriented education and the large class size, there is a lack of activities to organize students’ oral discussion and retelling listening materials. In the whole listening process, students only use the auditory and visual modes, and fail to make full use of the advantages of multimodal teaching.

For listening teaching activities, each step can be integrated into multimodal elements. First of all, before listening, teachers should prepare multimodal contextual materials related to listening materials and guide students to predict the content. The theory of multimodal teaching advocates that students should be provided with multimodal contextual materials, so that students can make full use of each sensory mechanism to understand the background of listening materials. Teachers can obtain contextual materials related to listening content from various media, such as self-media, Internet, TV, newspaper, and even real life, and present them to students in a multimodal way. Take the text “Choosing a School Club” as an example in the listening section of Unit 1 in the high school English textbook published by People’s Education Press, also a famous publishing house in China. Although the textbook is equipped with text and simple pictures before listening, teachers can use online resources and multimedia to present short dynamic videos about Ballet Club, Nature Club, Volunteer Club, and Debate Club. Compared with pictures, the image of the protagonist and multimodal elements, such as sound, movement, expression, and background music in dynamic videos, can convey three-dimensional content information to the viewer in the most intuitive image, which is easier to attract the attention of students, and has visual advantages. For example, the static picture expressing the title of Nature Club may not be fully reflected in fact, but if it is presented in English short video, the concept of Nature Club is relatively clear and complete. For another example, in the listening part related to natural disaster in Unit 1 from the same book, the pure audio mode of news reports can be adapted into audio-visual video form. Each type of natural disaster, such as earthquake, wildfire, floods, tornado, landslide, volcanic eruption, can be equipped with corresponding pictures or short videos, and at the same time, they may be put in disorder in the text. Students are asked to sort these disordered pictures after listening. Through pictures or short videos, students can grasp the general content of the listening material and predict the general meaning of the material on this basis.

Secondly, multimodal teaching activities are organized in the listening process, which can adopt the modes of student peer-assistance, peer-discussion, or group discussion, so that students can verify the pre-listening

prediction twice from the listening content. After listening, multimodal evaluation can be carried out, such as teacher comments, student self-evaluation, student mutual evaluation, and other modes, so that students can digest and internalize listening materials from multiple angles and levels to improve their listening level.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategies in Oral English Teaching

Firstly, multimodal corpus is collected to create authentic oral imitation context. Imitation plays an irreplaceable role in language learning and is an important way to improve the spoken language level of language learners. The information age provides a variety of authentic and idiomatic language materials for language learning, such as original English movies, music, drama, TV programs, short we-media videos, etc. Students can imitate multimodal oral corpus such as pronunciation, intonation, tone, expression, and idiomatic expression habits, which has a significant effect on expressing meaning in oral communication and consolidating the foundation of oral English.

Secondly, multimodal oral communication activities should be organized to provide enough opportunities for oral practice, which influenced by the baton of the National College Entrance Examination, most of the time and energy of English teaching in senior high school is still spent on the written test, and the teaching activities lack of oral training for students, so the current issue of “dumb English” is still difficult to solve. In addition, the oral practice is a single form of students’ “dialogue” basically by reciting the “lines” of the textbook. In this regard, teachers can create multimodal oral communication context to improve students’ interest and motivation in oral expression. For example, the topic of Listening and Talking section in Unit 2 from the textbook Book 1 published by People’s Education Press is “Make reservation”. This part only provides text and three simple pictures. In fact, it belongs to the traditional single mode. Teachers can create a suitable multimodal context in which students first watch at least one short video about booking air ticket, booking a hotel room, and booking a table for dinner. Then it can be equipped with some easily accessible props for creating context, such as using mobile phones as service phones, desks as service desks, pens and paper for recording order information, homemade restaurant menus or borrowing and copying food orders from physical stores, renting customer service work clothes, etc. Finally, let the students play the role of customer service and customer communication, and then let the students exchange roles. In addition, teachers can organize English corners around the topic of “Make reservation” so that students can combine their own experiences with classmates to exchange their gains and experiences. By allowing students to experience multimodal situational communication, they can realize the practicability of oral communication, thus stimulating students’ desire and learning enthusiasm for oral communication, and internalizing practical communication skills through output.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategies in English Reading Teaching

Under the background of the new media era, students are required not only to have the ability to read continuous text content, but also to have the ability to read non-continuous text. The application of multimodal theory can inject more vitality into English reading teaching and provide more abundant modal resources. Multimodal reading teaching can cultivate students’ ability to read modal symbols and improve students’ ability to accept and understand text reading. Take the text “The Chinese Writing System: Connecting the Past and the Present” as an example in Book 1 published by People’s Education Press. Before the introduction of this article, teachers can make good use of multimodal theory to stimulate students’ interest in reading. Of course, the prerequisite for the realization of multimodal reading teaching is that teachers should make full preparation before class. For example, they should first do a good job in learning situation analysis. The text content involves the

historical evolution of Chinese character writing, which is the mother tongue and history that students are familiar with. Although the textbook is equipped with a simplified drawing of ancient Chinese characters and oracle bones, teachers can show more dynamic pictures or short videos about the evolution of Chinese characters before reading. This three-dimensional dynamic mode can make students have a deeper impression on the evolution process of Chinese characters, and also expand their knowledge and vision.

Secondly, in the process of while-reading, the multimodal teaching process can promote students' understanding of the text and internalization of knowledge. For example, students will encounter more words loaded with Chinese historical and cultural characteristics in the reading teaching process, such as longgu, hanzi, Shang Dynasty, Qin Dynasty, Emperor Qinshihuang, Chinese character, Chinese calligraphy, and so on. These words can be taught with pictures or videos. In terms of discourse construction, teachers can design graphic modes of charts or timelines, connect the evolution history of Chinese characters in series, and let students complete them in the form of exercises. In this way, students can not only be guided to transform a single form of plain text into a concise and efficient chart or mind map, but also integrate the cultural mode of "telling great Chinese stories".

Finally, in the after-reading activities, on the one hand, teachers can guide students to carry out critical reading activities, with the purpose of inferencing and evaluating multimodal discourse (Silberstein, 2002). Teachers can guide students to infer and analyze non-textual texts, judge their meaning and functions, and help students form the habit of reading texts in multiple modes. For example, teachers can guide students to think about the functions of the ancient Chinese characters and oracle pictures mentioned above. On the other hand, teachers can carry out extensive reading activities, providing one or more English texts related to the "evolution history of Chinese characters" and designing them as the "image + text" mode form similar to the news media; meanwhile, put them in disorder and ask students sort them. This kind of jigsaw reading has multimodal (image + text + sorting), which requires students to carry out logical reasoning and integration of the text in the reading process, and is more conducive to improving students' reading comprehension.

Multimodal Collaborative Strategies in English Writing Teaching

In the multimodal environment, students are required to make use of the language and cultural knowledge they have learned, and to innovate the discourse with the help of multimodal elements according to different purposes and audiences. Teaching multimodal writing requires teachers to provide students with multimodal writing materials, such as pictures and videos through newspapers, networks, and media, etc. At the same time, students are also required to use the Internet and media to find diversified information resources according to the multimodal writing materials provided by teachers, so as to prepare the necessary "raw materials" for subsequent writing. In addition to providing multi-modal writing materials through the above channels, teachers can also design writing tasks by using real situations and life-oriented cases in real life. Also teachers can organize students to carry out multimodal writing activities. Take the Reading for Writing section Book 1 published by People's Education Press as an example. The writing task is "Writing a letter of advice". One of these writing topics is about "My parents won't listen when I tell them things...", that is, how to give advice on communication problems between children and parents. Teachers can ask students to collect news, videos, movies, programs, and other materials related to this topic with the help of online information resources. First of all, students should have a more comprehensive understanding of the universality, causes, and background of this problem. At the same time, students should be guided to conduct interviews with classmates and teachers around them independently or in

the form of group cooperation in their own class or campus as “reporters”, so as to deepen their understanding of this problem. Only when the context of the problem is clearly understood will the “advice” given by students in the subsequent writing process be meaningful and targeted, and will not be “empty”. As for the specific “advice”, students can also use the multimodal form of “literature research + interview” to obtain information. In fact, this kind of multimodal writing not only allows students to complete the “writing task”, but also helps students improve their skills in solving practical problems.

Conclusion

Our metacognition of the world is stored in the mind in the form of multiple modes (Xu & Liu, 2018). Therefore, multimodal collaboration conforms to the characteristics and rules of language learning, and can be effectively applied to high school English teaching practice, which helps to stimulate students’ learning motivation and interest, make the class lively, and inject vitality into the boring class. It plays a very important role in improving students’ listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing skills as well as their abilities of understanding, analysis, critical thinking, and innovation. In the practice of multimodal teaching, teachers should always follow the student-centered concept as resource providers and facilitators and guide students to make full use of the synergistic effect of multimodal resources and to actively participate in the construction of knowledge and ability, so as to improve students’ core English literacy.

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