Enhancing Learners' Subjectivity - Application of Multimodality in Chinese EFL Classrooms of Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract The EFL teaching and learning in Chinese higher vocational colleges are undergoing reforms directed to the shift from teacher-centered knowledge transmission to learner-centered experience and knowledge construction. However, this shift faces some challenges partly due to the conception of learning and college students' teacher-centered habits and expectations. Furthermore, Chinese students in higher vocational colleges do not have a good command of English so with less confidence, their shift from passive knowledge receivers to active EFL practitioners is not easy. Therefore, it is valuable to research what pedagogy can help fulfill this shift and then enhance their learning effect and subjectivity. This paper is devoted to explore the multimodality, the multimodal pedagogy and the possible methods of implementing this pedagogy in Chinese EFL classrooms of higher vocational colleges. The application of multimodal teaching and learning shows that this strategy greatly increases learners' participation and enriches their experiences as EFL utilizers due to the learning process through their five senses or various modes, and even with their whole being. The described methods may provide the practical reference on how the multimodal pedagogy could be applied in the EFL classroom and on how to engage the passive learners with the active learning and knowledge construction. However, it should be noted that these pedagogical methods may need amendments and the statistical support on the basis of an empirical study in the future if possible.

Keywords: EFL, nature of learning, learners' subjectivity, multimodal pedagogy

1. Introduction

The article aims to explore how a multimodal approach can provide insights into the learning process. In the multimodal framework, learning is allowed to operate in communication within the human world and between the human and non-human world. Communication within the human world refers to learners' engagements with other people around, while communication between the human and non-human world can be understood as their engagements with the impersonal resources available to them in specific sites or circumstances. This process of communication involves the selecting of different modes as resources to achieve the representation of events and relations within the special context. No matter in what aspects, the multimodal approach always enables the subjectivities of both teachers and students to be realized through various modes. This is especially significant to the education reforms that happened now in China. Since 1997, the government has launched a series of basic education reforms that have attempted to, together with other aims, "shift the emphasis of teacher-centered

pedagogy to student autonomy and from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction" [1]. Hence, this article will initially confine itself to learning within the EFL classroom in Chinese higher vocational colleges although with a full recognition that learning is a complex process that can happen everywhere, any time and for everybody.

The nature of learning will be explored firstly together with the issue of identity. This part tends to reveal that, in a multimodal approach, learning is communication within which learners' identities are subject to change due to their various ways of representing their learning outcomes. Multimodality and pedagogy will then be examined and the application and implication to Chinese learners of English are also under scrutiny by implementing learner-centered and experience-based classroom activities and projects. Based on these, the article argues that a multimodal approach values different modes of meaning representation and communication in teaching and learning practices. With the application of this approach, classroom learning can become a democratic place where learners' subjectivity is realized and enhanced in their own ways of making meaning through representation and communication. What multimodality can most importantly

provide to pedagogy is that learning process can combine various modes rather than rely totally on the written materials and the oral speeches. The multimodal pedagogy helps with constructing knowledge/meaning and identity, and learners are enabled to realize their complex subjectivity.

2. Learning and Identity in Communication

2.1. The Nature of Learning

Human learning is such a complex process that has triggered many theoretical researches from philosophical, psychological and sociological perspectives. Rather than stretching out to the large literatures, the article is more specific with focuses on the learning as social process. Sociologists emphasize the relationship between learners and the life-world, as Jarvis indicates [[2], p.2]:

Consequently, no theory of leaning can legitimately omit the life-world or the wider social world within which we live since learning is a process of transforming the experiences that we have and these always occur when the individual interacts with the wider society.

From this, we can elicit the key idea that learning is to transform personal experiences through the interactions with the outside world, which would result in "transforming ourselves" by building "perceptions of external reality into our biography" [[2], p.5]. If set in the classroom, this point can offer teachers an insight that classroom leaning is where students can have more experiences, rather than just accumulating the knowledge from teachers' indoctrinations. In this sense, students' contribution is quite essential. Jarvis [[2], p.34] highlights the fact that the person through the process of learning has been an agent who can "act[s] back on the structures transforming them through learning and being transformed through the learning". Learners as the learning agents would result in the transformation of both the social world and the learners themselves. To explain what does happen, the metaphor of learning as transformation is interpreted as the similar metaphor of learning as knowledge creation. Paavola et al [[3], p.564] view knowledge creation as a social process and explain:

In a shared problem-solving process, agents who have partial but different information about the problem in question appear to improve their understanding collectively through social interaction. Accordingly, new ideas and innovations emerge *between* rather than *within* people. (italics in origin)

In knowledge creation, the role of individual subject is emphasized. Upon this, Paavola et al reach such a summary that "knowledge creation is a matter of individual initiative embedded in fertile group and organization activities" [[3], p.567]. Paavola et al bring up the so-called most widely used metaphor "learning as *construction*", holding the constructive view that learners construct or transform knowledge [[3], p.572].

From the above discussion, we can manifest that no matter what approach/metaphor for learning, different metaphors do have quite different ideas about the learner,

and these metaphors differ a lot in that they share a core issue: *individual subject and its role in learning process.* The following discussion, therefore, will turn to the issue of identity.

2.2. The Issue of Identity

Identity is also termed as "subjectivity" and "core identity" [[4], p.100]. This article would use the term "subjectivity" more when I analyze the classroom activities. No matter what term is used, and to put it simply, Gee defines it as a certain "kind of person" due to the many different meanings of identity in the literature. To sketch more, Gee writes [[4], p.99]:

The "kind of person" one is recognized as "being," at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable.

As he claims later, in this sense, people have multiple identities related not to their nature but to their performance in society [4]. Learning as social process discussed above, is connected closely with people's multiple identities. Constructing identities through learning process has been studied a lot [4,5]. To establish what kind of person he/she is, learner's engagements with the social, or more specific here, learning practices, are very significant. This is the key reason why identity is often deployed to study educational theories and practices, like the present article doing so. Learner's subjectivity plays a key role to initiate and involve these practices, through which he/she realizes their multiple identities. How do these happen in the classroom? Creating classroom as communities of learners, as a popular wave of school reform, is what has done now to this and is also what Gee [4] employed to elucidate how to form "Affinity-identity", one of his four ways to view identity. He explains that:

Such classrooms stress collaborative (group, team) learning, distributed knowledge (i.e. knowledge that is not in any one person's head, but distributed across the group, its practices, and the tools and technologies it uses), and a variety of other sorts of distinctive learning practices (e.g. collaborative research, use of the Internet). These practices and the ways in which learners share and co-participate in them are meant to create a distinctive identity for learners. [[4], p.107]

Obviously, identity formation can be achieved in collaborative learning with sharing and co-participation. This comes to reflect another metaphor of learning as participation, or that participation is one means of learning [3,6]. Up to now, I have examined the issue of identity and learning processes as transformation, knowledge creation/construction, and participation. Two implications deserve consideration for this article. First, identity/subjectivity needs much respect in the classroom learning. This means, on the one hand, how to cultivate learner's willingness to involve the classroom activities is rather significant, though it is not easy to do so. On the other hand, learning should be an experience that helps construct learner's multiple identities. Second, identities in learning are changeable in different contexts, the reason why the plural form is used, and can be manipulated in various processes of learning. These show the possibilities of many roles that learners can take depend on what techniques are used

in the classroom learning. Multimodality is what I turn to exemplify these techniques, and the different identities in the EFL classroom learning. Before we go further to multimodality and pedagogy, let's see how the nature of learning is distinctive in the multimodal framework.

2.3. The Nature of Learning in the Multimodal Framework

The sociological interpretations of learning as transformation, as knowledge creation/construction, and as participation discussed above are all adopted in the multimodal framework to develop the notion of learning. Communication, meaning making, and multiple identities are the key concepts here. Learning is the instance of communication. The communication here does not just cover our usual and daily interaction by using language, either spoken or written, but extends beyond just language, like the communication through images when viewing TV and surfing the internet [[7], p.1]. According to Norris, moving images or still photos can communicate meaning to the viewer, and she goes further to include all movements and all material objects that carry meaning when they are perceived by a person [[7], p.2]. All these meaning carriers are called communicative modes in Norris's book, or signs and semiotics in Kress [8]. It is in the communicational frame between a person and the social semiotics around, no matter rising from the other persons like interlocutors, instructors or teachers, or from images (layout, color, sound, font, size, etc.) and movements (gesture, posture, distance between people, etc.), that learning happens.

Learning is connected with social semiotics in the multimodal framework. The embedded relationship here, as Kress points out, is "focus[ing] on the role of the social and the material resources in and through which meaning is made and by which learning therefore takes place" [[8], p.182]. Meaning making and learning are in essence the same, but posed from different perspectives, one semiotic and the other pedagogic [8]. Kress states that "learning is the obverse of making meaning and learning is the result of a semiotic/conceptual meaning-making engagement with an aspect of the world" [[8], p.178]. Meaning-making to some extent echoes the sociological analysis of learning as knowledge creation/construction. Another notable multimodal researcher, Carey Jewitt, highlights that:

Learning is a process whereby meanings are taken in by a person and made sense of in relation to their present and previous experience... Through that process meanings are re-made by them [[9], p.76].

From this perspective, meanings are re-made to create new knowledge that will be accompanied with learner's past and present experience. So knowledge here is not "the outcome of processes regulated by power and authority but of everyday, entirely banal processes of meaning-making by individuals in their engagement with the world" [[8], p.178]. Moreover, both the subjectivity and the position of learners as meaning makers are established firmly. Learners' personal experiences mean a lot in making meaning/knowledge, rather than just acquiring under teachers' power and so-called authority, if in the classroom learning.

In the communications with different modes or signs, learners' identities are changeable. For example, in multimodal communication, learner can be either the designer or the interpreter in making sense of modes/signs/semiotics. To confirm this, Kress's production of a very clear synopsis on semiotic communication is partly quoted here [[8], p.36]:

Communication is a process with two stages. Stage one is dominated by the interest of the initial maker of the *sign-complex*, the *rhetor,* with his or her intent of disseminating the *sign-complex* as a *message* and for the *message* to be taken as a *prompt*. In stage two, the *interest* and *attention* of an *interpreter* is in focus: it leads to *selection* of what is criterial for the *interpreter* in the initial message and to the *framing* of the selected aspects of the initial *message* as a *prompt*; which is, subsequently, *interpreted*. The meaning made in that *interpretation* can become the basis of a new *sign-complex* in the making of a new *message*.

The *sign-complex* here can be seen as the objects studied, consisting of different signs with complex inter-relationships within. In the multimodal classroom, learning can be designed by the student, i.e. rhetor/designer, when collaborative learning is organized. And their design works would in turn be interpreted by other learners in the procedures from selecting → framing → interpreting as explained in details above. The intent, interest and attention of individuals are crucial to the new meaning making. In addition to be designers and interpreters, learners can also take the role as representors when the representational resources are available [8,10]. No matter what role a learner tends to perform, what the multimodal approach of learning emphasizes is that in what means learners deal with the resources to communicate their meaning in design, interpretation and representation. The interest and attention of an individual learner will always come first and are pivotal to the successful learning. Next part will accordingly move to discuss the multimodal approach/multimodality and pedagogy.

3. Multimodality and Pedagogy

To understand what a multimodal approach of pedagogy is, it is to figure out what happens in the classroom. A starting point to address this, in Stein's words, is "conceptualizing classrooms as semiotic spaces in which human beings who are the agents of their own meaning making produce multimodal texts—visual, written, spoken, performative, sonic, and gestural" [[10], p.333]. In other words, what happen in the classroom are the activities of meaning making with the multimodal semiotic world. A multimodal approach will therefore be examined first in this part, which will be followed by the discussion on multimodal teaching and learning, since the activities of meaning making, in the perspective of pedagogy, can be paraphrased as teaching and learning, accordingly, the teacher and the student as agents.

3.1. Multimodality

Communication has always been multimodal [[11], p.3]. If looking at the common communications between

human beings, we will hear each other the words, see each other the facial expressions and body movements, and pay attention to the environments by looking, listening, and even touching. So, being multimodal here is a fact that "human beings perceive the external world using the five senses of touch, hearing, sight, smell and taste" [12]. As Bellik and Burger indicate, natural communication between human beings in most situations is multimodal, as it combines several communication modes (i.e. visual mode, sound mode, gestural mode, etc.). If looking at the communication through the material objects, for example, a picture, the communication modes are the words on it if there is any (their fonts and sizes), the color, the overall layout, the images etc. that of course are perceived by five senses. In this sense, the communication through objects is multimodal, too. To make such a simple and even a bit narrow interpretation for what is multimodal approach, this article just aims to set a clear division between subject and object. All the modes produced from the subjects and the objects are the resources of meaning making that leads to learning. In discussing the multimodal teaching and learning later, it is significant that both teachers and learners need to look at themselves and each other as well as the material objects.

The large amount of research on multimodal approach mainly draws on the theory of social semiotics which can be traced back to Halliday's socio-semiotic theory of language [13]. The premise of multimodal approach is "the idea of limitations of language – the limitations of all modes ---, of the *partiality of all modes*" [[14], p.58]. This recognition has profound influence upon the views of teaching and learning. Jewitt et al focus on mode rather than on content or pedagogic models, taking a science lesson as an example to show that teachers draw on a wide range of resources/modes, not on speech alone, to construct 'blood circulation' as an entity [[15], p.327]. Questioning the central status of language in classroom learning is the first challenge the multimodal approach poses. The second challenge it presents is the learners' subjectivity. It aims to argue against the fact that "learning is an acquisitive process in which students 'acquire' information directly from the teacher (or from textbook, or worksheet, etc.), which marginalizes the role of students in learning" [[11], p.10]. According to Kress et al, learning is neither marginalizing students as passive receivers nor teachers as simplified facilitators; rather, learning "needs to be seen as a dynamic process of transformative sign-making which actively involve teacher and students" [[11], p.10]. In a word, the classroom pedagogy with multimodal approach is the sign-making and its meaning making through the communicational learning with all possible modes including language (speech or writing) rising from both the subject (teacher and learners) and the object. In such a dynamic process, how teachers practice the multimodal teaching and how learners experience and realize the multimodal learning will be explored in the following paragraphs.

3.2. The Multimodal Teaching and Learning

What is multimodal teaching? To put it simply, "a teacher can utilize modes that are usually used interdependently (like gesture and spoken language) as two distinct meaning making systems, when such a distinction is beneficial for teaching/leaning" [[7], p.129]. Turn back to the science lesson of blood circulation mentioned above. In the party of the teachers, their speech and body movements like gesture, gaze, and posture, their drawings on the white board, the artifacts they bring into the classroom, etc. all work together as sign complex or entity. The above modes all carry "the affordance in Kress's terms, or the meaning potential of a mode for Van Leeuwen", which "is shaped by how a mode has been used, what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social convention that inform its use in context [[16], p.24]. In the party of the learners, these modes and their affordance/meaning potential are the semiotic resources for them to hear, to see, to feel, and to observe, leading to their multimodal experience of learning. As mentioned earlier in this part, the observation between teachers and learners is meaningful. What a teacher has done with different modes can be seen as the sign of communication, and the responses from the learners, for example, their nodding, their copying the drawing, their touching the artifacts, etc. can be seen as the sign of learning. Learners' subjectivity need much respect and this can instruct teacher's design of pedagogy. In this sense, the multimodal teaching is to offer learners the agenda/opportunity (in and out of classroom) to work and deal with different modes.

Stein's [[17], p.122] case study of the course of "Pathology of the Ear" is utilized here to exemplify how teacher can help realize the multimodal learning. The first problem met in "Pathology of the Ear" is that the students feel difficult to understand the basic anatomy of the middle ear structure, which is represented two-dimensionally in the textbook diagrams. What their teachers do is organizing group working, with the supply of a box and other materials that suitable to represent the inner structures in the middle ear. In the process, they work with teachers' guide and sometimes the able peers' ideas to 'translate' the two-dimensional diagrams into a three-dimensional model that occupies space. The second problem is that the students do not understand how sound moves through the inner ear. What teachers do this time is hiring a hall where students work in teams to dramatically depict the sound movement with the provided textbooks and posters. In dealing with these two problems, the teachers "take students out of the 'traditional pen and paper' approach to learning" and ask them to figure out their own problems by doing and experiencing [[17], p.123]. The process of doing and experiencing the experiments is their working with modes and the relationship between these modes. So, knowledge is re-made and "the learner is constructed as agentive, critical and resourceful" [[17], p.124]. To some extent, the multimodal teaching is inviting learners to do and experience in order to re-make the difficult learning into more accessible and closer to them.

Cooperated with the multimodal teaching, it is the multimodal learning from the perspective of learners. What will be done actually in the multimodal learning? To make it explicit, we can set into two categories: interactive and non-interactive. The interactive multimodal learning "includes simulations, modeling, and real world experiences; typically includes collaboration with peers, but could be an individual interacting with resource", and the non-interactive one "includes using text with illustrations,

watching and listening to animations, listening to lecture with graphics on devices such as whiteboard, etc.; typically involves individualized learning, or whole-group work that includes listening, observing, or reading, but little to no interaction" [[18], p.13].

Learners will be encouraged to attend the modes or the semiotic resources from the communication with the teachers or the interaction through the materials like words, images, artifacts, drawing, music/sound etc. So, the multimodal learning shapes the communication in the classroom beyond the language, which is only one of the modes that offer potential meanings. The shift from the focus on language to the focus on the modes results in the formation of social semiotic theories that study signs or modes.

Semiotics does not deal with learning [[8], p.182]. Its significance for learning lies in the focus on learners' subjectivity. "Social semiotic theories place human beings at the center of meaning-making: as designers and interpreters of meaning, they make active choices, according to their interests, from the semiotic resources available to them" [[17], p.2]. Learning in the multimodal classroom, learners are exposed the multimodal texts and this entails "a conscious awareness of the relationship between modes, learning and identity" [[17], p.122]. So, a multimodal approach poses high requirements for learners. The multimodal learners are aware of their active and changeable roles, and able to take and play different roles in order to do/experience learning, with the scaffolding from the teachers and peers in collaboration. Being active will enable the learning as "transformative engagement in the world, transformation constantly of the self in that engagement, transformation of the resources for representation outwardly and inwardly" [[19], p.21]. Constant transformation of the self, may be seen as one of the ultimate outcomes of learning, as the transformation to some extent implies the personal enhancement and the upgrading abilities to deal with different modes. The other outcome will be the production of representational works or practices as the result of the outward and inward resources transformation.

So the notion of classroom pedagogy as "a discourse that informs the production of teacher and student subjectivities in the classroom" [[20], p.134] needs to be more specific. Learners' production of representational works is significant to perform their subjectivities or identities. The production of teacher should include part of design leading to learners' production. So the classroom pedagogy, especially the multimodal one, comprises the production of learners, too. And their production is also multimodal, mediating different modes (writing language, images, sound/music, actions, etc.). To conclude, a multimodal learning means the active transformation and production of knowledge, or the terms used before, the active knowledge creation and meaning making. Accordingly, learners' identities are changeable from transformers, representors, knowledge creators to meaning makers, though they are sometimes overlapping in between.

4. Applications and Implications

As both a learner (in my own schooling before) and a teacher in the EFL classroom, I feel a large gap between the language knowledge and the language application. For a long time, both my students and I are learning dead English from the textbooks. And this is what we called "language acquisition" through the teaching model of transmission. As Halliday comments, it is "rather an unfortunate term because it suggests that language is some kind of a commodity to be acquired, and……if it is taken too literally the consequences can be rather harmful" [[13], p.16]. This 'deficit theory" of language learning is now avoided and linguists turn to a functional approach to language and language development. To develop the English language competence, multimodality is deployed to create a democratic classroom where learners are doing participatory learning rather than acquisition learning. To make it clear enough, the learning process here will be divided into two phases: the input from teachers and the take-in and out-put from learners. The pedagogic practices with multimodality in these two phases will be construed in this part.

Before moving to the methods of implementing the multimodal pedagogy in focus, it is essential to introduce my EFL students with whom I apply the multimodal teaching so as to involve them in the multimodal learning. My students are the year-one business English majors in Guangdong Industry Polytechnic, a higher vocational college in Guangzhou city, China. They take the 3-year programme of Business English, with the first year studying general English and the following two years, studying business English (ESP). So the students I work with are freshmen aging around 18-19 at college level, not university level, which means in the Chinese context that such students are lack of solid language foundation from their middle school learning. In other words, they do not have a good command of English, not to mention their natural utilization in real life. As mentioned above, they have been learning dead language for years and used to rote learning. Although they may notice that their previous experiences are not successful, they do not have any clue of changing that. When entering the college, they still tent to be the passive takers, struggling to transform themselves to be the givers in the EFL classroom. This partly manifests that they enjoy language input, so more competent in reading and listening, while they feel very timid in the output process of speaking and writing.

In the framework of multimodality, language is just one of the modes that offer resources for meaning making and representation, and images, sound/music, drawings, actions etc. are not considered as the illustrations to the language, but considered as the modes deserving the same serious attention. This is largely due to the dramatic technological and social changes that lead to multimodal communications rather than monolingual or linguistic communications. Print literacy, media literacy, computer and information literacy and, essentially, the concept of multiple literacies are emphasized to empower individuals [21]. The New London Group is prominent in its promotion of new literacy pedagogy, "us[ing] the term 'multiliteracies' as a way to focus on the realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness" [[22], p.64]. What is the implication that multiliteracies pose to foreign language teaching and learning? To show its concern for this, the Modern Language Association in the United States issued a report, "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World". With the construct of "trans-lingual and trans-cultural competence", the report

underlines the importance of students' acquiring "a basic knowledge of the history, geography, culture, and literature of the society or societies whose language they are learning; [and] the ability to understand and interpret its radio, television, and print media" [23]. Such a trans-lingual and trans-cultural competence is meaningful in any foreign language classroom in terms of its multimodal literacies practices involving cultural products and texts like radio, television, print media, etc. So in the EFL teaching to Chinese students from higher vocational colleges aging around 18-19, literacy practices must be multimodal. For such a youth group that has fully exposed to computer technology and information, a multimodal approach can meet their demand to read and interpret multimodal texts, thus becoming multiliterate.

In conducting the multimodal teaching, the course book used is New Horizon College English published by Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press in 2011 in Beijing. It is a content-base and topic-oriented textbook, covering the most common life and social issues in eight units. The course focusing on the comprehensive English skills is assigned four periods (40 minutes per period) per week. Due to the richness of each unit and the input, take-in and out-put phases, each unit takes 6 periods, probably one more period in some units for the summary, feedback and question time.

Take the unit of environmental protection as an example. The first stage of input process is to familiarize the key vocabulary concerning what human beings have done to our earth. The memory of new vocabulary is all along a big obstacle for my students. To improve the basic skills in literacy, like vocabulary and pronunciation, video, cartoon pictures and audio are used here. In the warming-up, Michael Jackson's music video "earth song" is played first. After viewing this, I invite students to express their responses in English. Then some fans of Michael in the classroom are really excited and they attend much to the dance and the lyrics. And the others feel really astonished at the scenes in the video that animals are killed, natural preservations are destroyed, water is polluted severely, etc. At this moment, I ask them to go back to the literary text, to find out the English terms for the environmental issues shown in the video. The literacy activity bridges the translation between the writing mode and the other modes in the video, like images, colors, and actions. Students perform so well in the location of these new terms in the text, as the multimodal video text has made these issues explicit and what they need to locate is just how these are expressed in the English text, like air/water pollution, rainforest destruction, acid rain, ozone layer destruction, global warming, overpopulation, etc.

Then the mp4 file is played, reading the whole text. Looking at the text on the computer screen and wearing the earphones, the students read and listen to these issues. The cartoon pictures, illustration of the same issues, are displayed after that as a memory exercises. Students take turns to announce the relevant issue when a specific cartoon is shown. For example, a cartoon depicts a very big bird, which hangs many eggs in the necks, in the body, in the feet, and even in the tail. The students first enjoy the funny picture and quickly associate the picture with the overpopulation phenomenon. The multimodal texts are helpful to make the memory exercises less demanding.

"Much of memory is located in the senses, in the body" [[10], p.334]. In the input process of learning new English terms, the sound mode of music and yelling and the visual mode of pictures and words carry much memory sign, and are much more impressive than the learning on just the written words.

The second-stage of input process takes the strategy of doing and experiencing to enable students to discuss the above environmental issues in the structure of "problem --- solution --- evaluation". To be more specific, this stage aims to establish a communicational arena where students in group interpret their understanding of the literacy text. It is a simulated international conference on environmental problems throughout the world. Different groups represent different countries to give a short speech upon their own countries' problems, for example, Canada's overfishing, Indonesia's overpopulation, Brazil's rainforest destruction, etc. Upon their own reading and group discussion, they elicit the relevant information from the literary text to fill in the three boxes of "problem --- solution --- evaluation". The strategy of learning by doing is firstly to turn away from the teacher-centered pedagogy resulted in the so called "authoritative" interpretation of the text; and secondly it is to exercise the application of English language in the classroom simulation context, rather than reading the dead language in texts. In this input process, the teacher is the facilitator to help them elicit the useful information, realizing the mode switch from the writing to speaking, and accordingly the change in language register, from the formal to the informal. Also the teacher can be one of the participants, for example, the chairperson in the simulated conference. In the part of the students, they interpret their understanding using their own preferred modes, including body movements and pitch of the voices. Rather than the individual literacy reading, the simulated conference allows the students to represent the information orally together with other modes like gestures and eye contacts.

The take-in and out-put process later is designed to fully exploit students' learning subjectivity and thus fully value their production of representational works. It is a project of representing any environmental problem, and then try to influence students around, relating to their own campus life. Students groups were requested to contribute some works to this project. The project turned out to be amazing in the end. Some groups preferred the computer-supporting learning. They used the PowerPoint to demonstrate environmental problems, for instance, air and water pollution, and desertification in China, deploying such modes as sound, picture, animation, and words. Some groups chose to demonstrate the simple experiments to call for 3R (reduce, reuse, and recycle). The experiments, like paper recycle, acid rain effect, and the greenhouse effect, were explained orally together with the whole procedures of actions. In these experiments, students' speech and body movements are the major modes. Some other groups were really good at designing posters in which modes of drawing, layout, color, and images were combined. The multimodal approach of pedagogy here integrates the informal learning outside the classroom into the classroom learning. The students made use of the resources available to them in their lives and then re-produced them in new representation. This is what

Stein terms as "*re-sourcing resources*" that means "taking invisible, taken-for-granted resources to a new context of situation to produce new meanings" [[10], p.335]. What multimodality can benefit students is, according to Stein, the recognition of "students as remakers and transformers of the representational resources available to them" [[10, p.335]. In other words, students' identities are constructed through their own production of multimodal texts.

5. Conclusion

This article states the nature of learning, learners' subjectivity, multimodality and the multimodal pedagogy. It also demonstrates the multimodal teaching and learning in the EFL classroom with an example on the detailed teaching and learning phases conducted in a Chinese higher vocational college. Through the observation of students' classroom performance, the application of multimodal pedagogy greatly increases my students' participation and enriches their experiences as EFL utilizers. The current emphasis on combining ICT into classroom teaching will bring more opportunities and diversity to the multimodal pedagogy. For the study of this field, the described methods/phases may provide the practical reference on how to transform our passive students to active learners and knowledge constructors. Enhancing students' subjectivity is the challenge that many Chinese EFL teachers from higher vocational colleges have to confront because most of the college students in China are even afraid of speaking English now. My use of multimodality in teaching them English is the attempt to deal with the challenge. However, it should be noted that these pedagogical methods may need amendments and the statistical support on the basis of an empirical study in the future if possible.

Acknowledgements

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