

Using an arts-integrated multimodal approach to promote English learning: A case study of two Taiwanese junior college students

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ABSTRACT: The theory of learning multimodality is receiving greater attention. Its application in language learning classes is also increasing in number. Since Chinese-speaking EFL learners are likely to be visual learners, as an instructor of Taiwanese EFL students, I have come to believe that arts-integrated, multimodal projects help less confident and less motivated students. In this article I report on two case-study students over the two successive years, when they were under my instruction and engaged in a series of multimodal English writing tasks, including an online literature circle, five first-person narratives with images, and digital storytelling. Using a case-study approach, I closely examined the two students' course work and closing reflections each semester. The results of the qualitative data analysis revealed that the multimodal learning practices enhanced the two students' motivation and confidence, after they had been discouraged by conventional language learning instructions. A discussion of the two students' evolution into active English writers is presented in detail. Their compositions, constructed within multiple modes, are provided to exemplify that arts-integrated pedagogy can inspire and empower at-risk EFL students and lead them to a realm that a paper-and-pencil task can never match.

KEYWORDS: Multimodal learning, Chinese EFL students, case study, arts integration, writing.

I didn't want to do the homework. But when you said in class that we could also use pictures to respond to the book we were reading, I was thinking, "Really, can we do that?" So I started drawing the ship with the MS Paint, and it was fun. (Lin, personal communication, 2010)

INTRODUCTION

Background: The theoretical framework of the study

The theory of learning multimodality has been receiving increasing attention. It is held that all communication is multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). When communicating, we use different modes of text, image, sound and gesture to make meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003). All the modes we use contribute to the construction of meaning in different ways, and no one mode stands alone in the process of making meaning (Jewitt, 2008). As language teachers, we have observed that our students' lives move between art, music, movement, mathematics, drama and language as ways to think about the world (Short, Kauffman & Kahn, 2000). They can access semiotic resources of all varieties—visual, aural, gestural and spatial—to assemble meaning (Siegel, 2012). We also have acknowledged the great move “from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the dominance of the image” and the

great move “from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen” (Kress, 2003, p.1). Accordingly, as Kress (2003) put it, “we can no longer treat literacy (or ‘language’) as the sole, the main, let alone the major means for representation and communication” (p. 35). In other words, literacy needs to be redefined within current curriculum contexts (Walsh, 2010).

Siegel (2012) suggested that school literacy curricula have to change to integrate multimodality because: 1) literacies are changing, 2) youths bring multimodal practices to school, and 3) multimodal practice can reframe at-risk students as learners of promise (pp. 672-674). According to Siegel (2012), a multimodal approach allows at-risk students to “demonstrate knowledge and critical understandings far beyond that which they displayed when language was the sole mode of meaning making and communication” (p. 671). To teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this message is of particular importance, because more often than not we observe our students struggle as they are hindered in the linguistic mode of communication, either in written form or in speech.

Rationale of adopting the multimodal learning as the theoretical framework

I teach general education English courses at a technological university in Taiwan. The university offers both four-year undergraduate and five-year junior college programs to students. The aim of general education English courses at the university is to develop students’ linguistic skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students enrolled in technological universities in Taiwan receive vocationally oriented education and hands-on training and are usually evaluated as less motivated or lower academic achieving students compared to students enrolled in general universities (Huang, 2010; Sheu, Hsu, & Wang, 2007).

During the past several years, I have tried a variety of approaches to engage my low-achieving or low-motivated students and most of them have worked well. While examining student learning processes and results recorded over time in my teacher’s journal, I noticed that the curriculum design based on the theory of learning multimodality has been particularly beneficial to certain students. Students who were especially intimidated or discouraged by the conventional linguistic mode of meaning-making, that is, written texts, found a way to voice their thoughts and to be engaged in English learning as I provided them with an alternative mode, such as images, to construct meaning.

Gibson and Ewing (2011) along with others believe that “all knowledge is related to every other piece of knowledge even though some relationships may be more direct and stronger than others” (p. 16). Therefore, an integrated curriculum with blurring boundaries among different disciplines can offer a powerful pedagogy as it reflects students’ real life knowledge and experiences. Gardner (1983) also held that there were multiple intelligences and therefore multiple ways of creating knowledge. Among the seven intelligences that Gardner (1983) proposed, visual intelligence allows a learner to use images as a way of understanding the world and communicating about it (Wilhelm, 1995). Olson (1992) stated that students who think and learn visually process information through images instead of through words, and these students often have great difficulties succeeding in school. If teachers encourage visual communication, a process of sending and receiving messages using images

(Bamford, 2003), the images can naturally evoke students' interest and may be used to provide powerful alternatives to text-based learning instruction (LeCompte & Bauml, 2012). They can also be used to motivate less engaged readers and allow such readers to revisit and rethink the experience of reading in ways previously unavailable to them (Wilhelm, 1995). Moreover, the images can be used for EFL or ESL (English as a Second Language) learners to observe, relate to, discuss and develop academic language for abstract concepts (LeCompte & Bauml, 2012).

Chinese-speaking learners are generally thought to be more visually oriented learners than those in Western society, on account of the pictorial Chinese characters forming the written language. As Carson (2001) cited in his study, "Chinese characters were originally pictographs in which the sign indicated the word by meaning, not sound" (p. 145). Learning to read Chinese depends less on phonological awareness skills and more on visual skills than does reading in English (Huang & Hanley 1995). As a result, Chinese characters appear to boost visual memory, and mastering Chinese characters involves a relatively complex task of visual recognition and memory (Flaherty, 2003). In an early article by Kaplan (1966, reprinted in 2001), he stressed the influence of cultural factors on writing patterns and indicated that the English paragraph is generally linear in structure while an oriental paragraph is more circular-like (p. 21). The circular writing structure adds further support to the suggestion that Chinese-speaking writers are visual-based learners.

In short, as Chinese-speaking writers tend to be more visual learners, using a multimodal learning approach that emphasises visual arts should benefit them more than other approaches.

Research questions

Studies examining the use of arts to improve language learning have been increasing in number (see Literature Review). However, not many have focused particularly on Chinese-speaking learners. Considering that Chinese-speaking learners may tend to be visual learners and may receive more support from images when constructing meaning, it is essential to discuss how multimodal learning with an emphasis on arts benefits Chinese-speaking EFL students. As mentioned earlier, my experience in teaching lower achieving EFL students heightened my awareness of the benefits of using a multimodal approach. Among the students I taught, two particular students motivated me to conduct the current case study. In this article, I introduce their learning processes and results, and argue that multimodal learning practices enhanced the two Chinese-speaking EFL students' motivation and confidence when they had been discouraged by conventional language learning instructions.

The following two research questions led me to conduct the case study: (1) What happened to the two specific case students' learning experiences when I used arts-integrated multimodal projects in my EFL classes? (2) What did the two students' learning processes reveal about the effects such an approach had on their English learning practices?

LITERATURE REVIEW: ARTS-INTEGRATED, MULTIMODAL LITERACY

The arts provide a way to engage students in learning. Berghoff & Borgmann (2007) call it a “third space” (p. 24). They argue that in order to make school more engaging, especially for disenfranchised and disengaged students, teachers can look to the arts because

they unleash students’ capacity to be self-directed and innovative, to develop self-discipline and self-confidence. They allow students to reveal themselves in more ways and allow teachers to know their students at more levels resulting in more profound learning and more empathetic relationships between students and with teachers. (p. 24)

For disadvantaged, disengaged and disenfranchised students, arts particularly provide them the means to find a way back to learning (Gibson & Ewing, 2011).

Plenty of empirical studies have been conducted to investigate integration of arts-integrated teaching in literacy programs. For example, grounded in multimodal theories of literacy, Kesler (2011) encouraged his pre-service students to think critically and be inventive when they read a text. His purpose was to have the students transform understandings by building connections mapping, one sign system onto another (p. 72). For example, his students, being engaged in a book club activity, read historical fiction texts and then responded through a variety of activities, such as sketch-to-stretch, stop and jot, two-sided entries, representational sketches, and character web of relationships, etc. The students created digital stories as their final responses to the reading texts. Kesler (2011) observed that students’ multimodal engagement with the text deepened their meaning-making; they also realised the multiple layers of literacy.

Callahan and King (2011) investigated two high-school class’s creative writing practices. The students were required to interpret poems by using the full range of affordances provided by PowerPoint, including visuals, animations, sound, colour, and font. The researchers realised that three kinds of classroom “remix” (that is, integration) were related to the practices. The visual, linguistic and auditory composition elements afforded by the PowerPoint technology were blended to form the composition remix. The teachers and students created a remix of insider and outsider mindsets, where students were often positioned as experts in the classroom. The third remix was participation, suggesting that classroom hierarchies, consisting of those who do well and those who do not, were challenged. Through the three kinds of remix, students with various talents and abilities were allowed to participate in the classroom discourse in new ways.

One recently prevailing trend in employing arts-integrated instruction is to have it integrated with the practices of new literacies (the New London Group, 1996) and accordingly engage students in digital video composing activities. Miller (2013) proposed six major benefits of using digital video composition in classrooms, one being that such classroom activities allow students to create and compose connections between the original text/textbook concept and the emerging multimodal text. She observed that the students trans-mediate text into sensory modes for representation in order to translate and link the symbolic systems and to understand and communicate concepts. She gave one example showing that a student, in what the teacher called

“the lowest performing group”, discovered a new resource for learning through acting for a digital video. The student translated from “just words” to “real doing” and therefore had a deeper understanding of the text (p. 417).

Arts-integrated instruction is considered beneficial to ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. The New York State Education Department (2010) proposed that integrating the arts and art-making into English language teaching and learning could help ESL students to “develop and deepen their understanding of their own and others’ human experience” (p. 2). Moreover, “the arts can open doors for high levels of analysis and also challenge students to explore themselves and their surroundings, and thus find avenues for sophisticated comprehension and communication” (p. 2). Ajayi’s (2009) empirical study examined ESL students’ use of drawings and verbal explanations to react to a cellular phone advertisement. Her findings echoed the official document presented above. She found that the ESL students produced new meanings, which reflected their personal interests as shaped by their life histories. Moreover, the use of multimodal pedagogy allowed the students to “enter into text composition from different paths” and “fostered critical literacy practices” (p. 594).

CURRICULAR CONTEXT

Students enrolled in the junior college program at the technological university where I teach are marine-related majors. Every year, I teach two English classes, one majoring in Marine Engineering and the other Shipping Technology. Generally speaking, the students’ English proficiency is not high; on average less than one fourth of the two classes pass the elementary level of GEPT (General English Proficiency Test, administered by the Language Training and Testing Center in Taiwan to assess students’ English proficiency).¹ To strengthen students’ basic English skills, the first and second years of the general education English courses (each with three credit hours) are carried out with specially designed remedial instruction. In the third and fourth years (three and two credit hours respectively), I am expected to implement more advanced reading and writing instruction. During the years of 2010 and 2011, I integrated the following activities: online literature circle, first-person narrative writing with images, and digital storytelling, which I introduce in detail below.

Online literature circle

The online literature circle was conducted in the third-year English course. In addition to adopting an EFL textbook for regular classroom learning material, I asked the students to choose a title from a suggested list (from the Oxford Bookworms series, which are simplified versions of English classics) based on their reading proficiency. The students independently read self-chosen books during the week and came to class to discuss with their group members the pages they read. Afterwards, the students went online and posted their reading responses. A group discussion board was offered through the school-constructed e-platform, so that students could post messages and respond to each other. During the year, every student read two books, one in each semester.

¹ The elementary level of the GEPT is presumed by the LTTC to be appropriate for students who have studied English through junior high school. Therefore, students enrolled in the junior college are supposed to be proficient enough to pass the test.

First-person narrative writing with images

In the fourth-year English course, in addition to the traditional EFL textbook, other writing practices were implemented. During the first semester, the students were asked to compose five first-person narratives under the theme “Something about me”. Students wrote about their interests, families and friends, life experiences, or their life goals and dreams. The assessment rubric provided included attention to themes, supporting details and accuracy. Each article had to be at least ten sentences long and with at least one image, usually a self-taken photo, to illustrate the text content (see article excerpt in Figure 1). The students posted their five articles on the school e-platform for the class to view.

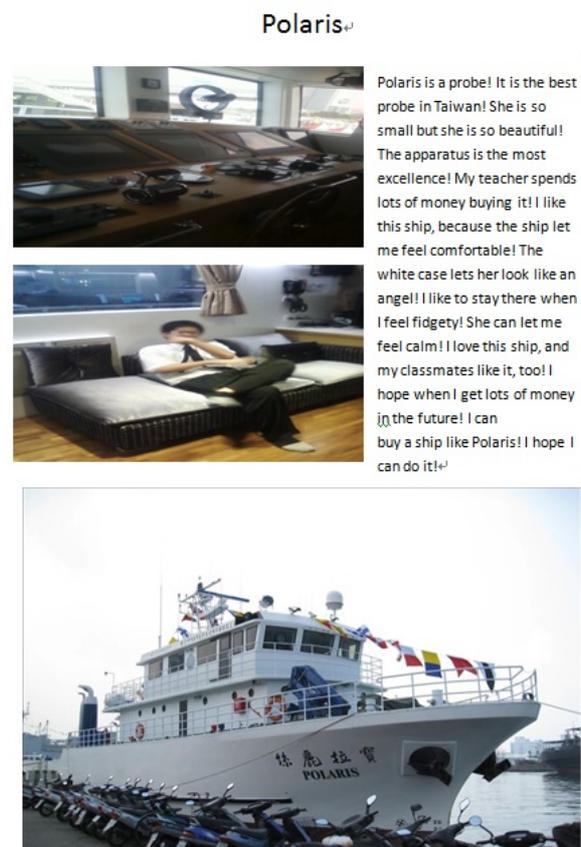


Figure 1. Excerpt of a student's first-person narrative

Digital storytelling

In the second semester of the fourth-year English course, I expanded the idea of first-person narrative into a digital story activity (Lambert, 2006; Meadows, 2003) by asking the students to add recorded voice, still or moving images, and music or other sounds. Students followed a seven-step model (adapted from Chung, 2007) to create their videos and I used a rubric (adapted from Barrett, 2006, Chung, 2007, and Sadik, 2008) to assess the components of their final work. I also asked two English teachers to come in as judges to choose the best videos, while the two classes viewed all the videos in class and voted for the most popular ones. (See the example cuts of three students' digital stories in Figure 2.)



Figure 2. Student digital story cuts

METHODOLOGY OF THE CASE STUDY

Merriam (1998) proposed that case study is suitable if the researcher is interested in process (p. 33); she also stressed that case study can be useful for studying educational innovations and for evaluating programs (p. 41). Therefore, in this article, I adopted a longitudinal, qualitative, case-study approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding (Stake, 1995) of the effect of arts-integrated multimodal projects on student learning, especially on how two case-study students evolved as English learners. Although this situated research provides insight into only two particular students' experiences, I believe that the findings have application to a broad audience, as the traditional paper-and-pencil mode of teaching is failing many of our students.

The implementation of the above-mentioned multimodal projects received positive student responses. However, the students perceived both advantages and difficulties. Most students found the projects interesting and felt motivated through their participation in the activities. Their writing skills also showed improvements as time went by, and I conducted studies and wrote reports on student learning experiences, perceptions, and the improvement of their English (Lee, 2011; Lee, 2012). During the two years of teaching and researching, I saw that two students' learning experiences were particularly significant.

The two case-study students

My research was focused on two male students, Chen and Lin (both pseudonyms). During their third and fourth years of junior college (about 16 to 17-years-old), they were enrolled in my general English courses. In the two successive years, they, and all other students in the course, participated in the class activities and reflected in the retrospective survey at the end of every semester. I did not pay them any particular attention until the very end of the last semester, when I noticed their unique learning experiences, and felt that investigating their learning results could enhance my own understanding and perhaps contribute to the existing literature. So I obtained their consent to use their course work and reflections as sources of data for this case study.

For a brief introduction, Chen majored in Shipping Technology and exhibited low confidence in learning English. Lin majored in Marine Engineering and exhibited low motivation to learn English.

Data collection and analysis

As a teacher-researcher who adopted a participant observation approach to collect and interpret the data, I used data triangulation and member-checking to validate the data. The data came from various sources, including the two case-study students' writing assignments (such as postings on the discussion boards, five narrative writings, pre- and post-project essay writings), their digital stories, their retrospective survey answers at the end of every semester, and informal communications with the two students recorded in my teacher journal. I closely examined the data with an inductively constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once I gained some preliminary findings, I discussed them with Chen and Lin to determine if my interpretations of their learning experiences were accurate. In the following sections, using a thick description method (Stake, 1995), I report the two case students' progress to demonstrate how arts-integrated multimodal projects might benefit less confident or less motivated EFL learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Student Chen

1. Starting as a low-achieving learner: Compared to his class members, Chen was considered a low achiever in English proficiency, because he always scored below average on the semester-based university-wide English competence test (see Table 1 for the comparison).

Semester	Chen's Score	Mean Score of the Class
3rd Year 1st Semester	33	53
3rd Year 2nd Semester	37	48
4th Year 1st Semester	39	49
4th Year 2nd Semester	55	67

Table 1. Comparison of English competence test scores

In addition to being frequently close to failing the English courses, his class participation, in terms of course assignments, was also unsatisfactory. During the third-year English course, when the online literature circle was carried out, Chen posted fewer entries than his classmates (nine vs. 20 in the first semester and 12 vs. 16 in the second semester). Although Chen did make some progress in the second semester by posting relatively more, his engagement during both semesters appeared to be below average. It is very likely that Chen did not have enough reading or writing proficiency to help him complete all the course assignments. Moreover, Chen's answers (see Table 2, translated from Chinese) to the retrospective surveys, conducted at the end of each semester, suggested that Chen perceived himself as a poor reader and writer.

Open-Ended Questions	Chen's Answers	
	1st Semester	2nd Semester
Q: Self evaluation of my reading performance...	I had no confidence in reading.	I was a poor reader.
Q: Self evaluation of my writing performance...	I had no confidence in writing.	I wrote poorly.

Table 2. Chen's answers in the retrospective surveys

Chen also admitted in the survey that he had difficulty when reading the book: “I checked all the vocabulary but still could not understand the meanings of the sentences.” Chen appeared to spend a great deal of time looking up vocabulary in the dictionary, in an effort to “decode” the words in the texts; he thought a translation tool would be the panacea: “It would be better if I could have a machine helping me translate phrases and idioms.” As for the writing task, Chen also wanted “a machine to help correct my grammar”. Chen relied heavily on the Google translation tool to help him complete the writing tasks, and as a result of this direct and basic translation, most of the sentences did not make sense. In short, throughout the third-year English course, Chen showed little confidence in himself as a reader or writer, and did not fully devote himself to either the reading or the writing tasks.

2. Using images to support his writing and to gain authorship: The next semester, when images were integrated into student writing assignments and the topics more personally related, Chen's participation in the course work showed improvement. First of all, he completed all five online writing tasks as required. He wrote about his pet dog, his birthday party, an unforgettable trip in his childhood, his scooter, and his favourite sport—tennis. These topics appeared much easier for him to compose in English. Thus, all of his articles were longer than his reading responses posted in the previous semesters. Chen also relied less heavily on the translation tool for his writing, only using it to help with certain vocabulary. His passages, although still short, now made more sense. Moreover, Chen used images to support his writings. Figure 3 is an example of his writing:

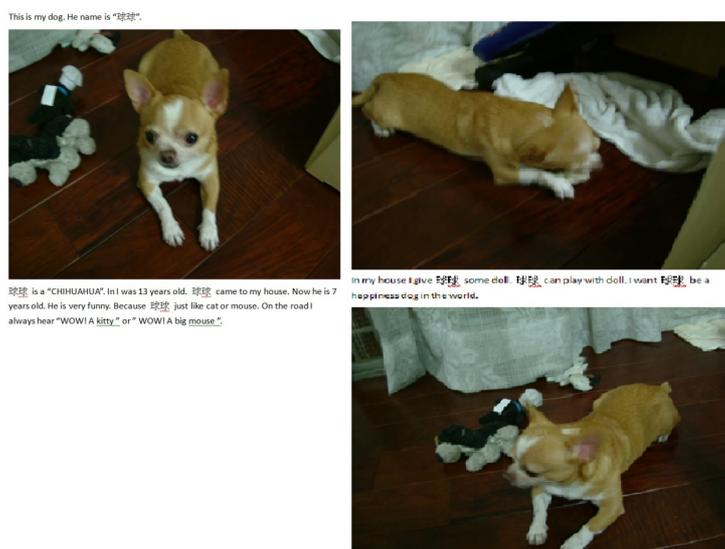


Figure 3. Excerpt from Chen's first-person narrative

Chen started this article by introducing his dog and the dog's name “球球” (or Chiu-chiu, as it would be spelled phonetically in English) and presenting a photo of the dog looking at the camera. Then in the second paragraph, he explained how Chiu-chiu became a part of his family and gave a lively description of his special characteristics, directly quoting strangers' comments to illustrate how his dog looked like a cat or even a mouse. Chen concluded his writing by indicating that he gave his dog toys and wished that his dog would be happy. A photo of Chiu-chiu with his toy was also presented at the end. As it is shown here, the dog was always in the centre of the photos, while the text served to explain the photos.

Jennifer Rowsell (2013) has argued that “images/visuals should not always substitute other modes of making meaning but should be considered as a way to supplement and enrich what a text offers” (p. 59). Adopting such a strategy, Chen's other writings throughout the semester were also like the example above, that is, a mixture of texts and images, presented in an alternative order with a stress on the photos. In his favourite piece, an unforgettable trip in his childhood, Chen wrote: “Look at photo. This is Africa's most south tip. This is my first time to go to the southern hemisphere. It is also my first time leaves Taiwan. I went to South Africa because my father has been worked in there.” Compared to his previous writings, in response to the literature he read last year, the presentation of the images this semester appeared to lead him to the writing task in an easier and smoother way. As the text functioned to describe images from his life experiences, the writing itself became less challenging. Scholars (Guzzetti & Wooten, 2002) observed that when students composed by creating a combination of graphics and written texts, they learned that text and visual images can enhance each other to represent ideas. Moreover, “the emphasis on illustrations motivated otherwise reluctant writers to create a text that would extend their ideas” (Guzzetti & Wooten, 2002, Common benefits section). Apparently, writing about images allowed Chen to develop his confidence as an English writer.

He reflected in the survey: “I am satisfied with all my articles because they were the outcomes after I had racked my brains.” Although Chen still found that he had difficulty with grammar and tenses, and he sometimes did not know “which word to use”, his comments above showed that he gained ownership of his writings and he felt proud about himself because of his hard work. Never again did I hear him say that he was poor in English or that he was concerned that he would fail the course. Writing on self-chosen topics and personal life experiences undoubtedly helped ease Chen's tension when composing his short articles. There was also no denying that using images provided Chen with an alternative and richer way to voice his thoughts and construct meanings. Chen was starting to evolve into a more confident English learner.

3. Growing into a skilful story-teller with his own voice: In the second semester of the fourth-year English course, the students were required to create a digital story. Chen's story was an expansion of his previous writing. His narrative started with a brief introduction, saying that he took a walk with his dog every morning, afternoon, evening, and before bedtime. Then, following the structure he used in the earlier five articles, he used mostly self-taken photos to present in a chronological order the “stops” during their walks. In each stop, he added vivid details to describe the places they visited. For example, when they stopped at the pet shop, he wrote that his dog would visit his old friend there, a cat who shared the same name. At the Sun Yat-sen

Memorial Hall stop, he explained that the Taipei Lantern Festival was held there this year, so there was traffic control by the police. He took his dog there to meet other dog friends and for him to “look at pretty girls”. In the end, Chen concluded his video by asking a question: “I have a question. Why do I do this every day, I was getting fat but my dog has become increasingly thin?” As Chen’s friends sometimes teased him because he looked a little chubby, this final remark, with an image (Snap shot 1 in Figure 4), showed that he was able to use humour to please his audience. Chen’s writing throughout the video script demonstrated that he was growing into a more skilful writer. Though there were still grammatical errors, the whole passage was in a clear format and easy to follow.

Throughout the video, Chen’s tone was relaxed and humorous. He creatively led his audience to experience the carefree daily walk with his dog. Chen also cleverly adopted some images from the Internet to support his narration. One interesting example was the use of the famous Japanese manga character, Doraemon (Snap shot 2 in Figure 4), to illustrate that people in the neighbourhood were annoyed by the traffic noises from the visitors to the Lantern Festival. When recounting that his dog’s friend, the cat, died, although a hand-written word “cry” was inserted to highlight his dog’s sadness (Snap shot 3 in Figure 4), a giant cute cartoon figure actually helped erase the possible sad feeling a death incident might cause, and therefore made this scene match the pleasant tone of the whole video. Moreover, Chen used a brisk waltz as background music to emphasise the happy mood he and his dog felt during their walks. As a result, the whole video created a cheerful atmosphere and as viewer, I found myself enjoying the walk as much as Chen did. By tactfully combining a variety of elements with his relaxed narration, Chen successfully told a joyful and interesting story. An English assignment did not seem to be a burden for him any longer. When I asked him whether this project helped change his attitude toward learning English, he told me, “No, I have always had a positive attitude toward English learning.” I was glad to see that Chen had forgotten his lack of confidence the previous year. Being engaged in a multimodal English learning activity allowed Chen to explore possibilities that he could not have attempted before. Therefore, such activity provided him with the opportunity to become a skilful storyteller as well as a confident English learner.

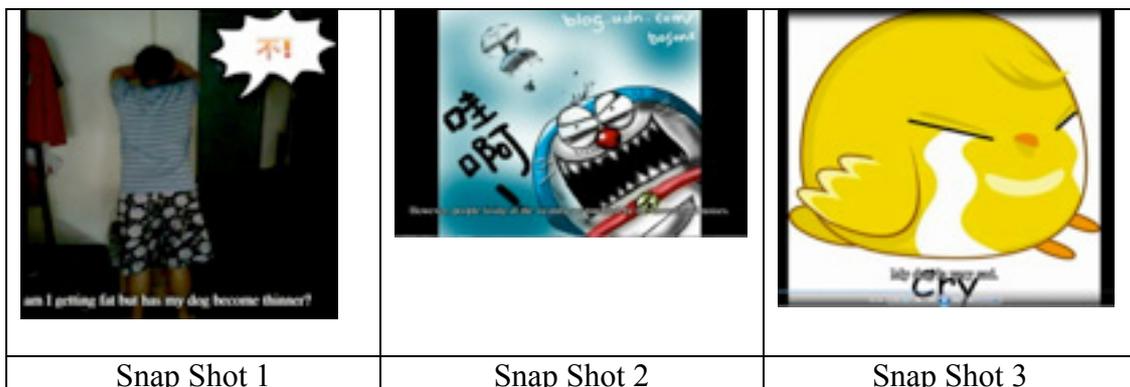


Figure 4. Snap shots from Chen’s digital story video

Student Lin

1. Lacking motivation to be involved in class activities: The first time Lin caught my attention was when he fell asleep in class. As he was also frequently late for class, I had private talks with him from time to time. In our conversations, Lin told me that he was not interested in studying and he found the English textbook easy and boring. He also shared with me that when he was in junior high school, he was a strong English learner. Therefore, when his peers had to spend some time mastering the class materials, he skimmed through them quickly and then easily passed the exams. However, Lin did not score particularly highly compared to the mean scores of the class on the English Competence Test conducted every semester (see Table 3).

Semester	Lin's Score	Mean Score of the Class
3rd Year 1 Semester	54	50
3rd Year 2nd Semester	67	55
4th Year 1st Semester	22	44
4th Year 2nd Semester	79	66

Table 3. Lin's scores on the English Competence Tests

Table 3 shows that although Lin always received a score above the class's mean score on the English competence tests, his scores were not as good as I had expected they would be. In fact, he even scored very low once (in the first semester of the fourth year) because he did not notice that he left one page of test questions unanswered, perhaps suggesting that Lin was not concerned enough about his English class to pay attention to the test. Accordingly, I assumed that Lin might have a good basic knowledge of English from when he studied in junior high school; however, he was not motivated enough to pursue advanced knowledge or to excel in this subject after he entered junior college. It could be that Lin's lack of motivation stemmed from his being unable to see any practical benefits (Hudson, 2000) of this language in his life. Although he was studying marine technology, Lin told me that he did not really want to pursue a maritime profession; he would most likely maintain the locksmith business left to him by his deceased father, therefore having very little need for English. Remaining disinterested in the course work, Lin posted nothing at all the first semester when the online literature circle was implemented, while the class's average number of entries was 15. Nevertheless, he managed to pass the course by studying the textbook and scoring very high on the final exam. In short, throughout the first semester, Lin appeared capable of yet uninterested in learning English.

2. Seeing using arts as an option: Throughout the second semester the online literature circle continued. Thinking about Lin's lack of motivation, I started wondering how I could inspire students like him to become more engaged. I presented examples of students' thoughtful, interesting ideas and invited them to use the arts as part of their responses. I also urged less skilled students to write longer passages. That semester Lin completed six online responses. Compared to the average number of the class's entries (20), six entries was not much. However, considering that Lin had posted nothing the previous semester, this was a big improvement.

Lin made his first entry in March, the second week after the online discussion started, and he only wrote one sentence: “All are starting from the Introduction.” This posting suggested that Lin was just trying to fulfil his duty so that he would not have to face the risk of failing the course, as occurred the previous semester. However, this one-sentence entry suggested that he was either reluctant to make any effort to accomplish the task or he was unable to write a longer paragraph.

I continued to encourage the class to submit longer entries more often. One month later, when the class had already posted five times, Lin made his second entry. This time, he wrote:

When i heard the bad priate-Flint is dead. i am so s surprised. i think the killer may be Sliver, because how bad person he is .and the next, Sliver is coming, and shoot them. How will Jim be after? I hope he can live.

Lin’s second entry also echoed his survey answer, that the book “was full of adventures and sometimes when I kept reading I would become worried for the leading character.” His writing, generally making sense yet needing improvement with syntax and format, suggested that he was engaged in the reading and also capable of composing a written text. However, being engaged in the reading did not lead Lin to engage in writing. He waited until the next month to make his third entry, while his classmates had now made eight. Figure 5 was his third entry, with the title, “Pro picture: About the story”:

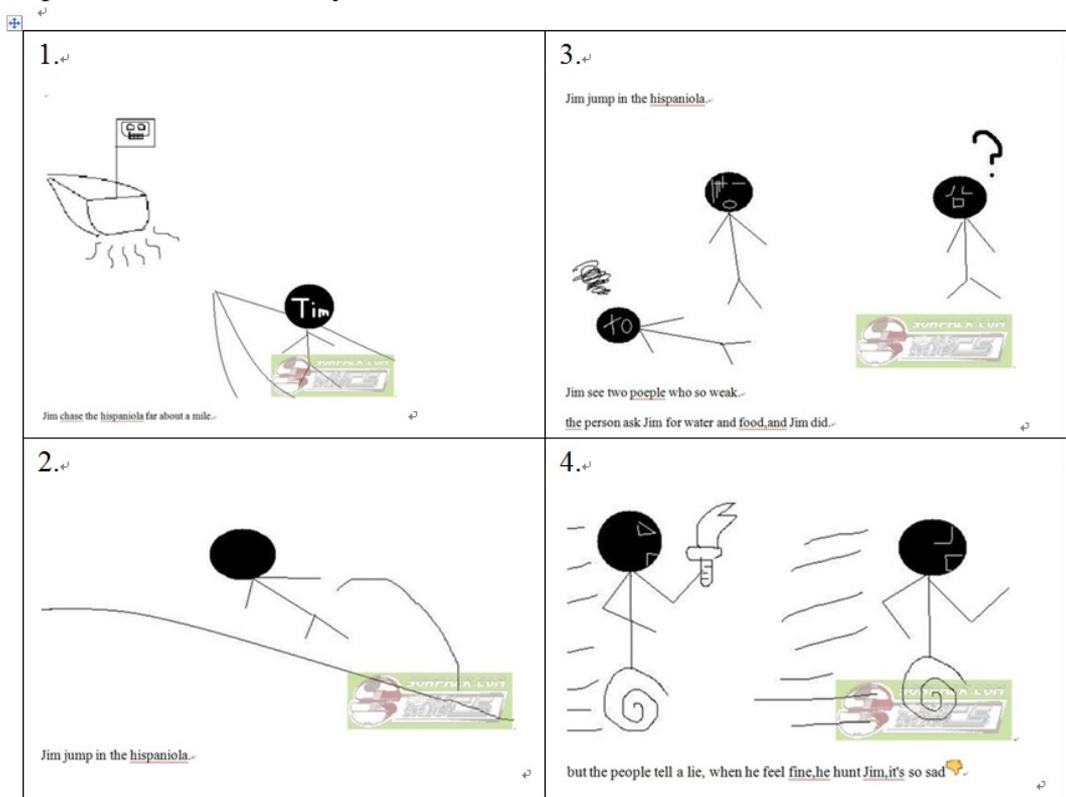


Figure 5. Lin’s third posting in response to the book, *Treasure Island*

In this posting, Lin gave a summary of the development of the plot. Both linguistic form and images served to tell the story. His drawings, although just simple lines and circles, vividly conveyed the messages. I was so amused with his drawings that the

following week in class I used Lin's entry as a model posting. This act undoubtedly encouraged Lin. One week later he posted his fourth message and, on the same day, replied, for the first time, to one of his classmates. He posted again the following week and only skipped the last week as the final exam was approaching. What was interesting was that all three of these subsequent entries were basically in the written form, except that he used a thumb-down image to emphasise his feelings toward the character. The fact that his work was accepted and appreciated motivated him; he now felt much more relieved and had more to say about the book. He even started to play with words. His next entry following the drawings was a letter to the leading character in the form of a poem, with the poem entitled "pro-letter for Jim siao pi hai" (Siao pi hai is the phonetic spelling of the Chinese words "小屁孩", which describes children who are naughty and ignorant but self-perceive themselves as important.):

Run ! Jim, Handes will get you soon!
 Jump ! Jim, Handes is near you!
 Load gun ! Jim, Handes will kill you!
 Shoot ! Jim,you must be in self-defense!
 Good jod ! Jim,you are a real man now!
 see you next week

Lin also replied to his classmate (Figure 6), pointing out:

When Jim shoot the man.Is Jim be bad? idon't think so,because he had no choice.
 That's so sad. 🙄

Figure 6. Excerpt of Lin's posting entry #

Then, the next week, he wrote (Figure 7):

My favorite Role is Sliver.
 Because he is very bad guys,but he never fell he is bad(shameless).
 He have characteristics of leader.
 If i can become like him,maybe I will be a successful people in this world..
 He is hero of times,unfortunately he didn't born a right time.
 So sad 🙄

Figure 7. Excerpt of Lin's posting entry #6

Lin's postings, especially the last one, showed that he was a sophisticated reader able to think critically by justifying the characters' motives of resorting to force or taking extreme means. He also favoured the antagonist in the story instead of the leading character, suggesting he thought independently without following the crowd. Furthermore, he made a connection to the text, envisioning that with certain

characteristic traits, he too, could be successful in society. Louis Rosenblatt has argued (1978/1994) that the reading process is a “transaction” between the reader and the text. Lin brought his own opinions to the reading with the use of a different genre and a different mode, revealing that he was involved in both efferent and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), which could not be detected in the previous semester, as he never responded to the text. Maturity might have contributed to such an improvement, but it was also very likely that using arts encouraged him to become a more active and responsive reader.

Lin’s answers to the survey questions suggested that the reading and writing tasks were somewhat challenging to him in the beginning, as he stated that “the vocabulary was much more difficult, and the grammar was more complex,” and that “I knew the development of the plot but I did not know how to express my thoughts or the topics.” However, as time went by, and as he constantly received encouragement from the teacher (“Almost all my postings were presented and shared with the class. I was acknowledged by the teacher and I felt very satisfied.”), he gained confidence and appeared to be more capable of or more interested in sharing his thoughts. Therefore, he perceived himself a more successful learner in the end, and described his English learning during this semester in these words: “It was low in the beginning but soared high later, just like the Yankees moved toward the world championship.” He even expected that he would do better the following semester: “I will become better and better.”

Lin’s use of arts seemed to be the turning point. Wilhelm (1995) stated that, “artistic responses may encourage risk-taking because it is traditionally freer from judgment than answering authority-generated questions about a reading” (p. 496). As Lin’s attempt to employ drawings was appreciated in the English course, where usually the “linguistic intelligence” (Gardner, 1983; 1993) (mainly reading and writing) was valued, it seemed that the light bulb went on for him. He started to recognise the value of sharing responses to the book and appeared more willing to accomplish the written responses. If he could not write well, he would have used all images in his next postings. However, his last three messages, all in the written form, suggested that he was a competent writer. What he needed was simply a cue, a signal saying that modes, other than written text, could also work. Drawing to summarise the plot engaged him and then he felt comfortable giving opinions in either form. When I chatted with him at the end of the semester, he said:

I didn’t want to do the homework. But when you said in class that we could also use pictures to respond to the book we were reading, I was thinking, “Really, can we do that?” So I started drawing the ship with the MS Paint, and it was fun.

3. Accomplishing the English task with keen motivation: The theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; 1993) argues that students will be better served by a broader vision of education and therefore that “language learning tasks can be developed around different types of intelligences” (Arnold, & Fonseca, 2004, p.125). Creating a curriculum based on the theory of multiple intelligences, and especially on visual intelligence (Gardner, 1983), appeared to benefit a student like Lin greatly. Once arts were allowed for course work and his creation was appreciated, Lin evolved into a motivated and active learner. During the first semester of the fourth-year English course, he never missed an assignment, submitting the five first-person

narratives along with images. Lin's first article introducing his hobbies revealed how much he enjoyed arts. He wrote that he liked to draw pictures, especially the Japanese animation characters (see Figure 8 for the different styles Lin presented in his article).



Figure 8. Drawings by Lin in his writing article

To him, drawing the characters brought him fun and a sense of achievement. Then, in the following paragraphs Lin explained at great length how to draw an animation character:

Drawing picture is not easy for beginner.

You must image something what you want to draw, and try to trace the face of role.

Then strengthening broad strokes to draw step by step.

The last, you had to fill color and draw the shadow, and you are finishing a creation.

When giving the details, Lin held the tone of an expert confidently. As the topic was about his favourite activity and sharing his art works, Lin transformed into an enthusiastic and informative author and artist rather than a student required to complete a writing task.

In the second semester of the fourth-year English course, Lin created a digital story using his favourite animation figures as the leading characters. Lin brought the animation figures he collected to the scenic spots in Cijin (where the campus is located and also where he grew up) and took photos of them, presenting the couple's romantic and fun trip there. In addition to the self-taken photos, he also drew pictures to add artistic variety to the story and created a soundtrack of a Japanese song as background. As a result, Lin's digital story was full of an exotic Japanese flavour, while the beautiful scenery of the local community was presented to the audience. In the retrospective survey Lin wrote that his motive for creating such a work was to "introduce the scenic spots in Cijin through a story". To Lin, this English assignment was no longer course work that he had to accomplish. Rather, it became a medium he employed to share what he treasured, namely his favourite animation characters and his community. The English language became a communication tool and the multiple modes, such as the photos, the drawings, and the music, were also the tools he used to

help convey his messages. (Click on the URL to see Lin's digital story, admission obtained from Lin: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGZ12DIBONU>.)

Lin's work was chosen by two teacher judges as the third place among the two classes' works. Twenty-four of his classmates also marked his video as a "liked" one. One student commented that it was a special video because Lin used the figures as leading characters. Another student wrote with even more understanding and appreciation: "I felt that I was a swallow and I did not know the ambition of the eagle. However, I believe that as long as he was willing to do it, he could make his movie even longer and better." Lin told me later that he spent most of his time creating the video and therefore spared little time preparing for the mid-term exam. However, he felt it was worth it. The award he received as the winner encouraged him, while the acknowledgement from the teacher and peers especially inspired him. He proved to both the teacher and the class that he was capable of accomplishing such a task in an amazing way, which would not have been achieved if he were asked to write with pencil and paper only.

A comparison of Lin's writings (Figure 9), one done before the third year began and the other at the end of the fourth year, showed the growth of Lin as a writer. In his first writing introducing himself, Lin wrote: "I am Raymond. I have two brothers in my family. I have many friends in my class. I like to exercise every day." After I urged him to write more, he added one more sentence in the end: "And I love to play computer, too." Two years later, in his last piece of writing, he wrote about the three most important things in his life. This time, he wrote a whole page. Maturity and two years of writing practice contributed to the growth. However, it cannot be denied that Lin's use of the arts to supplement his writing helped inspire him and therefore allowed him to become an engaged English writer. Now he was a learner with keen motivation.

I am Raymond. I have two brothers in my ~~family~~ family. I have many friends ~~in~~ in my class. I like to ~~exppice~~ ^{exercise} every day every day. And I love play computer, too.

The most important thing is my family in my life. My mom is the best mother in the world, she ~~is~~ always take care ~~of~~ ^{me} and my brothers. We love our mother very much. Next, my friends ~~is~~ are also important, they are good guys for my school lifes. ~~And~~ ^{we} We always study and play together. Nothing more funny than be with them. And the last thing is My ~~is~~ future, I hope I can have a good job, Marry ~~is~~ a good wife and have a nice house. If I back ~~to~~ my home, My wife will cook for ~~me~~. In ~~company company~~ company. My ~~boss~~ boss will work hard and I will. Although this dream are far away, I believe that day will comes, one day!

Figure 9. Comparison of Lin's first and last writing pieces

CONCLUSION

Ghiso and Low (2013) indicate that valuing the visual arts as a source of meaning-making “disrupted the ways students are often sorted by their abilities to decode print and produce personal narratives along essay conventions for the genre” (p. 33). In this article I reported the learning processes of two Chinese-speaking English learners in my junior college English classes. The two students did not appear to be engaged in responses to literature as assigned in class. Neither were they assessed as competent learners when using conventional reading and writing practices. However, once students were encouraged to integrate arts into their responses, both students showed improvement in course participation and increased motivation in writing activities. Most important of all, their multimodal creations suggested that they were capable of using a variety of techniques to make meaning and thus position themselves as thoughtful and creative authors. As time went by, the two students’ English writing skills improved and their perceptions of English learning were also changed positively.

Through thick descriptions and discussions of the two students’ development, I came to the conclusion that an arts-integrated multimodal approach was effective in promoting EFL student learning. It stands to reason to argue that such an approach can benefit teachers of EFL with their curriculum design, whether their students are Chinese speakers or speakers of other languages. However, certain limitations do occur. As only two case-study students were introduced in this report, and no control group was provided for comparison, it is difficult to tell whether an arts-integrated multimodal approach will particularly benefit Chinese-speaking students. In addition, as the two case-study students grew into English writers, because they were allowed to explore a variety of modes to construct meaning and their confidence was enhanced and writing skills improved, it is still arguable that the two years of course work and their maturity would also eventually lead them to such growth. Nevertheless, it is clear that an arts-integrated approach can support at-risk EFL writers, students who are more likely to fail academically than their peers, by providing a powerful tool to voice their thoughts. However, whether the integration of the arts exclusively contributes to improvements in English skills is another question needing further investigation.

Chen and Lin graduated in the year of 2012 and I appreciate how much I was able to learn from them. Rowsell (2013) has argued that “visualising content is at the core of most texts that we interact with in today’s increasingly design-mediated world,” and she has particularly pointed out that as educators, we still “have nascent understandings of how to incorporate visuals into conventional language classes” (p. 59). I hope that what I learned through this case study will also benefit other teachers of EFL learners as more arts-integrated instruction is incorporated into literacy classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the National Science Council of the Republic of China for financially supporting this research under Contract No. NSC 99-2410-H-022-008 and National Kaohsiung Marine University for financially supporting this

research during the school year 2010. The reviewers' comments and the editors' help on the early draft are also deeply appreciated.

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Manuscript received: March 30, 2014

Revision received: September 2, 2014

Accepted: September 18, 2014