Application of *Learning by Design* Into the Cultivation of Multiliteracies: A Case Study of College English Teaching Practice at Soochow University

Wei-xing Gu
Soochow University, China

**Abstract**

Multiliteracies are an indispensable component of language abilities in the modern age of information technology. First proposed by the New London Group in 1996, multiliteracies refer to the abilities needed to obtain the learning resources that are transmitted through different media and modals, and to apply different modes and means to communicate with others to create meanings. The cultivation of multiliteracies is not only a systematic process of constructing knowledge but also a dynamic cycle of designing learning activities.

In undertaking an international multiliteracies project, the New London Group adopted a mode of *learning by design* to cultivate multiliteracies. *Learning by design* includes three progressive components of *available design*, *designing*, and *redesigned*, with *available design* referring to the learning resources available, *designing* being the work to be done to make use of the learning resources obtained, and *redesigned* meaning the regenerated and transformed learning resources that are to become the new learning resources for *available design*. When it comes to the stage of *redesigned*, the mode of *learning by design* enters a new cycle.

Ever since *learning by design* was adopted, it became the main theoretical framework used to cultivate multiliteracies. The college English teaching subsequently developed at Soochow University followed and specified the general principles of *learning by design* while constructing its own specific mode, trying to integrate *available design* and *designing* into a dynamic whole geared toward cultivating multiliteracies (one of the three abilities needed to use English, together with language expression abilities and intercultural communication competences).

With regard to *available design*, efforts were made toward building and expanding various learning resources, facilities, settings, environments, and other learning support systems at Soochow University. This was done to provide easy and selectable accesses to the Net.
multimedia forms of different learning resources and specific course contents. In designing, different task-based and project-driven classroom and extracurricular/term explorative learning activities, particularly those revolving around the two courses of Film English and Media English Reading, were created for students to actively undertake cooperative and interactive learning, facilitating their language application. The teaching of available design and designing was interdependently progressed and students’ language acquisition and application were systematically integrated to promote the effective cultivation of multiliteracies.

Keywords: college English teaching, abilities to use English, multiliteracies, learning by design

1. Introduction

To satisfy the increasing demands for the cultivation of new skillsets in the 21st century, there have been significant adjustments and reforms of college English teaching as regards its objectives, contents, approaches, and evaluations. To provide nationwide guidance for college English teaching practice and research in China, the National Collegiate Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Board, under the Ministry of Education, revised the College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements (abbreviated hereafter as the Requirements (yao qiu)) and in 2015 completed the Guidelines for College English Teaching (abbreviated hereafter as the Guidelines (zhi nan)).

In the Requirements that were put into trial implementation in 2004 and officially enforced in 2007, the main focus of college English teaching was cultivating students’ comprehensive abilities to use English, particularly the abilities of listening and speaking. As teaching situations and students’ needs for English learning changed, the Guidelines amended the Requirements to make it clear and specific that the teaching objective for college English was to cultivate students’ abilities to use English for effective communication in school life, academic study, social exchange, and career development. It was also stated in the Guidelines that different colleges and universities needed to specifically program their own college English teaching objectives in accordance with their respective teaching realities and situations.

From the compulsory Requirements to the directive Guidelines, college English teaching is no longer unitary on a national scale; different colleges and universities have been given more decision-making power to carry out their own college English teaching practices. The Guidelines, as the name indicates, lay a practical basis for colleges and universities to define the specific contents of their college English teaching and research programs, in order to tailor their focus on students’ English application abilities.

2. Multiliteracies

The abilities needed to use English, which are a systematic integration of the knowledge
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of English phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and structure, the English language kills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, and the practical applications of English in daily life, professional study, and social employment, comprise what are known as “the competences to use the language in certain contexts” (Wang, 2016, p. 5).

In the application contexts, the abilities needed to use English include the abilities to use it for general purposes, for academic and vocational purposes, also called specific purposes, and for intercultural communication purposes (Guidelines, 2015). This definition may have already been nationally agreed upon. But in the application contents, the abilities needed to use English are probably very diversified on a nationwide scale. In general, listening, speaking, reading, and writing have long been regarded as the four basic skills of English, as well as the fundamental components of the abilities needed for English leaners, but based on the specific teaching realities and situations of different colleges and universities (such as talents cultivation orientations, disciplines development plans, and students’ learning demands for various skillsets), college English teaching practices can have varying focuses on how they cultivate the abilities needed to use English, putting emphasis on either written production or oral expression.

Having carefully examined the specific teaching practices meant to cultivate the abilities needed to use English (such as pursuits to satisfy growing demands for the cultivation of internationalized researching talents to participate in international affairs, and students’ practical needs for language expression abilities and their changing learning styles and growing preferences for multimedia means in the modern age of information technology), the case study university defined the abilities needed to use English as falling into the categories of multiliteracies, language expression abilities, and intercultural communication competences. It has subsequently carried out necessary teaching reforms and implemented new teaching practices to cultivate those abilities, whose achievements have been popularly acknowledged in the educational field.

2.1 Proposition of multiliteracies
Modern information technology has created, for foreign language teaching and learning, brand new ways of learning, and has provided extremely rich learning resources (Guidelines, 2015), whose extensive application in educational fields has enabled foreign language teaching and learning to have convenient access to unprecedented multiple modals and media in obtaining the learning resources needed for language acquisition and application. Affected by modern information technology, “the traditional expressions of meanings with the medium of words have been combined with the media of visual, audio, gesture, and other forms of meaning expressions” (Zhu, 2008, p. 10). Multimedia-assisted learning has thus become one of the striking features of effective language learning in the 21st century.

To cultivate language learners’ abilities to effectively obtain and use multimedia-presented learning resources, a number of renowned linguists and education experts from the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia met in London and formed
the New London Group, co-conducting academic researches on the International Multiliteracies Project. The International Multiliteracies Project wrote a research paper titled “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures”, which was published in the first issue of the *Harvard Educational Review* in 1996. In this paper, the proposition for the concept of multiliteracies was first put forward, with the reasoning that in the contemporary world, traditional word-mediated literacy could no longer meet the diversified needs of language learners who were growing up against the background of modern information technology. Subsequently, to facilitate effective language learning, the focus on the cultivation of abilities needed for learners to obtain and make use of learning resources should be shifted from the training of traditional unitary literacy to the cultivation of modern multiple literacies, or multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996).

### 2.2 Definitions of multiliteracies

Just as the ways the term “multiliteracies” was translated into Chinese were quite different (Hu, 2007; Zhu, 2008), the definitions of multiliteracies were not the same, either. Some scholars claimed that multiliteracies were the abilities needed to obtain learning resources not only through such traditional media as textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals, but also through the modern media of audio and video products, particularly those utilizing the Internet and mobile phones (Hu, 2007; Williamson, 2005). In the modern age of information technology, the media and modals used to obtain learning resources had already become manifold, and could generally be classified into the different dimensions of language, vision, audition, posture, and space (Gentle, Knight, & Corrigan, 2006). Other researchers held the view that multiliteracies were not only the abilities needed to obtain learning resources through multiple media and modals, but also the competences needed to use the obtained learning resources to communicate with others in different modes and means (Gamble & Easingwood, 2000) and to construct knowledge and create meanings (Duncum, 2004).

From the above definitions a conclusion can be drawn that multiliteracies are composed of the abilities needed in two very clear aspects: obtaining the learning resources for language acquisition and making use of those learning resources for language application. Specifically, multiliteracies are on the one hand the overall abilities needed for language learners to obtain, through multiple media and modals, the learning resources needed for language acquisition, and on the other hand the practical abilities needed to internally digest, for a deep understanding of the learning resources obtained, and to apply the obtained learning resources with different media and modals to construct knowledge and create meanings, which helps language learners develop their language application abilities and cultivate their cultural cognition, critical literacy, innovation ability, and intercultural communication awareness and competence (Spiliotopoulos, 2005; Zhang & Zhang, 2014).
2.3 Features of multiliteracies

Literally, *literacies* refer to language abilities and *multi* is a prefix that indicates plurality, here referring to the different ways used to cultivate those language abilities. Multiliteracies involve people’s multimodal receptive systems in language learning and they are “closely related to people’s mastery of the newest information technology and the interpersonal information exchanges” (Zhu, 2008, p. 11), because modern information technology has dramatically pushed people’s learning away from traditional unitary literacy and toward modern multiliteracies. Multiliteracies certainly include, but are not just limited to, traditional literacy, because they “lay more emphasis on the use of diversified media in learning and attach great importance to the integration of different modals through proper designing, aiming to fulfill the tasks of communication” (Yi & Wu, 2014, p. 105), which is the ultimate goal of any language learning endeavor.

In comparison with those features of traditional literacy, the features of multiliteracies are very obvious, at least in two aspects. First, regarding the ways of the cultivation of abilities, traditional literacy relied mainly on word-mediated means to obtain the learning resources needed for the target language learning. To cultivate traditional literacy, printed words were the major medium used to express meanings, either orally or in written form. The scope of language learning and modes of obtaining learning resources were largely restricted. Differently, modern multiliteracies boast multiple means of obtaining the learning resources needed to acquire the target language. The traditional medium of words apart, multimedia and multimodal transmissions facilitated by modern information technology have become imperative and indispensable learning modes, and the scope of language learning and the modes of obtaining learning resources have been expanded to a very great extent.

As for the goal of the cultivation of abilities, training students to develop the abilities needed to obtain learning resources and learn the target knowledge was the major goal of traditional literacy, and traditional literacy “only involved the individual’s cognitive behaviors of reading and writing” (Zhu, 2008, p. 11). Therefore, the goal of traditional literacy training was simply quite unitary. In contrast, in addition to the training of the abilities needed to obtain learning resources and learn the target language, modern multiliteracies attach more importance not only to the in-depth understanding and internal digestion of the obtained learning resources, but also to the practice of communicative learning activities that are aimed to help learners construct knowledge and create such meanings as cultural cognition, critical literacy, and intercultural communication competence. The cultivation-oriented goals of modern multiliteracies are virtually multiple.

3. Application Mode of Learning by Design to Cultivate Multiliteracies

Having put forward the concept of multiliteracies, the New London Group then adopted the mode of *learning by design* to cultivate multiliteracies. *Learning by design* is a system that includes the three progressive components of *available design, designing,*
and redesigned, forming a complete cycle of multiliteracies cultivation development (New London Group, 1996). Available design includes the meaningful learning resources available, designing is the work to be done to make use of those available learning resources, while redesigned refers to the regenerated and transformed learning resources, also the new learning resources for available design.

Adopted by the New London Group in 1996, learning by design thereafter became the main theoretical framework used to cultivate multiliteracies (Kress, 2003). Following the framework, Zhang and Zhang (2014, p. 6) designed the following mode of learning by design to cultivate multiliteracies, aiming to provide enlightenment for foreign language teaching and learning in China. In their mode, available design includes the available experiences, theoretical knowledge, and critical innovation activities being undertaken, designing covers eight aspects of cultural contexts, situational contexts, learning approaches, learning media, learning modals, learning processes (circular modes), meaning transformation, and multiple abilities, while new learning resources transformed for available design consists of learning results, such as acquired knowledge, theories, viewpoints, and abilities. In the progress of learning by design to cultivate multiliteracies, obtaining learning resources, constructing knowledge, and creating meaning become an active, dynamic, and circular process, because any knowledge construction or meaning creation in language learning is a process designing of learning (Zhang & Zhang, 2014).

Figure 1. The comprehensive framework of learning by design (Zhang & Zhang, 2014)

The case study university, with reference to the flipped classroom that moves the teaching of information transmission tasks outside the class and arranges the teaching of active and positive learning activities inside the class (Dawson, 2015), constructed its own
application mode of *learning by design* to cultivate multiliteracies, which has continued to receive modification and perfection.

Figure 2. Soochow University’s application mode of *learning by design* into the cultivation of multiliteracies

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Ever since the *College English Application Courses* of the case study university were awarded the Jiangsu Provincial Top-quality Courses in 2008, which continued to develop into the National Top-quality Courses in 2009 and the National Top-quality Open Courses in 2013, a new round of college English teaching and reform has been enforced, in which the abilities needed to use English were defined to include multiliteracies, language expression abilities, and intercultural communication competences.

To cultivate the abilities needed to use English, the college English curricula designs were adjusted and a general education compulsory courses platform and a general education selective courses platform were set up, and such relevant *College English Application Courses* as *English Writing and Translation* and *Advanced Oral English* to cultivate language expression abilities, *Intercultural Communication* and *Featured*
Chinese Culture to cultivate intercultural communication competences, and Film English and Media English Reading to cultivate multiliteracies, were constructed either on the compulsory courses platform or on the selective courses platform.

In every academic year, high-achieving students in the field of English, defined (through the placement test in every September) as those who were in the top 10 to 15 percent of over 5,000 new students, would take the application courses as compulsory courses, and the other students could take the application courses as selective courses. So briefly, well over 5,000 students have been instructed to follow the above application mode of learning by design to cultivate multiliteracies.

As is indicated in the application mode, students were encouraged to focus on their learning interests, learning competences, learning needs, and learning goals before class to construct their own learning processes and design their own learning modes. Equipped with their own learning processes and modes, they obtained autonomously, through various symbols, modals, media, mediators, and channels, learning resources from such learning resource platforms as Film English, Media English Reading, and Open Courses (including College English On-line, National Top-quality Courses and National Top-quality Open Courses) to obtain the learning resources needed to learn the aspects of the target language such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and structure, and acquire necessary information about relevant course contents and themes. In the process of “self-controlling their learning paces and conducting individualized learning” (Deng, 2016, p. 90) of the target language and relevant course contents and themes, students fulfilled the learning task of available design, cultivating their autonomous learning habits and constructing knowledge systems that were to be developed into application abilities in the stage of designing.

While in class students were guided and mediated by their teachers to use the obtained learning resources to undertake task-based/project-driven cooperative learning activities, which would very likely be extended to extracurricular or even term programs. By having various interactive activities, students understood and digested those learning resources, constructed knowledge and created new meanings, and fulfilled the task of designing, promoting effective learning and developing such relevant application abilities as knowledge, theories, and standpoints that helped in turn to obtain learning resources in the stage of available design.

The application abilities developed and meanings created, specifically the learning products derived from designing, constitute an integral part of redesigned, which are the “resources to create new meanings” (Zhang & Zhang, 2014, p. 3). When it comes to the stage of redesigned, the application mode of learning by design starts a new dynamic cycle.

4. Teaching Practices for Available Design

In the application mode of learning by design into the cultivation of multiliteracies,
available design played a fundamental role, which not only decided the extent to which students were able to construct their knowledge systems but also exerted influences on students’ choices of learning modes in the stage of designing. Therefore, how to help students effectively fulfill the learning task of available design was of basic importance in the whole application progress of learning by design.

4.1 Constructing learning resources to stimulate individualized learning

Learning resources are facilitative teaching factors and conditions to implement classroom teaching, expand course learning space, and support curriculum management. Learning resources include all types of overt and covert teaching materials, learning environments, and other teaching support systems, which help teachers and students to cooperate in carrying out teaching activities, fulfilling teaching tasks, and achieving teaching goals (Guidelines, 2015). Learning resources are not only effective guarantees to cultivate the abilities needed to use English but also fundamental means to improve teaching efficiency (Cui & Wang, 2014) because learning resources enable students to break through the limits of time and space allotted for learning, construct autonomous learning platforms, and develop from a learning approach of passive acceptance to a learning way of active exploration.

For the smooth implementation of available design, the case study university, in its construction of College English Application Courses ever since 2008, constructed and expanded the learning resources that enabled students to fulfill their learning in the stage of available design, stimulating their individualized learning. On the one hand, the large-scale College English On-line website, the National Open Courses website, and the Higher Education Press I-courses website were used as Internet-based learning resources platforms, offering selectable and accessible means for students to obtain learning resources to cultivate the abilities needed to use English, including multiliteracies as well as language expression abilities and intercultural communication competences.
Figure 3. The learning resources constructed for available design in Soochow University’s application mode of learning by design into the cultivation of multiliteracies, the second prize of the 2017 Jiangsu Provincial Higher Education and Teaching Achievements: Research and Practice on “3+1” College English Abilities Cultivation System
On the other hand, the two specific courses of *Film English* and *Media English Reading* were developed with the priority of cultivating multiliteracies. For these two courses, on-and-off line textbooks were published, websites were set up and updated, and learning resources were substantiated. The learning resources included those regarding course objectives and plans, knowledge and ability components, teaching focuses and difficulties, teaching syllabuses and evaluations, and reference materials and resources, all of which were basic resources reflecting course teaching ideas, contents, methods, and progresses. Other supplementary interactive learning resources were also constructed and expanded, such as mini-lectures, on-line course (MOOC or SPOC under construction), videos of learning tasks/projects, students learning products, and so on, which were used to support and promote the process of teaching and learning. Because of the achievements made in learning resources construction and application courses development, the *College English Application Courses* were granted the honorable title of the National Top-quality Open Courses in 2013 by the Ministry of Education.

### 4.2 Creating multimedia for obtaining learning resources to encourage autonomous learning

Owing to the differences in learning interests, language abilities, cognitive competences, and development needs, students naturally tend to have preferences for certain means or media to obtain learning resources. Although relevant research has indicated that in the Internet+ situation, students have somewhat higher needs for multimedia e-learning resources than for traditional paper-mediated learning resources (Zhu, 2015), the medium of paper is still a necessary multimedia component, and paper-mediated learning resources have a potential demand.

Based on this understanding, the case study university continued to expand the traditional paper-mediated learning resources for the two courses of *Film English* and *Media English Reading* (including printed teaching materials, film and play scripts, and newspapers and magazines), trying to satisfy the possible (or even basic) needs of students to resort to their familiar medium of words to express meanings and fulfill the learning of available design.

Since mobile phones and the Internet are not only indispensable tools in the daily life of college students who grow up against the background of modern information technology, but also important media for their engagement in professional studies and academic exploration, it is imperative for college English teaching to carry forward the integration of the newest information technology with its curriculum instruction (Guidelines, 2015) so as to conform to students’ new learning styles and individual preferences for learning media.

Following this guiding principle, the case study university, apart from having expanded the traditional paper-mediated learning resources, built up, expanded, and perfected those highly integral, practically interactive, comparatively objective, and super-textural modern learning resources (Liao, 2013). The learning resources, information, and
teaching support systems already built up for the two courses of *Film English* and *Media English Reading* included films and recordings of plays and acted performances, online interaction platforms, dubbing apps, audio and visual news clips, course blogs, and media apps, all of which were multiply presented in various symbols, modals, media, mediators, and channels. These multimedia-presented learning resources enabled students to tailor the learning of *available design* to their personal preferences and practical needs to pick up more effective and favorable means needed to obtain learning resources, encouraging them to carry out autonomous learning.

Figure 4. The multiple media and modals created for *available design* in Soochow University’s application mode of *learning by design* into the cultivation of multiliteracies, the second prize of the 2017 Jiangsu Provincial Higher Education and Teaching Achievements: Research and Practice on “3+1” College English Abilities Cultivation System

4.3 Guiding the process of obtaining learning resources to promote effective learning
Any type of learning is always aimed at fulfilling certain tasks or achieving certain goals. Obtaining learning resources is no exception. Autonomously obtaining learning resources from multiple media and modals doesn’t mean that students can conduct their learning without an aim. Only with explicit directions can obtaining learning resources have a definite objective in view, and only with clear learning purposes can the learning resources obtained be practically and effectively developed into application abilities.

Since *available design* and *designing* were interdependent in the application mode of *learning by design* for cultivating multiliteracies, with the learning in the stage of
available design being the basis for the ability development in the stage of designing, the case study university managed to guide students to construct their learning progresses and design their learning modes in the stage of available design in accordance with their interactive and cooperative learning activities in the stage of designing, making the learning in the stage of available design purposeful and the learning in the stage of designing effective.

The learning of available design was guided by the learning of designing. At the very beginning of the school term, students were informed of such term learning activities as teaching themes, communication topics, debate issues, group discussion programs, learning tasks, and research projects (including their respective falling dates, process requirements, presentation means, and assessment criteria) to be applied in the stage of designing so that they clearly knew what specific learning resources they would obtain, what proper learning approaches they would need to construct, and what possible learning assistances they would tend to seek from their teachers in the stage of available design. With very clear purposes in mind, students managed to make their learning of available design effective.

5. Teaching Practices for Designing

In the application mode of learning by design into the cultivation of multiliteracies, designing was the development that helped students analyze and digest the obtained learning resources, and adopted different modes to create meanings, developing their application abilities. On the other hand, designing helped students consolidate their knowledge systems already built up in the stage of available design.

5.1 Learning tasks/projects: Platforms to implement designing

Learning tasks and projects are important platforms for college English to effectively implement its teaching practices in light of “the guidance of the practical use of English” (Guidelines, 2015), because task-based and project-driven learning boasts the striking features of being open, cooperative, interactive, practical, and researching (Alan & Stoller, 2005). Learning tasks and projects are implementation platforms that enable students to construct knowledge and develop abilities, because in fulfilling learning tasks and implementing learning projects, students resort to specific learning contexts, apply available learning resources, adopt cooperative learning approaches to participate in interactive and explorative learning, which would enhance their knowledge and skillsets, and develop their potential abilities to analyze, study, and solve practical problems.

To implement designing, the case study university tapped the teaching contents of Film English and Media English Reading, and designed various in-class learning tasks and extracurricular or term projects, such as conducting film appreciation and analysis activities, written film commentaries, performances of culturally-themed discussions, making dubbings for films and plays, designing film promotion pictorials, editing and
composing news comments, compiling *College English Plus* (da xue ying yu bao), broadcasting on-campus news, and having debates on hot issues.

These learning tasks and projects were created to help students transform the obtained learning resources into practical application abilities, by interactively applying, in specific learning contexts, new media and modals to create meanings and generate new products that would become the learning resources for available design. Also, the successful fulfillment of learning tasks and implementation of researching projects drove students to use such active and explorative learning approaches as task-based learning, project-driven learning, and cooperative learning, with an aim to learn by doing to improve their learning efficiencies.

### 5.2 Cooperative explorations: Media to fulfill designing

Learning is in nature an active and positive knowledge construction process (Wang, 2016), in which learners, by means of cooperation and interaction, create meanings and develop application abilities. Being an effective medium in language acquisition, team cooperation is conducive to the reduction of spiritual pressure and a favorable learning environment is the prerequisite for successful learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), because team cooperation centers on students and their learning to organize learning, revolves around learning tasks and projects to promote learning, and helps to maximize the learning efficiency of all members in the team, achieving the co-objectives of learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). More importantly, team cooperation encourages students to change from a “passive and receptive learning” style to an “active and explorative learning” approach.

In the application mode of *learning by design*, team cooperation was an imperative medium not only for carrying out task-based and project-driven learning but also for successfully implementing designing, because task-based/project-driven learning and designing were both social learning activities important in exploration to construct knowledge and create meaning. For effective implementation of designing, the case study university designed a task-based/project-driven team cooperative learning process for students to follow.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5. The feasible means designed for designing in Soochow University’s application mode of *learning by design* into the cultivation of multiliteracies (Gu & Ye, 2017)
In the pre-task/project period, students were encouraged and guided to form different cooperative and explorative teams/groups according to specific learning tasks/projects. Based on the requirements of learning tasks/projects, team members negotiated themselves the responsibilities of their respective roles, discussed to design their task/project plans and programs, and collectively decided on the forms with which they would present their learning achievements.

While implementing tasks/projects, students, with proper mediation by their teachers, the obtained learning resources, and different media and modals available, implemented cooperative exploration to fulfill learning tasks/projects either on campus or off-campus, developing their practical abilities to work out problems and achieving the joint objectives of cultivating multiliteracies.

In the post-task/project period, students, through exhibition of their learning achievements, took pride in demonstrating what they had learned, enhancing their sense of success, through mutual assessment of learning efficiencies, had opportunities to learn from each other, improving the extent of their multiliteracies cultivation, and through summarization of learning projects/tasks, reflected on their cooperative exploration processes, optimizing their team cooperation in the new circle of learning by design.

5.3 Teachers’ mediations: Guarantees to promote designing
College English teaching consists of “the three stages of motivating, enabling, and assessing and all the three stages should be mediated by teachers” (Wen, 2015, p. 553), because in a foreign language learning context teachers are “the indispensable ‘significant others’ in promoting students to form and develop their language competences” (Zhou & Zhang, 2013, p. 96).

The roles played by teachers in mediating students’ learning at the case study university were embodied in such areas as arousing students’ interests in being good at and fond of learning, promoting students to positively participate in learning processes, encouraging students to negotiate problem solution programs, and providing students with prompt suggestions and feedbacks to improve learning, all of which helped students to “solve problems, carry out tasks and achieve goals which would be beyond their unassisted efforts” (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).

In promoting designing, teachers mediated students in different stages of their learning. As organizers of and participants in students’ learning activities, teachers helped to design and organize task-based/project-driven learning activities such as performing culturally themed discussions and performing debates on hot issues, etc. to construct favorable language learning environments to stimulate students’ learning enthusiasms, because familiar learning settings and friendly learning environments enhanced students’ sense of belonging, and stimulated their strong desire to learn for themselves (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005).

As monitors and motivators of students’ learning progresses, teachers, on the one hand, offered general guidance and instruction in relevant academic theories, theoretical concepts, suggestive viewpoints, trains of thought, and possible approaches for students
to fulfill their learning tasks/projects, promoting their learning progress. Teachers, on the other hand, managed to make use of their “role advantages” in being authoritative “knowers” by initiating discourse interactions (Li, 2012) to exchange views and negotiate with students in revising and perfecting their problem solution programs, helping them independently analyze, and work out practical problems, enabling students’ learning.

As evaluators and promoters of students’ learning efficiencies, teachers provided various formative and summative evaluations and feedbacks about the existing problems in students’ learning processes and approaches, and the differences between ideal learning performances and the current learning realities, promoting students to reflect on their learning progresses and improve their learning efficiencies.

6. Conclusion

*Learning by design* has been proved to be a feasible and effective mode for college English teaching and learning to cultivate multiliteracies in the modern age of information technology (Yi & Wu, 2014; Zhang & Zhang, 2014; Zhu, 2008).

Throughout the whole process of *learning by design* practiced in the case study university, students’ autonomous learning of *available design* was integrated with the guided learning of *designing*, and students’ knowledge systems needed to obtain learning resources were integrated with their ability systems needed to develop application abilities. *Learning by design* not only developed students’ traditional literacy with a focus on individuals’ word-mediated reading and writing behaviors, but also trained students’ media application ability by applying different media and modals to practical use, cultivated students’ media literacy by reading and using different media information, enhanced students’ critical thinking ability by analyzing and digesting different media information, developed students’ innovation development ability by constructing learning resources and creating meanings, and promoted students’ intercultural communication competency by being actively engaged in interactions and exchanges.

Cultivating abilities needed to use English is an important objective for college English teaching and the key to its realization lies in enabling students to change their learning methods from passive and receptive approaches to active and explorative styles (Wang et al., 2016). The modes of teaching surely exert influences on students’ choices of specific learning ways, and in this regard, innovating teaching modes is unquestionably an important task for college English teachers and also a practical study topic for college English teaching and research.

To innovate its college English teaching mode to cultivate multiliteracies, the case study university constructed an application mode of *learning by design*. For its smooth implementation, available learning resources were expanded and new learning media were created for students to build up their knowledge systems in the stage of *available design*, and learning tasks/projects were designed for students to construct knowledge and create meanings in the stage of *designing*. Although over 5,000 students have been instructed
to cultivate their multiliteracies with this application mode of *learning by design* ever since its initiation in 2008, were quantitative follow-up investigations (including tests and questionnaires) conducted into the exact extent to which students’ multiliteracies were actually improved by using this application mode of *learning by design*, this study would be more complete. But it is still hoped that this study, tentative as it is, could offer some possible inspiration for more college English teachers and researchers to work out more feasible ways or modes to cultivate the abilities needed to use English, including multiliteracies.

**Notes**


2. The case study university’s college English teaching practices have been termed “Soochow University Mode” and its research program: *Research and Practice on “3+1” College English Abilities Cultivation System* was awarded the second prize in 2017 for the Jiangsu Provincial Higher Education and Teaching Achievements (3 refers to the three respective abilities of multiliteracies, language expression abilities, and intercultural communication competence).

**References**


**About the author**

Wei-xing Gu (zhijiegu@263.net) is a professor of English at Soochow University. He got his Ph.D in Modern Chinese History (the history of English teaching in China in the late Qing Dynasty) from Soochow University. His research areas include the history of English teaching in China and college English teaching, with a special focus on English teaching in mission schools (curriculum design and teaching methodology), and relevant areas in cultivating abilities to use English (teacher professional development, English abilities to promote Chinese culture). He has published about 40 academic papers on such journals as *Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Foreign Literature Studies, Foreign Language World*, etc.