Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners in China through a Multiliteracies Theoretical Framework using Picture Books

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By

Simin Ma

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by

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April 3, 2018
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ABSTRACT

The current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in China uses a teacher-centered and examination-oriented approach. Chinese EFL teachers emphasize teaching in relation only to examination content such as vocabulary and grammar. Currently, it is uncommon to utilize picture books in EFL teaching beyond elementary school and little attention is given to visual literacy. This research explores the importance of developing meaning-making between illustrations and linguistic texts in picture books to augment language acquisition skills. For example, by teaching the metalanguage of the Elements of Design (line, form, texture, etc.), students can learn this terminology to enhance their visual literacy and ability to analyze visual texts. This study uses multiliteracies as the theoretical framework to examine picture books as a resource to accelerate Chinese EFL learners’ language learning. Suggestions are given for EFL teachers to facilitate Chinese EFL learners acquiring the target language of English by using picture books strategically to develop their communication skills as well as their capacities for creative and critical thinking.

Keywords: picture books, English as a Foreign Language, language acquisition, multiliteracies theory, application, visual literacy
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners learn English with less attention devoted to production skills and creativity. When applying picture books to the curriculum, there is a lack of pedagogical use of the pictures integrated in as contributing to the meaning of the stories as a whole.

Butler (2004) indicates that in some Asian countries, primary school teachers perceive more proficiency in receptive skills, which include listening and reading, but have weaker productive skills, which include speaking and writing (p. 20). Hsiu-Chih (2008) suggests that teachers’ proficiency in productive domains should be improved, especially when they are “facing the growing need to develop communicative abilities in their students” (p. 49). In many Chinese English classes, teachers teach mainly about the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. There is much less practice on communicative skills. Moreover, since there is a large population in China, the class size is usually big, containing approximately 50 students, it can be hard for the teachers to arrange group discussions. This has led to the norm of Chinese EFL class, where teachers are not familiar with the management of class discussions, and as a result, most students often feel uncomfortable to take part in discussion or communication even if activities are facilitated.

Hsiu-Chih (2008) also points out that Chinese students are not very creative. Students expand “their perspective of the world and [it] stimulates their imagination” when they read creative texts (p. 53). Picture books can be a rich source for teachers to improve their students’ productive skills (Hsiu-Chih, 2008, p. 49), and students’ imaginations can be stimulated if they are taught visual literacy skills. However, the current using of picture books in Chinese EFL classes still focuses too much on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Teachers are not familiar with
the pedagogy to use pictures and stories combined together to stimulate their students’ creative and intellectual capacities. They tend to train the students to practice vocabulary and sentence structures and tell them about the moral and ethical implications in the stories.

To better apply picture books into the teaching practice, they need to be used multimodally, which asks teachers to focus on the different modes of the picture books. The design elements showed in Figure 1. will be discussed more in the following chapter. Teachers should also focus on the cultural and social aspects of narratives. Chinese EFL teachers sometimes pay less attention to these issues, and they often ignore the necessity for students to discover and communicate. This phenomenon will reduce the function of picture books as a powerful pedagogical tool in Chinese EFL classes to accelerate the Chinese students’ English learning.
Background

As Tang (2015) notes, “English in mainland China is a foreign language, never a practical means of daily communication among the multi-ethnic Chinese public” (p. 1563). Therefore, the situation is different from English as a second language in those countries where English is a necessary tool of everyday communication (p. 1563). However, English has become increasingly important for it is “an international language used for international and intercultural communication” (Hismanoglu, M. & Hismanoglu, S., 2013, p. 507). Moreover, Liu, Zhou, and Fu (2015) point out that China “has sped up its economic development and asserted itself on the international stage” (p. 100). It started to pay much more attention to English as a basic
instrument of communication under the influence of globalization. China revised its national curriculum to include English as a major subject of formal education. Liu, Zhou, and Fu (2015) also predict that China will have the largest English as a Foreign Language speaking population in the world by 2016 (p. 100).

To enhance Chinese EFL learners’ comprehensive English ability, especially their communicative skills and creative and critical thinking, there needs to be changes in Chinese EFL pedagogy and learners’ way of learning. The application of picture books as a pedagogical tool in current Chinese EFL classrooms will be the main focus here.

Soundy and Drucker (2010) suggest that in today’s language classrooms, “children use visual and multimodal texts and multiple modes of representation in their daily literacy activities” (p. 448). “Texts” are understood in an expanded sense to include all means of communication in a variety of modes; texts are no longer seen as the unique tool for students to learn language. Kachorsky et al. (2017) claim that to be a literate citizen in the new millennium, the necessary skills “have expanded from simply being able to read and write printed text to being able to consume and produce a variety of texts across traditional and new technologies and working in digital and mobile environments” (p. 233).

As a visual and multimodal instrument, picture books can play an important role in the process of English acquisition. Serafini (2010) points out that “multimodal texts, in particular contemporary picture books, are used extensively in many elementary reading programs, conveying meanings through the use of two sign systems: written language and visual image” (p. 85). Kachorsky, et al. (2017) note that literacy researchers are investigating how children “make sense of picture books and other multimodal ensembles,” and they notice that “visual images, design elements, and written language are being combined in unique ways, and readers in the
new millennium will need new skills and strategies for constructing meaning in transaction with these multimodal texts” (p. 232).

Today’s classroom and the situation of the outside world do not always align. In the new environment, as language educators are moving from the traditional monomodal texts such as classic novels and standardized test passages, which used to dominate classrooms, to the multimodal texts such as picture books, “they will need to be more intentional in their instruction to address the new strategies and theories that will be useful for making sense of these texts” (Serafini, 2011, p. 348). For example, through teaching the metalanguage of the Elements of Design (line, form, texture, etc.) to students, they can use this terminology to enhance their visual literacy and abilities to analyze visual texts.

Goldstone (2001) explains that “picture books are categorized not by content but by format, which is an interdependence of the illustration and the text” (p. 362). Murphy (2009) notes that historically “more than 300 years ago in 1658, a teacher and Moravian bishop, Johann Amos Comenius, created what is now recognized as the first picture book made expressly for children entitled *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*” (p. 20). He also points out that picture books have an average of “32 pages in length, with a picture appearing on every page or on every two-page spread,” and there is always “a symbiosis [which] exists between the illustrations and the text” (p. 20). He metaphorically refers to the relationship between words and pictures as marriage, and claims that the two partners function together to make the book work. Murphy suggests that “the actual reading event is a synergy of text and art; a new entity is revealed that is more than the sum of its parts” (p. 20).

For the content of picture books, Strasser and Seplocha (2007) explain that “they can be fiction or nonfiction and the illustrations can be photographs as well as drawings, paintings, or
collage” (p. 220). Picture books are not only designed for children, but also for readers of all ages, and they can be around all topics and subjects (Murphy, 2009, p. 24).

Birketveit and Rimmereide (2017) indicate that “in a picture book, the pictures carry much of the narrative responsibility, and in most cases, the meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image” (p. 102). They claim that the words and pictures in the books are equally important as opposed to an illustrated book where text can exist without the aid of pictures (p. 101). Bader (1976) defines picture book as a book that incorporates text and illustrations as part of its total design, and is a social, cultural, and historical document that is produced commercially to be consumed and experienced by children. He goes on to state that as an art form, the picture book hinges “on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page” (p. 1).

Picture books can play an important part in English language learning. For example, Huang and Chen (2016) indicate that “bilingual children’s books are widely utilized in educational programs that have large numbers of beginning English Language Learners.” They also note that bilingual picture books can connect learners’ first language with the target language (p. 475). Murphy (2009) points out that there are many compelling reasons for using picture books in middle school classrooms. First, the books are short enough to be read in a few minutes. Time is thus saved for meaningful discussions and activities. Second, the intriguing illustrations in picture books are pleasurable to view and engaging for students. There are also opportunities for aesthetic learning. Third, to ensure the brevity of the picture book text, the words are carefully chosen, and the texts can be used as models of English writing (p. 21).

Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004) suggest that “reading books aloud not only increases reading achievement scores, but also listening and speaking abilities” (p. 158). They
claim that learners who are more frequently exposed to story book reading “are more likely to use complex sentences, have increased literal and inferential comprehension skills, gain greater story concept development, increase letter and symbol recognition, and develop positive attitudes about reading” (p. 158). They also note that many research studies show that children make progress in language through shared story book reading experiences. Teachers use story reading to benefit learners’ language acquisition. In the shared story reading process, children not only acquire language and literacy skills, but also gain vocabulary growth. Isbell et al. (2004) believe that story reading can foster communication opportunities for learners as they discuss the text and pictures in the books (p. 158). Murphy (2009) also points out that “picture books enhance vocabulary, foster independent reading, and promote diversity” (p. 23). He insists that “reading a picture book for information is different than reading a textbook for information” because reading with illustrations focuses more sharply on a topic or an object and presents specific information which gives readers a clearer understanding (p. 23).

Picture books not only help EFL learners with the learning of vocabulary or writing, but they also raise students’ interest to the target language because they show the world in a different and compelling way. Murphy (2009) indicates that “picture books can help by entertaining, informing, and leading students to greater understanding of the world around them” (p. 20). He further explains that for the students who are not interested in particular content, “picture books are a captivating medium to learn content” (p. 20).

The Chinese Context

As mentioned before, English in China is taught as a foreign language, and learned in a context where it is not a daily communication tool, including in English classes. There is so-called “哑巴英语” (mute English), which means “English learned but not spoken.” However, the
situation has changed along with the development of globalization, and the growth of the Internet has bridged the distance and brought more Chinese EFL learners into contact with native speakers to enhance their English ability (Tang, 2015, p. 1563). It is also indicated in the English Curriculum in China that as one of the most widely used languages in the world, English has become an important tool for international cultural and technological communication. In addition, the English subject undertakes the responsibility to develop students’ basic English competency and thinking ability, which refers to students’ abilities gained through the learning of English to develop their basic English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill, and to initially form the communication skill\(^1\) (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2011, p. 1-2).

Xiaohong and Zeegers (2010) also indicate that it is a trend towards globalization, which influences the culture and norms in China, and “that influence has been further exemplified in the changing role of English in China in relation to the current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum reform” (p. 178). Tang (2015) points out that “it becomes outdated to see English as only a useful tool for access to English knowledge…but updated to regard it as an increasingly strategic vehicle for active cross-cultural communication with the English communities” (p. 1563). Kuo (2009) also claims English to be “one of the main subjects for national college entrance examinations, essential for students in obtaining their first degrees at universities and colleges, as well as being considered a necessary skill for personal well-being” (p. 483). Li and Ni (2011) indicate that the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline

\(^1\) My translation. The original quotation in Chinese: 作为全球使用最广泛的语言之一，已经成为国际交往和科技、文化交流的重要工具。英语课程承担着培养学生基本英语素养和发展学生思维能力的任务，即学生通过英语课程掌握基本的英语语言知识，发展基本的英语听、说、读、写技能，初步形成用英语与他人交流的能力。
“encouraged teachers to use audio, visual, and the Internet resources for foreign language teaching” (p. 70).

Yu and Wang (2009) point out that although English has become a great concern in Chinese education and a compulsory course in Chinese schools, and there have been great achievements in the establishment of national curriculum and upgraded textbooks, “language practitioners and administrators in China are faced with profound challenges” (p. 457). They indicate that the challenges include “a substantial shift in teaching philosophy and practice” (p. 457).

Moreover, as Hu and Commeyras (2008) note, it is hard for Chinese students to attain English literacy because of the significant differences between their first language Chinese and their new language English (p. 3). Xiong and Qian (2012) also indicate that “Chinese English is generally perceived as a localized variety with Standard English as the core constituent that has unique lexis, syntactical and discourse patterns to express concepts unique to the Chinese social and cultural context” (p. 78). They are concerned that students may encounter “world Englishes [sic] shock” in real situations when they face the native norms (p. 78). When using the made-up word “Englishes,” Xiong and Qian emphasize the wide variety and diversity of English in the world.

**The examination-oriented education.** Xiaohong and Zeegers (2010) point out that “English language teaching and learning in secondary schools has traditionally pursued examination-oriented education, which has been designed to cater for the demands of college entrance examinations in China” (p. 179). Although the curriculum reform has focused on making changes to support new systems, rather than holding on to the tradition, “college
entrance examinations have traditionally tested students’ textbook knowledge, largely ignoring the testing of students’ abilities in using and creating language knowledge” (p. 179).

Zheng (2008) notes that the college entrance examinations (CEE) were established in 1952 and have become a “nationwide primary examination” (p. 138). Bai, Chi, and Qian (2013) point out that “each year, millions of high school students in China sit the Chinese National College Entrance Examination” and “for the majority of students, the CEE score is the sole determinant of college admission” (p. 632). It is thus a high stake examination to which students, teachers, and parents all attach great importance. They spent money and energy on training and practicing to get higher marks. Zheng (2008) observes, “Many families sent their child to take special classes preparing for the competitions since the child was in an elementary school” (p.633). Students are learning in a highly competitive environment where efficiency is recommended, while creative as well as critical thinking and communication are largely ignored.

The test of English is one of the components of the CEE. For the English subject, Zheng (2008) points out that grammar knowledge and language points associated with college entrance examinations requirements are addressed in detail in the curriculum and in classroom teaching by teachers. “Students have been concerned with completing grammar and translation exercises as well as keeping notes” (p. 179). She also notes that the EFL curriculum used to “stress only two basic aspects: language knowledge and language skills” and the assessment is only summative in form with a focus on scores and results, ignoring the formative process (p. 179).

There have long been debates to abolish the examination or reform, however, as it “involves such a huge population, facing a series of dilemmas, and being unbiased, any single even any minor change has to be made with considerable deliberateness” (Zheng, 2008, p. 146).
Therefore, in spite of the reform of curriculum, it is still hard for both teachers and students to change the norm.

**Chinese teaching practice.** Chinese classrooms are traditionally teacher-centered. Xiaohong and Zeegers (2010) indicate that this kind of EFL teaching practice “emphasizes the role of teachers in class while grammar-translation method promotes ‘rote memorizing, heavy grammar instruction and vocabulary explanation’, the very things that Confucian educational ideas advocate” (p. 179). Yu and Wang (2009) also note that “classroom practices in the Chinese context are still teacher-dominated, textbook-focused and exam-oriented rather than student-centered and communicative-oriented” (p. 465).

Wei et al. (2015) also note that “because of the influence of Confucian heritage culture...the degree of teacher control will be high” (p. 136). Yu and Wang (2009) point out that in Chinese tradition, instead of knowledge construction and application, learning is more of a process of knowledge accumulation. There is also the belief that knowledge is in the textbooks and should be transmitted by teachers. “As a result, careful note-taking, attentive listening to teachers in class, and accurate reproduction of learned knowledge are understood as necessary and essential steps for deeper comprehension and better learning” (p. 465).

Yu and Wang (2009) claim that “changes can only be expected if teachers can first of all change their classroom practice” (p. 466). However, the changes are not easy to make. With the influence of globalization, Chinese classroom is indeed facing a transformation towards student-centered style pedagogy. Wei et al. in their study point out that students “enjoyed the modernized, student-centered learning environments yet wanted their teachers to be strict,” which is to say “while they preferred a more cooperative classroom, they preferred their EFL teachers to be more helpful/friendly and understanding but less dissatisfied and to offer more
freedom, with less control, while remaining strict (yan 严)” (p. 141). Chinese students and parents are glad to experience the new learning environment, but when it comes to grades and gaining new knowledge, they still need the teacher to be strict and give enough guidance to ensure the accumulation of knowledge and progress in scores.

**Chinese students’ learning style.** Since Chinese education is examination-oriented, Chinese students have developed a unique style of learning. Rao and Yuan (2016) state that “traditionally, Chinese students are considered as having a closure-oriented learning style, which is to say that they tend to avoid ambiguity and expect an accurate and authoritative answer to any question in their learning process” (p. 15). Students are used to asking for the answer directly instead of inquiring and exploring. They need the process to be efficient, and the development of creative and critical thinking skills, which are often non-linear, are thus ignored.

The study of Yu and Wang (2009) shows that the teaching and learning approach in Chinese classrooms “does not cultivate the learners’ awareness of cooperative learning, but encourages them to frequently use memory and cognitive strategies such as rote learning and repetitive practices” (p. 464). Chinese students are good at memorizing and rote learning from an early age, but they seldom raise questions or doubt what the teachers say.

Compared with western learners, Chinese learners are more passive due to the examination-oriented education and teacher-centered practice. Yu and Wang (2009) indicate that “the learners tend to use ‘passive’ strategies to memorize vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and enlarge their vocabulary for the sake of better scores in the exams” (p. 464). When learning English, Chinese students focus more on the language points being tested, and the test emphasizes the assessment of receptive skills more than productive skills. They also note that “the knowledge-oriented teaching and learning in China tend to focus on the transmission
and learning of grammar and vocabulary knowledge out of the communicative context” and as a result, “the focus on written forms of linguistic knowledge in the exams not only encourages learners to employ strategies of memorization and repetition, but also greatly constrains these learners’ use of affective and social strategies” (p. 464).

Due to the passive learning style, Chinese students prefer attentive listening in the classroom, and the Chinese teaching practice is not communication-oriented. Yu and Wang (2009) indicate that this kind of teaching practice “does not provide opportunities for learners to practice or functionally use the target language” (p. 463). They point out that activities such as role plays and group work are not always promoted in Chinese classrooms (p. 463). In this way, learners can hardly get the opportunity to communicate or cooperate. There is a lack of opportunity for students to inquire and express their ideas. Yu and Wang (2009) also note that there is little “natural communication between teachers and students or among students” and “learners are encouraged to follow the teachers’ instructions both in and out of class, and to use memory and cognitive strategies rather than affective and social strategies” (p. 464).

Chinese students are not doing enough reading after class. When it comes to the reading of English texts, Chinese EFL students are mostly just reading textbooks and reading comprehension in the daily exercises. Their reading habits are not fostered in and out of class. Sun (2017) set Taiwan as an example, where EFL learners do little reading outside of class, and university students have a small vocabulary size, which is far from the baseline vocabulary size (p. 97). The vocabulary size and language application need to be developed by reading native English books rich in description and imaginative play. Words and sentences in textbooks are not enough for EFL learners to acquire authentic English language.
When it comes to the teaching of English reading in China, Sun (2017) explains that to start a reading activity, teachers typically first introduce the topic and pre-teach the key words or phrases. Students then read the text word-by-word. After the learning of new words and first reading of the text, students answer comprehension questions and do vocabulary or grammar exercises. They may be asked to make sentences or write a short passage using the newly learned words. Sun claims that “intentional learning under this condition, however, neither prepares these learners to become readers in English nor, as studies show, helps boost their vocabulary size” (p. 98).

When applying picture books into their pedagogy, Chinese EFL teachers still follow the same pattern and pay much attention to the key words, sentence structure, and grammar. Moreover, picture books tend to be only used for pre-school learners in China, and the norm is that older learners would feel childish to read picture books. There are many picture books that deal with social issues which are better geared toward teenagers. For example, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) talks about the adventure a new arrival has and gives readers ideas about immigrant experience; and *Heather has Two Mommies* (Newman & Cornell, 2015) tells a story of a girl with two mommies, and shows readers the diversity of families. Chinese EFL teachers should not constrain the use of picture books only to pre-school learners, and they can choose various kind of picture books to fit the learners’ need. They should also not only focus on the linguistic design of the books but pay attention to all the other modes and the cultural aspects in the books to enrich the students’ learning. In North America, for instance, social issues picture books have been used effectively to teach certain key concepts, or act as prompts to bridge into difficult subject matter, at the secondary level.
This study proposes to explore how the theory of multiliteracies can offer a new dimension to the teaching and learning of a foreign language (in this case, the target language is English) in the Chinese context.

The central question of the study is: How can picture books be used to accelerate Chinese EFL students’ language learning and creative and critical thinking?

The sub-questions are:

1. How do Chinese EFL teachers use picture books in language teaching?
2. What is the outcome of Chinese EFL students’ learning by using picture books?
3. Why are picture books important for EFL learners?
4. What is the value of picture books?
5. How do picture books’ multimodality and cultural narratives promote language acquisition?

The theoretical framework of multiliteracies will be discussed in the following chapter. A multiliteracies theory offers teachers a way to engage students in effective language learning.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Multiliteracies theory is an ideal theoretical framework to help teachers and learners work with picture books as a multimodal instrument in EFL education in China.

The New London Group (1996, 2000) were a group of international experts in literacy and language learning, first coined the term “multiliteracies” in 1996. Multiliteracies theory consists of two crucial arguments developed by the New London Group. The first is associated with the modes of meaning-making. Instead of focusing solely on, or completely privileging, only linguistic elements in representation, multiliteracies theory emphasizes the multimodality of meaning-making. The New London Group (2000) has identified “six major areas in which functional grammars, the metalanguages that describe and explain patterns of meaning, are required—Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design and Multimodal Design” (p. 25). Cope and Kalantzis (2000a) suggest that “Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning” (p. 5). When two or more modes are combined to create meaning, multimodality is being deployed. For example, a board game uses the visual mode (reading the cards, interpreting symbols); audio (listening to other players’ responses); spatial (rolling dice, moving game pieces) – when combined, these modes create a multimodal experience to create a particular form of communication.

The second argument relates to “the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000a, p. 5), which arises from “the realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness” (p.6). Cope and Kalantzis, original members of the New London Group (1997) claim that “we have to negotiate differences every day, in our local communities and in our increasingly globally interconnected working and community lives”
Cope and Kalantzis (2009) suggest that “diversity is pivotal in today’s life-worlds” (p. 174). They believe that people who can live well in this world should be able to “navigate from one domain of social activity to another,” “articulate and enact their own identities,” and “find ways of entering into dialogue with and learning new and unfamiliar social languages” (p. 174).

Kress (2000), another original member of the New London Group, indicates that there is a wide range of means for the human body to engage with the world, and these means are called “our ‘senses’: sight, hearing, smell, taste, feel” (p. 181). Each of the senses works in a specific way in relation to nature and the environment around us, providing highly differentiated information for human beings. Also, “none of the senses ever operates in isolation from the others—other than in severe pathologies” (p. 181). When learning by reading picture books with explicit pedagogical attention to multimodality, readers are using their senses of sight, hearing, and sometimes kinesthetic feel to experience the texture of the books. In terms of multimodality, the modes of visual, audio, gestural, spatial are combined together with the linguistic design. Early and Yeung (2009) explain that the modes of communication such as “speech, writing, image, space, and gesture, consist of sets of semiotic resources or meaning-making potentials” and are associated with the forces of globalization and information technologies. Early and Yeung contend that “the seminal call to multimodal approaches to pedagogy was made as a response to the changing social and cultural communicational landscape” (p. 301).

Holloway (2012) points out that multiliteracies emphasize the learners’ need “to have agency in the content and modalities with which they choose to innovate or to critique” (p. 158). Ajayi (2009) notes that multiliteracies pedagogy can play the role to provide opportunities for English learners to “learn about different text types in ways that enhance the expansion of interpretation of text” (p. 587). Gee, Kress, and van Leeuwen notes that literacy is not just the
ability to read and write but should be understood as “the ability to construct and understand the different possibilities of meanings made available by differing textual forms associated with diverse domains such as the Internet, videogames, visual images, graphics, and layouts” (as cited in Ajayi, 2009, p. 585).

Multiliteracies theory focuses on classroom pedagogy, which brings together some of the best characteristics of both traditional teaching and student-centred teaching practices. Cope and Kalantzis (1997) note that there are four components of pedagogy: “situated practice,” which “draws on the experience of meaning-making in lifeworlds, the public realm, and workplaces;” “overt instruction,” through which learners “develop an explicit metalanguage of Design;” “critical framing,” in which learners stand back and critique the meaning they make; and “transformed practice,” in which learners “as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures” (p. 470). (See Appendix B.) They argue that there should be a mix of the four elements in “teaching and learning about the Design of meaning” (p. 476). These four elements are not necessarily taught in chronologically. “As designers of meaning, we are designers of social futures—workplace futures, public futures and community futures” (Cope & Kalantzis, 1997, p. 470).

Teachers are also viewed as designers of students’ learning. The New London Group (2000) suggest teachers to “treat any semiotic activity, including using language to produce or consume texts, as a matter of Design” involving three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned” (p. 20). The New London Group believe the three elements together emphasize that “meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules” (p. 20). Cope and Kalantzis (1997) suggest that in the process of design, individuals are inseparable from culture, and “the representational resources available to an
individual are the stuff of culture: ways of making meaning that an individual has learnt and perennially used over the course of their life” (p. 475). Learners will inevitably be involved to add “something of themselves to the meaning” (p. 476). Given that languages are always based in cultural paradigms, this cultural approach focused on design in teaching and learning are fitting for effective language learning pedagogy. Serafini (2012) comments on the New London Group’s concept of design which involves the transformation from available designs to the redesigned and suggests that “meaning is constructed anew in each act of reading (interpreting) or authoring (producing) texts, while at the same time reconstructing and renegotiating the reader’s identity” (p. 156). See Figure 2 for a summary of the New London Groups’ Designs of Meaning.

![Designs of Meaning](image)

Figure 2. Design of meanings. From “A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures” by the New London Group, 2000, in B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. p. 23.

By researching three bilingual focal students’ (six to seven years old) multimodal composing processes for seven months, Ranker (2009) found in his qualitative case study that the students used visual designs to help with composing. The students imported various kinds of resources into the focal composing event, and they “transformed them (to varying degrees) to meet the needs of the new composing situation” (p. 342). Ranker notes that “multimodal composing practices (as available designs) can be continuously redesigned to serve as strategic
resources during subsequent composing events.” This study’s results have the implications “for designing the curricular contexts necessary for fostering such redesign processes” (p. 323).

Öman and Sofkova Hashemi (2015) suggest that learners will integrate and select the available designs that teachers provide “if teaching has changed to encompass a multiplicity of modes besides the written and spoken language” (p. 141). By “a multiplicity of modes,” Öman and Sofkova Hashemi (2015) mean that “certain design elements; for example, in linguistic design there are vocabulary and metaphor, in visual design there are colors and perspective, and in audio design, music, and sound effects,” and they emphasize that “the orchestration of meaning involves selection and configuration of modes” (p. 143).

Ajayi (2009) suggests that the use of multimodal pedagogies and resources has the potential to enhance students’ language and literacy learning in a transformative way and affects the students’ identities (p. 594). He points out that “teachers should be able to supplement district-approved reading materials with texts from different genres such as graphics, posters, photographs, billboards, and teen magazines” (p. 594). Nakata (2000) suggests “teachers will seek to immerse students in meaningful practices based on students’ own experiences” (p. 115).

Multiliteracies also plays a part to enhance learners’ communication skills. “Designing is the act of doing something with Available Designs of meaning, be that communicating to others (such as writing, speaking, making pictures), representing the world to oneself or others’ representations of it (such as reading, listening or viewing)” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 177). Ajayi (2009) talks about communication and views it as “sign production, reception, and transformation and can be understood as the product of people’s interaction with the semiotic resources that are available to them at a particular moment in a specific context” (p. 585).
In a study by Cummins et al. (2006), they asked three Grade 7/8 Pakistan girls, who were newcomers to Canada and had different English level proficiency, to collaborate in dual language story writing. The researchers noticed that each girl contributed to the composing process and collaborated well with bilingual peers. Cummins et al. called the creative work “identity texts” and indicated that “students invest their identities in the creation of these texts which can be written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form” (p. 24). In this process, communication is increased through the work of multiliteracies, and learners can also develop their creative thinking ability by designing and producing their own work. When using picture books in language learning, EFL teachers can also ask students to create their own picture books after their learning and discussion of the books. Learners might refer to the language or composing skills they acquire from the books, and modelling their work somewhat on existing picture books, each student contributes to the composing process using their own strength.

Multiliteracies is also a powerful means for the development of learners’ critical thinking. Ajayi (2009) suggests that teachers can “motivate students to analyze, interpret, and critique” and “to account for their social, cultural, and ideological production” (p. 594). He indicates that learners can be engaged in “sifting through complex texts composed of language, colours, pictures, and graphics to understand the politics and aesthetics,” and they can relate these elements to the broader society. In this way, learners will be encouraged to “reject single interpretations of texts and instead deconstruct materials based on their experiences and perspectives” (p. 594). In China, since students tend to get quick and accurate answers from the teacher to learn knowledge in an efficient manner, they are not likely to doubt or critique. Instead of providing answers and theories directly, Chinese teachers need to alter their way of teaching.
and give more guidance for learners to develop the habit to ask their own questions and critique concepts. EFL teachers can exploit language, pictures, and stories in picture books to provide learners with opportunities to enhance their critical thinking skills.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Methods for Searching the Literature

The literature review in this paper analyzes the benefits of picture books using a multiliteracies theoretical framework to teach Chinese EFLs.


I mainly used the databases such as Scholars Portal, CRKN Wiley Online Library, EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete, and Taylor & Francis Journals Complete through the Leddy Library, and when looking for literature, I am only focusing on peer reviewed books and journals. I also searched in public libraries for picture books.

I researched Chinese empirical studies that have sought to examine and explore how in practice in real classrooms picture books have and are being used by teachers as a part of their pedagogy to teach English as a Foreign Language in the Asian context.

The articles I chose are mostly within ten years’ period of time (2008-2018). Only a small part of them are written earlier. The earlier research is seminal work important to these fields of study. The books and articles explain the use of picture books in language teaching and learning, the theory of multiliteracies and visual literacy, and the current situation of Chinese EFL
teaching and learning. I also used articles providing empirical evidence for the findings. When articles were only available in Chinese, I have provided my own translation into English in addition to quoting in the original language (provided in the footnotes).

The picture books I have selected to include demonstrate the metalanguage of multiliteracies. Some of them explain the techniques illustrators use in association with visual literacy, and others relate to social justice issues, which connect to part of the theory of multiliteracies. I also chose certain picture books to demonstrate that they can be used for not only young children, but also adolescents.

I organized the literature I selected by taking notes on the literature and developing an outline of it, and I wrote the literature review that summarizes the literature for inclusion in my paper. My goal was to investigate broadly what literature has already been written on this topic so that I could in a small way build upon and contribute to the substantial body of writing that already exists in this area. Since the theory of multiliteracies has not been widely introduced into the teaching of EFLs in the Chinese context, much of the theory has been drawn from western, English speaking journals.

Picture books that incorporate multiliteracies can enhance EFL learners’ language development and creative and critical thinking ability. However, in order for educators to select picture books that effectively utilize multiliteracies for their classrooms, it is critical to understand the potential value of picture books and how they employ multiliteracies to facilitate English learning.

Among all the modes, picture books associate with the visual mode most closely. Visual literacy is defined as “a group of acquired competencies for interpreting and composing visible
messages” (Brill, Kim, & Branch, 2007, p. 55). Newfield and Stein (2000) in their study on visual literacy in English education “aimed at exploring aspects of multimodality and media education especially in relation to the visual mode. The ‘production assignment’ required students to produce media materials or programmes with a prominent visual component, for the purposes of English education” (p. 294). Holloway (2012) suggests that “visual literacy and multimodalities give all students a wider breadth of means and of content to develop their own skill sets” (p. 153). She notes that “teachers who use multiliteracies aim to tailor the curriculum to better serve English Language Learners” (p. 161). Ajayi (2009) also talks about how English language learners benefit from using visual literacy resources: “In multimodal texts, knowledge is not made available in English only; rather, it is made available to [English learners] in multidimensional ways, that is, through the combination and integration of language, images, graphics, and layouts” (p. 594). Through a multiliteracies pedagogy, the visual mode in combination with the linguistic mode gives EFLs more clues to figure out the intended meaning of a text.

**The Importance of Picture books**

Hsiu-Chih (2008) suggests that reading and learning with picture books can accelerate the development of EFL students’ comprehensive skills (p. 49). Serafini (2014) also notes that processing “visual images is an essential skill both in and out of school” (p. 26). Teachers and students must develop the competency to comprehend and interpret visual literacy. As a form of visual literacy, picture books can function as a multimodal tool to provide rich resources for EFL teachers, and an approach to teaching which can improve the speaking and writing skills of learners.
The value of picture books. Picture books promote two key skills: language comprehension and creativity. Picture books promote language comprehension by providing a narrative context to understand language and offering images that facilitate comprehension. They use two semiotic modes together to enhance meaning. When read aloud, with the teacher using voice pitch and modulation to give a dramatic reading of the text, a third mode is introduced to augment how meaning is constructed for the language learner. The teaching and learning of visual literacy can also encourage students’ imagination, thereby promoting creativity.

The value of language in picture books. Cunningham and Stanovich’s (1991) quantitative study with 104 students from an elementary school in the U.S. shows that “in samples of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade children,” there are “significant correlations with spelling, vocabulary, verbal fluency, word knowledge, and general information” (p. 264). They indicate that the amount of children’s early reading can influence their later reading achievement (p. 264). If Chinese EFL students can learn to read English picture books from an early age, they may become better readers than those with little early reading experience in English. Montag, Jones, and Smith (2015) note that if parents read picture books regularly to children, the children will get more diverse data regarding the to-be-learned language (p. 1493). Montag, Jones, and Smith (2015) also point out that “books are not limited by here-and-now constraints; each book may be different from others in topic or content, opening new domains for discovery and bringing new words into play” (p. 1494). This is especially important for Chinese EFL learners because they can be involved in a richer and more authentic English language environment. By reading picture books that tell stories about different themes, children gain the opportunity to learn more vocabulary and native expressions, and they can also gain access to different world
views, cultural perspectives, and culturally-based humour, which they can seldom see in their daily life or in traditional English textbooks.

When reading picture books, children can also view the words and sentences they have seen, which can help them learn in an interesting and meaningful context. The words can be used in all kinds of situations, and children can learn how to use the sentences in certain situations (Hsiu-Chin, 2008, p. 48). According to Littlewood, “just as a single linguistic form can express a number of functions, so also can a single communicative function be expressed by a number of linguistic forms” (as cited in Hsiu-Chin, 2008, p. 48). Picture books can provide various kind of context and situations for expression. Therefore, students can learn not only vocabulary and sentence structures, but also different usage of linguistic functions by reading and learning with picture books.

In picture books, certain linguistic units—such as homonyms and other confusing words pairings, sound effects, and target vocabulary—can also be highlighted to indicate their importance. Cope and Kalantzis (2000b) indicate that linguistic design can be linked to visual design, from graphology to the pages of “desktop publishing in which fonts, point sizes, leading, kerning, bolding and italics are all integral to the grammar of the words—and the organization of linguistic meaning around headings, subheadings, indents, bullet points, pictures, diagrams and open spaces” (p. 209). Huang and Chen (2016) point out that many picture books utilize a variety of methods to emphasize specific words, such as “boldface, underline, [different] font size, and capitalization” (p. 480). The multimodal design helps to make meaning of the text and enhance the readers’ reading. Overt instruction on how to infer meaning from these multimodal designs is one example of how teachers can engage EFL Chinese learners to think critically about how text is designed to convey meaning for specific purposes and specific audiences.
**The value of stories in picture books.** Stories also contribute to the learning of vocabulary, sentence structures, and even culture and values. According to Cameron, “when listening to a story in a foreign language, EFL learners are able to recall the meaning of some words or phrases in the foreign language (as cited in Hsiu-Chin, 2008, p. 49). Hsiu-Chin (2008) also indicates that when EFL learners understand narrative conventions, stories can facilitate their language learning by allowing them to link it to their prior knowledge, thereby making “the foreign language classroom less foreign” (p. 50). Moreover, instead of being grammar-based, the process of story reading is more content-based. Picture books provide the learners with a more pleasant and engaging world than textbooks and promote the learning motivation of the EFL learners.

Stories in picture books can be therapeutic and cathartic as they help children process and understand problems they may encounter in life. Serafini and Coles (2015) introduce “My Teacher Is a Monster (Brown, 2014), The Boy Who Looked Like Lincoln (Reiss, 2003), and The Frank Show (Mackintosh, 2012) [which] all deal with the challenges children face in school.” These books talk about issues children deal with such as “having a mean teacher, being different, and deciding what to bring to show and tell” (p. 637). Children who have problems or put others in difficult situations will be engaged in the plots they are familiar with in the stories and be encouraged or inspired by the stories the authors tell. By reading stories, students with difficulties may resonate with the emotions of the narratives and feel less isolated, while those who used to cause troubles for others may be educated to behave properly and have empathy from an early age. Serafini and Coles (2015) note that picture books tell stories not only about problems students encounter at school, but about everyday fears they experience as well. As they elaborate: “What If…? (Browne, 2014) deals with children’s fears of going to a party and not
knowing anyone. Browne’s masterful illustrations bring a child’s imagination to life in ways only this award-winning artist can” (637). The stories associated with students’ daily confusions and challenges give them an opportunity to interact with the characters inside the picture books and discover solutions to their problems. Children may also come to realize that they are not alone in their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which in turn can alleviate the anxieties associated with growing up.

**The value of pictures in picture books.** When reading or learning with picture books, before reading the stories, readers usually look through the visual images first. Kress suggests that as readers interact with images “in printed materials, we must remember the world shown is different from the world told” (as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 86). Ikeda (1999) demonstrates that the use of a certain volume of images can promote the understanding of stories (p. 117). This is reinforced by Herrel and Jordan (2016), who note that “visual scaffolding is an approach in which the language used in instruction is made more understandable by displaying drawings or photographs that allow students to connect spoken English words to visual images being displayed” (p. 38). In the 21st century, students must not only be verbally literate, but visually literate as well (Brumberger, 2011, p. 46). In addition, Wiseman, Mäkinen, and Kupiainen (2016) state that “Literacy researchers have recognized the significance of visual modes of literacy and how they can expand options for writing and reading in the classroom” (p. 537). Literacy is vitally important in language acquisition. Learning a language only through a linguistic mode will slow down the acquisition of the language.

In pictures, both the elements of art and the principles of design are important concepts. Martens et al. (2012) explain that in picture books, graphic cues correspond to the writing, and they consist of elements of art such as dot, line, shape, colour, value, space, and sometimes
texture (p. 286). They also note that the principles of design include “balance, emphasis, pattern, rhythm, movement, variety, harmony, contrast, unity” (p. 287). They further explain that when applying the elements of art:

Horizontal and vertical lines show calm and stability; diagonal lines indicate tension or movement. Pointed lines or shapes indicate danger or pain (negative feelings); curved lines or rounded shapes indicate safety, being at peace (positive feelings). Color helps to create different moods or emotions (happiness, sadness, angry, calm, peace, excited, embarrassment). Warm colours such as red, yellow, and orange sometimes represent peace or love and other times anger. Cool colors such as blue, green, and purple sometimes show danger and other times life, rebirth, at rest or peace. Pattern through use of repeated line, shape, and color can help to create movement (p. 288).

All the elements of art and the principles of design can promote the readers to think critically and give rise to discussion. They can also read the graphic cues to have a better and unique understanding of the stories. Pictures in story books can help to increase the learners’ comprehension and stimulate their imagination.

It is also different to read visual messages because when reading stories, the understanding of language usually starts with details and grow to the whole, while the understanding of pictures often goes in the opposite direction from the whole to the details. When looking at the pictures in story books, this feature can make the EFL students gain a top-down reading model (Hsiu-Chih, 2008, p. 51). Brill, Kim, and Branch (2007) purport that “visual messages are fundamental to complex mental processing because they provide information and opportunities for analysis that text alone cannot provide” (p. 51). By necessity, the language used with young children must be fairly simple, yet images can remain complex and sophisticated,
provoking a range of intellectual and emotional responses. Images can achieve nuances in meaning beyond the scope of linguistic texts aimed toward young children. While analyzing the visual information, EFL students, especially visual learners, can have better opportunities to understand the stories and the language from a different perspective, thus more possibilities are provided for language acquisition.

Visuals can also play the role to broaden the learners’ imagination. Holloway (2012) notes that creating and analyzing images may enhance students’ abilities to imagine (p. 158). In language learning, this process can be vital to help with students’ productive skills. Holloway suggests that “visuals can generate writing and vice versa” (p. 158). The analysis and communication evoked by reading visuals can be an effective tool for Chinese EFL students to develop both their speaking and writing competencies as well as their imaginations.

Apart from language learning, visuals can also help students to appreciate art works. Lechner notes that a close look at the images in picture books “can bring to children’s attention the wide visual vocabulary and range of expression that artists employ to tell a story, and can increase children’s enjoyment and understanding of the challenges of artistic expression” (as cited in Serafini, 2015, p. 450). Martens et al. (2012) suggest that it is important to develop student’s appreciation of art. They should be able to ask and consider how and why the illustrator made the decisions to express meaning. Art is a mode to convey deeper meaning. As a valid language, art should be taught and valued (p. 287).

Fine art works have been a part of the curriculum and pedagogy to develop the students’ appreciation of art. Serafini (2015) notes that the artworks in picture books have been used as a pedagogical tool to guide readers to the world of visual art, “as a bridge between a traditional literacy curriculum that focuses primarily written language and the visual images and multimodal
ensembles of contemporary digital environments” (p. 450). The appreciation of art can be developed especially in reading the picture books with fine art work inside. Serafini (2015) points out that the relationship among “works of fine art and the illustrations in narrative picture books help readers make sense of these picture books as they work to connect and understand the meaning potentials offered in the relationship among these visual images” (p. 439). He affirms that the analysis of illustrations of fine art can expand the students’ interpretive strategies when they are trying to make sense of pictures and stories. It also supports the readers’ appreciation of works of fine art (p. 439). Eckhoff and Guberman argue that “the visual arts can provide young children with meaningful viewing experiences while offering opportunities to engage the imagination and draw upon previous experiences with popular culture” (as cited in Serafini, 2015, p. 450).

**Multiliteracies in picture books.** When learning English, instead of only applying a linguistic mode in the learning process, EFL teachers should provide students with multimodal texts. Cope and Kalantzis (2000a) explain that the word “multiliteracies” describes two important arguments. The first is associated with the multiplicity of communication media, and the second is related to cultural and linguistic diversity (p.3). Picture books contain both the two aspects of multiliteracies and help EFL students with language acquisition in both ways.

**The multiplicity of communication media.** Serafini (2012) explains that mode is created within or across different cultures to construct meanings. He goes on to explain that modes are “developed by humans to express ideas and communicate with one another. In other words, when more than one mode is present in a text, we consider the text to be multi-modal” (p. 153). He also puts it that “a multi-modal text is a text composed of more than one mode. Photography, music, sculpture and written language are examples of different modes” (p. 153). Jewitt and
Kress note that “multimodal texts present information across a variety of modes including visual images, design elements, written language, and other semiotic resources” (as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 87).

Serafini (2010) suggests that readers interact with traditional texts “that contain multimodal elements, for example picture books, informational texts, magazines and newspapers, as well as contemporary texts that contain hypertext, videos, music, and graphic designs. In fact, most contemporary written texts are accompanied by visual images” (p. 87). Kachorsky et al. (2017) also indicate that “the contemporary literacy landscape is one that is increasingly multimodal” (p. 231). Multimodality theory explores how modes structure communication, and explains how linguistic, visual, gestural, and special modes work together to carry meaning. Picture books are multimodal, in which the text is linguistic, the pictures are visual, the layout and design can be spatial, and the position and movements in the pictures can be gestural (Martens et al, 2012, p. 286). According to Lewis, “each mode—visual, linguistic, spatial, gestural—contributes to the meaning of the whole and can only be understood in the context of the other modes” (as cited in Martens et al, 2012, p. 287). Arizpe and Styles argue that by examining the visual context, learners can analyze the modes and have personal response to the story even when they are struggling with the texts (as cited in Martens et al, 2012, p. 287).

However, Kress and van Leeuwen argue that “multimodal texts are more complex than texts that use written language as the primary semiotic resource. These challenging texts require that readers work across multiple sign systems and use different strategies for navigating and comprehending these texts” (as cited in Serafini, 2011, p. 343). The shift from the focus on solely the linguistic mode to multimodality requires readers to “navigate, design, interpret and analyze texts in new and more interactive ways” (Serafini, 2010, p. 86). So as to understand multimodal
texts successfully, students will need to use a variety of converging and interconnected perspectives (Serafini, 2010, p. 88). It challenges both the teachers and students to use multimodal texts in the process of language learning and combine different modes when reading picture books. However, if the teachers and learners can break the barriers and make meaning by incorporating different modes together, their ability to construct meaning and make interpretations will be enhanced dramatically.

**Visual literacy.** Among all the modes, visual is the most important element in picture books. Brill, Kim, and Branch (2007) note that, “visual literacy is: A group of acquired competencies for interpreting and composing visible messages” (p. 55). According to Serafini (2010), visual literacy is the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in any variety of form that engages the cognitive processing of a visual image” (Serafini, 2010, p. 87). Or, as Holloway (2012) puts it, “Visual literacy provides the opportunity to make meaning from imagery with similar levels of complexities as in spoken language. As with any interpretation, visual literacy needs to be understood as socially constructed” (p. 150). EFL readers’ perceptions are shaped by the cultural, social, and historical contexts, and their language acquisition needs the help of multiliteracies, especially visual literacy, to guide them in interpreting texts. Multiliteracies always perceives language learning as socially situated.

McDougall suggests that visual literacy allows learners to “express themselves through media images and in their verbal analysis of such images [which] can enhance traditional literacies. In this way, the production and interpretation of multimedia can be viewed as a vehicle for developing reading and writing skills” (as cited in Holloway, 2012, p. 160). It offers students “a critical lens so they are less likely to take images at face value, and instead read the world” (Holloway, 2012, p. 160). Moreover, Kress explains that the modes of written language and
visual image “are governed by distinct logics; written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas, visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality, organized arrangements, and simultaneity” (as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 87). By reading and analyzing visual messages, Chinese EFL learners can have access to develop their creative and critical thinking ability, thus express and interpret the information in English in diverse ways.

**Cultural and linguistic diversity.** The other important argument of “multiliteracies” is cultural and linguistic diversity.

The New London Group (2000) claims that people need to “have the chance to expand their cultural and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources” (p. 15). Ajayi (2009) contends that the pedagogy of multiliteracies has the potential to offer learners a platform for meaning-making, and “multiliteracies pedagogy can facilitate literacy learning among English learners, particularly in the light of a growing orientation toward semiotics and the proliferation of different text types, technologies, and meaning-making options in the contemporary world” (p. 586).

Chinese EFL students are living in a cultural environment dramatically different from many English-speaking cultures. When EFL students are learning English, they are also learning another culture. When they read picture books written and illustrated from another country, there will be challenges for them. However, it is also an opportunity to raise the students’ cultural awareness (Hsiu-Chih, 2008, p. 54). Huang and Chen (2016) suggest that, “as a branch of multicultural literature, bilingual children’s picture books present a special opportunity for readers to expand their horizons and knowledge of other cultures” (p. 475). They also note that picture books can help students increase their sensitivity to different cultures (p. 476). Colby and Lyon indicate that picture books “help children identify with their culture, introduce children to
different cultures, facilitate diversity, and stimulate acknowledge of different beliefs, values, and customs” (as cited in Huang & Chen, 2016, p. 476).

Traditional English textbooks in Chinese classrooms are mostly focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. To better engage the students in learning of the target language, cultural elements should be incorporated into the curriculum and teachers’ pedagogy. Picture books with diverse and abundant cultural elements and native expression can be a good tool to facilitate the EFL students’ language learning and enrich their cultural awareness. Picture books alongside traditional textbooks offer learners opportunities to think and engage in language learning in diverse ways.

The visual mode in picture books also provides EFL learners with the opportunity to appreciate art from a different culture. As literature, art is a system of meaning, and “there are facts, principles, rules, and ways of making and understanding art that are learned through an education system and/or a social structure that determines how a culture sees and experiences the world” (Serafini, 2011, p. 343).

The Design of Picture books

When creating picture books, the first step is to make up engaging and thought-provoking stories. Choosing vocabulary is important, but attention should also be paid to the plots. Hsiu-Chih (2008) suggests that reading the plots apart from the vocabulary or sentence learning can make the students more interested in the books, and without being aware of it, they will go on reading the words and sentences (p. 50). For example, *George’s new dinosaur* (Meltzer, 2017, p. 8) provides a simple and interesting story for young readers (See Figure 3). While reading the plots, children are attracted by what is going to happen, and they won’t pay too much attention to the unfamiliar vocabulary. However, if a new word is important and occurs many times in the
story, children can figure out the meaning by looking at the illustration. In this way, children are
discovering and learning the new words by themselves.

Figure 3. Illustration of a dinosaur when the word occurs many times. From “George’s new dinosaur” by J. Meltzer, 2017, Scholastic Inc., p. 8. Copyright 2017 by Astley Baker Davies Ltd/Entertainment One UK Ltd.

Pictures in story books provide a source for learners to relate their prior knowledge and form interpretations of their own (Hsiu-Chih, 2008, p. 51). When choosing picture books, the artwork should be creative, imaginary, or realistic. Chiong and DeLoache’s (2013) study shows that some students learned more from picture books when they were illustrated with realistic colour, rather than cartoons (p. 227). Serafini (2011) suggests that visual symbols represent conventionalized ideas in sociocultural contexts—“for example, a rose signifies love or caring, a cross signifies Christian values, and the colour red signifies anger. Visual symbols are constructed in social settings and used by artists to convey meanings beyond the literal level” (p. 346).
According to Serafini (2011), “how objects are organized and positioned in a visual image is called composition. The arrangement and placement of various objects determine their relative importance and how they interact with other elements in an image” (p. 346). He introduces three compositional techniques graphic designers use to attract the attention of readers:

1. the relative size of the object,
2. colour and contrast,
3. foregrounding and focus.

(Serafini, 2011, p. 346)

The arrangement of the objects can give emphasis to the elements such as the particular vocabulary the author and illustrator need the reader to notice. This arrangement can also provide the readers with opportunities to analyze and make inferences about the plots and the designer’s intention.

Multimodality should be considered when teachers and students are analyzing the design of picture books. “Expanding the perspectives students use to make sense of these multimodal texts is an important part of comprehension instruction” (Serafini, 2011, p. 342). When a book is designed in a multimodal way, teachers and learners can analyze its multimodalities. Teachers can build a bridge to students by using visual aids. “Giving children the possibility of elaborating an image helps teachers to evaluate the abstraction level of the class and sensitize children to understand how we often see reality in a partial and approximate way” (Cocchiarella, 2015, p. 157). Martens et al. (2012) indicate that both written language and art in pictures are symbols used to carry meaning, and they extend, build on, and contrast with each other. When learners
read picture books, they should be guided to think critically, focus on details, and make inferences. They should move between modes to construct meaning by themselves (p. 291).

The design of typography should also be considered when teachers are asking students to critique and interpret picture books. Schwanenflugel, Westmoreland, and Benjamin argue that “traditionally, the visual images and design features, including typography, have been considered distractions to be avoided rather than multimodal elements that offer meaningful additions to the written narrative,” and they claim that the linguistic elements of the text are used to increase a reader’s fluency and prosody, rather than being seen as resources for building meaning (as cited in Kachorsky, et al, 2017, p. 233). However, recently, Justice and Ezell (2004) contend that “encouraging children to attend to illustrations and characteristics of font such as color, size, and weight can aid in emergent literacy development and print knowledge” (as cited in Kachorsky, et al, 2017, p. 233). They also indicate that when making meaning with texts, instead of absolutely relying on textual resources, readers rely on a variety of multimodal resources including “typographical features, paralinguistic features, illustrations, design features, and background knowledge in order to construct their reading” (p. 244). They suggest these systems of meaning “move beyond language, allowing readers to draw on available resources to both make sense with these texts and to talk about them” (p. 244).

The space in illustrations can be used as special modes to draw readers’ attention and indicate specific intention of the designer. Youngs and Serafini (2011) introduce the use of framing:

Images in [picture books] are sometimes surrounded by white space…. This is an example of what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) called framing. Framing is an aspect of composition created by the spatial arrangements of an image on the page of the book.
Framing is a way for illustrators to invite viewers into an image or distance them from what is being presented. The greater the white space around an image, the more one is positioned as an objective viewer, looking into and watching the world of the characters. The white space as frame serves as a window from which we see events unfold. (p. 120)

Readers are led into the atmosphere of the stories and illustrations on each page by the space the designers set.

Different layouts of space and image size can give readers varied reading experience. Sometimes, special modes can also appear in a different fashion, as Youngs and Serafini (2011) further explain, when a particular image “spreads to the edge of a page (full bleed) …. the artist is inviting the viewer into the world of the story” (p. 120). Sometimes an image breaks the frame with a character or object “spreading across the border, in essence coming out at the reader. This breaking of the frame serves as a bridge between the story world and the world of the reader, bringing them into a more intimate relationship” (p. 120). This kind of design can make the reader interact with both the stories and the images, and even the characters inside the picture books. Figure 4. is an illustration from *The bunny who found Easter* (Zolotow & Craig, 1998). A bumblebee hums into the picture from the left side of the page and breaks the frame, which indicates the direction and distance of its track. (See Figure 4.)
The relationship between the reader and the story can also be developed by other techniques of design. Kress and van Leeuwen introduced two techniques: Demand and offer (as cited in Youngs & Serafini, 2011, p. 120). Youngs & Serafini (2011) explain that “when characters gaze out at a viewer, making direct eye contact, it is called a demand, and when characters look at other characters or objects within the image, instead of out at the reader, it is called an offer” (p. 120). By using demand, readers enter into a more direct relationship with the character, and allow the character to directly appeal to them. Youngs and Serafini (2011) note that “Through the use of the technique of offer, readers are positioned as spectators, observing the story as it unfolds” (p. 120). They suggest that instead of bringing the readers into a direct relationship with the characters, the technique of offer makes “their actions and line of sight serves as information for the reader to consider. The reader is positioned as an invisible onlooker or objective observer, and the characters are on display for scrutiny and inspection” (p. 120).
The two techniques can be seen in *Finding Christmas* (Munsch & Marrtchenko, 2012) in Figure 5. and Figure 6. Figure 5. shows the use of demand, where the girl looks out of the image to the reader and points to a direction. The readers will look in the way she points, and find out what is in the background. Figure 6. uses the technique of offering. In the images, the characters are busy packing and decorating. Readers are positioned out of the image and spectating what is going on inside the picture.

Youngs and Serafini (2011) introduce other techniques called motif in picture book design. They explain that a motif is a repeated image throughout a picture book, and “this technique is often used in [picture books] to bring attention to certain images. These images take on weight because they are repeated and because of the associations we make with the image” (p. 121). They also point out that how characters are arranged within the images can show a lot about the power structures between each character and various objects (p. 122).

Figure 7. is the illustrations from The fairy princess (Andrews, Hamilton, & Davenier, 2015). In most of the images, the sparkler of the little girl appears and works as a symbol of fairy. This is the use of motif in a set of illustrations to emphasize the specialty of the character.
Moreover, picture book illustrators sometimes appropriate or transform fine art works to fit the designs of the stories they illustrate (Serafini, 2015, p. 439). Many illustrations in today’s narrative picture books are found to be associated with traditional works of fine art. “For instance, many [picture book] artists have been formally trained in specific artistic styles, movements, and techniques and bring this training to their work as [picture book] artists” (Serafini, 2015, p. 439).
The Use of Picture books

Kachorsky et al. (2017) indicate that picture book scholars offer analytical frameworks to understand the role of specific design elements in contemporary picture books. These elements include “page breaks, typographical elements, and endpapers,” and “associated with contemporary [picture books] need to be conceptualized as semiotic resources used by authors, illustrators, publishers, book designers, and readers to realize the meaning potential of these multimodal texts” (p. 233). However, drawing inferences from the texts and pictures, then interpreting multimodal texts based on one’s own experiences and socio-cultural contexts is a challenge for readers (Serafini, 2010, p. 100).

To be specific, Serafini (2012) gives examples by talking about postmodern picture books. He suggests that “multimodal and hypertexts are often presented in non-linear fashion,” unlike traditional written texts which are often presented in a linear way. Postmodern picture books ask readers to “navigate the visual and textual elements presented during the act of reading,” and at the same time “to actually design the text to be read from the visual and textual elements…. the reader is required to become an even more active participant in the navigation, interpretation and design of multi-modal texts” (p. 158).

Kachorsky, et al. (2017) developed five categories of semiotic resources for readers to make meaning with the designing of picture books:

- Typographical features: characteristics of the typography such as the type of font used, the font size, the weight of the font, and the usage of typographical emphasis (e.g., italics, bold, underlined)
• Paralinguistic features: features related to the text, but were not linguistic in nature such as punctuation (e.g., exclamation points and question marks) and capitalization

• Design features: aspects of a picture book spread that were external to the illustration (e.g., word bubbles, page numbers, motion lines, and sound effect words)

• Illustrations: the images drawn on the spread or a characteristic of the image such as the characters’ facial expression or body positioning

• Background knowledge: Previous knowledge that the child has about another text, another form of media, social behaviour/practice, content knowledge, or other information (p. 238).

During the whole process, they identified three ways for students to articulate meaning making: “explicit, referential, and performance.” Explicit means the students identify the semiotic resource they are using and explain why they used it. For example, a student explains that he/she reads a specific sentence loudly because there is an exclamation mark. Referential indicates in other cases, students make statements referring to a particular semiotic resource, but do not name it explicitly. For instance, a child points to the semiotic resource or refers to the resource as “it.” Finally, performance means students change their reading or perform the reading in another way. For example, a student gives each character a different voice when reading the story (Kachorsky, et al, 2017, p. 238).

When reading picture books with special arrangements of characters and objects, the students’ ability is also needed to analyze the designer’s intention. Youngs and Serafini (2011) claim that “readers need to consider where characters are placed within particular images and
throughout the picture-book as a whole” (p. 123). They suggest that teachers can ask questions like:

What might the spatial relationships suggest, and how might we interpret the placement of characters or objects on the page and throughout the book? Who or what is privileged in the various images? What systems of power are represented and how are they being represented? (p. 123)

As noted above, teachers using a multiliteracies theoretical framework should view themselves as readers-of-images and provide guidance for the students. In Hsiu-Chih’s (2008) study, the teacher regarded herself to be the “mediator” (p. 52). Instead of providing answers or leading the conversation, teachers should help to stimulate the learners’ imaginations through discussion. Serafini indicates that teachers can develop a more explicit understanding of the meaning associated with colour, line, style, and also the way in which these elements are used together with the text (as cited in O’Neil, 2011, p. 214). He also suggests specific questions teachers can ask to encourage the students’ analyses and inference of the designing such as:

• What is foregrounded, and what is included in the background?

• What catches your eye first?

• What are the dominant colours? What effect do they have on you as reader?

• How is white, or negative, space used? Are the illustrations framed or full bleed? How does this position you as a viewer?

• Is the image symmetrical or does one section (top-bottom, left-right) dominate the image? How does this add to the meaning of the image?

• What is the artist trying to get you to look at through leading lines, colors, contrast, gestures, and lighting?
• How are size and scale used? What is large? Why are certain elements larger than others? How does this add to the meaning of the image?

(Serafini, 2011, p. 346)

The select studies in this literature review of picture books focus mostly on how to critique design and use picture books to facilitate students’ language learning and critical thinking. This study focuses on the Chinese EFL curriculum and pedagogical devices, the students’ learning styles and preferences, as well as the current context in Chinese EFL classes in order to enhance the Chinese EFLs’ English language acquisition and creative and critical thinking at the same time.
Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

Implications

Norgaard (2009) emphasizes the concepts of multimodal perspectives. He indicates that “multimodal theory, with its interest in the multi-semiotic nature of all meaning-making in context, would seem a promising approach to dealing with literary meaning beyond that of word-meaning” (p. 159). Britsch (2010) suggests that “Language does not develop as an isolated mode of communication. Its relationship with visual imagery is primal” (p. 171). With the assistance of the visual mode, language could be learned in a multimodal way.

Picture books are a good resource for EFL teachers and learners to get authentic English language context, and for engaging the students in learning through the visual design at the same time. “Literacy skills can be embedded when using an engaging children’s picture book instead of focusing on skills in isolation” (Strasser & Seplocha, 2007, p. 219). Strasser and Seplocha’s (2007) study of picture books and young children's literacy also found that “picture books should be a part of every day in the early childhood years” (p. 223). They encourage reading to children in order to engage them in activities that help them use the expressive language to increase their phonological awareness and high-level thinking, which is “critical for the development of the skills and dispositions that are necessary for reading and writing” (p. 223).

When using picture books to facilitate language learning, it is important for the learners to interact with the books and construct meaning by investigating and observing. Readers of picture books should become the interpreter and be like the writers (Serafini, 2012, p. 156; Murphy, 2009, p. 22). When interpreting the books, it is not enough to only understand the meaning of new vocabulary or sentence structures. There are the needs of “generating viable interpretations in transaction with visual images and written texts and one’s ability to construct
understandings from multiple perspectives, including the author’s intentions, textual references, personal experiences and sociocultural contexts in which one reads” (Serafini, 2012, p. 156).

Murphy (2009) claims that there is a skill needed when reading books, which is “reading like writers.” He suggests that “Writers look beyond the plot and notice the craft, the way the story is designed and built” (p. 22). As writers, readers should “notice voice, mood, and metaphors, much as a carpenter or architect might walk into a house and appreciate its fine structure” (Murphy, 2009, p. 22). He also notes that “these devices are more evident and obvious in picture books than in longer works of fiction” (p. 22). Serafini (2012) also points out that “readers should no longer be viewed as solitary explorers trying to uncover a single main idea hidden in the bowels of a classic novel,” but should be “active constructors of meanings, transacting with texts in particular times, places and contexts” (p. 156).

With the help of images, readers are able to connect the texts with the colour, lines, shapes, and layouts to make meaning of particular words or sentences, and try to investigate in the intention of the writer and construct understanding. Teachers should also choose picture books which can give the readers more access to exploring and investigating. The images need reflect and build upon the language and plots to engage the learners in reading and inquiring. In a qualitative case study including 26 Taiwan university students, Kuo (2009) noted that “instruction based social-issue picture books [are] effective not only in promoting literacy learning but also in eliciting meaningful themes for students to discuss.” (p. 492). Different topics and themes in picture books can give readers a variety of language context and provide EFL learners with abundant opportunities to become competent to apply the language for various targets and in different environment.
Murphy (2009) gives some guidance for teachers saying that when demonstrating “how to explore literature and guide students in doing so, teachers help break down barriers.” He emphasizes the importance of “each individual’s effort to interact with the printed page” and claims that “the teacher’s task is to nurture and cultivate those interactions and transactions between individual readers and literary works so that readers of all ages will be able to construct their own meanings” (p. 20). In their teaching practices, EFL teachers have the responsibility to choose appropriate picture books which can better facilitate the learners to gain opportunities to inquire and ask questions. Instead of only reading the stories and explaining words and sentence structures, they should give the learners more autonomy by playing the part to guide their students to critique and discuss the relationship between word and image.

Piro (2002) provides a set of strategies in visual and language literacies for teachers:

1. Engage the readers. In this process, the letters and words, decoding skills, and graphic organizer can be used to aid the learning of language. Observation and description of the painting, and analysis of the design elements can work as visual strategies along with the language strategy.

2. Enter the story. When the readers are interested in the story and images, teachers can use read-aloud, story map, sound-spelling relationships as language strategies. The visual strategies to be used in this phase can be “read-aloud of painting descriptions, use of principles of design; examine dominant visual objects.”

3. Explore the story. To explore the story, the readers can use comprehension skills, inferential skills, summarizing skills, and storytelling skills as language strategies. The visual strategies to be used are describing action, probing hidden messages by examining allegory and symbols.
4. Evaluate the story. The last step is to evaluate the story along with the images. The language skills can be enhanced in this stage by understanding the use of writing, developing advanced vocabulary, practicing independent writing, and improving reading fluency. The visual strategies to be used include interpreting the work, making judgements about meaning, giving opinion on the quality of art, and determining the value of the work.

(See Appendix A)

The strategies used above not only increase the learners’ language competence, but also practice the learners’ ability to work in pairs or groups and communicate. It is vital for EFL learners to develop their communication skill in language learning process. Si-Qing (1990) indicates that linguists and researchers have shifted the emphasis on second-language acquisition, and are “becoming more interested in the study of the learning process than the learning product, in the behavior of learners than that of teachers, in the development of communicative competence than that of linguistic competence” (p. 155). Early and Yeung (2009) also note that “Designing pedagogical practices that focus on communicative meaning-making and also on formal and functional aspects of language is an undertaking required of teachers in many foreign and second language learning programs/classrooms” (p. 300). In the context of globalization, the skill of communication is emphasized as a more and more important aspect of language learning than ever before, especially in China, where EFL learners are learning the so called “mute English” to meet the need of examinations. However, the challenges Chinese EFL learners are facing are not only the examinations, but also the communication and negotiation capacity as global citizens. Changes are thus needed to make them more competitive in the new global milieu.
Moreover, as Murphy (2009) indicates, “discourse and promotion of picture books in the social studies curriculum enable students to understand life in other historical periods or geographical regions as they develop understanding and appreciation of differing cultures” (p.22). Learners should learn about life and culture from other countries to enrich their awareness of the world. Picture books with various kinds of topics can give readers resources to “experience” life and events which are different from their own. In this process, readers can have a better understanding of the people and world around them, become more respectful to difference, and be willing to inquire and be curious to know more about the culture of others and diverse perspectives from an early age.

Recommendations

The Chinese English Curricular Standards claim that the curriculum’s goal is more than helping students learn English, but to also:

1. Pay attention to quality education and reflect the value of language learning in the students’ development;
2. Face to all the students and focus on their individual learning characteristics;
3. Design the learning goal holistically and consider the gradualness and continuity of language learning;
4. Emphasize the learning process and attach importance to the practicality and applicability of language learning;
5. Optimize the assessment and evaluate the students’ comprehensive language ability;
6. Enrich the curriculum resource and expand English learning channels.\(^2\)

\(^2\) My translation. The original quotation in Chinese is:  
（一）注重素质教育，体现语言学习对学生发展的价值
The Chinese curriculum indicates that students’ comprehensive language ability should be developed, which requires changes in the EFL teaching and learning practice. Using picture books and adopting a multiliteracies theoretical framework can provide solutions to broaden the ways of teaching and learning in Chinese EFL classrooms. The New London Group recognized that multiliteracies is not a formula, and must be adapted in meaningful, culturally context-specific ways, respecting the needs of local language and cultural beliefs and practices.

In current Chinese EFL education, picture books are mostly taught in limited ways pre-school classrooms. Although there has been the recognition to change the teacher-centered classroom norm, EFL teachers in China still pay more attention to the teaching of vocabulary and grammar, and ignore the cultivation of learners’ communication skills and creative and critical thinking.

**Augmenting fluency in Chinese EFL learners through picture books.** Language in picture books for EFL learners is particularly important due to its function as a tool to facilitate language acquisition. The language should be native and authentic English (although of course there are variations in English around the world), and reader-friendly at the same time. Since the books are not aimed to be used only in pre-school classes, the language should be written in accordance with both the language level of the target readers as well as their chronological age.

Murphy (2009) gives examples of picture books focusing on different linguistic aspects:

(二) 面向全体学生，关注语言学习者的不同特点和个体差异
(三) 整体设计目标，充分考虑语言学习的渐进性和持续性
(四) 强调学习过程，重视语言学习的实践性和应用性
(五) 优化评价方式，着重评价学生的综合语言运用能力
(六) 丰富课程资源，拓展英语学习渠道

He suggests that “the use of literature to teach or reinforce parts of speech is more engaging for middle school students than a textbook or workbook” (p. 23). Moreover, since the topic of story books is broad, they “often contain vocabulary items that are infrequently used in children’s everyday conversations with family and peers” (Evans, et al., 2013, p. 596). The vocabulary used in the books should also be consistent with the target learner’s level. The language development is divided into four stages by TESOL, which include preproduction (silent period), early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency (as cited in Herrell and Jordan, 2016, p. 3). (See Appendix C.) Each of the stages has its own characteristics of language proficiency. Teachers can select picture books according to a learner’s language proficiency stage.

Picture books are an important resource for EFL learners, especially those in speech emergence and intermediate fluency stages, to develop their English writing skills. Murphy (2009) notes that “picture books provide models of good writing techniques that can inspire young authors” (p. 22). Good picture books can be used as an ice breaker “to capture students’ attention, engage their sensibilities, and get them thinking about their own narratives. Carefully chosen picture books with outstanding literary quality can be wonderful models for encouraging focused student writing” (Routman, 2000, p. 382). The texts and images in the picture should work together to provide opportunities and enhance EFL learners’ writing skills. Hu and
Commeyras (2008) suggest that English as a foreign language learners can use picture books to “develop their concept of stories.” They indicate that the learners “can not only practice writing sentences in English, but also they should learn how to talk about the meaning of the picture orally or by writing about pictures” (p. 5).

**How text and image read each other.** “The text and illustrations of high-quality picture books weave rich stories that can excite and surprise children, make them laugh, make them wonder, and make them think” (Strasser & Seplocha, 2007, p. 223). Lee (2016) indicates that by reading or listening to the stories and by trying to make meaning of the experiences and perspectives emerging in the books, readers can “gain broader knowledge of social relations in which various ideas are embedded to form part of the children's own identity” (p. 390).

Lee (2016) believes that “picture books offer ideas and solutions,” and can help parents with “limited knowledge and experience of handling feeling challenges” (p. 390). Matvienko (2016) also points out that “picture books tend to deal with problem behavior by presenting ideas that are tangible, specific, immediate, creative, and occasionally far-fetched” (p. 606). Lee (2016) concurs, stating, “Literacy can be a powerful tool to which readers and writers can connect their lives” (p. 400). Authors of picture books give the stories life by helping readers with their real issues in life through literary explorations of cultural and personal values.

A good story should consist of “elements such as vocabulary, words and expressions, sentence structure, transitional expressions and well-built paragraphs” (Birketveit & Rimmereide, 2017, p. 104). Isbell et al. (2004) explain that “When a story is read, the primary reference for the communication event is the text, as fixed upon the page” (p. 158). Images also play the role to stimulate readers’ communication. Strasser and Seplocha (2007) indicate that no matter whether the images inside the books are “photographs, black-and-white line drawings,
unusual designs, paintings, woodcuts, or collage, the visual art form excites the young audience” and no matter whether the text is “factual, fictional, historical, readily identifiable to the listener, or something from another culture, the stories fill young children with a multitude of ideas, words, and questions” (p. 223).

Goldstone (2001) articulates that “The text, like the illustration, is linear, with a clearly articulated beginning, middle, and end” (p. 362). Argerinou and Pettersson (2011) also talk about the relationship between texts and pictures, indicating that they “represent different languages that complement each other when they are used at the same time.” They suggest that “both text and images can be designed, presented, perceived and interpreted in many different ways.” There are unlimited possibilities to use typography, layout and other design elements to combine texts and pictures, and “there are always several opportunities to convey a message” (p. 12). In reading picture books, readers may develop a “metalanguage” to describe and interpret the “multimodal texts in purposeful ways to understand the structures and elements used to convey meanings” (Serafini, 2010, p. 100). The metalanguage would include technical terms like “use of demand” or “full bleed” to give EFLs the language to critique illustrations through the lens of literary critics or visual designers.

Serafini (2012) indicates that when combining the multimodal texts of images, text and design elements in picture books, “it should be made clear that images are not neutral, objective representations of reality any more than language is a neutral, objective representation of reality” (p. 156). Berger suggests that “viewers of design elements and visual images, like readers of written texts, are socialized into ways of seeing, in much the same way that readers are socialized into particular ways of reading” (as cited in Serafini, 2012, p. 156). This point relates to Critical
Framing within a multiliteracies theoretical framework; students are invited to see texts as socially constructed and culturally shaped.

When designing images in picture books, illustrators are sensitive about the design elements to be used and the relationship with the text and story line. O’Neil (2011) points out that reading pictures “for simple clues to the nature of the character or for a stronger notion of the setting is not really different from the daily observations a child naturally makes in the park or a grocery store.” However, illustrations “often carry deeper and more subtle connotations portrayed through choice of color, tone, media, or style” (p. 214).

For example, the perspective used in an image can represent different meaning and give readers varied sense of space. “How close or far away the viewer is positioned relative to the objects and participants in an image affects the viewer’s relationship to these visual elements” (Serafini, 2011, p. 346). To be more specific, Serafini explains that “when the characters or actors in an image are positioned closely to the viewer, readers tend to feel a strong relationship with them” whereas when they are positioned farther away, the readers will have less connection with them (p. 346). Therefore, when the author and illustrator want to emphasis a particular word or concept, the illustrator can make the choice to position the character or object closer, which means bigger in the image. The technique of “breaking of frame,” “demand,” and “offer” is often used to create the space between the readers and the characters, and make the picture more vivid and compelling.

Serafini (2011) further explains that illustrators also “depict a particular character or object from straight on (face to face), or above or below the readers’ view”:

When readers are positioned to look up at a character, or a character is positioned to look up, readers tend to view the character as powerful. In contrast, when readers are
positioned to look down on a character, or a character is positioned to look down, readers tend to the view the character as less powerful than a character who is looking up. (p. 346)

The use of perspective indicates the relationship between characters or objects and the readers. Illustrators use this strategy intentionally to provide readers with the sense of connection with the characters or objects in the pictures. In this process, readers are actually communicating and interacting with the characters in the book. “Making students aware of how artists use positioning in picture books is an important concept for interpreting visual images” (Serafini, 2011, p. 346).

Moya Guijarro (2013) states that “Writers and illustrators need to know how visual metonymies may be exploited to create interaction and represent the narrative reality without surpassing the cognitive capacities of the children for whom the stories are written and illustrated” (p. 348). He suggests that being aware of “how to create narrative tension and how to generate interaction between the characters in tales and the child-viewer by means of visual metonymies can stir children’s interest in picture books and, in turn, help educators encourage children to read” (p. 348).

Cultural elements in picture books. Another important aspect is the cultural elements in picture books. Rao and Yuan (2016) view cultural awareness and culture associated knowledge to be critical for English reading courses in EFL contexts (p. 13). “As an indispensable part of second language acquisition, cultural knowledge of the target language is of vital importance in helping students have a thorough understanding of the English language” (Rao & Yuan, 2016, p. 13). It is also important for readers to learn about their own culture from the books and acquire English at the same time. When communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds,
Chinese EFL learners not only need to have the knowledge about other people’s culture, but also to be able to express and introduce their own culture to have better cultural communication.

Baghban (2007) also talks about cultural issues in picture books saying that “curricular materials relevant to the social and cultural experiences of children engage interest and generate the enthusiasm to keep learning” (p.75). Hade indicates that when including picture books about cultural issues into the curriculum, readers can understand that stories can be not only about themselves, but also about the feeling and experiences of others (as cited in Baghban, 2007, p.75). Readers can be connected to historical period and geographic regions which are different from their own by reading books with rich content about different cultures and develop a better understanding of the world.

The use of picture books in Chinese EFL classroom. Sun (2017) suggests a brief picture book lesson plan with three stages: “warm-up, individual picture-book reading, and a collaborative post-reading activity that [encourage] learners to interact with text, illustrations, and peers to construct and reflect on story meaning” (p. 99). This has implications for Chinese EFL teachers to use picture books properly in their classrooms.

When applying picture books in EFL classroom, teachers should be a reader first. Sun (2017) emphasizes the importance of teachers’ involvement in the learning activities. Sun suggests that “instructors of EFL integrate reading-based collaborative output activities designed for text-meaning-searching/making in their teaching pedagogies in order to promote students’ vocabulary learning and to create opportunities for learning enjoyment” (p. 113). In the working groups, teachers should circulate actively “to intervene as needed or simply to listen to each group’s discussion and share their own insights into the story so that students can feel teachers’ enthusiasm and love of reading” (p. 113).
Youngs and Frank (2011) state that teachers can ask readers to “consider how they add meaning to the story as a whole” and consider “narrative perspectives, composition, and how characters are presented” to expand their interpretive possibilities (p. 118). However, learners’ interest in activities “might flag if overly structured procedures and lack of flexibility make it seem like routine class work” (Sun, 2017, p.113). Sun notes that “to motivate interactions among peers and promote cognitive engagement with new words, learning activities that prompt original thinking and allow students to bring their imagination and creativity into full play should be provided (p.113). Activities can encourage thinking, creativity and collaboration, and student can have their voices heard through activities (Kuo, 2009, p. 493). Sun (2017) points out that “teachers can open up conversations by posing questions that reveal students’ understanding and encourage meaning constructions or by modeling how they interact with the text and illustrations and make sense of them” (p. 113).

Using picture books in EFL classes properly facilitates meaning construction. For the literary part of picture books, Murphy (2009) suggests that the appropriateness of picture books should be evaluated before they are used with students, and teachers should ask whether the book offers something of substance to the students, whether it will facilitate their lesson, and whether it is suited to the academic level of the students (p. 21). EFL teachers should be aware of the students’ language level at that time and prior English knowledge and choose the correct picture books for the learners accordingly.

For the multimodal texts, especially visual elements in picture books, Serafini (2011) suggests that to analyze the images in picture books, “students would begin by creating an inventory of the objects, characters or actors, design features, and other images and visual elements of the book” (p. 344). In this process teachers should ensure that “students are attending
to all of the visual elements of individual images and design elements included in a multimodal text” (Serafini, 2011, p. 344).

Serafini (2011) introduces the Noticings-Connections-Wonderings chart (see Figure 8), with which he articulates the elements of multimodal texts to his students:

The first column refers to Panofsky’s first level of meaning and asks readers to describe and classify various elements included in a visual image. The second column asks students to consider, through their experiences and knowledge, what these elements might mean. The third column asks students to consider what the visual elements might imply outside the text (p. 344).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Notice</th>
<th>What It Might Mean</th>
<th>Implications</th>
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The chart can be used to help students build their knowledge through three steps: Noticings, through which they identify what they discovered in the multimodal texts; Connections, which involves constructing meaning on their own; and Wonderings, which involves transferring the knowledge into other contexts to solve multiple problems. This process resembles the New London Group’s (2000) pedagogy of multiliteracies, which includes the elements of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. They refer to transformed practice as “transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites” (p.35). Cope and Kalantzis (2009) claim that “literacy teaching is not about skills and competence” but aims at “creating a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to
differences, change and innovation” (p. 177). They indicate that multiliteracies recognize “that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a pedagogy based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses for a world of change and diversity” (p. 177). When learners transform the available designs to different contexts and cultural sites, they construct meaning actively by themselves. In this way, “learning is conceived of as something a learner does, not something that is done to the learner. Students do not passively accept knowledge from the teacher or curriculum” (Johnson D., Johnson R., & Smith, 1991, p.1).

Serafini (2011) further explains that the comprehension of visual literacies begins with the insight that the illustrators use to express the story. “If readers don’t attend to particular elements, they can’t draw from them during their interpretive processes” (p. 345). Teachers need to help students with the meaning construction and analysis. Kachorsky et al. (2017) note that picture books provide readers with “visual and textual resources for constructing and expressing meanings, teachers need to familiarize themselves with various approaches for analyzing and understanding visual images and design elements, in addition to the strategies they utilize for comprehending written language” (245). Serafini (2011) indicates that teachers can help learners expand their interpretive repertoires and use analytical guide to “scaffold students’ use of comprehension strategies by calling attention to the elements and making the transition from the literal meaning to ideological implications” (p. 345). However, teachers themselves should “first be able to analyze and investigate these multimodal ensembles in greater detail” to guide the learners to have the sense of the visual images, design elements, and written language of picture books (Kachorsky et al., 2017, p. 245).

When using picture books, teachers can use both story reading and storytelling as strategies in EFL class. “Storytelling and story reading are both beneficial to the development of
oral language complexity and story comprehension in young children” (Isbell et al., 2004, p. 160).

Isbell et al. (2004) suggest that “story reading is a traditional activity in early childhood programs” (p. 160). “Given that young children are often read the same book several times, it may be that they will learn, even memorize, stretches of the text and feel that they have the competence to try to read along or track the printed text as it is read” (Evans, Saint-Aubin, Evans, & Saint-Aubin, 2013, p. 597). For older learners, “In story reading, participation generally involves discussing the book illustration…reading quality children’s books can enhance children’s imaginations as well as encourage them to create mental pictures” (Aina, 1999, p. 158).

When reading the stories to the learners, teachers can ask students to take notes of the words and visual elements which they think are important in the story. Students can also take down what the colour, objects, or characters make them feel. After the reading, students can think more about the meaning of the texts and images, and have discussion or express their feelings.

Kachorsky et al. (2017) introduce another way to help readers during story reading, which is to create meaning through the use of voice. In the study, they notice the readers created different voices for the characters. The readers “alternated voices for each character throughout the entire book” (p. 243). They note that changing voice is a common practice in the reading of picture books, and this practice contributes to the construction of characterization (p. 243). Teachers can use this method to help readers have deeper understand of different characters and train them to do the same.
Isbell et al. (2004) introduce another strategy to be used when applying picture book, which is story-telling. “Stories provide a conceptual framework for thinking, which allows children to shape experiences into a whole they can understand” (p. 159). They indicate that “telling traditional stories provides children with a model of language and thought that they can imitate” (p. 159). Students are also asked to retell the stories in picture books. They notice that the readers “relied heavily on the illustrations to retell the story” because “when children are provided with illustrations, they make specific visual associations,” and they “often described the illustrations, to help restructure the story.” Moreover, in their retelling of the stories, readers also “create their own diverse images” (p. 159).

For Chinese EFL learners, the development of communication skills is very important. Picture books can be a tool for EFL teachers and learners to gain opportunity and practice the communication skills. Soundy and Drucker (2010) point out that “language, whether written or spoken, is a subset of communication that often occurs in a social setting” (p. 449). Linebarger and Vaala (2010) note that “social interactions are vital to language acquisition” (p. 180). “Language development does not occur in isolation,” and interactions “provide detailed knowledge about objects, events, and persons as both actual referents and representations of these referents” (Linebarger & Vaala, 2010, p. 180).

EFL teachers can use different activities in class to facilitate communication between teacher and students or among students. Sun (2017) suggests that “activities that involved predicting for meaning and reflective journal writing, which required good comprehension of the text, provided opportunities for students to collaboratively figure out the word meanings, which incidentally contributed to their vocabulary learning” (p. 99). Murphy (2009) introduces the approach of small-group reading, which means reading and discussing picture books in small
groups. He indicates this approach can “provide opportunities to improve oral communication” (p.22). He claims that “through discussion and teacher explanation, students make sense of what they are expected to learn and find answers to their own questions (p. 23). Sun (2017) suggests learners can work together on a creative project, where group member’s idea can help others to solve problems. For example, they can notice “words they might have overlooked while reading alone” (p. 112). Sun also points out that “interactions and group discussions facilitated students’ understanding of unfamiliar words presented in the text” (p. 99).

During the group reading and discussion of picture books, EFL learners can talk about the stories, the pictures, and questions about the language with their teachers and peers. This can be a process of collaborative inquiry and research. Learners can develop their ability to think with different perspectives or to argue for their own viewpoints by providing proof and literary textual evidence. When discussing about the design elements of the images, they are also enhancing their appreciation of art.

Concluding Thoughts

The current study uses multiliteracies as a theoretical framework to address the need to use picture books in Chinese EFL classroom to facilitate language acquisition. The current EFL education in China tends to be more teacher-centered and examination oriented. Both EFL teachers and learners in China focus more on test scores and ignore the necessity to develop the communication skills, inquiry and research ability, and creative and critical thinking.

To enhance learners’ productive skills in English, this study suggests Chinese EFL teachers might consider using picture books in their pedagogy. Although picture books have already been utilized in some Chinese EFL classes or training institutions, they are mostly used
in pre-school classrooms for young learners, and the pedagogy still pays more attention to the learning and memorizing of vocabulary and grammar.

Therefore, this study gives Chinese EFL teachers some recommendations on how to engage in a multiliteracies pedagogy when using picture books to enhance learners’ comprehensive language development. Various kinds of strategies and techniques are used with picture books to make the texts and images as a whole to convey meaning for readers. Teachers can choose those books in which the language focus fits into the target readers’ English learning level and knowledge base. The artistic design of picture books also provides readers with abundant resource to interact with the book, inquire, investigate, interpret, and communicate with the teachers and their peers.

Using picture books within a multiliteracies framework could improve the effectiveness of Chinese EFL teaching. Using their own good professional judgement, Chinese teachers within a multiliteracies pedagogy could assess when it is best to use teacher-centered alongside student-centered classroom strategies. To be more specific, teachers should guide learners to actively construct meaning by reading picture books with various techniques. A multiliteracies theoretical framework could provide teachers with a way to move forward to make a difference in EFL teaching in China if adopted.
REFERENCES


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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

**Linked Strategies in Visual and Language Literacies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reader-response theory</th>
<th>Language strategy</th>
<th>Visual strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage the reader</td>
<td>Sound, letter, and word development; word identification; employment of decoding skills; whole-to-part phonics; use of graphic organizer</td>
<td>Inventory the work; list objects in painting; write basic description of the painting; analyze compositional features using elements of art (e.g., line, color, shape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter the story</td>
<td>Use of read-aloud, development of verbal fluency, use of story map, acquisition of a sense of story and text, sound-spelling relationships</td>
<td>Read-aloud of painting descriptions; use of principles of design (e.g., harmony, tension, proportion, rhythm, balance); examine dominant visual objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore the story</td>
<td>Increase comprehension skills, develop inferential strategies, develop skills of summarization, improve storytelling skills</td>
<td>Examine how artist &quot;stages&quot; the painting; describe action; probe hidden messages by examining use of allegory and symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the story</td>
<td>Understand multiple uses of writing, develop advanced vocabulary, practice in independent writing, improve reading fluency</td>
<td>Interpret the work; make judgments about meaning; give opinion on the quality of art; determine if work should be considered a masterpiece</td>
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**Appendix B**

Elements of a pedagogy of Multiliteracies

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Situated Practice</strong></th>
<th>Immersion in experience and the utilisation of available Designs of meaning, including those from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overt Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding of Designs of meaning and Design processes. In the case of Multiliteracies, this requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the Design elements of different modes of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Framing</strong></td>
<td>Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular Designs of meaning. This involves the students’ standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformed Practice</strong></td>
<td>Transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites</td>
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Appendix C

Stages of Language Development

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<th>Preproduction (also known as the silent period) Characteristics:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Communicates with gestures, actions, and formulaic speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Often still in silent period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is building receptive vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Early Production Characteristics:**

- Can say, “I don’t understand.”
- Can label and categorize information

**Speech Emergence Characteristics:**

- Uses language purposefully
- Can produce complete sentence

**Intermediate Fluency Characteristics:**

- Can produce connected narrative
- Can use reading and writing within the context of a lesson
- Can write answers to higher-level questions
- Can resolve conflicts verbally

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