

# An Analysis of Senior English Unit Teaching Model from the Perspective of Big Ideas

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**Abstract:** High school English curriculum standard clearly puts forward to promote the development of English core competence and shows higher requirements for teaching and learning. In actual teaching, students' learning content is diversified and superficial, which makes it difficult to promote the deepening of learning content and core competence. From the perspective of big ideas, high school English unit teaching model is established, which can integrate unit content and learning activities to promote the effective implementation of core competence.

**Keywords:** Big ideas; Core competence; Unit teaching model

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## 1. Introduction

The implementation of the new curriculum standard indicates that Chinese English curriculum reform turns to the effective implementation of core competence. Although the new curriculum standard puts forward six elements<sup>[1]</sup> to make up for the fragmented learning objectives and process, it doesn't clearly reflect the deep correlation between the six elements and the value of discipline education, and the implementation of core competence is still on the surface. An integrated education system is needed to help students develop comprehensively and cultivate core competence.

## 2. Big ideas and big ideas teaching

### 2.1 The connotation of big ideas

In the field of education, Herbart proposed in the 19th century that thinking is carried out through strong "idea" activities. Bruner argued the foundation of any subject can be taught to anyone at any age in some appropriate ways, emphasizing that learners can assimilate "ideas" that constitute their understanding<sup>[2]</sup>. Then P. Phenix also put forward the concept of subjects "representativeness" to improve the learning effect. Ausubel believed broad and stable "guiding concepts" should be applied to coordinate and integrate cognitive structural elements. In 1998, H.L. Erikson clearly pointed out that big ideas were more abstract, general and eternal; In 2004, Wiggins & J. McGregor systematically summarized the meaning of big ideas<sup>[3]</sup>. These "ideas," "disciplinary structures," "representational concepts," and "guiding concepts" are the earliest prototypes of big ideas.

### 2.2 Big ideas teaching

Big ideas teaching is unit integrated teaching with big ideas as its core goal. Here a unit refers to a "set" based on core literacy. The simple accumulation of knowledge is no longer in line with the current teaching objectives. The change of educational objectives forces the upgrading and breakthrough of teaching design and teaching design should shift from the series of knowledge to the integrated teaching of units.

## 3. The relationship between big ideas and core competence

### 3.1 Promote the integrated development of core competence

By refining unit theme and integrating learning content and activities, teachers imperceptibly cultivate students' emotions, attitudes and values in teaching, and promote the effective implementation of core competence. Compared with the core competence, students' intelligence, attitudes, values and other skills are relatively dispersed and lack integration. So only if all elements are integrated into an organic unit, the cultivation of students' core competence can be promoted.

## **3.2 Coordinate the comprehensive development of five disciplines**

Nowadays, students' development is emphasized to be in an all-round way, which not only requires the comprehensive development of five disciplines, but also coordinates individual development<sup>[4]</sup>. The overall development is that individual's advantage intelligence can be realized to the maximum extent, and his inferior intelligence can also get a minimum development. Accordingly, students' all-round development education is bound to require a more integrated teaching pattern<sup>[5]</sup>, that is, the big idea teaching.

## **3.3 Connect teaching content and core competence**

There are educational objectives, training objectives, course objectives, teaching objectives and classroom objectives in teaching. And unit teaching objectives have dual functions, which are the specific embodiment of course objectives and the generalization of teaching content. The complex and diverse teaching contents are gradually integrated under continuous generalization of unit big ideas, and finally can be abstractly connected with the core competence.

## **3.4 Strengthen the connection between education and life**

The core literacy is reflected in the classroom transformation, whose focus is to shift from the imparting of expert knowledge to the cultivation of expert thinking, emphasizing innovation and practice. What's more, it focuses on authenticity<sup>[6]</sup>, namely the ability to automatically search for relevant knowledge and skills to creatively solve real problems. Therefore, big ideas connect not only the knowledge within the disciplines, but also school and life.

# **4. Implementation of big ideas unit teaching**

The big ideas unit teaching is divided into three aspects, extraction and revelation of big ideas, derivation and construction of big ideas and evaluation and reflection of big ideas. Take Unit 4 Natural Disasters, PEP High School English Compulsory I as an example.

## **4.1 Extraction and explication of big ideas**

There are two ways to refine big ideas. One is top-down, referring to the curriculum standards, core literacy, expert thinking and on the basis of the understanding of the textbook to find the potential big ideas. The concepts and ideas that appear frequently in the curriculum standard may be potential big ideas. In-depth understanding of core competence, expert thinking and teaching materials can also help teachers find potential ideas. Second, from the bottom up, teachers can start with students' learning difficulties, knowledge and skill goals, life value and evaluation criteria, to refine more abstract unit ideas. The explicitness of big ideas means to clarify the micro-learning objectives. That is to design teaching from the four aspects of knowing what content has been learned, understanding the learning content, summarizing the knowledge to solve similar problems, and finally using knowledge to solve practical problems.

Take Unit 4 Natural Disasters as an example to analyze its teaching concept and unit big ideas. The theme of this unit is "Man and nature", teachers can guide students to gradually establish the unit idea of "understanding natural disasters, taking good protection, and valuing the relationship between man and nature" through the connection between the knowledge and the theme behind language in class. Before teaching, teachers take this idea as the leader, grasp the main line of teaching, organize teaching content and activities, and constantly monitor whether the teaching content is centered on the theme of meaning exploration, whether the teaching process leads students to express creatively, whether the teaching results achieve the purpose of educating people, so as to adjust timely.

## **4.2 Derivation and construction of the big idea**

Derivation of big ideas is to form high-quality problems centered on unit big ideas and guide students to learn through problem solving<sup>[7]</sup>. Teachers can design core problems according to the big idea, then derive them to put forward related small problems, next mobilize students' existing knowledge to solve similar problems, which can help students promote knowledge induction and low-path transfer and establish their basic knowledge framework<sup>[8]</sup>. By solving the core problems, students are guided to summarize and conclude the knowledge they have learned, construct the big ideas group and the small ideas group, and establish the correlation between them, which will lead students to gradually form the big idea framework.

Unit 4 Natural Disasters belongs to the prevention of disasters under the theme of man and nature. Based on the unit theme, teachers first extract and analyze the theme of each part to generate small ideas. For example, the video of Natural disasters in the first part shows various kinds of natural disasters, which deepens students' understanding and concern about the current situation of natural environment. Then teachers connect the big and small ideas in the unit, reorganizes the content to constructs the explicit framework of "phenomenon of natural disaster - impact of natural disaster - protection and solution of natural disaster", and then guides the students to generate the big idea of the unit on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of natural disaster, namely, understanding of natural

disaster, taking good protection and pay attention to the relationship between man and nature.

### 4.3 Evaluation and reflection of big ideas

The integration of teaching, learning and evaluation refers to the mutual unity among teachers' teaching, students' learning and learning evaluation to achieve the same goal, and the key of realizing the integration is teaching objectives. Therefore, according to the predetermined teaching objectives, teachers can know whether students can understand, master and apply knowledge from the four dimensions of students' learning ability, understanding ability, practical ability and learning expectation. Teachers can monitor students' learning situation by collecting students' learning works, displaying students' learning results or demonstrating students' viewpoints. In this process, if any unstable links are found in the framework building, targeted guidance and remedies are carried out to ensure the integrity of students' big ideas construction.

The Night The Earth Didn't Sleep in Unit 4, is a narrative discourse about an earthquake. It is developed according to the time line of "before -- when --after" of the earthquake. Based on the detailed analysis of the text and learning situation, teachers determine the teaching objectives and design different teaching activities. After activities, teachers can use evaluation tools such as problem solving, mind mapping, group debate and group presentation to pay attention to students' behavior and learning status<sup>[9]</sup>. Teachers evaluate the construction process of students' unit ideas in order to assess students learning results and help them timely remedy and improve to ensure the effective implementation of core competence.

## 5. Conclusion

The senior English unit teaching model from the perspective of big ideas can fully integrate various teaching contents and activities, which can promote the effective implementation of core literacy in teaching, strengthen students' in-depth understanding of knowledge and ability to solve practical problems. At the same time, it needs more practice in classroom to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency.

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