

# Core literacy-based teaching design of high school English: A big idea perspective

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## Abstract

The core literacy of the compulsory English curriculum is the centralized expression of the curriculum's nurturing value, which is the correct values, necessary character and key abilities that students gradually develop through the curriculum to meet the needs of their lifelong development and social development. On the basis of clarifying the requirements of core literacy for high school students' English learning, this paper divides the high school English teaching Units as a whole and guides the teaching design with the ideological connotation of the big ideas, aiming at promoting the development of scientific and humanistic aspects of high school English teaching.

## Keywords

Core Literacy; Big Idea; New Curriculum standard; High School English.

## 1. Introduction

The first curriculum concept put forward in the English curriculum standard for compulsory education (2022 edition) is to play the unifying role of core literacy, make the cultivation of morality and education of people as the fundamental task, determine the curriculum objectives around the core literacy, select the curriculum content, innovate the teaching methods, improve the examination and evaluation, and guide the construction of teaching materials.[1]. The core literacy to be cultivated in the English curriculum include language proficiency, cultural awareness, quality of thinking and learning ability. In high school English teaching, we should always adhere to the core literacy as the basis for teaching activities, in cultivating students' correct outlook on life and complete literacy. In addition, the term "big idea" was first used in China's General High School Curriculum Program (2017 Edition) to emphasize "structuring the course content by taking the big idea of the discipline as the core and contextualizing the course content by taking the theme as the leader" (Ministry of Education, 2018 )[2]. From this, it is easy to see that the new standard attaches importance to the overall concept of the English curriculum as a teaching tool, as a front-line teacher, it is more important to take the overall teaching of the Unit as a way to take the big ideas as the theoretical outline, and take the core literacy as the basis for the implementation of high school English teaching work in a scientific way.

## 2. The intrinsic relationship between core literacy and broad concepts

### 2.1. Connotation and structural characteristics of English core literacy

#### 2.1.1. Connotation of Core Literacy

The development of core literacy in the English language subject focuses on four aspects: language proficiency, cultural awareness, quality of thinking and learning ability. On the one hand, the domestic new curriculum standard defines linguistic competence as the ability to understand and express language when using language and non-language as well as a variety

of strategies to participate in language activities related to the topic in a specific context. Chomsky, on the other hand, from a linguistic point of view, believes that the grammatical knowledge inherent in the human mind is linguistic competence, i.e., linguistic competence is systematic grammatical knowledge. Human beings are born with the ability to learn language, that is to say, language ability is a skill unique to the human brain[3] In other words, linguistic ability is a skill unique to the human brain. To summarize, linguistic competence is a mixed type of competence, which involves not only students' own linguistic competence, but is also subject to students' cognitive ability. Cultural awareness refers to the ability to understand and express language when using linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge as well as various strategies to participate in language activities on relevant topics in a specific context. And cultural awareness is often associated with cross-cultural awareness. For instance, according to scholar Hanvey, cultural awareness refers to participating in cross-cultural communication with a sensitive awareness of cultural factors, that is, sensitivity to the similarities and differences between different cultures and common cultures, and self-consciousness in adjusting one's linguistic comprehension and linguistic output according to the culture of the target language when using a foreign language.[4] . Thus, students' cultural awareness also profoundly affects their ability to include and absorb foreign cultures. Thinking quality is the personality trait of human thinking, reflecting the level and level of students' understanding, analyzing, comparing, inferring, criticizing, evaluating, creating and so on. The understanding of foreign scholars about the quality of thinking is represented by the American psychologist Guilford, who first put forward the "quality of thinking" and researched the quality of thinking from the aspects of flexibility, divergent thinking and creativity.[5] He also studied the quality of thinking in terms of flexibility, divergent thinking and creativity. It can be seen that the intuitive measure of thinking quality can be assessed from seven verbs, and the new standard visualizes the quality of thinking, which makes the cultivation path of students' thinking quality more operational and practical. The new standard defines learning ability as the awareness and ability to actively use and adapt English learning strategies, expand English learning channels, and strive to improve the efficiency of English learning. In the author's opinion, learning ability is the outward form of students' self-motivation and internal stimulation, a kind of English learning interest pointing to the embodiment of English learning activities, the embodiment of students falling in love with English classes and having the ability of self-management and independent learning, and the mixed ability of multi-faceted and deep-overlapping. To summarize, sorting out the connotation of these four aspects is a prerequisite for clarifying the relationship between them.

### **2.1.2. Structural characteristics of the four dimensions of core literacy**

The new curriculum proposes that the four aspects of core literacy are interpenetrating, integrated and interactive, and synergistically developed. That means the four of them together form an organic whole, have a close relationship with each other, and have the effect of influencing and complementing each other. Then we can take advantage of the commonality of the four and the big idea to combine them and make it a theoretical whole as the four aspects of core literacy.

## **2.2. Connotations of the Big Idea**

Based on the standard (2017 version), the big idea is mentioned in "taking the subject's big idea as the core, structuring the content of the curriculum, and promoting the implementation of the subject's core literacy", and has not been extended much. Regarding the connotation of the big idea, educator-psychologist J. Dewey argued that it serves as a basis for linking disciplinary content to students' prior knowledge, which can make their learning experience transformative.[6] . In light of the above, the author believes that it should be developed in two ways. Horizontally, the big idea requires teachers and students to have interdisciplinary

thinking, combining the same knowledge or spirit from different subjects; vertically, the big idea requires finding texts with the same theme in the textbook and teaching them in tandem, e.g., the high school English version of the Foreign Studies Association's Compulsory Study 1 Unit 5 In to the world and Unit 6 At one with nature can be combined and taught with the broad concept of protecting nature. For example, when talking about idioms in language class, teachers can do English to Chinese translation demonstration, and express idioms in English, such as fear no one, strive for greatness, etc. Therefore, the Big Idea has different positive impacts on the construction of horizontal subject system and the depth of understanding of the subject.

### **2.3. Intrinsic relationship between broad concepts and core literacy**

The big idea and Core Literacy seem to be two independent thinking, but in essence, they are both serving the fundamental task of building moral character and accumulating theoretical foundation for the practice of high school English curriculum standards, which have a certain relationship with each other.

#### **2.3.1. The relationship between the Big Ideas and the Core Literacy is: mutually reinforcing**

The relationship between the big idea and Core Literacy is complementary, with the big idea based on Core Literacy and Core Literacy using the big idea as a practical path. Then, it can be developed from the following dimensions. First, the big idea advocates interdisciplinary thinking, and the cultural awareness in the core literacy has the connotation of combining Chinese and Western cultures and perceiving foreign cultures, so it is possible to integrate many disciplines, such as language, history and geography, which represent the traditional Chinese culture, can be combined with English, which represents foreign cultures, to be displayed in the new classroom. In this way, the integration of horizontal subject knowledge is achieved to meet the requirements of the broad concepts, and the term language comprehension in cultural awareness is catered for to enhance cultural insight and sensitivity. Secondly, since the release of the latest curriculum standards, scholars at the point of education and front-line teachers in schools have been trying to explore the paths for their realization, and in the author's opinion, the design of teaching the big ideas based on core literacy is one of the paths. Organically combining aspects of core literacy with the big idea, integrating Units or disciplines, and searching for their commonalities and characteristics, such a path is a unification of scientific and humanistic aspects, and a combination of practical and theoretical aspects.

#### **2.3.2. The relationship between core literacy and broad concepts is essentially this: different paths lead to the same place**

Core Literacy and big idea are two terms proposed with different ideas as the traceability, they seem to have no interconnection between each other, each in its own way, each has its own status, but in the design of high school English teaching, its essence serves the same teaching goal, and is equally conducive to the deep learning of teachers and students. Teachers, teaching materials and students are the three basic elements of classroom teaching, and they are also the objects served by the core literacy and the big idea, then from these three aspects, the core literacy and the big idea are in the same way. First of all, the new curriculum standard in 2022 is different from the previous curriculum standard in the curriculum standard is to optimize the structure of the course content, in the middle of the special instructions "based on the requirements of the development of core literacy, the establishment of interdisciplinary thematic learning activities, and to strengthen the practical requirements", this change is obviously in line with the core literacy and the concept of the combination of the big ideas, serve the the concept of teaching goals. Secondly, from the teachers' perspective, core literacy is the literacy goal that students need to achieve through teaching, and therefore the teachers'

teaching task. And the big idea, as a practical concept, can help teachers to fulfill the teaching task, then it can also be said that integrating the big idea into teaching can help teachers to fulfill the teaching goal of cultivating students’ learning ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and language ability required by the English curriculum, and it is also one of the ways to help teachers to fulfill the teaching task. Again, from the students’ point of view, big ideas require linking students’ existing experiences and combining what is known and what is unknown in their minds. For example, in the aspect of learning ability in the core qualities, the active learning spirit of students is certainly important, but the mastered learning strategies and methods to improve learning efficiency are even more important, in this way, the role of the big idea as a bridge to link the students’ existing experience is particularly important, to play the big idea of the “value of life” and “Thinking Up”. To sum up, the concept and the core literacy always have an inextricable relationship, they can not replace each other, but both are serving the students’ learning objectives, teachers’ teaching tasks, the requirements of the curriculum and materials, is the same way.

### 3. How to implement the core literacy-based instructional design of high school English broad concepts?

#### 3.1. Establish Unit instructional objectives guided by broad concepts and core literacy.

Before setting up the Unit objectives, it is necessary to design the small teaching objectives for each lesson, then refine them to the reading, listening and writing of the various boards of the lesson and content, and finally integrate the learning ability, language ability, cultural awareness and thinking quality literacy that the students should achieve, to form the overall Unit objectives. Take the English Unit2 Exploring English in senior high school of Foreign Studies Society as an example to design the Unit objectives.

Big ideas:

Students are able to put forward to some examples about English and Chinese’ idioms.

Which different from its literal meaning. Students are able to provide some familiar words which have another unfamiliar meaning in certain context.

Teaching objectives:

Language ability: Students are able to understand idioms’ literal meaning and connotative meaning.

Cultural awareness: Students are able to think of the connotative meaning of dialects or idioms which express in English and Chinese and translate them to each other.

Learning ability: Students are able to use technique like brainstorming or mind map to collect idioms and dialects which source from their country and province, and use them properly in writing essays.

Thinking quality: Students are able to assess if the usage of idioms in an essay right or not, and creatively use them in their writing genres such as diary, narrative, expository, prose and so on.

Table1 Teaching time allocation.

language ability	cultural awareness	Learning ability	Thinking quality
10mins	10mins	10mins	10mins

It can be seen that setting up instructional goals by integrating the core literacy requirements with the broad concepts as a general overview is highly practical and allows for a close integration between the curriculum content, curriculum standards, and student literacy, and an instructional design around a completed instructional theme.

### 3.2. Clarify the teaching evaluation standards to realize assessment for learning and assessment for teaching.

The new curriculum 2022 emphasizes the need to exert the positive function of evaluation, expand the scope of the positive influence of teaching evaluation, and increase the number of evaluation subjects, so that students, teachers, and subject curricula can communicate with each other. Then, before the implementation of teaching evaluation, we first need to clarify the two standards so that the evaluation can be based on rules and regulations.

#### 3.2.1. First, the criteria for evaluating instruction should be aligned with core literacy.

Teaching evaluation based on core literacy is not alone in the academic world, the term “evaluation literacy” was formally introduced by the American scholar Stiggins in 1991.[8] Later, a scholar Taylor pointed out that the study of “evaluation literacy” needs a clear conceptual definition, that is, to adopt a common, non-specialized way of describing its connotation and extension, so as to make it easier to be understood and applied.[9] Then, we can start from the four aspects of core literacy learning ability, language ability, cultural awareness, and thinking quality, so as to be targeted, to play the unifying role of core literacy, so that teachers and students can clearly locate the content of evaluation and the direction of their efforts.

#### 3.2.2. Second, the criteria for evaluating teaching and learning should be consistent with the recommendations for curriculum implementation.

In the process of curriculum implementation, teachers and students should insist on strengthening the wholeness of Unit teaching, carrying out in-depth study and reading of discourse, and enhancing the effectiveness of the use of information technology. First of all, it is necessary to change the phenomenon of the past teacher’s “one-word hall” and “full of irrigation”, and extend the evaluation subject to students. In addition, high school students are gradually maturing, they have the ability to think independently, critical evaluation, has formed a certain sense of responsibility, especially for independent learning and self-evaluation of self-analysis. Therefore, in the high school English classroom, teachers can actively carry out peer assessment, teacher assessment, expanding the open-ended assessment of the students and understand students’ self-evaluation in all aspects.

The following is an example of an evaluation form designed for the writing part of Unit 3 Family Matters in the compulsory study 1 of the FLTRP, which is used as a general reference for both teacher evaluation and peer-to-peer evaluation.

Table 2 General Assessment

teaching goal	Teaching Evaluation Criteria
Big idea: Students are able to write a narrative that describes family memories.	Time: accurate expression of time
Sub-idea 1 (language ability): Students are able to use past continuous tense to write down the things and feelings clearly and logically in which about memorable moments.	Being logical: narrate things clearly and make them accord with logic. Accuracy: Make sure the collocations, grammatical constructions and spellings are correct.
Sub-idea 2 (cultural awareness): Students are able to learn to deal with the family matters and conflicts intelligently, aiming to construct a harmonious family.	Authenticity: remember to write the true things or real feelings instead of some copy works.

	Comprehend: understand other countries' family matters and contract their solutions with ours.
Sub-idea 3 (learning ability): Students are able to use various narrative methods such as flashback, narration, the first person or the third person in narration.	Skills and strategies: learn to use new approach on narrative, to apply detail descriptions on person or things in order to give reader a sense of vividness .
Sub-idea 4 (thinking quality): Students are able to use writing strategies to create an article about their family memories.	Good structures: to give article a clear narrative structure, to arrange the time, place, characters of story logically, to imitate some narrative styles from some original pieces.

Peer-to-peer assessment forms are useful in helping students to improve their independent learning skills and provide a grip and basis for the assessment process.

Table 3 Peer Assessment

Genres:
Your name:
Your partner's name:
Questions:
① Do you think this narrative with a clear structure?
② Have you found any spelling errors and improper grammar usage?
③ Do you think the character description of the family give you a vivid image?
④ Do you think there is any places should be improved and why they should?
⑤ Which part made you moved most, tell why?
⑥ Is there any narrative part writing better than yours, what are they?
⑦ Does the author use any words unusual and appropriate, what are they?

In the table of overall evaluation criteria, it can be seen that in the teaching objectives based on core literacy, the four sub-objectives are combined with the major concepts and sub-concepts, and such a listing seems to be very clear, and such an instructional design will make teaching more specific and scientific, as in the case of "Family Matters" writing, which is more difficult to grasp the teaching focus. This kind of teaching design will make the teaching more specific and scientific. At the same time, the evaluation criteria on the right side are annotated with key words, which is conducive to fair and practical scoring by teachers, students, and educators, and ensures fairness in education and promotes the autonomy of education. The companion form in table 2 is in the form of long interrogative sentences and open-ended questions to enlighten students' thinking, in which the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh questions add a question to promote students' reflection, to improve students' thinking quality, to cultivate their spirit of learning to make inferences and dare to be skeptical, which distinguishes it from the closed "yes or no" form of evaluation in the general sense, and is more acceptable to students and the assessment results obtained will be more authentic and effective.

In summary, this writing instruction is based on the theme of person and self, and students should be able to write in journal genre around place, time, and character in setting, and the instructional design in order to serve the teacher's instruction and the students' learning is based on the core literacy and the big ideas, clarifying the teaching goals and refining the evaluation criteria, so as to promote the teachers and students to learn and teach together, and to better evaluate and implement teaching.



### 3.2.3. Finally, designing Unit teaching activities with the view of English learning activities.

The latest curriculum standard mentions that students should be involved in a series of interrelated and cyclical language learning and utilization activities, such as learning and understanding, application and practice, transfer and innovation, which are directed to the exploration of the meaning of the theme. Then, in the design of high school English teaching, teachers should be based on the premise of teaching objectives, practicing the concept of learning activities, so as to make the English classroom alive. The author to foreign research society high school English must repair a Unit 4 "Like a father, like a son". Understanding ideas of this lesson as an example, the organization of activities, the following teaching design. The type of the class is a reading class, involving activities mainly including prediction, scanning, skimming, group discussion, debate, role-playing and so on, under each activity, the design theme closely around the learning and understanding, application and practice, migration and innovation and the planning of the layers of progress.

Table 4 Teaching design

Teaching objective	Teaching activities	Assessment criteria
Sub-idea 1 (language ability): Students are able to learn the genre of this passage and to write a play or dairy by using multiple tense and clause to organize a story.	Activities of learning and understanding: 1. Students match three people with their relationship. 2. Students discuss the conflict between son father and grandfather in group four and share their ideas.	Be logical Accuracy
Sub-idea 2 (cultural awareness): Students are able to understand the education ideas of foreign country, to find and contrast the similarities and differences among them.	Activities of applying and practicing (应用实践): 1.Students divide the play into several part and write down the name of them, such as background starting and ending. 2. Students summarize the story by using what when where why and how with their partners.	Authenticity Comprehend
Sub-idea 3 (learning ability): Students are able to analyze characters' inner mental activities and feelings by pictures and interjections .	Activities of transferring and creating: Students share about their own understanding of the title "Like father like son " . 2. Students organize a debate competition named whether should we follow parents' suggestions on career and future, why?	Skills and strategies
Sub-idea 4 (thinking quality): Students are able to infer the story development by the context,to use more questions to clarify the passage structure.	Some ready activities: Role play the passage part in class which according to students' answer in activity of learning and understanding.	Good structure

Therefore, it is less abstract to understand the concept of English learning in conjunction with the above table. It can be seen that using the four aspects of core literacy as the teaching objectives, naming the sub-objectives in terms of sub-concepts, and then assessing the classroom effectiveness and classroom activities based on clear teaching evaluation criteria are undoubtedly the icing on the cake. Among the activities mentioned above, the item of organizing an English debate competition not only helps students to deeply understand the text, but also gives play to the theme of migration and innovation, pushes themselves and others, and exercises their English expression level and language organization skills.

To sum up, in practicing the road of core literacy-based teaching design of high school English big ideas is practicable, to seize the three key points of teaching objectives, teaching evaluation and teaching activities, to creatively carry out the teaching design, to serve and teach and learn.[10].

#### 4. Conclusion

To carry out the design of teaching big ideas does not mean to abandon the concept of traditional teaching, but to mobilize more subjects, activate the rigid classroom atmosphere, and practically improve the students' quality of thinking, cultural awareness, learning ability, and language ability, so that both students and teachers can participate in the classroom happily and make progress together. There are still many shortcomings in this study, and future research can conduct empirical studies about teaching big ideas from more perspectives.

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