

# A Study on the Integrated Unit Reading Teaching Strategy of High School English to Cultivate the Thinking Quality

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**Abstract:** *The thought trend of holistic education has emerged influenced by the Holism philosophy and the Gestalt psychology since the last century. And the learning theory, curriculum theory and pedagogy of holism have gradually emerged and improved. In China, the concept of core competence of English discipline was first put forward in the new English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017), and then the unit design, which also attaches importance to the integration of unit content, has attracted more and more attention. And in recent years, many scholars proposed the integrated unit teaching approach in primary and secondary schools. The English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 Version 2020 Revision) states that teachers should set learning objectives, interpret reading texts and then design reading activities based on the integrated unit guided by the unit theme. Besides, the 2019 FLTRP senior high English textbooks, compiled based on the new English curriculum standard, are designed unit-theme-guided and also activity-driven. And the new textbooks' reading activities of each unit are structured reflecting Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in cognitive domain from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. In addition, reading teaching is the main way to develop students' core competence in English class, and thinking quality reflects the mental characteristics of core competence in English. So it is worth further exploring how to comprehensively understand the new English textbooks and make good use of them in order to achieve the goal of cultivating the core competence of English discipline in reading class. Based on this, this paper points out the integrated unit reading teaching strategy of "Focus on logical thinking ability in Pre-reading; Cultivate critical thinking ability in While-reading; Develop creative thinking ability in Post-reading". After that, the writer also elaborates on this strategy with specific reading text, aiming at exploring how to use the new textbooks to cultivate students' core competence of English discipline in English reading teaching.*

**Keywords:** *Thinking quality; Integrated unit teaching; 2019 FLTRP English Textbook; Reading teaching strategy*

## 1. Introduction

The 2006 version FLTRP English Textbooks are designed lacking of systematic thinking training, which usually make it easy for teachers to neglect the development of students' thinking ability. And the new 2019 FLTRP English textbooks are compiled based on the new *English Curriculum Standard* (2017), which are designed unit-theme-guided and also activity-driven. Besides, teachers need to set the learning objectives and design the learning activities based on the unit theme meaning, and by doing so, students' learning process is also the process of inquiring the meaning of the integrated unit.

The new textbooks have made great changes in the design of reading part, which mainly distribute in two sections: *Understanding ideas* section and *Developing ideas* section. Furthermore, the former section focuses on core language knowledge and structures through discourse and reading activities to help students understand the unit theme and achieve the deep processing of language form and meaning, and at the same time develop their cultural awareness and thinking quality. And the latter section provides a new reading discourse that further presents the unit theme from different perspectives and mobilizes students' logical thinking, critical thinking and creative thinking. Therefore, in English reading teaching, teachers should be familiar with the new design concept of the new textbooks, and pay attention to the unit theme meaning, then set the integrated unit learning objectives that point to the development of students' core competence of English discipline<sup>[1]</sup>. To be more specific, teachers are supposed to consider the whole unit learning objectives, and then design every objectives of each

discourse based on the unit theme in order to cultivate students' logical thinking ability, critical thinking ability and creative thinking ability.

## 2. The Integrated Unit Teaching

The philosophical concept of "thinking in a holistic way" was formed in the late 1980s, which is a kind of worldview or theoretical position that emphasizes "the ultimate unity, connection and intrinsic meaning of all existence" [2], and it has influenced the field of education. Secondly, influenced by German Gestalt psychology, the learning theory, curriculum theory and pedagogy of holism have gradually emerged and improved. What's more, the holistic learning theory emphasizes the connection between learning contents and subjects, and also focuses on the role of learning and educational environment, which pays attention to the harmonious development of all aspects of human beings in the learning process. And the holistic curriculum theory respects the "whole student", seeks to integrate the curriculum, and constructs holistic teaching. As for the holistic teaching theory, it emphasizes the wholeness of knowledge and learning, and takes the wholeness and inter-relatedness of knowledge, and learner participation as the principles [3].

In China, Professor Ma Lan believes that through "holistic and orderly design of unit teaching" and using unit teaching as a module, it is possible to grasp the big picture of unit teaching and then carry out step-by-step orderly teaching design, so as to achieve the best teaching effectiveness [4]. After the core competence of English discipline was put forward, Professor Zhong Qiquan points out that unit design based on the core competence of English discipline is a basic skill for front-line teachers [5]. And he refers that a unit is an organic and modular grouping of knowledge. And teachers design learning activities in a unit based on certain objectives and themes can help students integrate fragmented knowledge and thus achieve qualitative learning. In addition, it is also pointed out that holistic teaching should be carried out following the steps of "whole-part-whole" and a unit-based holistic teaching model was also mentioned [6]. And the new English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 Version 2020 Revision) also emphasizes the importance of thematic meaning in English language teaching, as well as the integrated unit learning objectives pointing to the development of core competence of English discipline [7].

## 3. Thinking Quality and English Reading Teaching

According to the new English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 Version 2020 Revision), thinking quality refers to the ability and level of thinking in terms of logic, criticality, and creativity, and reflects the mental characteristics of the core competence of English discipline. And the goal of thinking quality include the ability to identify specific phenomena in language and culture, sort out and summarize information, construct new concepts, analyze and infer logical relationships of information, correctly evaluate various ideas and opinions, express their own opinions creatively, and have the awareness of multiple thinking and the ability to think creatively [8]. In daily teaching, due to heavy teaching tasks and limited teaching time, teachers usually pay more attention to the achievement of students' language knowledge and language ability and other goals, and the cultivation of thinking quality needs to be further improved. Moreover, thinking quality, as an important component of core competence of English discipline, needs to be incorporated into the learning objectives by teachers when designing reading activities.

Reading is a mental guessing game as well as a process in which language and thinking interact [9], and students' thinking ability can be improved through reading. And Professor Wang Qiang points out that reading itself is one of the important ways to collect information, know the world, develop thinking, and gain aesthetic experience, and the process of students' extraction, integration, internalization, analysis, comparison, criticism, and evaluation of material content is the process of forming thinking quality [10].

Besides, reading is an important part of the high school English curriculum, and it is the main way to develop students' thinking quality. The thinking activities involved in reading take various forms, and teachers should consider the hierarchy of reading activities comprehensively in the design of thinking training [11]. According to the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, thinking can be divided into six levels including remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which is from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking [12]. Students can only develop their higher-order thinking skills of analyzing, evaluating, and creating if they get the

lower-order thinking level of remembering, understanding and applying. Therefore, teachers need to fully consider students' existing thinking levels in the design of reading activities, and be clear about the thinking level goals that need to be achieved for that reading discourse, using the text as a carrier to activate students' various thinking through the form of activities to train their thinking ability in authentic contexts.

In addition, reading activity is the basic organizational form of reading teaching. The new textbook selects reading content, which is structured and contextualized, with a variety of discourse types, and guided by unit themes to promote the implementation of core competence of English discipline. Based on the high requirements put forward in the new curriculum, teachers need to understand the design of reading activities in the new textbooks and interpret the unit reading activities as a whole from the perspective of cultivating students' thinking quality, in order to better carry out thinking training activities in the reading classroom and achieve the goal of cultivating thinking quality.

#### 4. The Integrated Unit Reading Teaching Strategy of Senior High School English

In response to the phenomenon of fragmentation of reading teaching content, the design of reading discourse and reading activities in the new textbooks reflects the integration of units. Figure 1 shows part of the unit sections of 2019 FLTRP senior English Book 1 Unit 5 Into the wild. It can be seen that the different sections of "Starting out- Understanding ideas- Using language- Developing ideas- Presenting ideas" respectively shows different unit functions to help students from "know the unit theme" to "express the unit theme", which is guided by the unit theme of "Human and Nature" to learn to respect and protect the animals. So the unit-integrated English reading teaching is guided by the unit theme meaning, which is based on the different discourses, and integrating the unit learning content, creating inquiry activities that meet the developmental characteristics of students' thinking, providing higher-order thinking participation, picking up activity paths from understanding to applying and creating, and then realizing the goal of learning from surface meaning to deep understanding. The following is an example of the Developing ideas section "An Encounter with Nature" in this unit.

As shown in Figure 2, there are six activities of this text following the sequence of leading in the topic at the stage of Pre-reading, and then get more information of this text at the stage of While-reading, and finally output related information at the stage of Post-reading. And it can also be seen that in these learning process, it can develop students thinking skills from logical thinking at the first stage, and then critical thinking at the second stage, finally, the creative thinking can be developed in the last stage, which shows the gradual progress from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking.

Thus, the new textbooks compiled based on the new English curriculum standard correspond well to the levels of thinking quality specified in it in terms of reading activity design, and are in line with the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives of "remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating", which aims to help students develop their thinking through progressive reading activities. And then students can develop the ability to observe and compare, analyze and judge, summarize and construct, and criticize and create in the process of inquiring unit theme meaning which is provided by the discourse context.

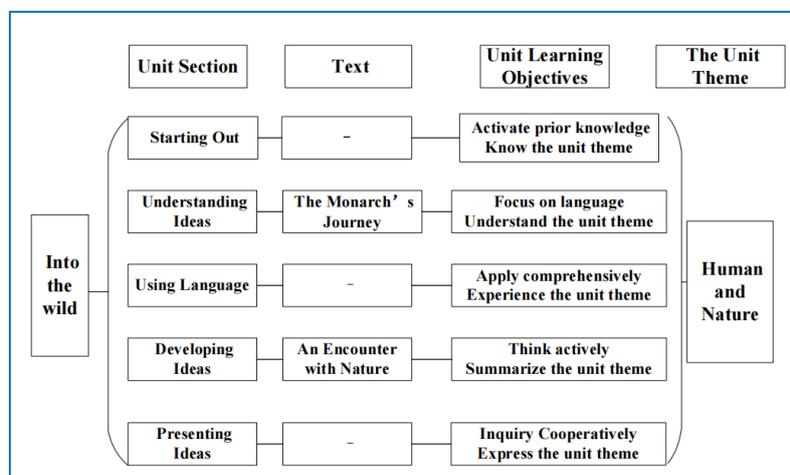


Figure 1: The Unit Structure of "Into the Wild"

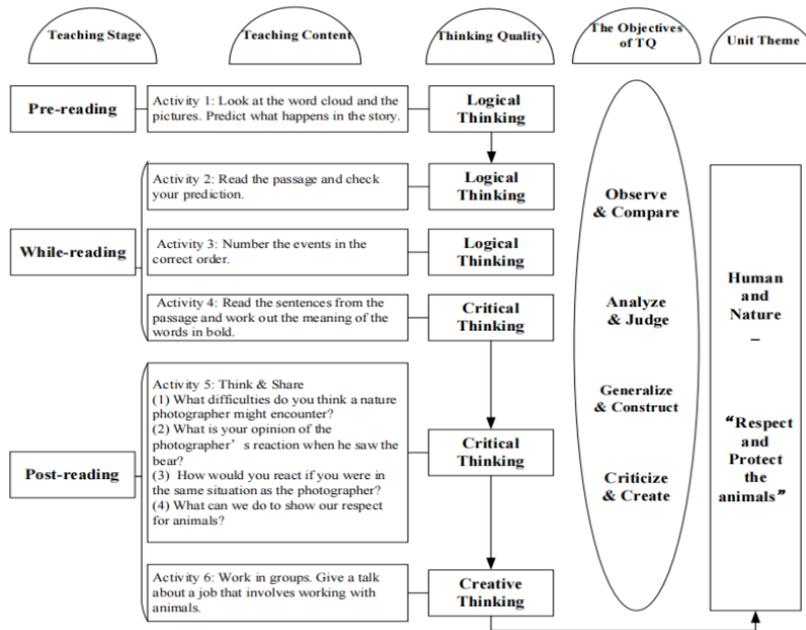


Figure 2: Analysis of the reading activity of the discourse “An Encounter with Nature”

The effectiveness of teachers’ organization of unit learning determines the level of implementation of core competence of English discipline. In reading teaching, teachers should promote the achievement of thinking quality objective by making specific adjustments based on the overall grasp of the distribution pattern of activities in the textbooks as well as students’ learning situation. Therefore, the senior high English unit reading teaching that points to thinking quality development aims to improve students’ logical thinking ability, critical thinking ability, and creative thinking ability by deeply analyzing the design of reading activities in the new textbooks, grasping the design rules of the textbooks, and then learning the reading activities according to these characteristics. Based on this, the author proposes the integrated unit reading teaching strategy of “Focus on logical thinking ability in Pre-reading; Cultivate critical thinking ability in While-reading; Develop creative thinking ability in Post-reading”, which will be elaborated below.

#### 4.1 Focus on logical thinking ability in Pre-reading

##### 4.1.1 Clarify the unit theme meaning and set the learning objectives

The new textbooks are theme-guided and activity-driven, and the learning units are designed holistically, and each unit has its thematic context and thematic content. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the different thematic meanings of each unit according to the curriculum content specified in the new English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 Version 2020 Revision), and allocate lesson objectives reasonably on the basis of determining the learning goals of the unit. From the perspective of unit theme meaning inquiry, the main goal of the pre-reading activities is to give students an initial perception of the unit themes and to be able to identify the three major thematic contexts of “Human and Nature”, “Human and Society” and “Human and Self” according to the unit content.

As shown in Figure 1, in Book1 Unit 5 Into the wild, the thematic cluster of this unit belongs to the “human and the environment, human and plants and animals” under the “Human and Nature” thematic context provided by the new curriculum; and the overall goal of this unit is to learn to understand nature, respect nature, and then protect nature. Teachers should first clarify the thematic context of the unit, and then explore the meaning of the theme in the context of the unit. For example, the discourse An Encounter with Nature belongs to the Developing ideas section of this unit. The learning objectives of this section is to help students further understand the relationship between human and animals and eventually form the correct values of loving and respecting animals, respecting nature and protecting ecology. Therefore, teachers need to consider setting a higher requirement of students’ thinking level in this section, which students are supposed to transfer to real-life situations based on the events in the text, and finally to be able to explore how to respect and protect animals.

#### ***4.1.2 Mobilize students' prior knowledge and focus on logical thinking***

The main goal of the Pre-reading stage is to activate students' prior knowledge through different forms of activities such as creating a context or predicting the content of the text according to the pictures and heading of the text. This stage should focus on the thematic meaning of the discourse, activate students' schema and then cultivate their logical thinking ability. At this stage, teachers should design activities that are closely and logically related to the thematic meaning of the reading text to lead in, such as using charts, timelines, story lines, relational network diagrams, or video and audio materials that are closely related to the thematic meaning of the discourse, or predicting the content of the text by guiding students to observe pictures, article titles and so on, so as to help students activate their prior knowledge and stimulate their learning interests.

As shown in Figure 1, in the discourse *An Encounter with Nature*, Activity 1 is a pre-reading activity, which provides word clouds of 11 key words and phrases related to the text, such as "photographer, nature, bear, observe animals, national park", and there are also two pictures of a black bear and a man taking a picture with a camera. The purpose of this activity is to stimulate students' interest and create a context for the next reading activity by activating the prior knowledge of students through the word cloud and the pictures, which focuses on the development of their logical thinking ability. In this activity, students make predictions about the content of the text based on the information given in the word cloud diagram and pictures. Teachers can add videos related to wild animals or interviews with wild animal photographers, documentaries, songs, movie clips, etc. as listening input. And based on the text, then create authentic context, which can help students observe and compare prior and new information, and then promote the development of logical thinking ability.

#### ***4.2 Cultivate critical thinking ability in While-reading***

##### ***4.2.1 Guided by the unit theme meaning, analyze activities specifically***

The new English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 Version 2020 Revision) states that the inquiry of unit theme meaning should be the most important content of students' language learning, directly affecting the degree of their discourse comprehension, the level of thinking development and the effectiveness of language learning. And the unit theme meaning inquiry should be regarded as the core task of learning and teaching. In other words, the process of reading activities is the process of unit theme meaning inquiry for students. And the main goal of the while-reading stage is to help students understand the information in the text and further develop their thinking ability through the reading activities guided by the unit theme meaning, and then complete the construction of thematic meaning in the process of reading activities. Therefore, teachers should analyze the implied thinking objectives of each reading activity in the textbook under the guidance of the unit theme meaning, so that students can rationalize the content of the text through reading activities, construct new cognition based on deconstructing the text, and then develop their thinking ability progressively on the basis of logical thinking and gradually develop critical thinking ability.

As shown in Figure 2, in the discourse *An Encounter with Nature*, Activity 2, Activity 3, and Activity 4 are all while-reading activities, but their focus of thinking ability is obviously different. Specifically, Activity 2 is a fast reading activity, which aims to let students read through the text and check their answer of the former activity based on the information in the text, which reflects the requirement of logical thinking. And Activity 3 and Activity 4 focus on the cultivation of logical thinking ability and critical thinking ability respectively. Therefore, understanding the design intention of textbook and analyzing the requirements of thinking ability carried by different activities are helpful for teachers to cultivate students' thinking quality through reading teaching activities.

##### ***4.2.2 Deeply understand the text and develop critical thinking***

The activities in while-reading stage require students to further improve their logical thinking ability and develop critical thinking ability on the basis of sorting out the plots of the text and clarifying the theme of the text. And then teachers need to help students in this process to dig deeply and further process the content of the text on the basis of understanding the main information of the text, so that students can further reason and evaluate based on observing, comparing, analyzing, inferring, inducing, and concept constructing, and then get their thinking ability to a higher level.

Firstly, teachers should guide students to gradually sublimate the unit theme meaning through hierarchical reading activities in the specific contexts provided by the reading text. Secondly, students should be guided to finely process the information provided by the text through reading activities to

grasp the structure of the reading discourse. Finally, teachers can remind students to pay attention to the language features of the discourse, grasp the language features in different contexts, and help them accumulate different language expressions in specific contexts. In this process, the content of the discourse is used as the basis for progressive reading activities, and other strategies such as Mind Map, Story Mountain, and Question Chains can also be used to help students to understand and express in depth, actively construct new cognition, and achieve further development of thinking. For example, in the discourse *An Encounter with Nature*, Activity 3 and Activity 4 are detailed reading, in which Activity 3 requires students to grasp more information about the details of the article and then sort the events in the text, which develops students' logical thinking ability. And Activity 4 requires students to locate target statements in the article and infer the meaning of key words in context, which can develop their critical thinking ability to a certain extent.

### ***4.3 Develop creative thinking ability in Post-reading***

#### ***4.3.1 Sublimate the unit theme meaning, encourage cooperation and innovation***

Creative thinking is reflected in the ability to think outside the box, to imagine, to break through stereotypes, to make bold assumptions, to push the envelope, and to come up with novel ideas and thoughts. The main goal of the post-reading stage is to help students internalize and understand the unit theme meaning of the reading discourse by connecting it to their prior knowledge or individual growth experiences. And in this process, the inquiry activities around the theme meaning can help students develop their creative thinking ability. In the post-reading stage, teachers need to set up higher-level thinking activities to help students summarize and refine higher-level theme meaning or the big concept of this unit and achieve sublimation of the unit theme. In this process, teachers can provide students with opportunities for independent cooperative inquiry activities, in which students can interact with their peers, communicate and cooperate, and then generate more unexpected new ideas about the unit theme. Moreover, the activity of cooperative inquiry into the meaning of the theme encourages students to think actively and imagine boldly, which is conducive to creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere, mobilizing students' enthusiasm for learning, making them think actively, getting rid of the shackles of traditional stereotypical thinking, and achieving creative thinking development.

#### ***4.3.2 Set integrated tasks to develop creative thinking***

The new textbooks highly reflect the close connection of thinking levels in the design of post-reading activities, so that students can output through authentic tasks on the basis of familiarity with the theme of the reading discourse, and realize reading for writing, writing for use, and use for thinking. At the post-reading stage, teachers can set different forms of activities such as post-reading writing task, role play or speech to encourage students' individual expression and help them promote the development of creative thinking in the transfer of real situations.

In the sample discourse, Activities 5 and Activity 6 are post-reading activities. And Activity 5, *Think & Share*, is one of the highlights of the new reading activity design in which through four questions, students can make a natural transition from clarifying facts to expressing their opinions in relation to the content of the text and their own experiences. In this activity, from the possible difficulties encountered by the nature photographer and his possible reaction after seeing the bear, students can move to their own possible reactions and then according to the feeling experience they can show respect to the animals after reading the text, which sublimates the theme meaning and develops their logical and critical thinking ability. And the final Activity 6 requires students to choose one of the four careers from "groomer, zoologist, vet, police dog handler", and based on the supporting information in the table, they need to give a description of the chosen career in terms of job description, job requirements and rewards of the job. Therefore, in this activity, students can develop their transferring and applying ability through the experience from nature photographer to new career descriptions. And then they can further express their own opinions based on the information in the text and fully demonstrate their creative thinking ability.

## **5. Conclusion**

The 2019 FLTRP English textbooks are theme-guided and activity-driven, which the units are designed holistically. Besides, the reading activities are designed including pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, which are closely integrated with the specific texts of each unit. Moreover, the activities in each specific unit may vary slightly, but as a whole, the reading activities in the new

textbooks reflect a progression from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. In this paper, the author proposes the integrated unit reading teaching strategy of “Focus on logical thinking ability in Pre-reading; Cultivate critical thinking ability in While-reading; Develop creative thinking ability in Post-reading”, which are supposed to promote the development of students’ thinking quality in English reading teaching.

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