

Exploration of Junior High School Art Major Unit Teaching Based on Art Course Standards: A Case Study of "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education"

Yang Liu*

Chifeng No.2 International Experimental School, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, China

**Corresponding Author.*

Abstract: In line with the "curricular philosophy" and "core literacy" requirements proposed by the "Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards" issued in 2022, this study aims to explore unit-based, structured teaching design in junior high school art courses, centered around the "big ideas" of the subject and revolving around "themes". The results show that such teaching design, with the subject's "big ideas" at its core and structured around "themes", effectively promotes the cultivation of core literacy in art education. Specifically, unit teaching helps integrate interdisciplinary knowledge, enhances students' creativity and critical thinking skills, and cultivates their aesthetic and cultural awareness. Moreover, the study found that thematic teaching methods provide students with a more attractive and meaningful learning experience, helping them connect art learning with real-world situations. In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that unit-based, structured teaching design, centered around the "big ideas" of the subject and themes, is an effective educational approach for fostering core literacy in art education, enhancing students' artistic skills and promoting their comprehensive development as creative and culturally aware individuals.

Keywords: Junior High School Art; Major Unit Teaching; Core Literacy; Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings

1. Introduction

Integrating the educational concept of "big ideas" with major units or thematic teaching models can compensate for the shortcomings

of independent class teaching in junior high school art, and is beneficial for cultivating students' interdisciplinary integration and diversified thinking in teaching. Taking the theme of "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education" as an example, based on the "Double Reduction" policy and the principle of "teaching and evaluation consistency," the art textbook lessons are reorganized and combined with regional cultural characteristics to form new learning units. Through the optimization of unit structure, the creation of an open learning environment, and the design of multi-dimensional evaluation, the horizontal and vertical continuity of unit learning content is enhanced, improving students' research-based learning and interdisciplinary knowledge integration capabilities, and achieving a deeper understanding of architectural aesthetics.

2. An Analysis of Junior High School Art Major Unit Teaching Based on "Big Ideas"

"The Core Literacy for Chinese Students' Development" explicitly puts forward the teaching requirements for "core literacy", and unit teaching guided by "big ideas" is an important form of implementing literacy. The concept of curriculum architecture and teaching design based on "big ideas", originated from abroad, has also influenced Chinese art education scholars in their research on applying "big ideas" in art teaching. Mr. Yin Shaochun, in his "From Core Literacy to Core Literacy of Art Subject - The Major Change in Chinese Basic Education Art Curriculum", discusses: "Linking the learning of art knowledge and skills with social issues or big ideas, thereby giving value and meaning to art knowledge

and skills." [1]

Integrating the educational philosophy of "big ideas" with major units or thematic teaching models involves placing scattered knowledge points within a complete, related disciplinary system for construction, and designing teaching from the unit level. This not only effectively avoids the excessive refinement of teaching objectives but also ensures the completeness of the knowledge system, enabling students to autonomously construct a system of disciplinary concepts and gradually form "big idea" thinking.

Junior high is a critical stage in the artistic transformation of adolescents, and there are few systematic natural units in junior high school art courses. This leads to fragmented and scattered learning of knowledge points, superficial learning of course content by students, and a lack of disciplinary integration and deep understanding. Long-term independent class teaching can also lead to the standardization of teachers' course design, resulting in a focus on results over process, which is not conducive to the development of interdisciplinary integration and students' diversified thinking. Mr. Wang Dagen also states in "Major Unit Teaching Based on Art Core Literacy" that "implementing the 'core literacy' of the art subject requires 'major unit teaching' to emphasize the nature and educational value of the art subject." [2]

3. Constructing Junior High School Art Major Unit Teaching Based on Art Course Standards

The "Art Course Standards" issued in 2022 specify art courses including music, fine arts, dance, drama (including opera), and film (including digital media arts), reflecting the integration of artistic disciplines including fine arts. Core literacies have been modified to aesthetic perception, artistic expression, creative practice, and cultural understanding, with the establishment of course objectives and the reflection of course philosophy all revolving around these core literacies. The fine arts curriculum is organized into four learning domains: "Appreciation and Critique," "Modeling and Expression," "Design Application," and "Comprehensive Exploration." Course content is set according to these domains and is reasonably arranged in different learning stages, reflecting the

continuity and progression of learning.

Traditional single-lesson art teaching is far less reflective of the educational philosophy and spirit of the "Art Course Standards" than unit teaching based on big ideas. Combining the Double Reduction policy in the design of art major unit teaching, optimizing unit structure through the reorganization of lesson times and reconstruction of units, enhances the horizontal and vertical continuity of single lesson times and course content. This approach encourages students to relate single, fragmented knowledge points, and achieve learning objectives in a gradual, expansive manner. Thematic or unit-based teaching more easily engages students in the teaching process. Utilizing the comprehensive, situational, and interdisciplinary integration of art unit teaching not only imparts knowledge to students but also broadens their horizons and common sense, enhancing their comprehensive abilities in thinking, skills, and interests, thereby achieving the enhancement of the four major academic literacies [3,4].

4. Junior High School Art Major Unit Teaching Strategies

In the "Art Course Standards," there are two educational stages related to junior high school art curriculum teaching, namely the third stage (grades 6-7) and the fourth stage (grades 8-9), with a total of 10 learning tasks set. The third stage integrates the sixth grade of primary school with the seventh grade of junior high, reflecting the new art curriculum standards' emphasis on curriculum continuity.

In accordance with the spirit of the curriculum standards, it is essential to integrate the four core literacies throughout junior high school art classes. Combining the characteristics of junior high school students' growth and development and applying the principle of "consistency in teaching and evaluation," it is crucial to clarify "why to teach," "what to teach," "to what extent," and "how to teach." Integrating fragmented knowledge and skills with teaching content organically enables students to deeply connect with the art subject and enhance their comprehensive abilities.

In the process of junior high school art teaching, it's important to create an open learning environment and construct situational teaching that integrates with students' learning conditions, social culture, and local art

resources. Encouraging students to actively participate in art practice activities through autonomous learning and cooperative inquiry fosters their proximity to nature, appreciation of life, and creativity, thereby realizing the value of art learning and enhancing their abilities in artistic practice, creation, and aesthetics.

Junior high students have more mature abilities in using art materials, understanding online platforms, and comprehensive exploration than elementary students. With their physical, emotional, and intellectual development entering a new stage, art teaching should creatively use both traditional materials and modern media. It is important to guide students to use new technological devices and technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality for autonomous learning while also leveraging the characteristics of various art media to engage students' visual, auditory, and tactile senses, thereby enhancing their deep experience of art and improving the quality of art teaching. [5, 6]

Utilizing multi-dimensional evaluation reflects

the diverse abilities of students at different levels. Firstly, designing classroom learning evaluation forms, and skillfully using classroom evaluation through questioning and communication helps understand students' learning processes and behaviors, stimulating their enthusiasm for learning and aiding in their improvement. Secondly, homework evaluation complements teaching design, with homework design grounded in the Double Reduction policy, combining practice, written, and comprehensive exploration tasks. This should include independently completed and team collaborative tasks, written and activity-based tasks, consolidation exercises and creative practices, as well as general and personalized tasks. Homework evaluation should focus on both results and the process. Additionally, assessment methods can be designed in line with the concept of "joint family-school education," and the results of evaluations can be effectively used for teaching reflection, thus constructing a comprehensive and efficient art teaching system. (See Table 1 for details)

Table 1: Design of Comprehensive Evaluation Form for Unit Learning

Evaluation Area	Evaluation Criteria	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Appreciation and Critique	Understand the meaning and scope of art heritage.			
	Learn to analyze the artistic charm and cultural traditions embedded in old streets and buildings.			
	Grasp the significance of art heritage preservation and inheritance, with unique insights into the protection of old streets and buildings.			
Modeling and Expression	Hand-drawn line images are vivid and concise.			
	Painting creation closely follows the theme, with complete composition, rich colors, and creativity.			
	Skilled in painting techniques, appropriate use of materials.			
Design and Application	Reasonable layout design in research reports, innovative concepts.			
	Paper model designs cleverly use materials and are beautifully crafted.			
	Designs of daily-use items and accessories incorporate innovation while inheriting traditions, and the design concept is logically written.			
Comprehensive Exploration	Actively participate in exploration activities and collect relevant materials.			
	During cooperative inquiry, actively engage in discussions, offering unique insights or making significant contributions.			
	Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to express viewpoints from various perspectives.			

	Participate in planning exhibition schemes and engage in internal and external exchanges.			
Classroom Performance	Attentive and active in class, responds eagerly to questions.			
	Overcomes difficulties encountered during creation and assists other students.			
	Well-prepared before activities and proactively organizes materials, maintaining cleanliness after activities conclude.			

5. Junior High School Art Major Unit Teaching Design—Taking "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education" as an Example

5.1 Basic Information of the Unit Teaching

The theme of the unit design is "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education." The total number of lessons for the unit is 5. The textbook version used is "Art – Compulsory Education Textbook – People's Fine Arts Publishing House – Grade 8 Lower."

5.2 Curriculum Standards Reflected in the Unit Design

The combined design of the unit curriculum reflects the learning requirements of the fourth stage of the art subject in the "Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards": conducting research on revolutionary sites, ancient buildings, or ancient villages in the area of residence, understanding their historical roles, and writing research reports. Based on problems discovered during research, proposing improvement plans using hand-drawn sketches or three-dimensional models, and conducting presentations and exchanges.

Teachers should conduct teaching in the form of tasks, themes, or projects, embedding knowledge and skills within them. Through comprehensive and creative art practice activities, students are encouraged to deeply understand knowledge and skills, enhancing their comprehensive abilities. Guiding students to connect with their families, communities, hometowns, etc., to identify issues, and creatively complete art works or solve problems by comprehensively using knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking from art and other subjects, thereby enhancing their creative and problem-solving abilities. [7, 8]

5.3 Unit Theme Analysis

5.3.1 Overview of the unit theme

The People's Fine Arts Publishing House art textbook for the eighth grade lower volume, with courses such as "Paying Attention to Art Heritage around Us," "The Artistic Charm of Traditional Residential Buildings," and "The Protection and Inheritance of Art Heritage," all reflect the connotation of architectural aesthetics. The content of these courses is closely connected and progressive, so after combining them with regional culture, they are integrated into the unit theme of "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education."

Through the lesson "Paying Attention to Art Heritage around Us," students are cultivated to discover the art heritage around them, thereby understanding the culture, history, and artistic value of Chifeng's old streets and buildings, cultivating their artistic sensitivity, cultural vision, and humanistic sentiment. Transitioning from the content of the first lesson to the second lesson, "The Artistic Charm of Traditional Residential Buildings," students are made to appreciate the artistic characteristics and excellent cultural traditions of traditional residences, further feeling the artistic features and humanistic spirit carried by Chifeng's old streets and buildings. Finally, introducing the protection and inheritance of art heritage, combined with the content of the first two lessons, guides students to deeply appreciate the aesthetic connotation contained in Chifeng's old streets and buildings, while recognizing the importance of protecting art heritage, instilling in students the value of art heritage and establishing a sense of civic responsibility from the perspective of loving national cultural heritage.

5.3.2 Intention of unit combination design

The unit course requires students to combine classroom content with regional culture, engage in a series of activities such as information collection, field investigations,

and work exhibitions, to enhance their awareness of research-based learning and interdisciplinary knowledge integration, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of architectural aesthetics. The visits and investigations in the learning process focus more on exploratory learning, using a variety of methods that integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines such as history, geography, and language, while also training students' abilities in communication and cooperative inquiry. Classroom teaching, combined with painting creation, research reports, and model construction assignments, not only deepens students' understanding of the aesthetics of old streets and buildings but also consolidates the knowledge learned in previous courses, enabling students to improve their abilities in "Appreciation and Critique," "Modeling and Expression," "Design and Application," and "Comprehensive Exploration," while reflecting the core literacies of art courses. [9, 10]

5.3.3 Analysis of student learning situation in the unit theme

After studying art in the seventh grade, students have gained a certain depth of understanding of art. Their aesthetic awareness has improved, and they are able to use basic art knowledge and skills to analyze artworks. In art activities, they are not confined to conventions but dare to innovate, expressing their aesthetic feelings through exploring various artistic expression methods and creative approaches.

In the teaching process, it is possible to adapt to local conditions based on the actual situation of students, mobilizing their initiative and enthusiasm for learning, to further cultivate their good habits of using hands, eyes, and brain together, thereby enhancing their aesthetic literacy.

5.4 Design of Unit Learning Objectives

Students should be able to understand the artistic characteristics contained in the old streets and buildings of Chifeng city and use methods such as painting, photography, and research reports for communication and discussion, reflecting the core literacies of "aesthetic perception" and "artistic expression." Students should recognize the importance of protecting old streets and buildings in the urban development process, and through methods such as model making, discuss the feasibility of

protecting ancient buildings, reflecting the core literacies of "aesthetic perception" and "creative practice." Through the study of the course, students' architectural aesthetic cultivation is enhanced, thereby spreading the idea of protecting regional old buildings, reflecting the core literacy of "cultural understanding."

5.5 Design of Unit Learning Activities

Unit Overview: Before the start of the course, share with the students the teaching design concept of the major unit "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education," enabling students to understand the upcoming series of course content and facilitate the smooth unfolding of subsequent teaching tasks.

5.5.1 Paying attention to art heritage around us
Art Heritage Data Collection: Students use their free time to collect data on art heritage around them through photography, video recording, internet, and book searches, thereby gaining a basic understanding of the concepts related to art heritage.

Course Teaching: First, group representatives share and exchange the collected art heritage. Then, groups discuss the meaning and scope of art heritage based on the shared content. Finally, combined with the teacher's classroom teaching, students achieve a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge related to art heritage.

Drawing Line Images: Based on the art heritage pictures they have collected, students use hand-drawn line images with tools like fineliners and pencils to vividly and concisely depict the art heritage and share their works.

Painting Creation: Integrating the teaching content, related materials, and the drawn art heritage line images, students engage in painting creation on themes like "The Beauty of Art Heritage around Me" or "My Favorite Old Building in My Hometown." This can be completed as a group project. (Note the division of labor within the group, bold imagination, incorporation of personal artistic feelings, diversity in painting forms, and no restrictions on painting tools).

Design Intent: Through site visits, investigative learning, and more, students not only gain a deep understanding of art heritage but also learn about its historical and geographical aspects from other disciplines. The two-lesson painting assignment,

combined with the course content, not only deepens students' understanding of art heritage but also consolidates their knowledge of modeling and color, reflecting the core literacies of "aesthetic perception" and "artistic expression." Additionally, the assignment content lays the groundwork for the upcoming courses.

5.5.2 The artistic charm of traditional residences

Field Visits to Old Streets and Buildings: Teachers, parents, and students together conduct field inspections of Chifeng's old residences and streets, collecting relevant image materials.

Creating Electronic Research Reports: Working in groups and using the collected image data, students create an electronic version of a research report on Chifeng's traditional residences or old streets and buildings. A representative from each group is selected to present and exchange findings in class. (The research report should reflect the concept, layout, and typical characteristics of traditional residences.)

Course Teaching: The teacher introduces the concept, layout, and typical features of traditional residences in China.

Producing Paper Research Reports: Through drawing lots within groups, students create research reports on "The Distribution of Traditional Residences in China" or "Taking Zhang Family Courtyard/Support Column Building/Catholic Church on Erdao Street in Chifeng as an Example." (Students may combine results from previous course assignments to create paper research reports integrating text and images.)

Research Report Group Sharing: Group representatives present and share their paper research reports, providing in-depth interpretations of China's traditional residences or Chifeng's old streets and buildings from the perspectives of functionality, features, and traditional culture, expressing their feelings.

Design Intent: Utilizing the opportunity for students to learn about traditional residences, integrating content on the aesthetics of Chifeng's traditional residences and old streets and buildings. Through writing research reports, students achieve multidisciplinary integration, further enhancing their abilities in modeling expression and comprehensive

exploration. They also deeply appreciate the artistic charm of traditional residences, thereby sparking a strong desire to protect old streets and buildings.

5.5.3 Protection and inheritance of art heritage
Course Teaching: After studying art heritage and old street buildings, students have realized the precious aesthetic, historical, and cultural values embedded in these heritages. The teacher, through classroom teaching, guides students to understand the significant importance of protecting these heritages and introduces general methods for protecting and inheriting these art heritages.

Model Building: Students use materials such as cardboard and playing cards to reconstruct models of demolished or partially damaged old buildings or streets in Chifeng. Through model making, students not only deeply appreciate the aesthetics contained in the old streets and buildings but also explore methods to protect ancient buildings.

Group Discussion and Sharing: 1. Assuming you are the owner of an old residential building on Erdao Street, discuss how you would protect it. 2. Use the artistic elements from art heritage to design daily-use items, accessories, etc. (Pay attention to the writing of the design concept.)

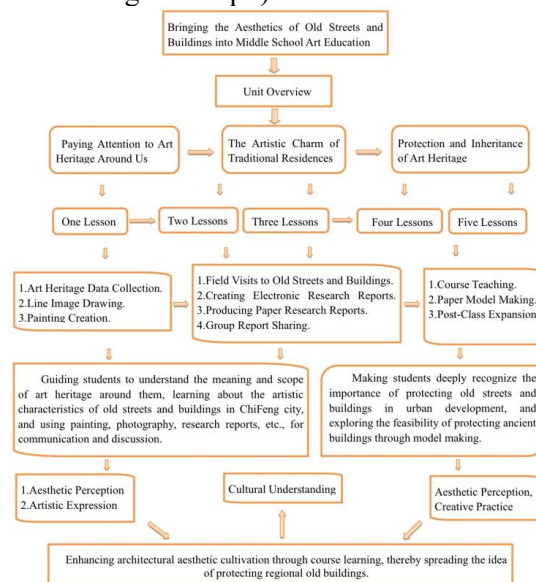


Figure 1. Structure Diagram of Unit Teaching

Design Intent: Through model making, students are led to deeply appreciate the architectural aesthetics contained in old streets and buildings, exploring methods to protect ancient buildings. Using role-playing and

design applications of art heritage, the activity awakens students' sense of responsibility for protecting and inheriting art heritage and old street buildings.

The above unit learning content is based on the theme unit teaching design of "Bringing the Aesthetics of Old Streets and Buildings into Middle School Art Education" under the art course standards, using the "big concept" of the art subject to lead teaching, prompting students to continuously deepen their understanding of the course content (see Figure 1).

6. Conclusion

This study sets unit objectives around the standards of "observable, evaluable, measurable", with tightly interlinked lesson combinations and progressively structured long and short-term assignments closely connected, integrated with the "four major learning domains" of the art subject for comprehensive evaluation. By combining textbook content with local cultural contexts around students, students gain a comprehensive understanding of architectural aesthetics, and deeply recognize the artistic, historical, and cultural values of Chifeng's old streets and buildings. However, the unit course practice also faces numerous challenges, such as students' discomfort with the teaching method, fixed thinking, reliance on explanations, incomplete preparation of course materials by students; long intervals between art classes; lack of unit teaching experience among teachers, etc. These issues indicate that the integrated art unit course design still needs effort to truly enter the art classrooms of the region. Theme unit teaching design based on the "big concept" of the art course can grasp the overall direction of the art subject. Guided by art course standards, using themes and units to integrate course resources, connecting knowledge points with "big concepts," and integrating structures with "themes." Achieving comprehensive enhancement of students' "core literacy," with the goal of cultivating high-quality, comprehensive talents.

References

- [1] Yin Shaochun, From Core Literacy to Art Subject Core Literacy-Major Shift in China's Basic Education Art Curriculum. *Art Observation*, 2017.4.
- [2] Wang Dagen, Major Unit Teaching Based on Art Core Literacy. *Chinese Art Education*, 2019, (6): 4-10.
- [3] Wen Ha Lun, Wei Yu, Science Education Based on the Concept of Big Ideas. *China Science and Technology Education*, 2016(10):1.
DOI: CNKI: SUN: KJJY. 0. 2019-01-038.
- [4] Li Gang, Lv Lijie. Analysis and Enlightenment of Foreign Curriculum Design Models around Big Ideas. *Comparative Education Research*, 2018, (09): 35-43.
- [5] Liao Rongtian. Research on Elementary School Art "Modeling and Expression" Teaching Based on the Latest Curriculum Standards - Taking the People's Education Edition as an Example. *Teacher*, 2022(26):66-68.
- [6] He Xiaoqiang. Exploration of Methods to Enhance Elementary School Students' Art Modeling and Expression Abilities. *Primary School Students (Late Monthly)*, 2022(10):79-81.
- [7] Shao Chaoyou, Cui Yunzhang, Instructional Design Oriented Towards Core Literacies: Perspective of Big Ideas. *Global Education Outlook*, 2017(6):11-19.
- [8] Hu Zhifan, Core Literacy is the Primary Goal of Art Curricula in Schools Worldwide. *Curriculum, Teaching Material, and Method*, 2017(3):116-121.
- [9] Hu Zhifan, Characteristics and Referential Significance of the U.S. National Core Arts Standards. *Education Reference*, 2015, (03):25-32.
- [10] Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe, Sheng Qunli, Shen Zuyun, Liu Feng, Wu Xinjing, Zheng Dandan (Translators). *Understanding by Design: Guide to Creating High-Quality Units (Part One)*. Fuzhou: Fujian Education Publishing House, 2018.