

Deconstruction and Reconstruction: New Ideas for Refining Teaching Materials on Education for Ethnic Unity and Progress —Starting from the textbook Great Unity of the Chinese Nation

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Abstract: *With the popularization and application of teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress, frontline teachers are particularly concerned about the interpretive approaches and response strategies embedded in the textbooks. In terms of textbook use, current problems include a mismatch between topic (issue) design and classroom practice, insufficient alignment between ways of presenting content and students' cognitive characteristics, and weak content systematicity with fractured articulation across schooling stages. To improve the effectiveness of textbook use, it is necessary to update usage concepts so that curricular content and curricular philosophy are organically integrated; innovate methods by relying on scenario-based teaching to help students deepen understanding; and enhance the user experience by developing scientifically sound, activity-based instructional design plans.*

Keywords: Teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress, Great Unity of the Chinese Nation, Content analysis, Suggestions for use.

1. Introduction

In April 2021, the Ministry of Education, the Central Propaganda Department, the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission jointly issued the Guiding Outline on Deepening Education on Ethnic Unity and Progress in Schools in the New Era (hereinafter referred to as the Outline), which clearly requires solid work on education on ethnic unity and progress at all levels and types of schools in the new era, and strengthening education on fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation among teachers and students of all ethnic groups.[1] The textbook Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) (hereinafter referred to as the Textbook), as an innovative vehicle for ethnic unity education in the new era, has become an important lever for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and for carrying out education on ethnic unity and progress.[2] By presenting, in a panoramic way, the historical trajectory and civilizational achievements of the Chinese nation as a pluralistic unity, the Textbook effectively strengthens a sense of community for the Chinese nation. It also places greater emphasis on values education by organically integrating the “ethnic unity gene” with the cultivation of patriotism, providing spiritual motivation for adolescents to participate in socialist modernization. Therefore, this study explores how frontline teachers' depth of understanding of textbook content affects their teaching practice, thereby promoting the realization of the textbook's educational function.

2. Problems in Using the Great Unity of the Chinese Nation Textbook

The Great Unity of the Chinese Nation Textbook has undergone profound reform in both its overall structure and specific units. Although it overlaps with the older edition in some content, it also includes necessary supplements and

expansions. The Textbook has distinctive practical, theoretical, ethnic, and contemporary characteristics. With highly integrative content that “networks” students' knowledge acquired in other subjects, it has brought about a series of common problems for teachers in application, and has also prompted deeper reflection and discussion.

2.1 A Disconnect Between Topic (issue) Design and Classroom Practice

On April 15, 2022, the General Office of the Ministry of Education released the Notice on Issuing the 2022 Catalogue of Teaching Materials for Primary and Secondary Schools (No. 2 [2022] of the Teaching Materials Department), hereinafter referred to as the Notice.[3] The Notice clearly pointed out that the teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress—compiled under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Education—would be adopted nationwide by junior secondary schools starting from the first semester of autumn 2022, and that regions should ensure correct selection and use of the materials in accordance with relevant documents. The Textbook advocates issue-oriented teaching methods and emphasizes the development of activity-based curricula. However, in actual use, the issues provided by the Textbook are often too broad or abstract, lacking specific operational guidance and step-by-step scaffolding. As a result, frontline teachers encounter difficulties when transforming the Textbook into classroom teaching. Specifically, teachers find it hard to design teaching activities with appropriate depth based on the Textbook content, causing “issue-based teaching” to become merely formalistic and to degenerate into mechanical listing of questions or superficial teacher–student Q&A. In parts of the Textbook, theoretical exposition is relatively dense, while supporting practical cases or scenario materials are insufficient. This makes it difficult for teachers to balance “theory explanation” and “activity experience,” and it is easy to fall back into lecture-dominated, monotonous instruction. Consequently, the Textbook's intended

combination of “rational norms and value appeals” cannot be effectively implemented in real classrooms, and the use effect remains superficial.

2.2 Low Alignment Between Content Presentation and Students’ Cognitive Characteristics

Teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress embody the national will on ethnic affairs. In use, it has been found that parts of the Textbook were not designed with sufficient consideration of differences in knowledge structures and reading habits among students across regions and schooling stages. While the Textbook emphasizes integrative and networked knowledge construction, in some chapters certain theoretical concepts are overly abstruse and lack concrete expressions closely connected to students’ lived experiences, which creates obstacles for students’ independent reading and understanding. In addition, the Textbook is not rich enough in the design of columns/sections that guide students toward self-reflection, innovative thinking, and so on. The integration between activity formats (such as storytelling and knowledge contests) and core knowledge points is not close enough, so students often passively receive information and find it difficult to generate deeper emotional resonance and practical motivation through the Textbook itself. This results in a passive situation of “teaching the textbook” rather than “using the textbook to teach.”

2.3 Insufficient Systematicity and Fractured Articulation Across Schooling Stages

Teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress are an important channel through which students acquire knowledge, and they are also the direct basis for teachers’ instruction. However, “teaching with the textbook” is not the same as “teaching the textbook.” Respect for the textbook does not mean rigidly pouring its content into students. In actual use, the Textbook reveals obvious deficiencies in systematicity, especially with respect to an integrated approach spanning primary, secondary, and tertiary education. First, some chapters are complicated and redundant, and the logical thread is not clear enough, which increases the difficulty for teachers to reorganize teaching content. Second, mechanisms for vertical articulation are lacking: the repetition rate of the same knowledge points (e.g., the system of regional ethnic autonomy) is relatively high across different stages, yet there is insufficient gradient progression and depth extension, failing to reflect learners’ “zone of proximal development.” This homogenization and disjunction in content arrangement can lead to student fatigue or cognitive confusion over long-term use, making it difficult to form a systematic knowledge system of a community for the Chinese nation. It also weakens the scientificity and rigor of the Textbook as a core teaching basis.

3. Accurate Interpretation of the Textbook Content by Teachers

In terms of content structure, scenario creation, and logical threads, Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) has been carefully refined and rigorously organized. The content progresses step by step and clearly outlines the historical trajectory of the Chinese nation’s

development, laying a solid foundation for students’ subsequent learning. Therefore, in implementing the Textbook, teachers need to understand its content in depth, interpret it accurately, and use it creatively, so as to more effectively realize the value connotations of education on ethnic unity and progress.

3.1 Interdisciplinary Integration of the Textbook’s Content Structure

First, grasp the whole: at the module level, it is necessary to clarify the Textbook’s main purpose and key ideas, and highlight the teaching objectives of each module. Second, restructure the framework: at the unit/chapter level, emphasize key content and identify horizontal differences among units and chapters. Finally, design connections: from the perspective of curriculum content, accurately identify teaching knowledge points and pay attention to vertical articulation across schooling stages.

On the basis of cultivating a pluralistic-unity educational goal for the Chinese nation, the teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress reconstruct their content and adopt cross-disciplinary, integrated teaching methods. For example, the first lesson theme “Love China, My Motherland” in Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) can be approached from multiple dimensions—history, geography, culture, etc.—to provide students with richer and deeper learning experiences. The first part, “The Chinese Nation Has a Long History,” can be integrated into history teaching; the second part, “The Chinese Nation Has Magnificent Rivers and Mountains,” can be combined with relevant geography content for detailed explanation; the third part, “The Chinese Nation Has a Splendid Culture,” can be integrated with arts education such as music or fine arts; and the fourth part, “The Chinese Nation Has the Advantage of Pluralistic Unity,” is suitable to be developed within the framework of the subject “Moral Education and Rule of Law.” However, a key prerequisite for interdisciplinary integration is joint teaching research among teachers of different subjects. Through collaborative lesson study, teachers can integrate and plan relevant issues across subjects to ensure seamless connection between the Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) course and other subject curricula. This not only enables orderly and efficient interdisciplinary teaching, but also better cultivates students’ comprehensive qualities and core subject competencies.

3.2 Accurate Understanding of the Teaching Scenarios Designed in the Textbook

Teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress have specific scenario frameworks—namely, how and from which perspectives they present their content. Reviewing the Textbook from specific angles and sorting out its scenarios is key to correctly understanding and grasping the main points. This helps to better see the internal links among textual contents and to comprehend the core ideas and explanatory perspectives of chapters and paragraphs.

Because education on ethnic unity and progress involves complex learning contexts, teachers should choose educational experiences according to students’ actual

situations in order to better plan and implement instruction. In terms of internal connections, Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) clearly presents, from the outset, an important marker: China is a unified multi-ethnic country—the national flag and national emblem of the People’s Republic of China, as well as a world map indicating China’s geographic location (note: the national anthem can be found in Unit 1). Under this theme, the Textbook’s core content is mainly divided into four parts: “The Great Chinese Nation,” “Jointly Building a Beautiful Country,” “Jointly Building a Spiritual Home,” and “Working Together to Realize the Chinese Dream,” and the concluding part summarizes with “Great Rejuvenation, Striving Together.” In terms of knowledge structure, the Textbook is arranged into 12 class periods; in each class period, the main text uses concise language to introduce relevant knowledge, theories, and guidelines, presenting the basic content. It also provides in-depth interpretation and guides students to think, explore, and investigate so as to enhance their ability to apply what they have learned to solve practical problems. In terms of supplementary text and illustrations, abundant visual information in the main text significantly increases reading appeal. In addition, the textbook provides a series of extended readings to help deepen students’ understanding.

3.3 In-depth Analysis of the Unit Themes

Compared with the directly presented content structure and scenario design, the Textbook’s logical thread is more implicit. This framework runs through multiple levels, including layout, narrative techniques, and argumentation structure. Its core purpose is to clarify why the Textbook is written in this way, or to explain textbook content based on these unique perspectives. An in-depth analysis of this logical thread helps to better understand the underlying reasoning and value orientation.

Unit 1 of the Textbook is titled “The Great Chinese Nation,” aiming to help students understand the growth process of the Chinese nation and the core elements of the Chinese national spirit, strengthen national identity, and enhance students’ consciousness of fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. Unit 2, “Jointly Building a Beautiful Homeland,” focuses on the historical efforts made by all ethnic groups to jointly build and defend the motherland, helping students firmly establish correct views of the motherland, history, and ethnicity. Unit 3, “Jointly Building a Spiritual Home,” focuses on the splendid Chinese culture jointly created by all ethnic groups, demonstrating the creative character of the Chinese nation. Unit 4 is titled “Working Together to Realize the Chinese Dream.” Its core content emphasizes that realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation must adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party of China, encouraging students to build firm faith in jointly contributing to the Chinese dream.

In summary, through a progressive cognitive path of “national identity → national mission → cultural identity → co-building the dream,” the Textbook becomes an effective vehicle for fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation and integrates the community concept into the practice of national rejuvenation. In teaching implementation,

it is necessary to adhere to a clear political stance, keep pace with the times, and focus on cultivating students’ political identification with contemporary China and their scientific spirit.

4. Specific Suggestions for Innovative Use of the Textbook

Based on an in-depth analysis of the Textbook content, this section focuses on two aspects—teaching design and classroom implementation—and seeks to use scientific methods to improve the quality of courses and teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress. First, update the concepts for using the Textbook to ensure organic integration of curricular content and curricular philosophy. Second, innovate methods for using the Textbook so that students can understand and master knowledge deeply in engaging scenarios. Finally, improve the user experience and develop scientifically sound activity-based curriculum plans.

4.1 Update Usage Concepts to Ensure Organic Integration of Curricular Content and Curricular Philosophy

First, refine core concepts. Teaching materials for education on ethnic unity and progress emphasize the condensation of core concepts, which helps students deepen understanding of curriculum content. Second, broaden horizons. General Secretary Xi Jinping’s major assertion that “the world today is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century” reveals new characteristics of the times. Grounded in China’s national conditions, closely following global dynamics, and looking ahead to future development trends, one distinctive feature of education on ethnic unity and progress is cultivating students’ ability to analyze social phenomena and current affairs with an objective, rational, and dialectical perspective.

Taking the “Love China, My Motherland” lesson in Great Unity of the Chinese Nation (for Junior Secondary Schools) as an example, it provides a high-level overview of the Chinese nation from four dimensions: historical origins, territorial geography, Chinese culture, and the pluralistic-unity pattern. This not only strengthens students’ identification with the Chinese nation, but also helps further foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. Lesson 5 focuses on “Jointly Defending the Great Motherland.” Teaching should go beyond simply narrating heroic deeds; it should guide students to deeply understand the shared responsibilities borne by all ethnic groups in defending the country. Teaching content should fully respect cultural diversity among ethnic groups, while also highlighting the pluralistic-unity cultural pattern of the Chinese nation. With vivid examples, theoretical content can be presented in an engaging way, demonstrating the school’s firm political stance in education on ethnic unity and progress. This is a direction that schools must consistently uphold and cannot deviate from under any circumstances.

4.2 Innovate Methods: Design Scenarios for Deeper Understanding and Mastery of Knowledge

To cultivate students’ emotions, attitudes, and values in an integrated way, a primary task is to recognize the indispensability of scenario creation in the teaching field. In

classroom implementation, teachers should make the materials for problem situations truly match students' interests, build a sound system of problem scenarios and atmosphere, and promote reasonable shaping of problem scenarios.[4] Through carefully designed scenarios, teachers can build an integrated learning environment that incorporates multiple viewpoints and perspectives, effectively improving students' overall literacy and skill levels, including problem analysis and solving, critical thinking, and creativity.

The Textbook is organized in a modular design consisting of seven major sections for each lesson: "Introduction—Main Text—Answer Questions—Ethnic Garden—Discussion and Exchange—Inquiry and Sharing—Practice Field." This seven-section system constructs a complete teaching-and-practice framework for teachers and students, guiding them from perceptual cognition to rational understanding and ultimately to conscious action. In education on ethnic unity and progress, teachers should focus on scenario-based teaching methods and actively use multimedia, real objects, role-playing, and other means to create vivid and realistic scenes that help students understand and master course content.

4.3 Improve the User Experience by Developing Scientifically Sound Activity-design Plans

Activity design aims to help teachers better organize teaching activities and promote students' acquisition of knowledge and improvement of abilities. It is mainly reflected in three points. First, activity design focuses on thinking qualities: the design of core questions should be universal and representative; in designing specific questions, attention should be paid to logic and progression so that they can guide meaningful discussion. Second, activity design makes the teaching process coherent and consistent: teachers can guide students to experience the charm of knowledge in activities and stimulate interest and participation; through an orderly series of activities, the teaching process is ensured to revolve around clear logic and key points, avoiding "fragmented learning" that artificially splits a complete knowledge system into scattered "points," thereby building holistic teaching. Third, activity design enriches learning experiences: by providing concrete and practical problem scenarios, using efficient data-processing approaches as a basis, paying attention to diversified collaborative research perspectives, and combining precise argumentation, it aims to both enrich learning tasks and deepen students' learning experiences.

The Textbook is concise and easy to understand, providing broad space for classroom practice. In the three chapters of Unit 1, it covers themes such as "Love China, My Motherland," "The Formation and Development of the Chinese Nation," and "The Chinese National Spirit." To enhance student participation, teachers may organize motivational speech or storytelling activities that stimulate students' enthusiasm. Taking a speech activity on the theme "Love the Motherland" as an example, speech materials can be selected from Lessons 1–3, and participating teams can give an impromptu speech limited to three minutes. To ensure students can complete the practical task smoothly, teachers can advance the activity step by step by class period so that theory and practice complement each other, enabling students

to deeply understand the great history and spiritual connotations of the Chinese nation. In class period 1, a grouped-reading approach can be used to guide students to conduct in-depth study of the three texts, draft a speech outline, and select speech content. In class period 2, students are guided to revise their speech drafts and practice within groups. In class period 3, classroom presentations are conducted; teachers organize guidance and timely coaching, create a positive classroom atmosphere, and let the seed of a community for the Chinese nation take root in the hearts of adolescents of all ethnic groups through the speech activity.

5. Conclusion

Today, we are closer than at any time in history, and have more confidence and ability than at any time in history, to realize the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." [5] The Textbook Great Unity of the Chinese Nation, designed specifically for education on ethnic unity and progress, highlights the core value of fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. It plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating key disciplinary competencies such as students' political sense of belonging and scientific thinking. Addressing core problems identified in textbook use—namely the disconnect between issue design and classroom practice, low alignment between content presentation and students' cognition, insufficient systematicity, and fractured articulation across schooling stages—this study explored specific pathways including interdisciplinary integration of textbook content, accurate interpretation of teaching scenarios, and in-depth analysis of unit themes. It also proposed practical strategies for innovative use of the Textbook from three dimensions: concepts, methods, and experience. All explorations point to the core proposition of transforming textbooks into learning materials and effectively translating textbook content into teaching content in practice.

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Author Profile

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