

Communicating About Sports

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Jie Gao
Language:	Mandarin Chinese
Grade:	6
School:	Bigelow Middle School, Newton, Massachusetts
Lesson Date:	February 4
Class Size:	12
Schedule:	50+ minutes, four times during a six-day schedule

Video Summary

In this lesson, students talk about sports. While their classmates learn the names and characters for eight sports, two native speakers learn more difficult Chinese vocabulary about the Olympics. Then students practice the new vocabulary and express their likes and dislikes about sports through a series of activities, including pairs discussions and group skits.

Standards Addressed

- Communication: Interpersonal, Presentational
- Comparisons: Language, Cultural

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- native speaker
- role-playing
- Total Physical Response (TPR)

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary located in the Appendix.

Class Context

“It’s very helpful, I think, being a second-language learner myself. You know the process. You know what frustration you have to go through. I tell my students, ‘Listen to me. This is my English. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. I went through exactly what you go through right now.’ So I tell them, ‘If you don’t make a mistake, you don’t learn. You learn from mistakes.’” —Jie Gao

School Profile

Jie Gao teaches sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade Mandarin Chinese at the Bigelow Middle School in Newton, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. The school has a diverse student body from the neighborhoods of Newton as well as from the METCO program, a city-to-suburb educational desegregation project. Bigelow is also the home of the citywide Chinese and Spanish bilingual programs. All Bigelow students study a world language.

Year at a Glance

Basic Greetings Counting
Classroom Objects
Family Members
Animals; Likes and Dislikes
Sports
Countries and People
Body Parts
Food

Lesson Design

The Newton World Languages Department determines the curriculum for the two middle schools that offer Chinese. The curriculum was designed based on the Standards, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and Newton’s Benchmarks (see Resources). Within this curriculum, Ms. Gao developed her own lessons and shared them with the other middle school Chinese teacher. Both teachers now teach very similar content, although they use different teaching methods and activities.

Class Context, cont'd.

The Lesson

In the videotaped lesson, Ms. Gao used Total Physical Response (TPR) to introduce new sports vocabulary. She believes that students learn the words very quickly when they can observe and then imitate the actions that represent these words. "I'm sometimes like a maniac," she jokes. "I jump from one end [of the room] to the other. And with my hand gestures and facial expressions, [students] will say, 'She likes this' or 'She hates that.'" Ms. Gao informally assesses her students during TPR activities. First she acts out a sport and observes how many students are able to name the sport. Then she observes her students' listening comprehension by reversing the activity: She names a sport and then watches as her students act it out. If students are having difficulty identifying the sport during either activity, Ms. Gao knows that more instruction and modeling are needed before the class can move on.

Key Teaching Strategies

- **Challenging Native Speakers:** The teacher adapts instruction for native speakers so that they pursue tasks that recognize and build upon their competencies in the target language while their peers do more basic work.
- **Preparing for Communication:** The teacher provides opportunities for students to express their ideas or feelings in the context of the language structure and/or content being learned.
- **Role-Playing:** Role-playing is an activity in which students dramatize characters or pretend that they are in new locations or situations. It may or may not have a cultural element. This activity challenges students by having them use language in new contexts.

Analyze the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- What are some benefits of using a thematic approach in your teaching? How can a unit be organized around a given theme?
- What opportunities do you provide beginning students to communicate using new learning?
- How do you challenge all students in a class that includes native speakers? How might you differentiate instruction for the two groups? What are the challenges and benefits of differentiated instruction?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Communicating About Sports,” take notes on Ms. Gao’s instructional strategies, particularly how she provides all students with opportunities to learn and communicate. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflect on the Video

Review your notes, and then respond to the following questions:

- What activities does Ms. Gao use to focus student learning? How does she structure the lesson to move from one activity to another?
- How does Ms. Gao use TPR to teach vocabulary?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.

- What opportunities do students have to use new material in interpersonal communication? How does this build their interpersonal skills?
- How does Ms. Gao encourage student expression beyond the narrow vocabulary taught?
- How does Ms. Gao develop students' ability to interpret and write Mandarin characters?
- How does Ms. Gao differentiate instruction for native speakers and beginning learners? When do the two groups of students pursue different tasks, and when do they work together as a class?

Look Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Gao's class to focus on specific teaching strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.



Video Segment: Learning Characters

You'll find this segment approximately 11 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 2 minutes.

Students learn to identify and draw select Chinese characters as they acquire new vocabulary.

- Why does Ms. Gao use English in this part of the lesson?
- How does she help students to discern common elements among the characters?
- How does Ms. Gao teach students to write characters? How does she use visuals to reinforce her teaching and help students learn new vocabulary and written characters?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Pairs Activity

You'll find this segment approximately 16 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Students work in pairs to practice expressing their sports likes and dislikes.

- What is the purpose of the worksheet used during the pairs activity?
- How does Ms. Gao interact with the student pairs?
- What evidence do you see that students are really communicating in this activity? How do you know they are “telling the truth”?



Video Segment: Preparing and Performing Skits

You'll find this segment approximately 20 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes.

Student groups prepare skits that incorporate their new sports vocabulary.

- How do students use the prompts (role-play cards) during their skits?
- How do the skits recycle material from earlier units and incorporate new material?
- During the skit practice time, what do you observe about individual students in their groups? How effective is Ms. Gao's grouping strategy?
- During the presentation phase, what do you observe about student participation?

Connect to Your Teaching

Reflect on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- How do you incorporate communication into lessons that are focused primarily on new vocabulary? How do you help make these exchanges more interpersonal, so that students feel they have a stake in their communication?
- How do you encourage students to express themselves when the words they want to use are not part of the main lesson?
- How do you incorporate writing into a lesson, particularly when the language uses characters instead of letters and words? How do you accommodate differences in motor skills, such as left-handedness vs. right-handedness, among students when you teach writing in a new script?
- What long-term or ongoing projects have you developed that allow students to integrate the various pieces of language they are acquiring along the way?

Watch Other Videos

Watch other videos in the *Teaching Foreign Languages K–12* library for more examples of teaching methodologies like those you’ve just seen. Note: All videos in this series are subtitled in English.

“Sports in Action” (German) illustrates word-building for beginners through sports, and “Daily Routines” (Japanese) uses comprehensible input to introduce new vocabulary and begins introducing written language with a non-alphabetic writing system.

Connect to Your Teaching, cont'd.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- Plan a lesson in which students can use new vocabulary to express an opinion. Even if students have learned only a few new words, have them use these terms to state how they feel about something. (For example, Ms. Gao had students express personal preferences using eight new sports terms.) Provide additional words to students who want to go beyond the given word group. They will remember these words.
- When teaching vocabulary, group or chunk words based on common factors. Students learn and remember new words better when they see the patterns and connections among them. For example, when Ms. Gao taught new sports vocabulary, she concentrated the lesson on sports that use balls. In Chinese, these sports have a common character, which enables students to learn them as a set.
- Design a project or activity that serves as an “umbrella” for smaller classroom activities, especially at beginning levels. For example, projects like writing letters to other students or developing skits can effectively incorporate new information with older work in a realistic, ongoing method of communication.
- Review a lesson that you have recently taught to see if it would be useful and appropriate to incorporate TPR.

Resources

Lesson Materials

Winter Olympics Worksheet*

A worksheet that native speakers used for Internet research

Skit Card*

Information that students used to create their skits

* These lesson materials can be found in the Appendix.

Curriculum References

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/>

Jie Gao's Recommendations

Web Resources:

News.sohu.com

<http://news.sohu.com>

An online portal for news and information from China (available in Chinese only); note: students used this site to research the Winter Olympics

Standards

World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages

The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* create a roadmap to guide learners to develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural understanding. This lesson correlates to the following Standards:

Communication

Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes

Standard: Interpersonal Communication

Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.

Standard: Presentational Communication

Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers.

Comparisons

Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence

Standard: Language Comparisons

Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard: Cultural Comparisons

Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.