

## GETTING STARTED

**Questions for Reflection**

- How does a typical language lesson unfold and what are its component parts?
- How do teachers transition from one component to another in a language lesson?
- As an observer of a class, what should you look for?
- What are some of the *choices* that a teacher makes, minute by minute, in delivering a planned lesson?

Welcome to the language teaching profession! Helping your students to learn an additional language will guarantee you more than your fair share of challenges, growth, joy, and fulfillment.

*Challenges* await you at every turn in your professional path. The discipline of language pedagogy is full of perplexing questions about how people learn foreign languages successfully.

Opportunities for *growth* abound because, for as long as you continue to teach, you will never run out of new questions, new possibilities, new ways of looking at your students, and new ways of looking at yourself.

The *joy* of teaching lies in the vicarious pleasure of witnessing your students' attainment of broader and broader vistas of linguistic proficiency and in facilitating the creation of a community of learners in your classroom.

And, ultimately, few professions can offer the *fulfillment* of knowing that your seemingly insignificant work really can make a difference in a world in need of communication that transcends national borders and interests.

You may be a little apprehensive about what kind of teacher you are going to be. What will it be like to be in front of a classroom full of expectant ears and eyes, hanging on my every word and action, ready and waiting to pounce on me if I make a false move? How will I develop the composure and poise that I've seen modeled by "master" teachers? Will I be able to take the sea of theoretical information about second language acquisition that I have studied and transform it into practical classroom applications? How do I plan a lesson? What do I do if my lesson plan falls apart? Where do I begin?

Before you ask any more questions, which might at this stage overwhelm you, sit back for a moment and tell yourself that you can indeed become a teacher who will fully meet the challenges ahead and who will grow in professional expertise, thereby opening the doors of joy and fulfillment. This textbook is designed to help you take that developmental journey one step at a time.

The first step in that journey is to come with us into a language classroom and observe what happens. Take special note, as the lesson unfolds, of each choice that the teacher makes: choices about how to begin the lesson, which activity will come next, how long to continue an activity, whom to call on, whether to correct a student, and so on. Everything a teacher says and does in the classroom is the result of conscious or subconscious choices among many alternatives. Many of these choices are—or should be—the result of careful consideration of underlying principles of second language learning and teaching.

## A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

The classroom we are about to enter is in a private language school in Seoul, Korea. Inside the classroom, a course in English as an Additional Language\* (EAL) is taking place. The 14 students in the course are young adults, most of whom are recent college graduates and now are working in businesses in Seoul. This is an intermediate level class; most of the students “graduated” into the class after completing the beginner’s level. The goal of the course is for students to be able to use English in their occupations, for future international travel, and to a minor extent in their local context (television, movies, pop culture, Internet). A few might eventually proceed to more advanced levels of English for job-related or academic purposes.

The course focuses on integrative skills (combining the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The main textbook being used is *Top Notch: English for Today’s World*, Second Edition, Level 2 (Saslow & Ascher, 2011). At this stage, two weeks into the course, the students are still not completely confident in their speaking ability, but can engage in simple social conversations and make some practical requests. Their listening ability varies but the teacher is able to appropriately adapt the textbook material to their level. They are quite good readers, having had English classes in their university studies. Their writing is modestly accurate at the sentence level using basic grammar, but rhetorical factors involved in composing an essay remain a challenge.

The lesson we are about to observe centers on the topic of “movies and entertainment.” The *functional focus* of the lesson is:

- Discussing preferences, likes, and dislikes

The *formal objectives* of the lesson are:

- Students will comprehend and produce “would rather” in meaningful sentences;
- Students will use a number of terms to categorize types of movies.

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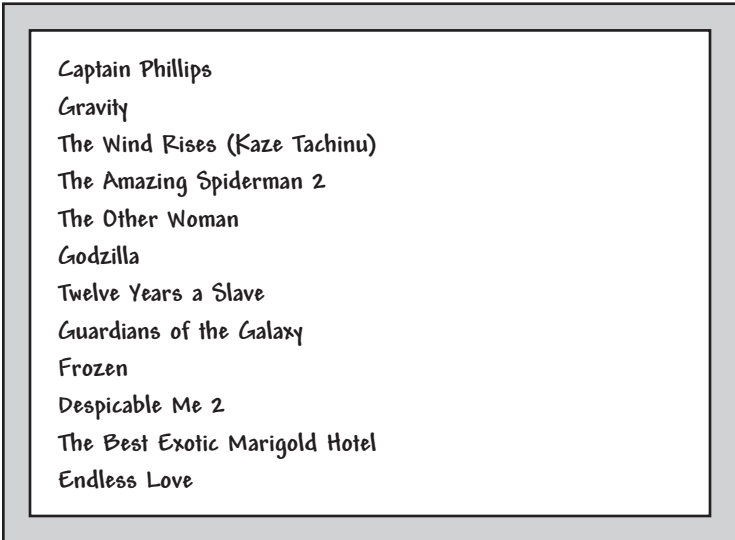
\* *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) is used in this book as a *generic* acronym to refer to instruction of English to speakers of other languages in any country under any circumstance. It subsumes both *ESL* (English in English-speaking countries) and *EFL* (English in non-English-speaking countries.)

The teacher, Ms. Choi, a native of Seoul, has about five years of teaching experience, and holds a certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from a local university in Seoul. Her English is excellent, partly the result of spending two years in Canada as a high school student while her father was assigned work there for his electronics company. She is confident, poised, and shows a great deal of empathy for her students. They seem to appreciate her warmth.

The lesson we are about to observe is reasonably well planned and executed, and characteristic of current communicative language teaching methodology. However, it is not necessarily “perfect” (are there ever any perfect lessons?), so what you are about to see may have a few elements that you or others could take issue with. Please remember this as you read on and, if you wish, take note of aspects of the lesson that you might question. Then compare these notes with the comments following the lesson description.

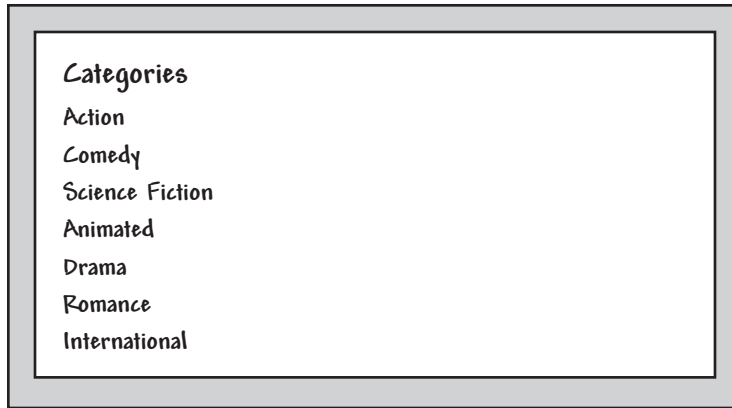
We take our seats in the rear of the classroom and observe the following sequence of activities.

1. Ms. Choi (T) begins the 50-minute class hour on this Monday evening with some small talk commenting on the weather, her own weekend’s activity hosting a family friend from Canada, and a movie that several students (Ss) saw (in English) over the weekend.
2. As she engages them in small talk, she marks attendance in her class roster.
3. She then asks the Ss to think of some movies they have seen recently, either in English or subtitled. She asks them not to name any movies that have been dubbed (into Korean). Ss volunteer movie titles, somewhat hesitantly at first, but come up with a list that the T puts on the board:



Captain Phillips  
Gravity  
The Wind Rises (Kaze Tachinu)  
The Amazing Spiderman 2  
The Other Woman  
Godzilla  
Twelve Years a Slave  
Guardians of the Galaxy  
Frozen  
Despicable Me 2  
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel  
Endless Love

4. At this point the T stops and writes “Categories” on the board and then writes the following movie types or categories on the board:



5. She then asks Ss to volunteer what each word means. One by one, Ss slowly venture “definitions” for *comedy*, *science fiction*, and *romance* with synonyms such as “funny, comic, make me laugh” for the first, “future, fantasy” for the second, and “love” for the third. They seem to have difficulty defining others. Ss eventually fall into silence.
6. Seeing that definitions may be too difficult for Ss to create, the T takes a different tack. She provides her own definitions verbally, and as some Ss nod their heads in apparent understanding, she says, “Okay, now, does everyone understand the meaning of each of these categories?” A few more heads nod, and the T moves on.
7. The T then says, “Now, take out a sheet of paper and write down the names of all the movies that are up on the board, and then, with a partner, decide what kind of movie each one is, and write the category beside the name of the movie.” She quickly pairs up Ss. Ss write the movies down, and proceed to engage in the pair work. The T walks around listening and checking on the pairs.
8. Next, the T asks Ss to report the movie categories. There is some disagreement among pairs, and most thought some movies belonged to two categories (*Captain Phillips*, for example, was thought to be both action and drama).
9. Now, says the T, “I want you to turn to page 19 in your books and listen to a dialogue on my CD player. Just listen this first time.” The following dialogue is then presented on the CD:

- A: What would you rather see—a classic or a new release?  
 B: It doesn't matter to me. You choose.  
 A: Well, what would you say to a documentary?  
 B: Hmm. To tell you the truth, I'm not that big on documentaries.  
 A: What about a comedy?  
 B: That works for me.



10. Next, the T asks Ss to listen again with closed books, and this time, with pauses in between each line, Ss are asked to repeat the line chorally. This procedure is repeated twice.
11. The T then asks Ss to turn back to page 18 of their textbook, in which examples are given for the grammatical construction *would rather* in both statements and questions. The T asks Ss to quickly skim the sample statements and questions, reproduced below:

**State preferences with would rather / would rather not and the base form of a verb.**

She'd **rather see** a less violent film.  
 We'd **rather not see** a horror film.

**Use than with would rather to contrast preferences.**

I'd **rather rent** a movie **than** go to the theater.  
 They'd **rather go** to a Woody Allen film **than** a Martin Scorsese film.

**Questions**

**Would you rather see** *Casablanca* or *Wall-E*?  
 Which **would they rather see**—a comedy or a drama?  
 What **would you rather do**—see a play or a movie?

**Short answers**

Would you rather stay home? Yes, **we would**. NOT Yes, ~~we'd rather~~.  
 Would you like to see a movie? Actually, **we'd rather not**. We're too busy.

I	}	'd rather	}	see a musical. not go out tonight.
He				
We				
They				

12. The T engages in some explanation of the structure, pointing out, for example, that the phrase “would rather” is similar to saying “prefer.” She also provides a rough Korean translation of the construction, and gives a brief explanation in Korean before reverting back to English. Ss remain attentive but silent.
13. Next, the T says, “Now I want all of you to take your lists of the movies that we discussed (the ones on the board) and make a grid like this”:

Movie	Category	Would you rather see it?
Captain Phillips		
Gravity		
The Wind Rises (Kaze Tachinu)		
The Amazing Spiderman 2		
The Other Woman		
Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom		
Twelve Years a Slave		
Guardians of the Galaxy		
Frozen		
Despicable Me 2		
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel		
Endless Love		

**14.** In the next few minutes the T explains the next task:

Class, now I want you to write in the category or categories of each movie. [pause while students write] Now, everyone stand up and move around the room and talk to as many people as you can. Choose two movies each time to compare, and ask your classmate, “Would you rather see—name one movie—or—name another movie?” Then, write the name of the person you talk to in the third column beside the movie they would rather see. Okay? Make sure your partner answers you in a complete sentence! [pause] So, your partner must say, “Yes, I’d rather see—your partner names one movie” or something like, “Actually, I don’t care.” Does everyone understand? [Ss look a little confused, so the T translates the directions into Korean and then models in English as follows]:

Kyung-mi, you would say to Nam-hee, “Would you rather see *Gravity* or *Endless Love*?” Nam-hee, you might answer, “I’d rather see *Gravity*.” Kyung-mi, then you would write the name of Nam-hee in the second column by *Gravity*. Then Nam-hee, you can ask Kyung-mi a similar question, and write the answer down. Then you move on to a new partner. Okay?

But, listen carefully! If you don’t have a preference, just answer, “It doesn’t matter to me.” And in that case pick another pair of movies to compare until your partner gives you a definite preference. [pause] Okay, do you understand now?

**15.** After a little more clarification in Korean, Ss nod in agreement, and the T tells them to start their multiple interviews. This exercise lasts for about 15 minutes as Ss enthusiastically engage in the task.

16. When the T calls them back together, she tallies the number of students who responded affirmatively to each movie, and in an unscientific poll, announces what appears to be their favorite movie. “It’s a tie between *Gravity* and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel!*”
17. With the time that’s left (about 5 minutes) the T asks Ss to complete the grammar practice exercise on page 19 in which they write responses to 6 questions or statements, such as “I’d love to see a drama tonight” and “Would you like to see a comedy?” Their responses range from “I’d rather not” and “It doesn’t matter to me” to “Actually, I’d rather see an action movie.”
18. As time runs out, and students gather papers together to exit the classroom, the T tells Ss to complete their written exercise as homework, and to try to see an English movie sometime before the next class (in one week’s time).

## ANALYZING THE LESSON

You’ve just observed a relatively effective class hour in which the teacher competently planned a lesson around a textbook lesson, managed most segments of the hour without major problems, and carried out the activities with some warmth and enthusiasm. This may seem like a simple accomplishment, but let’s think about the preparation, classroom management, and intuitive decisions that lie “behind the scenes.”

What you have just witnessed is the product of a teacher’s experience and intuition grounded in reasonably sound principles of learning and teaching. For every tiny moment of that classroom hour, certain choices were made, choices that may or may not be justified by research on second language learning and teaching. Think about those choices as you contemplate the numerous pedagogical questions that arise out of each numbered “statement” that follows.

1. Why the small-talk (vs. just getting straight to the lesson)? What teaching principle justifies such an opening? Why did the T comment on a movie that students saw on the weekend as part of the small talk? How long should such chatter continue?
2. Why did the T mark attendance while engaging in the small talk? It apparently didn’t interfere with the small talk—how did the T manage to do two things at once? Why didn’t she just call out names and have Ss say “here”? Is there another way to check attendance more interactively, involving student responses?
3. The textbook began with the dialogue (see #9) that this T chose to insert later. Why do you suppose she didn’t start with that dialogue? Was her choice a better segue from the initial small talk that began the class? What purpose was served by asking Ss to come up with names of movies themselves at the outset? Why didn’t the T just provide a list of her own?



And if she simply wants names of movies, why restrict the list to movies in English? What purpose did that serve? She chose to write the names of movies on the board—what purpose did that list serve?

4. Here she initiated the names of the categories. What would have happened if she had asked the Ss to create that list on their own? The title of this lesson, indicated in the textbook, is “Discuss preferences for movie genres.” Why do you think that the T wrote “categories” on the board instead of the term “genres”?
5. Why did the T ask Ss for definitions? Wouldn’t it be more efficient for the T to provide them? What purpose was served by urging them to create their own definitions? When Ss had some difficulty with defining, they tended to become more silent. Why was that? Was it a good idea for the T to ask Ss individually to come up with definitions of the words?
6. At this point it was apparent that T felt the task was over Ss’ heads—what led her to that determination? Was it a good idea to switch to providing definitions herself at that point? She then asked if everyone understood, and after seeing some heads nodding affirmatively, she assumed they understood. Is such a question appropriate in this situation? Do you think the Ss really understood? What alternatives might she have employed to carry out that informal assessment?

Notice, before you move on, that each question implies that a choice was exercised by the teacher. Among dozens of possibilities for teaching this lesson on movies, categories, and the *would rather* construction, Ms. Choi has chosen, either consciously or subconsciously, a particular set of activities, a particular order, and a particular tone for each. A relatively straightforward lesson is supported by a plethora of principles of learning and teaching. To further complicate matters, some of those principles are disputable. For example, when should a teacher simply *give* information to Ss (#6) versus urging “discovery learning” by the Ss? The context does not always clearly dictate the resolution.

7. She now sets in motion some pair work for Ss. This exercise did not come from the textbook; it was her own innovation, only distantly resembling one in the textbook. Why do you suppose she chose not to follow the book here? What would be an ideal seating arrangement for doing such pair work? What should the T consider for pairing up students for a classroom task? Were her pair work directions clear? Some teacher guidelines suggest modeling such pair work—why didn’t she do so? What do you suppose she was listening for as she walked around the classroom during this pair work? Do you think any Ss spoke Korean during the pair work? If so, what might the T have said or done?
8. What purpose did the reporting and processing serve? When there was disagreement on which category a movie belonged to, what do you think she did? What would you have done?



9. The T chose at this point to play the opening dialogue for the lesson. Did the background of the first 10–15 minutes of class provide enough context and interest for the Ss? What advantages and disadvantages do professionally recorded audio sound bites offer in a classroom in this context? The dialogue isn't terribly exciting; is that okay for the purposes of this lesson? What do you think of the T's pre-listening instruction for the Ss? Is there anything the T could have said or done differently before playing the CD?
10. Choral drilling is a commonly used technique in language teaching. Was it appropriate and useful here for this particular group of Ss? How do you think the T mentally justified its use? Why didn't the drill continue for several more repetitions?
11. This is one of the moments in the lesson that the T turns Ss' focus to form—particularly grammatical structure. Does the textbook segment (from page 18 of the book) sufficiently explain the structure?
12. Is the T's explanation justified at this point? Or should Ss just intuitively get a "feel" for the would rather structure? Could the T have done anything differently to help Ss understand the meaning of the target form? And what do you think about providing some explanation, as the T did, in Korean? Why did she choose to do so then, and was the language switch justified? What would be the role of using Ss' L1 in this particular situation? She seemed to be "lecturing" to Ss here; should she have asked explicitly for some kind of response from the Ss? Or should they have had some more choral or quasi-communicative practice at this point?
13. The grid is an adaptation of a similar one in the textbook, but the T added the feature of using it in face-to-face interviews. Why did she choose to have another communicative activity here instead of following the textbook's suggestion of having Ss listen to some movie reviews on the CD and write in their recommendations?
14. The whole-class mingling activity seems simple enough on the face of it, but Ss had a little difficulty initially figuring out the process. Were the T's directions sufficient and clear, once she was able to follow up after the looks of confusion? Was her use of the L1 appropriate and useful here? What could she have done to make this stage of the activity clearer?
15. What is the objective of this activity? It's clear what Ss are being asked to do: frame questions, respond to them, and record the responses. They seemed enthusiastic about the activity—why? Why was an activity with fairly routine grammatical practice met with enthusiasm? Were those 15 minutes put to good purpose?
16. Why do you think the T tallied Ss' responses? Did the informal tally serve the objectives of the activity or simply offer some interest? What purpose was served by announcing the result of the tally: the most popular movie?

17. It's possible that this last activity was squeezed into too short a time frame. Was that okay? When a T runs out of time at the end of a lesson, what should he or she do? What purpose did a writing activity (as opposed to the other three skills) serve here?
18. Sometimes these last-second comments are lost in the shuffle of students getting ready to leave the classroom. Was some purpose nevertheless accomplished? When the T asked Ss to see an English movie as "home-work," should she have given some guidance to them about what to do while seeing the movie?

A final question: As you look back over the lesson you've just observed, do you think the initial objectives were accomplished? Is there anything you think you might have done differently? Remember, you're dropping in on a class that is ongoing, so it may not be possible to completely judge the effectiveness of this lesson without the context of preceding and following lessons.

You've now skimmed through some of the many questions that one could ask about why certain choices were made about how to teach this lesson. Some of the answers are relatively standard, with few disagreements. Other answers would find even the best of teachers arguing the merits and demerits of the teacher's choices. But the answers to all these questions can be found, in one form or another, in the huge stockpile of second language acquisition research and collective experience of language teachers around the world. And many those answers will appear in the chapters ahead of you in this book.



Your goal, as you continue this journey, is to make the connections between research/theory/principles, on the one hand, and classrooms/teaching/practice on the other. By making those connections as you learn to teach, you will perhaps avoid some of the pitfalls of haphazard guesswork and instead engage in teaching that is informed by research and theory, or put another way, teaching by *principles*.

## FOR THE TEACHER: ACTIVITIES (A) & DISCUSSION (D)

1. (A) A good activity for the beginning of a course on teaching methodology is to ask the members of small groups of three or four to talk about who was the "best" teacher they ever had. In the process, each should specify why that teacher was the best. As each group reports back to the whole class, make a chalkboard list of such reasons, which should reveal some attributes for all to emulate. (This activity also serves the purpose of (a) getting students to talk early on, and (b) giving students in the class a chance to get to know each other. To that end, group reports could include brief introductions of group members.)

2. **(A)** On page 8, it was noted that teachers are constantly making *choices* in the course of a class hour. Assign to pairs two or three of the numbered items through #18. Ask them talk about (a) what the teacher chose to do, (b) why she made that choice, and (c) what alternative choices she could have made. Make sure they refer to the second matched set of items in which certain questions were posed, and try to answer the questions. Ask the pairs to report their conclusions to the whole class, and encourage others in the class to ask questions.
3. **(D)** If it's feasible to do so, arrange for your students to observe an L2 class in a convenient location. Alternatively, show a video of a class. At this stage, try asking them to observe the class without a checklist or agenda, and ask them to just get a feel for the *dynamics* of the classroom. If, as they observe, some questions come up about why the teacher made certain choices, ask them to jot down those questions. After all have had a chance to make this observation, ask them to describe what they saw and what questions occurred to them as they observed.
4. **(D)** As an extra-class assignment, ask students to find some currently popular textbooks in EAL (or other L2) and spend some time leafing through them, without a specific agenda—just noting things that they like and don't like about each. Ask them to share their impressions with the rest of the class.
5. **(A)** An alternative to #4 above is to secure enough copies of various L2 textbooks from whatever sources your institution may have. Distribute a different textbook to each of however many pairs are feasible in your class size. Ask the pairs to brainstorm features that they like and dislike, and to report these to the rest of the class. Some possible features for them to observe (you could list these on the board or distribute them in a small handout): layout, illustrations, color, attractiveness, exercises, adequate small group work, stimulation of authentic communication, distribution of focus on form (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) versus focus on meaning/communication. You might add your own features. Ask a few of the pairs to report to the rest of the class on the *ease* or *difficulty* of evaluating a textbook.

## FOR YOUR FURTHER READING

Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6th ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

This course in second language acquisition (SLA) is a comprehensive survey of issues and principles of SLA as they apply to language teaching. It is designed as a recommended textbook to accompany or precede *Teaching by Principles*.

Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D., & Snow, A. M. (Eds.). (2014). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.

We recommend referring to this anthology of 40 chapters on L2 teaching methodology, including current summaries of research on key topics in SLA. It could serve as a useful companion volume to this one.

Saslow, J., & Ascher, A. (2011). *Top notch: English for today's world*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

This text, referred to in the current chapter, is one of many possible samples of courses that would be useful to look at. If you are not familiar with how such courses are organized and presented, skimming through a course like this will give you a backdrop for the chapters to follow here in *Teaching by Principles*.