

# ***Standard 6 Learning***



## **Standard 6: Learning**

Performance Indicators 102

Adult/Community Vignette 103

Workplace Vignette 106

College/University Vignette 108

Intensive English Vignette 111

English as a Foreign Language Vignette 114

## Standard 6 Learning

*Teachers draw on their knowledge of language and adult language learning to understand the processes by which learners acquire a new language in and out of classroom settings. They use this knowledge to support adult language learning.*

The central focus of a teacher's work is understanding how people learn and, particularly, how people acquire language. Teaching, no matter how proficient, does not cause learning; rather, it enables, invites, and supports learning. There is no single or definitive view of learning, so teachers must

- know about theories of adult and social learning generally, and about second language acquisition in particular
- understand that these different styles of learning create varied ways of understanding, labeling, and interpreting what learners might expect from instruction and what they actually do
- recognize their own assumptions about learning and learners
- question what they believe about learning in the face of what is happening in their classrooms
- gather information from learners in the process of learning, analyze and interpret what they see, and rethink their approach, when necessary

Working to understand learning creates the ongoing dynamic through which teachers gauge and improve their teaching.

## **Standard 6: Learning Performance Indicators**

### **6:1 Classroom Environment**

- creates classroom contexts in which language acquisition can take place
- scaffolds language and content
- integrates instruction in oral language and literacy
- adjusts teacher talk to the English level of the learner
- provides language input, feedback, and opportunities for learners to use and extend English

### **6:2 Learner Activity**

- provides learning experiences that promote autonomy and choice
- provides learning experiences that promote cooperation and collaboration
- creates classroom contexts in which learners can negotiate meaning through interactions with the teacher and with one another
- creates situations where meaningful messages are exchanged
- encourages learners to use their first language skills as a resource for learning English
- helps learners to develop metacognitive awareness and to use strategies for knowing about, reflecting on, and monitoring their own language

### **6:3 Learner Variables**

- demonstrates understanding of the personal and contextual factors that affect language learning
- provides learning experiences that respond to differential rates and styles of learning

# Vignette: Adult/Community

## Standard 6: Learning

### Background

This vignette describes the experience of Thomas McCarthy, an English as a second language (ESL) instructor in Illinois who teaches in an adult program. Several factors helped him understand the process of learning a new language: learning a foreign language in college, earning a certificate in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and taking language acquisition classes and methodology courses. He teaches a high-beginning class, in which students are beginning to process the vocabulary they learned in the previous level in a more communicative way. The classes meet 4 days a week for 2 hours every class period. Students in this open-entry, open-exit program are very dedicated to learning if they feel they are making progress, but many have 40-hour-a-week jobs.

The curriculum requires Thomas to use a life-skill competency approach. The objectives for the course all relate to life skills, as does the standardized test the students take at the beginning and the end of the term. Early in his teaching career, Thomas taught several objectives at a time in a lesson at this level, believing that the more input, the better; he often said “give them as much as possible and something will stick.” But as he reflected on student progress, observed other classes, and began to incorporate other assessment measures, he saw that students were not grasping as much as he expected. Thomas adjusted his teaching to thoroughly address one objective at a time in this lower level class.

Thomas is still not satisfied with his teaching. He is convinced that he can teach more effectively and become more sensitive to student needs, so he makes sure to stay abreast of new ideas and approaches. He attends workshops when possible and is active in the local, state, and international Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conventions and conferences.

### Vignette

Thomas feels confident in his abilities after 5 years of teaching. In this lesson, Thomas establishes the context by talking about his experience while in a restaurant the night before. He is very aware of the language he is using to talk to the students and does not slow his speech; however, he does use cognates when possible and opts not to use many long or complicated sentence structures. He recounts how good the food was and what he ordered. Then he asks the students to open their books to find the menu printed in the textbook. Students are asked in the practice portion of the lesson to take orders. They listen to a naturally paced recording with background noises and unfamiliar words, and write the information they hear on a handout that looks like a server tablet. The recording is at a natural pace.

Because of his experience learning another language, Thomas knows how easily students can become frustrated when too much information comes too fast. He finds it useful to teach students how to learn in addition to teaching course content. In this case, he wants them to learn

6:1 Classroom  
Environment  
6:2 Learner  
Activity

6:2 Learner Activity

that it is not necessary to understand every word. He communicates this by using a metaphor that will make sense to his students. In this case, he likens listening to seeing, explaining that if the students close their eyes, they cannot see anything. Encouraging them to keep their ears open to what is being said no matter how frustrated they feel, he explains that understanding one word (in this case a food item from a menu) represents progress. He then offers them strategies to use the information they hear to make educated guesses and to clarify what is being said.

6:2 Learner Activity  
6:3 Learner Variables

Next, Thomas prepares the students to practice a dialogue in which they ask a partner “How much are the burgers?” “How much is the ice cream?” and so on. Although he has taught the singular and plural forms of the verb *to be* in various lessons, he reviews them because students who studied the structure in earlier lessons may not remember it. He explains to the students that learning grammar is a long process—and that they will acquire structures gradually and may even continue to make errors in structures they have already learned. Thomas used to become frustrated when students made errors in structures that they had mastered, but he now realizes that making mistakes is part of learning. He is also aware that many of his students had very little educational experience before arriving in the United States and that they might be slow learners; however, he continues to challenge his students to help them gain confidence in their abilities.

6:1 Classroom Environment

Thomas encourages his class to begin to think in English by using visuals throughout the lesson. He speaks only English in the classroom but sometimes addresses topics that are similar or different in English and the students’ languages. He knows, for example, that some Asian languages do not have markers for the plural, so he alerts the Asian students that they might have trouble with the final “s” in plurals. The final consonants are deemphasized in some languages but are essential in English, so he explains to other students that they may have trouble pronouncing and hearing the ends of words.

6:1 Classroom Environment  
6:2 Learner Activity  
6:3 Learner Variables

Thomas understands that learning a language is a complex process, that some students need different or additional input because of their prior education and experience, and that not all students learn in the same way that he does. These realizations have helped Thomas become more flexible as a teacher and open to introducing different methods and strategies in the classroom. He is convinced, however, that meaningful context helps all students learn, because he has observed that people seem more apt to acquire structures and use language properly beyond the classroom when they have opportunities to apply what they have learned in meaningful situations. He offers students an opportunity in every lesson to apply the language they are learning in the classroom and encourages them to use it outside of the classroom as well. In this lesson, he asks students to develop their own menu in groups and to role-play taking orders. He then asks them to bring menus from the community to the next class meeting.

6:3 Learner Variables

Many students performed as expected during the lesson, but five students did not participate in much except the dialogue and the application activity. Reflecting on how he might have set up the activity differently, Thomas realizes that his lesson had less group and pair work than his lessons typically do. He makes a mental note that these five students might learn more readily working in pairs than on their own. Thomas has become a keen observer of students, and he seeks out ways to reach each one through more effective teaching strategies.

## Discussion

- A. Study the vignette. Thomas demonstrates in the vignette that he recognizes many principles of effective language learning. Make a list of insights that make Thomas an effective teacher.

[Answer Key A: Answers may include: (1) He is aware of his own use of the language and how students may respond. (2) He realizes and imparts to the students that they do not have to understand every word they hear to understand the message. (3) He realizes and imparts to students that learning a grammar structure is not the same as acquiring it. (4) He alerts students that recognizing differences between their first language and English can help them learn. (5) He recognizes that students favor different learning styles, and he supports all these styles for learning a language.]

- B. Discuss the following:
1. How did Thomas's knowledge of the students' first language help him teach more effectively?
  2. Students, like new teachers, sometimes have misconceptions about what is expected of them. Discuss how students can misunderstand what is expected of them during grammar and listening activities. Then, discuss any other aspects of teacher or student expectations that can be confusing.
- C. What strategies that Thomas implemented would help you learn a language? What other strategies might be most effective for you?

# Vignette: Workplace

## Standard 6: Learning

### Background

This vignette describes an advanced writing program for an airline based in Asia. The program was designed to help customer service officers complete two tasks—to write promotional letters for upcoming events and special deals and to answer a range of written complaints by passengers.

During the needs-analysis and program-design stages, it became clear that the sponsors unrealistically expected that one course should suffice to teach all levels of learners. Furthermore, they wanted all participants to exit the program with the same high level of competency in English writing. Careful negotiation with the human resource manager and upper management led to an agreement that the provider would assess employees' levels of language proficiency and recommend the participants who could benefit most from the program. Of the 30 put forward for the training, only 13 had a high enough level of proficiency to benefit from the program. The participants selected were all graduates of Hong Kong universities and had been working for the airline for a minimum of 6 months.

### Vignette

The instructor, Jocelyn Porter, starts the course by presenting the objectives and emphasizing that the participants will succeed only if they attend class and apply the new knowledge and skills in their work. Many of the learners have been making similar mistakes in their writing, so she explains how to eliminate these errors. She encourages students to take risks in their writing rather than cutting and pasting from flawed models, and she assures them that she will provide ample feedback so they feel encouraged to participate actively in the program.

Jocelyn finds samples of good promotional writing and uses these in her lesson on complaint letters. She creates an authentic situation and clearly defines the context at the start of class. After dividing the class into groups of four, she asks students to read and discuss a model complaint letter and to speculate on the contextual variables of the letter (e.g., audience, content, purpose). In other words, was the complaint serious or trivial?

Jocelyn then distributes a model response letter, sometimes referred to as an *adjustment letter*, and has the students note the structural elements of the letter in the margins. The sections are

1. acknowledgment of the complaint
2. investigation of the complaint
3. outcomes of the investigation
4. resolution offer
5. final apology and closure

This becomes an outline on how to produce an adjustment letter. After the students have finished marking the sample letter in the margins, Jocelyn points out certain linguistic features

6:2 Learner  
Activity

6:3 Learner  
Variables

6:1 Classroom  
Environment

6:2 Learner  
Activity



in each section of the adjustment letter. For example, the investigation uses the past tense and often includes a short narration to reassure the customer that some action has taken place.

Finally, Jocelyn puts students in small groups and distributes a second complaint letter. She allocates 30 minutes for each group to draft a collaborative adjustment letter on a transparency or on paper that can be projected onto a screen. She encourages them to help, correct, and negotiate with each other at this stage. After they finish, the students correct and discuss their drafts. As she does at the end of every lesson, Jocelyn invites the class to apply their new knowledge in the workplace.

Jocelyn uses the same approach for another lesson but varies it slightly to meet the needs of the students who did not quite master the first presentation. This time she decides to use scaffolding techniques, where students build on what they know. She starts with a discussion of complaints the learners have encountered in the past, based on which she creates a two-column table on the board. After putting all the complaints in the first column and the possible responses in the second, Jocelyn asks students to look for a pattern in the responses. When they identify the repetition of *would*, she writes on the board a structure that is at once direct, formal, and polite: “We would like to offer you . . .” She asks students to finish the sentence in various ways.

Now Jocelyn produces a new sample adjustment letter for the students to analyze. After they locate the formulation they have been discussing, Jocelyn asks the students in groups to identify similarly direct, formal, and polite structures in all sections of the letter. Finally, after much discussion, students are given another complaint and asked to produce another adjustment letter.

Jocelyn notes that, in this second attempt, some students who were struggling before have made some progress. She encourages them to continue working diligently and organizes the next lesson similarly, but now focuses on vocabulary so they can all continue to show marked improvement.

## Discussion

- A. Study the vignette. Which of the performance indicators for Standard 7 is most clearly reflected in this vignette?

[Answer Key A: Every performance indicator was used. Learner activity is most apparent and includes promoting autonomy and choice, promoting cooperation and collaboration, fostering interaction, and creating situations where meaningful messages are exchanged.]

- B. Discuss the following:

1. Discuss ways to use scaffolding to foster learning. How did Jocelyn do this? What could she have done differently?
2. What strategies, if any, did students learn to reflect on their own language in this lesson? How could Jocelyn have promoted this more?

- C. In this vignette, Jocelyn recognizes that she must approach learners differently. Learning styles range from visual, kinesthetic/tactile, and auditory. How can all of these styles be addressed in a classroom setting? What would you have done to enhance these styles in Jocelyn’s class? How might you address learning styles more in your own teaching?

6:1 Classroom Environment

6:2 Learner Activity

6:2 Learner Activity

6:3 Learner Variables

6:3 Learner Variables

# Vignette: College/University

## Standard 6: Learning

### Background

This vignette takes place at a small community college in Utah. The main campus offers morning and evening classes, and the offsite location in a neighboring area offers evening classes. The ESL program includes four levels and serves slightly more than 200 students during each typical semester. The primary student population is Hispanic; however, a small number of international students from China, Japan, and Thailand also participate in the ESL program. The students hope to earn associate's degrees at the college or transfer to other universities in the state.

Ana Reynosa is the instructor of a low-intermediate writing class that meets in the morning at the main campus. Ana enjoys teaching writing to second language learners. She takes pleasure in learning about her students through their writing, and in witnessing the tangible progress in their expression across a semester. Her class this semester only has 15 students, 10 women and 5 men. Ana appreciates the small size, which allows for more individual feedback and conferencing with students about their writing. When studying for her master's degree, Ana taught at a large urban community college, where class sizes were nearly 30. Ana has been a part-time instructor at this college for 3 years.

### Vignette

Ana meets with her writing class two times a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes. She plans carefully to make optimal use of the class periods that often seem to go by quickly. It is week 4 in a 16-week semester and she is beginning chapter 2 in her textbook. The theme of this chapter is *learning styles*. The main purpose is to teach the students a 3-step process for paragraph writing that they will use throughout the semester, and to have students focus on subject-verb agreement and present and past verb tenses. Ana begins by identifying and labeling the three steps: (1) gathering information, (2) focusing and organizing, and (3) writing, editing, and revising.

Step 1: In order to gather information about her students' learning styles, Ana guides the group through activities to help them think about how people learn. She starts by personalizing the lesson with an exercise that includes descriptive statements and prompts like this one: "Some students choose to learn by doing. Describe a time when you learned how to do something by actually doing it." Observation statements followed by thought-provoking prompts such as these help the students to activate, clarify, and develop background knowledge. Next, Ana leads the students in some tasks that are more language specific. She provides sample student paragraphs about learning styles and uses them as an opportunity to introduce the concept of subject-verb agreement. She follows this with contextualized exercises that ask the students to select or fill in the appropriate singular or plural verb forms. Ana is raising consciousness in a strategic way before assigning a formal paragraph. To develop fluency, she has students do a 10-minute freewrite about a time when they learned something successfully. Freewriting does not penalize for errors, so it provides an opportunity for students to use new vocabulary and to try out ideas on paper without frustration or fear of making mistakes.

6:1 Classroom Environment

6:2 Learner Activity

6:3 Learner Variables

Step 2: Ana begins with instruction about topic sentences to move her students toward focusing and organizing. She explains the concept, and then uses a student writing sample to illustrate how, unlike in Romance and Asian languages, English writing tends to be direct and linear. She draws lines on the board to illustrate linear, circular, and back-and-forth development. She has students write sentences in their native languages on the board, and then translate the sentences word for word. The activity reminds students that word order within a sentence differs from language to language and allows Ana to demonstrate that the structure of arguments differs from language to language. Ana explains that one way is not better than another, but that it is important to satisfy reader expectations. English readers expect a topic sentence to guide them through a paragraph, for example, just as travelers defer to maps to find their route. The student writing sample does not have a clear topic sentence, so Ana underlines the ideas that provide control and direction for the paragraph. She asks the students to identify details in the paragraph and to suggest a topic sentence. Then Ana provides a list of sample topic sentences about learning styles, and has the students evaluate them and justify their responses.

6:1 Classroom Environment

6:2 Learner Activity

Next, Ana asks her students to look back at their own freewriting about a successful learning experience and analyze it in a similar manner, underlining the ideas that provide some control and direction for their thoughts. She then asks the students to use ideas generated during their freewriting to produce a topic sentence that includes two or three personal “best ways to learn.” Their next focusing and organizing task is to identify two or three keywords or phrases in their freewrites so they can provide category labels for their best ways to learn, and then list supporting detail phrases for each category as a handout.

6:1 Classroom Environment

Finally, Ana works with her students on developing ideas for a concluding sentence, which might summarize, recommend, predict, or offer a solution. The students analyze concluding sentences from model paragraphs about learning techniques and identify which closing strategy each writer uses. Then the students draft a possible concluding sentence for the paragraph they will write.

Step 3: As she did with steps 1 and 2, Ana strategically incorporates guidance, student models, and opportunities for draft practice and peer interaction. After she explains academic format expectations for college-level writing, the students write their first drafts of a paragraph about personal learning styles, and edit for subject-verb agreement. During the next class, Ana explains the value of sensitive, constructive feedback from peers and facilitates peer reviews with a paragraph checklist handout, reviewing her main teaching points so far: effective topic sentences, keyword phrases and adequate details, good concluding sentences, academic format, and subject-verb agreement. Finally, the students write clean revised drafts to hand in to Ana for evaluation.

6:1 Classroom Environment

6:2 Learner Activity

6:3 Learner Variables

## Discussion

- A. Study the vignette. How does Ana create a classroom climate in which learning can take place? Describe three ways in which she applies her knowledge of second language acquisition and learning processes to her lessons.

[Answer Key A: Ana's strategies include the following: (1) She teaches that English speakers approach writing in a linear fashion. (2) She demonstrates questioning strategies by making observation statements followed by thought-provoking questions. (3) She describes linguistic differences between English and other languages (such as word order).]

- B. Discuss the following:
1. Scaffolding is a teaching technique that allows students to build on what they know. Eventually the instructor removes the scaffolding so the learner can stand on his or her own. Discuss evidence of scaffolding in this vignette.
  2. Ana planned a lesson on learning styles. How do different teaching styles reflect or legitimize different learning styles?
- C. Identify one teaching strategy that Ana employs that would work for you, and another that would not. Which techniques have you chosen, and why? How would you teach differently in her setting?

# Vignette: Intensive English

## Standard 6: Learning

### Background

This vignette describes a small intensive English program (IEP) whose emphasis is project-based learning. There are four levels in the program, each well coordinated with substantial integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. What makes this program distinctive is Communication Seminar (ComSem), a project-based language learning approach with an emphasis on communication skills necessary for interaction in an academic community. ComSem uses a series of activities that provide students with an opportunity to discuss and evaluate their performance. To begin, a student who has been designated as the class leader chooses a topic, divides the class into groups, and keeps time. Students participate in an activity called SmallTalk at the start of class, during which they work in groups and discuss issues. SmallTalk is followed by “mind mapping,” where students synthesize their discussions in order to do the third activity known as “check-in.” During check-in, group members report to the class on the content and nature of their discussions. Finally, the groups rate their conversations. Because of the complexity of this format, all instructors in the IEP are trained in this approach before teaching oral communication. The instructor’s role is to observe and evaluate performance in order to identify areas of student need. In response, he or she produces vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar worksheets, and teaches concepts based on individual or group needs.

The instructors at this IEP work in collaboration. Bill, Lynn, Polly, and Yuka are the four intermediate teachers for grammar, ComSem, reading, and writing. Lynn and Polly are the most experienced teachers. Bill is a recent graduate from a nearby TESOL program, and Yuka is a practicum student from the local university who is working with Polly. Bill teaches the oral communication course, and Polly and Lynn oversee his work to offer their expertise and advice.

### Vignette

Although he has been trained, Bill is having trouble managing the ComSem approach. Bill assumed that SmallTalk should be an opportunity for students to relax, enjoy themselves, and chat about the weekend, but they have complained about the lack of feedback. Lynn and Polly work hard to convince him that learner-centered teaching does not mean a lack of planning, structure, or feedback. After visiting his class, they make some suggestions. They explain that during SmallTalk, Bill could help students make connections to the content of their reading class and he could help the leader generate more stimulating topics for discussion. For example, Polly, their reading teacher, describes a very lively discussion on friendship that students continued into lunch. At the next class, Bill overcorrects and gives feedback by interrupting conversations and correcting all grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary errors. Lynn invites him to observe her class.

Bill is amazed by Lynn’s class, in which an invisible structure appears to pull students together. Students organize the content of the instruction, the student leader assigns groups and

6:1 Classroom Environment  
6:2 Learner Activity

6:2 Learner  
Activity

keeps time, and the room is buzzing with activity. Students ask each other genuine questions rather than giving speeches, and two students in one corner of the room are actually arguing about global warming. Most impressive is Lynn's presence in the classroom. She is just as busy as the students. Without hovering meaninglessly, she floats quietly from group to group, busily recording grammar errors. She also takes note of when students occasionally code switch, or revert to their own language. Lynn knows that there are sometimes benefits to students using their first language and is intrigued by the influence of the first language on her students' English. Students enjoy learning about language acquisition theory, so Lynn decides that the use of students' first language to master English will be a good class discussion for a later date.

6:1 Classroom  
Environment

6:2 Learner  
Activity

6:3 Learner  
Variables

Students in Lynn's class have become comfortable with the classroom environment she has set up, which includes an instructor who speaks minimally and distributes occasional worksheets. Yuka helps by also circulating through the room during discussion time and noting important tendencies; and by creating worksheets in consultation with Lynn. Furthermore, Yuka is Japanese, so she is able to offer Lynn insights about Japanese conversation styles and classroom participation. After 20 minutes, students synthesize their conversation by mind mapping, and two students disagree about the difference between ozone depletion and global warming. At check-in time, Lynn reminds them not just to report what individuals said, but also to work together on synthesizing their discussion around concepts. There is a stimulating energy as students prepare their check-in reports. Lynn and Yuka circulate from group to group. Because there has already been considerable coaching for this particular task, Lynn remains silent, taking notes and recording grammar errors. Finally, the students are ready to report on the conversation. Each group has selected a representative to give a summary of their conversations while the other students listen attentively. After the check-in, Lynn asks the groups to rate their conversation on balance, energy, and exchange, another technique with which they are very familiar.

6:1 Classroom  
Environment

6:2 Learner  
Activity

Although they rate themselves rather high, certain students acknowledge issues. One student claims that the Japanese girls in his group would not participate and were speaking Japanese to each other, leaving him and another student to speak to each other. Lynn decides to use this situation as a springboard for a cultural lesson and pursues the topic by asking whether the topic or something else prompted the Japanese students to participate so little during class. A discussion about cultural differences ensues.

Throughout the lesson, Lynn provides feedback in a very nonintrusive manner. She will follow up by producing worksheets that address problem areas that she identified while students were speaking.

## Discussion

- A. Study the vignette. List the steps in the ComSem approach.

[Answer Key A: (1) Class leader decides on topic, divides class into groups, keeps time; (2) groups discuss issues and topics, synthesize discussion, and evaluate activities; (3) instructor distributes worksheets based on student performance in group discussions; (4) instructor reflects on the effectiveness of the approach and how to improve.]

- B. Discuss the following:

1. How is the classroom context created? Discuss the difference between Bill and Lynn's approach to establishing context.
2. Discuss the ways in which Lynn has created a genuine learner-centered classroom and the differentiated ways in which she provides rich sources of input, feedback, and opportunities for learners to use and extend English.

- C. What conditions need to be met in order for the particular approach represented in this vignette to be successful? Could you integrate this approach in your classroom? Why or why not?

# Vignette: English as a Foreign Language

## Standard 6: Learning

### Background

This vignette describes a well-established private language school in Kecskemet, Hungary. Classes typically have 20–25 students, more than at newer schools. Mike Westbrook was hired to teach some advanced conversation classes. Classes meet daily and usually last 50 minutes or an hour. Much of the work in this school is shift work, which means that he may teach as early as 7:30 in the morning and as late as 8:00 in the evening. Because he lives nearby, this suits Mike, and he uses the time between classes for preparation. Most of the students are middle class or affluent. Roughly half are university students enrolled in the language school as a compulsory part of their diploma, and the others are learning English in order to communicate with their non-Hungarian customers. Mike has recently earned an online TESOL certificate and is eager to try out some ideas.

He starts out excited about his new teaching situation. There is no textbook for his conversation courses. He has been asked to simply provide topics for the students. His Hungarian is fairly limited, so he is unsure of how to connect to his students and feels quickly as if he is losing their attention. He shares some newspaper clippings that his family has sent him from the United States, but the conversations are too unstructured and the students flounder. If Mike does not monitor the discussions, students speak Hungarian. He does not need to teach grammar, but finds this difficult because grammar is what he remembers best from his own secondary language courses. His students appear to like him fairly well, but he cannot tell how much they are learning. Two months into the session, he decides to ask them for feedback and is surprised to see the detailed list his class generates about how he can improve. One student writes: “English to us is an investment . . . we are not joking around here. This is our livelihood. It bothers me when the other students in class speak Hungarian.”

### Vignette

6:1 Classroom Environment  
6:2 Learner Activity

Feeling a bit deflated because of the student feedback, Mike decides to teach more systematically. His students seem to love literature, especially as a way to debate and cajole each other, so he decides to use books to stimulate interesting discussions. His students are also keenly interested in world events, so he selects George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* as a starting point. He knows that most of the students read and studied the work in Hungarian during high school, but convinces the administration that it would be worthwhile to buy the book for the students. He decides to incorporate literature circles into his course, a technique he learned in his training. He also uses several online resources for information about how to implement them. Literature circles rely on the instructor as a facilitator rather than an authority, so students can have real-life discussions on readings. In English as a foreign language (EFL) and ESL, the instructor usually chooses the text. Each student in a small group plays either a general role (leader, recorder, reporter, or timekeeper) or serves a more specific function like those that Mike establishes in his class.



When Mike introduces the project, he is careful to scaffold the instructions with a handout that clearly outlines the roles. The roles include illustrator, vocabulary keeper, summarizer, passage connector, and discussion leader. This first organized activity uses a short text so students can practice the new roles. Although Mike feels confident about the activity he has planned, he is unsure if students will speak English without monitoring. In each session, he allows one group to discuss the work in Hungarian as long as the members can report in English what they have discussed. As it turns out, the students are so excited about the content that they forget they are speaking English.

6:1 Classroom Environment  
6:2 Learner Activity  
6:3 Learner Variables

The literature circles prove to be an excellent catalyst for conversation topics. Often, Mike asks one member of each group, the passage connector, to write a quote on the board to offer students an opportunity to discuss how the text connects to their personal experiences. The quote might also serve as the discussion topic for the following class period. Mike knows that the literature circle needs to be well structured but varies the conversation routines to avoid boredom. Sometimes he prepares the questions on an index card, and the students move around the room. Other times, he organizes a simulated social party and has students float from student to student discussing the topics. While students are interacting with each other, Mike walks around with a clipboard noting relevant errors students are making in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. After each session, he presents a mini-lesson on areas that require extra attention. He cannot prepare in advance for these mini-lessons, so they are only marginally successful at first. As the semester progresses and he becomes more proficient, however, he can even begin to predict where students will make their errors, and the mini-lessons improve markedly.

6:1 Classroom Environment  
6:2 Learner Activity  
6:3 Learner Variables

At the end of the unit, he has the class break into two teams. Each group works together, so every student is prepared to speak for 1 minute on a theme from the book they read, based on the topics that emerged in the conversations. If a student needs help during the presentation, someone else from the team can take over until a minute has passed. Then the second team presents a second theme, and they continue to rotate until all students have presented.

6:1 Classroom Environment

At the end of the unit, Mike redirects students' attention to the process they have just completed. Students have become so involved that they have not noticed the amount of English they have produced. Mike allows students to reflect and identify how the process has helped them learn English. Students realize that they not only sharpened their English skills but also had meaningful discussions and debates while doing so. Mike explains that the strategies they are developing can be used throughout their language learning experiences.

6:2 Learner Activity

Mike likes this approach because it meets the needs of students with various learning styles, but he recognizes that students will not all benefit to the same degree. He takes a few minutes to discuss learning styles with the students and expects to make adjustments throughout, in order to satisfy all student needs and learning styles.

6:3 Learner Variables

## Discussion

- A. Study the vignette. List the ways in which Mike promotes student ideas and encourages discussion and collaboration.

[Answer Key A: (1) Mike chooses a topic that interests students. (2) He assumes the role of facilitator. (3) He assigns a role to each student. (4) Students take part in topic choices for future lessons. (5) He initiates “social parties.”]

- B. Discuss the following:

1. What changes has Mike made in his teaching? Discuss how these modifications affect the outcome of the class. If Mike were to ask for feedback again, how do you think students would respond?
2. This vignette lists the roles students take in their groups, but it does not describe the students’ responsibilities. Discuss the value of the different roles Mike has assigned and whether these roles will promote discussion and collaboration.

- C. How do you help learners reflect on their learning? If you do not do so now, how could you incorporate this in your teaching? Does doing this help your students understand? If so, how?