

The reviewer

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Affect in Language Learning

J. Arnold (ed.)

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With the growing emphasis on the learner and the learning process, it is not surprising that researchers are beginning to look in more detail at the ways in which emotions influence our capacity to learn. That feelings have a powerful influence over learning is something we have all experienced, either as students saying 'I'm just not in the mood for this today' or as teachers trying to create the right atmosphere in the class in the hope that it will speed up the process of acquisition. In this sense, researchers are arriving on the scene relatively late in the day, and there is a danger that they will attempt to tell us things that instinctively we already know. There is a need, however, for research which supports our intuitions about the importance of learners' feelings, and *Affect in Language Learning* provides a good start in this direction.

With a total of 19 contributors, the book is able to cover a wide range of topics concerning the role of affect in learning it is divided into three 'domains', each dealing with a different area: the learner, the teacher or the 'interactional space' (the materials, methods, and exercises used in the classroom). A list of questions and tasks are provided after each section to encourage the reader to engage with the text and to apply what they have read to their own contexts. These are perhaps best discussed in groups, while individual chapters would provide a good basis for in-service teacher training sessions.

Chapter 1, written by Arnold and Brown, provides an overview of the area and makes the case for renewed interest in the role affect plays in learning, arguing that factors external to the learner are recognized as influencing affect. A brief summary of some of these is given.

In Chapter 2, John Schumann describes the neural basis for stimulus appraisal in the brain. He hypothesizes that any event we perceive activates an emotional appraisal system in the brain which operates along five dimensions: novelty/familiarity, pleasantness, goal/need significance, coping potential, and self/social image. Positive evaluation along these five dimensions enhances learning, while negative evaluation inhibits it, so that each of us will tend to learn what we believe is worth learning. This may sound obvious, but no serious attempt has been made before to account for this in neurological terms. That such a system should exist, however, is not surprising: the brain is bombarded with sensory information of which only a tiny proportion can be stored for later use, and it must have mechanisms for dealing with this data efficiently. Models of the brain's role in language learning in the past have implied that memory retention has to be worked hard at, that information somehow has to be forced in. What Schumann's model implies, though, is that when his five dimensions for emotional appraisal are satisfied learning can be almost effortless. The practical implications of this, again, might sound obvious: don't do unpleasant things in the classroom; don't interfere with students' language goals; don't use materials above or below what learners can cope with, and avoid activities which could diminish students' self or social image. In addition, with every individual appraising activities according to their own criteria, it is unrealistic to imagine any classroom activity being appraised positively along all five dimensions by all learners, which suggests that the search for the perfect method is indeed a fruitless one.

In Chapter 3, Earl Stevick takes a closer look at the relationship between working memory (what he terms 'the worktable') and long-term memory. This is seen as a two-way interaction, with a stimulus from outside triggering the retrieval of connected images from long-term memory. On the worktable, new connections can be made between old and new information, equating to learning, and this can be re-stored for use at a later date. Stevick proposes that affective data is stored along with other information in long-term memory, is retrieved in a similar manner after an appropriate stimulus, and made available on the worktable to form new connections. This invests affect with a powerful role in the workings of memory, where it influences the shaping of networks as well as the ability of the brain to access information stored in long-term memory—explaining why our minds can 'go blank' in moments of intense emotion. Affective data may also trigger the recall of information from long-term memory which then clutters the worktable

and reduces the efficiency of the connection-forming process. Stevick deliberately distances his ideas from Krashen's 'language acquisition device' and 'affective filter' which, although along the right lines as far as they intuit a relationship between affect and memory, do not attempt to align themselves with current neurolinguistic models. The metaphor of a filter, for example, suggests that stimuli are somehow blocked out on their way to the memory depending on our emotional state, but how this relates to events occurring at the level of the neurone is not explained. Similarly to Schumann, Stevick advises teachers to pay attention to learners' feelings in the class as well as their linguistic needs in order to create an effective learning environment. He cautions us, however, not to become overly obsessed with either, since this can lead to 'sentimental manipulation' at one extreme and mere 'mechanical manipulation' at the other (p. 56).

In Chapter 4, Rebecca Oxford investigates the impact of anxiety on language learning. It is seen to have a negative effect either indirectly through worry and self-doubt or directly through reduced participation or avoidance of the target language. She lists factors which can have a detrimental effect on anxiety levels, and identifies ways of recognizing anxiety in learners. Although interesting, the practical implications suggested are unremarkable, including ideas such as boosting learners' self-esteem or helping them to recognize symptoms of anxiety.

In Chapter 5, Madeline Ehrman aims to identify differences between learners in terms of the way they process experiences. Two types are described: those with 'thick ego boundaries' tend to rely on conscious processes for learning and are meticulous and orderly, while those with 'thin ego boundaries' are motivated by establishing relationships, tending to be more tolerant of ambiguity, and trusting their own intuition. Not surprisingly, these two types of learner respond best to different sorts of activity in the classroom, with thick boundary personalities preferring clearly structured activities and conscious approaches, while thin ego boundary personalities prefer a non-linear methodology. This seems to equate roughly with Krashen's distinction between 'learning' and 'acquiring', with thick boundary learners 'learning' and thin boundary learners 'acquiring', although contrary to Krashen, Ehrman suggests that both approaches can be equally successful, and depend on the learning style of the individual. Methods are described for identifying thick and thin ego boundary students in the class, although it is recognized that most

teachers have neither the time nor the facilities to do this formally. A balance of more or less structured activities in the classroom is offered as an approach which will cater for both types of learner.

In Chapter 6, Veronica de Andres focuses on the importance of enhancing self-esteem in children in order to maximize their learning potential. This corresponds to Maslow's pyramid of needs, which stated that self-actualization can only be achieved if more fundamental needs of belonging, security, and self-esteem have been satisfied first. Two qualitative classroom research projects are detailed which attempt to answer the question: 'can a child's self-esteem be enhanced, and are there benefits with respect to their ability to develop social relationships and to perform academically?' The results seem to suggest that the answer is 'yes' on all counts. One boy in the study, Nathaniel, showed a marked improvement in his attitude to classes, his willingness to become involved, and also in his reading and oral skills, after being told by a fellow student that he was a talented artist. It is sobering to think that such apparently insignificant happenings in the class can have a profound effect on learning. Of course, adult learners have similar needs for self-esteem as children, although the activities described in this book would be highly unlikely to work with them—'The Car Wash' (p. 95), for example, asks learners to line up in two rows facing each other while one student walks through the middle. As they do so, they are stroked, touched, hugged, or told nice things about themselves, and in this way children learn to express affection both physically and verbally. It would be interesting to see whether similar activities could be developed for adults, although how acceptable they would be to students is debatable.

In Chapter 7, Claire Stanley deals with the use of reflection in teaching as a tool for teacher development, and the inhibiting or stimulating role affect can play on our ability to reflect. In a report of results from a qualitative research study, Stanley describes how negative emotional experiences in the classroom can either encourage or discourage teachers to reflect on their lessons. Those who avoided reflection after things went wrong were unable to process the experience and use it to develop professionally. This serves to highlight the fact that teachers' emotional responses to their lessons have an important role to play, and that teachers need to become more aware of their own feelings as well as those of their students, and find ways of processing them which allow for development.

In Chapter 8, Adrian Underhill identifies three general types of instructor: 'the lecturer', 'the teacher', and 'the facilitator'. With each successive move along these three types, there is an increasing depth in the level of awareness. At the level of 'the lecturer', only the knowledge transmitted is important, while 'the teacher' has an understanding both of the subject and the ways of teaching it. Finally, 'the facilitator', with the deepest level of understanding, not only has knowledge of a subject and a methodology for teaching it, but also pays conscious attention to the inner processes of learning. Some excellent practical steps are suggested to enhance teachers' awareness of what is really taking place inside the classroom and to move them closer to the model of the facilitator. For any teacher who is beginning to feel stale, these activities provide a good way to rediscover the complexities of the teaching/learning process.

In Chapter 9, Naoko Aoki describes her experiences of developing learner autonomy in Japan, which is interesting bearing in mind the extent to which this approach is at odds with more traditional methods in this country. She aims to show how affect plays a role in the development and practice of learner autonomy, but concentrates more on quoting the opinions of experts in the field than on describing her own experiences in detail, and this is a pity since it gives her work more the feel of a literature survey.

In Chapter 10, Dörnyei and Malderez discuss the importance of group dynamics in producing an effective learning environment. They describe the typical stages groups go through between formation and dissolution, and most importantly provide practical suggestions for the teacher to strengthen group cohesiveness. Many of their suggestions are already common ingredients in EFL classrooms, for example—encouraging pair-work activities or the use of ice-breakers and warmers, but it is encouraging to see these aspects finding support from researchers, too.

In Chapter 11, Moskowitz retreads familiar ground in waxing lyrical on the value of humanistic activities in the classroom. She describes five studies she has conducted into the effects of humanistic activities which involved using self-report questionnaires before and after to gauge changes. Her results are encouraging, giving evidence of a positive effect on learners' attitudes to themselves, to others, and to the target language. They also showed a positive change in the attitudes of teachers towards their classes. At this point you might be crying out for these activities which have such a remarkable impact on the class. Could this be the solution for that

difficult group of businessmen you teach on Friday evenings? A glance at some of the suggested activities quickly provides an answer: 'I like you, you're different' (p. 190), for example, asks learners to think about what makes them special, and write their ideas on cards to be read out to the whole group; in 'Fortune Cookies' (p. 190), learners write fortunes for each other, i.e. something they believe would make the other people in their group happy. Call me a cynic, but I just cannot see activities like these working in my own teaching context. Although this does not detract from the underlying philosophy guiding the activities, in my opinion Moskowitz overestimates their usefulness: 'Through the years of working with these techniques, I have made a very rewarding discovery—that they also transcend cultures and work with all kinds of people' (p. 192). I wonder what kinds of cultures and people she has been working with? They must certainly be very different from those I am familiar with, since in my own sphere of influence activities such as these would be a turn-off, wallowing as they do in the sentimental manipulation Stevick warns against in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 12, Rinvolucri continues with the theme of humanistic activities in the classroom, and argues for the need for activities which involve the whole person. He illustrates how many of the 'semi-communicative exercises' used in course books in recent years still only go part way towards providing opportunities for genuine communication on a human level. He goes on to show how truly communicative humanistic activities can transform classrooms, allowing learners to discover more about themselves and their peers through the language, and encouraging them to stretch themselves to their 'linguistic ceilings'. The problem at the moment is that these activities are of the 'bolt on' variety, and have yet to be fully integrated into a curriculum. Rinvolucri argues, however, that it is possible to do this—for example he describes how a class of 14-year-olds were asked to step inside a circle of rope which was gradually pulled tighter and tighter until they were all squeezed together in the middle. This led on to a (now animated) discussion on the feeling of being in tightly packed situations, and finally into a reading activity describing kids being crushed at a concert.

In Chapter 13, Grethe Hooper Hansen explores the role emotion plays in learning, viewed from the perspective of Lozanov's theories and suggestopedic methodology. Hansen argues that creating the right emotional climate in the classroom is fundamental to the success of the activities exploited. Carefully induced thoughts and emo-

tions triggering a biochemical response in the brain which conditions behaviour and thought. Recent scientific research seems to be supporting Lozanov's methods, and although not easy to adopt in their entirety, they do suggest ways forward in terms of improving the emotional climate in the classroom.

In Chapter 14, Crandall investigates the use of cooperative learning activities in the classroom as a way of increasing motivation and decreasing anxiety, thereby enhancing the learning experience. In this sense, it echoes many of the arguments extended in Chapter 10, supporting the use of small group interaction to develop social skills and foster a climate of positive interdependence. Examples of cooperative activities such as pair work, group work, jigsaw exercises, and process writing are given, and it is rather disappointing that these are passed off as somehow innovative, when any teacher likely to read this book will probably already be familiar with these concepts. Atkinson's (1989: 269) criticisms of 'some humanistic writers' come to mind here: 'in some cases widely accepted axioms based on common sense are presented as if they were fresh, original, revolutionary insights of the writer in question.' This kind of scenario obviously needs to be avoided if researchers are to avoid distancing their readers.

In Chapter 15, Herbert Puchta introduces the concept of neurolinguistic programming, which aims to help students access affective states that are more efficient for learning. It is based on the assumption that all learners have different 'inner maps', and therefore react differently to the same situation. They all, however, have the internal resources needed to cope with difficult situations, and it is the teacher's role to facilitate access to these resources. If learning patterns are inefficient, the teacher can help students to find new, more successful patterns of behaviour.

In Chapter 16, Jane Arnold provides a fascinating insight into the way in which imagery is intimately connected with emotion and language and is therefore of critical importance in learning. A word such as 'mum' or 'school' uttered in the classroom will bring forth a multitude of images in the students' minds which, in turn, evoke an emotional response. This relationship is circular, and by working more on imagery in the class teachers can encourage a greater emotional response from learners which, in turn, demands expression in words and leads to richer and more detailed work. This effect can be easily demonstrated by asking students to close their eyes and imagine themselves in a room ... What does it look like? What colour are the walls? What is

outside the window? After a few minutes of questions such as these, learners open their eyes and share their thoughts with each other. The discussion is inevitably more animated, bringing forth a wider variety of vocabulary and encouraging students to reach their linguistic ceilings. An activity like this could lead into a writing exercise where learners describe their rooms, and this is more likely to be successful after the imagery work has been done. The really good news for teachers is that this sort of exercise deepens the learning experience without requiring extra preparation time.

In Chapter 17, Kohonen argues that an acceptance of the importance of affect in language learning demands a change towards more affect-sensitive forms of evaluation which measure what we value. He suggests a variety of 'authentic assessment' strategies such as teacher observation, oral interviews, project work, or construction of individual portfolios by learners. Kohonen accepts that evaluation of this kind requires a recognition of the individual in the classroom and a conscious effort by teachers to collect data on each learner; something which is obviously more time-consuming than more traditional product-based forms of testing. However, because of the 'backwash effect', the type of evaluation adopted in a curriculum has a powerful influence on classroom events, and if we truly value the individual as a human being with ideas and emotions, our assessment procedures have to reflect this.

In the final chapter, Joy Reid gives a personal account of the problems, politics, and pragmatics of affect-sensitive approaches to language learning, and poses questions that need exploring in future research. She suggests, sensibly, that the answers to many of these questions will come from teachers working with their own learners in the classroom.

Affect in Language Learning is quite heavy reading at times, and I certainly would not advise reading it from cover to cover unless you have a particular interest in the subject. A better idea would be to pick out relevant chapters, since with both theoretical and practical issues given consideration, there should be something for everyone. The value that I see in this book is that it encourages us to consider the role emotion plays in language learning as well as the language itself. However, there is at times a little too much focus on 'affect' at the expense of 'language learning'. In our enthusiasm to incorporate this new dimension into our classes it is important that we do not forget our ultimate aim: to equip learners with the language they need to go about their business independently and effectively. As Gadd (1998)

points out, in much of the discussion of 'humanistic teaching' the language being taught is given little consideration, and we risk limiting ourselves to friendly, informal registers which inadequately prepare students for any role in the public sphere. Having said that, the main point of the book—which aims to convince us of the crucial role of affect in the language learning process—is an important one, and if a balance can be found between the two extremes of 'emotional manipulation' and 'mechanical manipulation' (Stevick p. 56), language learning in the future holds the promise of being a richer and more satisfying experience for teachers and students alike.

References

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The reviewer

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English and the Discourses of Colonialism

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There is a widely held belief that although the global spread of English had its roots in colonialism, the language has outgrown these roots to become a neutral means of wider communication for the world (e.g. Seaton 1997, Rajagopalan 1999). However, despite constructive postcolonial debates across a wide range of academic disciplines and a growing body of literature questioning the consequences of the spread of English (e.g. Pennycook 1994, Phillipson 1992, Tollefson 1991), there has been no postcolonial analysis of ELT. In *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* Alastair Pennycook endeavours to redress this imbalance.

Pennycook examines the relationships between ELT and colonialism, not to demonstrate the role of colonialism in the global spread of English, but 'to show how language policies and practices developed in different colonial contexts, and to demonstrate how the discourses of colonialism still adhere to English' (p. 2). In doing this, he retains his stance of 'principled postmodernism' (Pennycook 1990), and a post-structural analytical framework (derived largely from Foucault), which privileges discourse over economic forces. He also continues his quest for a critical pedagogy for ELT

(Pennycook 1994) which would enable learners, educators, academics, and other professionals involved in ELT to resist colonial discourses and build their own counter-discourses.

Pennycook begins by setting out why he has chosen to examine ELT and colonialism, arguing that the development of ELT cannot be understood without tracing its colonial heritage.

[...] there are deep and indissoluble links between the practices, theories and contexts of ELT and the history of colonialism.

[...] The history of the ties between ELT and colonialism has produced images of the Self and Other, understandings of English and other languages and cultures that still play a major role in how English language teaching is constructed and practised: from the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy to the images constructed around English as a global language and the assumptions about learners' cultures, much of ELT echoes with the cultural constructions of colonialism. (p. 19)

It is these cultural constructs of colonialism (detailed in Chapter 2) that provide the central theme of the book.

Whilst acknowledging the real effects of economic exploitation and political oppression on colonized people, Pennycook argues that colonialism has to be seen 'as a primary site of cultural production whose products have flowed back through the imperial system' (p. 34). These products are a series of dichotomous cultural constructions of the (colonizing) Self and the (colonized) Other, including white/non-white, cultured/natural, industrious/indolent, adult/child, masculine/feminine, rational/non-rational, and clean/dirty, which devalue the latter in each pair and disfigure both colonized and colonizer. Rejecting economic determinism, he sees these constructions 'not merely as justifications for colonialism, but the cultural conditions that both enabled and were generated by colonialism' (p. 47). He contends that their origins may have pre-dated the colonial period, but most importantly, 'they have existed as cultural beliefs well beyond the formal end of colonial rule in most parts of the world' (p. 47: op. cit.). Having been at the heart of colonialism, English and ELT remain infused with these disfiguring discourses of the Self and the Other.

In Chapters 3 and 4, he examines the role of these discourses in the formation of colonial language policies in India, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. These policies come out of a set of competing demands: the position of the colonies within a capitalist empire; local class, ethnic, racial, and economic