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Adult Students’ Affective Responses
to the Language Learning Experience:
A Theory Grounded in their Own Account

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To my dearest students who encouraged and trusted me. Thank you for your support and inspiration for this work, and also for the worderful time we have every class.
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Thank you
Abstract


This paper discusses how adult learners react affectively to the language learning experience. Affective factors have just recently begun to be the focus of research in the field, although they have always been object of reflections throughout the years. The theoretical part briefly introduces the concept of affect and explains its relevance to teaching. Classroom lessons and motivation are also presented as crucial matters for this study. A group of six students was observed during four classes and took part in a classroom activity which also provided data for this investigation. It was noticed that these students experienced insecurity and lack of sense of achievement; however, they promoted a great classroom environment and had lots of motivation. Learners were also asked to write a narrative describing their own language learning experience. These accounts were analyzed according to the principles of the qualitative research tradition grounded theory, and positive and negative affective reactions were pointed out and categorized. Social relations 29%, language awareness 25%, motivation 22% and past experiences 16% were the main reasons for affective responses. The narratives also confirmed that their good relationship and the need and satisfaction in learning helped overcome their problems with the language itself. This study provides methodological and epistemological variety in this kind of research. It also helped understand better this particular group and may be the basis for future actions.

**Key-words:** Affect, Adult Students, Language Learning, Grounded Theory, Affective Factors, Motivation, Narratives, and Classroom Research.
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Clearly free-ranging curiosity leads to more successful learning than do pressure and fear.
Confessions, Book 1, Chapter 14.
1. Introduction

According to some authors, language teaching and learning depends “less on materials, techniques and linguistic analysis and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom” (Stevick 1980, p.4). In other words, in order to enable and ease the process of learning a language, affective factors should share with cognitive learning teachers’ and educators’ attention in the teaching space. Bearing this in mind, this study aims at investigating adult students’ positive and negative affective responses to their language learning experience.

Dewaele (2005, p.3) states that, “because a writer’s and scholar’s views are shaped by professional experiences, it is important for readers to know the background of this writer”. Therefore, before getting into this research, it is important that the experience and motivation which led to it are properly described.

As a teacher, I have always been concerned with promoting a healthy and friendly environment in the classroom, free of anxiety and stress. I strongly believe that, ensuring that students experience positive emotions towards learning is of paramount importance and ought to be one of the teacher’s goals in the classroom. When I first started working with adult learners, something unexpected caught my eye. Adults shared their feelings and presented their views over their own learning experience much more often than I could have imagined. In addition, some of these older learners, differently from children, seem to be extremely aware of how these affective factors interfered or promoted their learning. Therefore, having worked for about seven years with groups composed essentially, or most times exclusively, by adults, and having listened to their accounts almost on a daily basis, encouraged me to want to learn more about it by exploring this universe.

It was clear how cognitive learning takes place more easily when students are engaged emotionally. More recently, while taking the specialization course in English language at PUC-Rio, I had my first contact with affect theories and could acquire some theoretical background on what just seemed natural at first. Consequently, this investigation is a product of personal curiosity, motivated by
professional experience, allied to the academic purpose of promoting methodological and epistemological diversity in language and research on affect.

For about a year and a half, I have had this group of students who have puzzled me for some time. Their account of anxiety and insecurity with their language proficiency did not reflect their grades on exams and their performance in class, which were above average. In this research, a case study was conducted with this group of students in order to investigate this matter, in an attempt to recognize and understand their affective reactions to the language learning experience. Multiple data collection sources were used and they helped shed some light on this subject.

This first and introductory chapter contains a description of what inspired and motivated this study, as well as a summary of what can be found in each of the following chapters. The succeeding chapter is a review of the literature where the main premises for analyzing data and all the theoretical background are depicted. Chapter III explains how the research was conducted. It includes the methodology used, the data sources, and a complete description of the context and of the participants. The analysis of the data comes subsequently. Some conclusions are drawn and the results are presented and discussed. Finally, the final chapter summarizes this study and its results, presenting its contributions to our knowledge of social or contextual factors in language learning as well as its implications for teaching.

The idea is that, by the end of this paper, we are able to recognize the influence of affective factors in these students’ learning experience and also develop a hypothesis for this particular group’s behavior. By doing so, these reflections may help us understand a little bit more about what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom, and how these positive and negative emotions influence our lives as learners and educators.
2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Affect in learning

In recent years, some authors have advocated that affect ought to be included as one of the focuses in the language learning classroom (Arnold, 1999 and 2011; Schumann, 1999; Dewaele, 2005; and others). One might argue that teachers and educators already have too many concerns in their work in the classroom and out of it; therefore, adding an extra worry to the learning process may cause the teachers’ jobs to become even more difficult, tiresome and complex. However, the idea is that giving attention to affect will facilitate learning for a number of reasons which will be discussed in the subsequent sections. Moreover, some attention will also be paid to motivation theories, to the classroom environment and interactions, and to personal narratives, since these are also relevant matters for this study.

2.1.1. The concept of affect in language learning

Although attention to affect is not a recent issue, it has just recently become fairly popular and the focus of important research in the field (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Garret & Young, 2009). Nonetheless, it is critical that the concept of affect itself is properly explained before shedding some light on its importance to language teaching and learning.

Arnold and Brown (1999, p.1) define affect as “aspects of emotion, feeling, mood and attitude which condition behavior”, which means that, everything going on inside and between individuals that have any effect over actions and reactions is considered an affective factor. The term “inside” refers to traits such as self-esteem, anxiety, inhibition, willingness to take risks, learning styles, self-efficacy, and motivation. “Between” refers to relational factors with varied patterns of interaction (teacher-learner, learner-learner, learner-language, etc.) such as group dynamic and identities, and friendship. These emotions and interactions which may trigger helpful or unwanted responses and results are what researchers concerned with affect in learning aim at tackling.
2.1.2. Relevance to teaching

As mentioned before, affect and emotion have been in the shadow of discussions in the field of language teaching, for cognitive learning and the building of knowledge have always been judged as being of greater importance. However, many reflections about this topic and its relevance to teaching have been made throughout the years, mainly influenced by humanistic trends. In the 70’s, some methods that emerged from psychology and psycholinguistic theories such as Suggestopedia, Community Language Teaching, The Silent Way and Total Physical Response had already taken into account the affective side of language (Arnold & Brown, 1999). Communicative Language Teaching was also a response to more structuralistic views (Richards, 2006, 9). Structuralists are not usually concerned with the role of emotions in the process of learning a language, but even these theorists consider important that stimuli that cause negative emotion are avoided so as to facilitate long-term retention (Skinner, 1957). Krashen’s Natural Approach also puts affective factors on the spotlight; one of the main premises of this approach is to reduce stress and anxiety in the process of learning a second language (Krashen & Terrell, 1995).

All these studies have contemplated the relationship between emotion, cognition, memory, consciousness and language learning. “In teaching we must, of course, never lose sight of cognitive functions, but we recognize that thinking processes will develop more effectively if the emotional side of learners is also taken into consideration” (Schumann, 1999, p.28).

A more humanistic approach to language teaching does not suggest that we change focus from cognition and replace teaching for other activities, but rather to incorporate the affective domain in order to enrich the learning process (Arnold 1998, in Arnold and Brown, 1999). According to humanistic and affect conscious methods:

- Language learning should take place in a low-anxiety atmosphere
- Opportunities for learners to succeed and thus raise their confidence should be built into classroom activities.
- The learner should be considered holistically: cognitive, emotional and physical aspects.
- Language learning should involve personally meaningful experience.
- Learner knowledge and resources should be drawn upon and autonomy is to be favored and developed.

(Arnold, 2011, p.12)
The cognitive and the affective side of learning cannot be considered separate; when together they build a more consistent foundation for learning to take place as affect plays a paramount role in retaining things in our memory. Without threat and stress it is easier for our brain to engage with the material to be learned. Emotions involve us and condition our behavior, they engage the learner enough to act, react and create meaning (Jensen, 1998; Ledoux, 1996; Bless & Fieldler, 2006 in Arnold, 2011).

Due to the influence of affective factors, even though students are exposed to the same stimuli, each individual learner processes lessons differently; these factors have direct effect in their cognitive learning. Anyhow, most times these differences disappear in the group. Focusing on the group has always been the mainstream among studies on language teaching. Throughout the years the pursuit for the perfect method that could be overgeneralized to different contexts was the basis for most investigations in the field of applied linguistics. However, postmodernist researchers refuse the idea of learners being considered as groups as if their individualities do not matter. Personality and identity are also central to the learning process, the awareness of how different students are psychologically helps to understand their uniqueness in the group (Dewaele, 2005). The best way to conduct research is to use a variety of methods which contemplate both the individual and the group.

Bearing this in mind, this study attempts at getting to know which levels of the learning process generate affective reactions on some students and how they themselves understand the significance of these emotions. Listening to their account on their experience as learners will help us to better comprehend how our pupils see this journey and what they consider to be the relevant aspects for their development as English speakers. The idea is that it will provide teachers with starting points for future actions on how to deal with the emotional difficulties which permeate the process of learning a new language.

2.1.3. Positive x negative affect

Affective factors may be positive (those which should be nurtured), or negative (those which should be worked out).
Anxiety, fear, stress, insecurity, anger, low self-esteem and inhibition are examples of negative emotions which go on inside the learner and should be handled towards a finer engagement to the material to be learned, a healthier classroom atmosphere and a better predisposition to learning. These feelings may damage our learning potential, and most times textbooks do not consider them. Fortunately, teachers are becoming more aware of the need to handle these negative factors.

Anxiety is probably the greatest barrier for students when learning a language. It is typically related to negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension. They tend to feel vulnerable since it is quite a challenge to express yourself when you do not master the vehicle of communication (Arnold and Brown, 1999). Anxiety makes learners nervous and insecure, and contributes to a bad performance, due to the fact that when we are worried we waste energy and lose focus which should be given to learning. Anxiety is responsible for poor engagement in class. Students with high levels of anxiety often avoid tasks that require communication or that involve potential peer or teacher evaluation. Therefore, they miss the benefit of interactive learning experiences (Wolf, 2005). Anxiety also takes place when students compare themselves to others. It is a complication because they may feel frustrated believing they are not in the same level of proficiency of their peers and it leads to lack of motivation to take part in classroom interaction, frustration and low self-esteem. (Garret & Young, 2009)

Inhibition affects our ability to take risks and makes us too self-conscious and afraid of making mistakes which are part of the development of the second or foreign language and even of the mother tongue. Therefore, error correction should be looked into closely because it can generate negative affect and become a threat. However, there is a difference between inhibition and introversion. People who are introverted are not necessarily bad learners; they may have a strong inner force and empathy, which are characteristics of a good learner. Teachers have to stop praising only extrovert behavior and keep an eye out for demonstrations of positive affect by introvert students. (Arnold and Brown, 1999)

Self-esteem, empathy and motivation are usually neglected, since greatest attention is given to negative feelings. Obviously one should not turn a blind eye to negative affect; however, it is essential to focus also on how to develop positive
emotions. Self-esteem, for instance, promotes cognitive learning. It has to do with the opinion and confidence one has over oneself and according to some research it has direct influence on students’ production. Rubio (2007) states that with low self-esteem “students may avoid taking the necessary risks to acquire communicative competence in the target language; they may feel deeply insecure and even drop out of the class” (Rubio, 2007, p.7).

Motivation itself has been target for probably the greatest amount of research in the field of affect in language in the past decades. So, it seems logical to dedicate a section for it in this review of the literature.

2.2. Motivation

Motivation is probably one of the most crucial aspects of affective learning. “The learner’s enthusiasm, commitment and persistence are key determinants of success or failure” (Dornyei, 2010, p.75). For this reason, throughout the years many studies on this issue have been carried out. Two of them will be briefly explained below and later a more recent view about motivation will be described.

2.2.1. Previous Studies

Some authors like Krashen (1985) for instance, categorize motivation as intrinsic which is the learners’ willingness to learn and extrinsic which is what comes from the outside such as promotion at work, academic opportunities etc.

Intrinsic motivation comes from the inside. It is students’ natural interest and desire to learn the language, how curious they are and how it will bring them personal satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation is external to the learning process itself. In depends on external reward, necessity or punishment. Although extrinsic motivation can be of help too, research shows that students engage in learning more easily when there is a natural desire. When students are willing to learn, they themselves will look for best ways to achieve their goal. Therefore, instead of encouraging only from the outside with grades, tests and so on, we should always attempt to develop intrinsic motivation.

Similarly, Robert Gardner (2001) categorizes motivation as integrative and instrumental, the former is the individual’s personal desire of learning and the
latter is the benefits it can bring him such as a promotion, better job and opportunities. Integrativeness and its concepts became really popular some time ago and it reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community. At one level, this implies an openness to, and respect for other cultural groups and ways of life. In the extreme, this might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one's original group), but more commonly it might well involve integration within both communities. (Gardner, 2001)

2.2.2. The L2 motivational Self System

Dörnyei (2010) and others, on the other hand, consider these views somewhat inaccurate and too generalizable. They present empirical findings which show the necessity to reinterpret integrativeness and other motivation theories. Dörnyei introduces the concept of the “L2 motivational Self System”. It utilizes psychology theories of the self and other research in the L2 field. This theory is based on the premise that learning a language is more than learning a mere code for communication, it involves the formation of identities. It is made of three components:

- Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘ideal L2 self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Traditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives would typically belong to this component.
- Ought-to L2 Self, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes. This dimension corresponds to Higgins’s ought self and thus to the more extrinsic (i.e. less internalized) types of instrumental motives.
- L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situated, ‘executive’ motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success). This component is conceptualized at a different level from the two self-guides and future research will hopefully elaborate on the self-aspects of this bottom-up process.

(Dörnyei, 2009, p.29)

Although Dornyei sees the need to reframe the view over motivation in L2 learning, he does not discard the contributions from previous studies. The author believes past theory will come to live and gain a new meaning with the “self”
theory. Zentner and Renaudork (2007, in Dornyei 2009), two other researchers who agree with the idea of self, believe that stable ideal-self representations “do not emerge before adolescence, and neither can younger children consider multiple perspectives on the self, most notably the ought self projected by significant others.” Hence, working with “self” theories would be more suitable for older teenagers and adults.

This understanding of the importance of motivation and the way the “L2 self” works will shed some light on how some stimuli may have effect over students willingness and eagerness to learn. Motivation has always been a central issue not only for teachers but also for the learners themselves. Therefore, when students talk about their experience, motivational aspects are bound to be included in their descriptions; also offering an account on how their identities as learners have been formed throughout the process.

In the classroom environment, the creation and development of these identities are fundamental to motivate and engage students.

2.3.
Classroom Lessons

“The classroom lesson is an event of several different kinds: It is a unit in a planned curricular sequence, an instance of a teaching method in operation, a patterned social activity, and an encounter between human personalities.” (Prabhu, 1992, p.225)

This encounter of personalities and patterned social activity are bound to have a huge influence over the learner in terms of affective responses and motivation. Although not enough is known about the real impact of classroom interactions in the success or failure in learning a language, it is crystal clear for experienced professionals that they are responsible for a great deal of students’ development (Allwright, 2000). Social relations and classroom identities will shape and set the tone of these interactions in the classroom, and also be molded by them. It means that, the relationship between classroom and affect is bidirectional. Not only affect can contribute to the learning process but also a good classroom environment can promote positive affective reactions and feelings which will facilitate cognitive processes (Arnold and Brown, 1999).
According to Prabhu, the English lesson is not only a pedagogic event but also a social event and an arena of human interaction. However, most times it is seen just as the implementation of a teaching method and a curricular unit. The classroom is much more than that. It is an encounter between people in a “routinized social event”. Its participants have roles that vary in distinct cultural backgrounds. Some consider that paying attention to this idea is a waste of time that should be given to the curriculum. Although these roles may seem irrelevant to pedagogical matters, it would be a mistake not to contemplate the utmost function they have in this context. (Prabhu, 1992) The class is an event with many participants, thus the need of a routine makes itself more urgent; students want to understand their role in this environment and build their identities. Otherwise, the unpredictability of this kind of human encounter may lead to anxiety, inhibition and eventually low self-esteem and frustration.

As previously said, according to humanistic theories, a low-anxiety atmosphere is essential to guarantee that the learning will take place more easily. Anxiety generates a poor engagement in class, and together with inhibition and low self-esteem, jeopardizes students’ willingness to take part in classroom interactions.

This two way channel between classroom and affect is of paramount importance for learners’ development.

Dick Allwright states that part of the teachers’ job is to try to promote and establish socialization (socially acceptable behavior) both inside the classroom environment, in order to easy the conflicts caused by pedagogic matters and social interactions. Language teachers also have an extra concern if compared to other disciplines. Besides having to worry about this “internal socialization”, which is this way of acting socially adequately to the classroom, they also have to bear in mind the “external socialization”, which is the connection to the world outside the classroom where the language is actually spoken. (Allwright, 1996) This “socialization-oriented pedagogy” can be helpful when it comes to affective factors in the classroom because it moves away from the old “subject-oriented” learning, still the most common with other subjects.

To sum up, the classroom environment and interactions can determine whether one will succeed or fail in learning a language. By observing and stimulating these exchanges teachers may find ways of improving their practice
and help learners develop positive attitude towards the lessons. In addition, students can also assist the teacher by accounting for their own learning experience in the classroom and out of it. Classroom activities and personal narratives, either in the form of diaries or memoirs, are ways of getting this kind of useful information from them.

This research will show how the students’ personal narratives were a valuable instrument to understand how affective factors permeate the learning process. In the next section we turn to the personal narratives.

2.4. Personal Narratives

Learners are born witnesses to their own learning process (Dewaele, 2005). They live the learning experience themselves; consequently they have obviously a lot of impressions and valuable ideas to share. The journey of learning a language inside and outside the classroom is unique to each individual, and these differences must be taken into consideration when teaching. Therefore, their account will supply information about how different each of them appraise their experience and provide insight into where students focus their attention during lessons. (Garret & Young, 2009)

Although some may support the idea that there is a gap between the narrative and the event it depicts since it contains a lot of the person’s identity and point of view, personal narratives have gained more attention in recent studies of identities in the field of applied linguistics and language learning. Aneta Pavlenko (2005) in her study of narrative competence in second language stated that, “Narratives are central means by which people make sense of their experience”. According to her and Lantolf (2000, p. 159):

“In recent years narrative genre and personal narratives per se have gained increasing stature in psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and anthropology as legitimate and rich data sources for a variety of investigations including that of narrative construction of selves and realities”

Therefore, it seems to be a valid way of extracting students’ opinions and interpretations of their experience as language learners. Oral or written autobiographical accounts from learners can be collected through writing tasks, “talks” and classroom activities. These narratives may lead to ideas and understanding for studying language learning and its emotional side.
A narrative oriented perspective, method and analysis, seems to be suitable for learner-centered and experience-centered researches, since it carries the concept of self and identity. Misuko Miyahara (2010), who has carried out a great work on this matter, also states that narratives should be seen as experience:

“Experience is not just a mental state, but also the interactions of the individuals with the environment (interaction). Understanding narratives as experience implies that narratives are not simply individual productions, but includes a social dimension as well.” (Miyahara, 2010, p.7)

By understanding narratives as experience and as means for human meaning-making, we can say that it does not account just for personal or individual experiences, but it also emphasizes the social, cultural, and historical context in which individuals experiences are formed, including how identities are constructed, shaped and expressed. “When telling stories, we convey to others a sense of who we are, of our beliefs and values” (Bastos & Oliveira, 2006 in Miyahara, 2010, p.10). Thus, even though there is criticism against narratives as valuable data to describe one’s experience, all these studies prove that they are important for building identity and informing one’s feelings over events and key moments.

In order to respond to criticism and emphasize the meaning of experience, researchers developed a qualitative research methodology called grounded theory which will be explained in the next section.
3. Methodology

One of the inspirations for this monograph was the paper by Paula Garret and Richard Young, “Theorizing Affect in Foreign Language Learning: An Analysis of One Learner’s Responses to a Communicative Portuguese Course”. In their study, one of the authors was submitted to an eight-week Portuguese course and after each class they would meet and talk about the experience. These meetings were recorded and analyzed using qualitative research: grounded theory. The methodology chosen by them was the motivation for the one used here, as they also worked with affective factors and believed that the learners’ accounts are valuable data sources for research in the field.

This study aims at answering the following research questions: How do my students describe their language learning experience? What aspects of this experience do they consider relevant? What positive and negative affective responses have they produced to these different aspects of the learning process? What are the implications of these affective factors in their lives as learners? In order to reach this goal, the qualitative research traditions called case study and grounded theory were applied. The data from an exploratory case study was analyzed, and grounded theory was used to go deeper into the case study data and to drive data acquisition activities within and outside the case study.

Both methods have their roots in sociology and their main focus is to understand and explain human behavior. They are ideal methods for research on affect as they are useful for exploring human responses to the learning experience. The goal of case study is to describe a contemporary situation in its real-life context and the goal of grounded theory is to develop theories that describe or explain particular situations. Their importance for this study will be explained below as well as how these methods will work together so as to answer the research questions.

3.1. Case Study Data

Case study tradition is a research design that is often guided by a framework and is useful to investigate a complex contemporary phenomenon using multiple data sources (Yin, 2003).
3.1.1. The context

This research was conducted in an English language course in Rio de Janeiro. The course book is based on behaviorist theories with drills, question/answer exercises, repetition and role plays, but conversation and debates are also part of the class. The group of students chosen for this study meets once a week for a three-hour class with a ten-minute break after one hour and twenty-five minutes. They are students with an intermediate level of proficiency in English and most of them have been studying together for about a year and a half. The group is composed by eight students; however, just six of them are participants in this study. The other two have joined the group very recently and were not part of the observation phase.

The classroom atmosphere is friendly and they clearly have a lot of fun every class. The students get along pretty well, welcome new comers nicely and these new classmates quickly became part of the group. Even though they usually look exhausted and often comment on it, they rarely miss class and are usually on time. Most of them try to speak English the whole time, except during break time. Homework has been troublesome; they all complain about their busy schedules during the week and always make up excuses for not doing what they are supposed to do between classes. So, it is assumed that their study time at home is really short or, many times, none. Nevertheless, progress in language proficiency has been noticeable.

Despite this clear evolution, the group always seems to be uncomfortable when new material is introduced and apparently lacks sense of achievement and confidence. Before tests they generally “freak out” and state that they will fail for sure. They never get low grades, though. It was one of the reasons why this group was chosen for this investigation. The feelings of anxiety, insecurity and frustration they shared did not match their constant improvement and, especially, their grades. In order to understand this context better, let us take a closer look at the participants.
3.1.2. The Participants

The participants of this study were chosen because as a group they have a very strong tendency of sharing their feelings with each other and the teacher before, during and after class. As mentioned above, their public account of their feelings and emotions did not reflect their performance. Although they showed a lot of signs of negative affective factors, such as insecurity and anxiety, and seemed to doubt their capacity, their accomplishments, as far as language proficiency is concerned, had been above the expected.

Raff

Raff is an enthusiastic funny intelligent guy. He is in his early thirties and is an effective group leader. Without doubt he is one of the reasons why they have become such good friends and interact so well with each other. He uses the language in his favor to make jokes and raise interesting issues. He shows signs of insecurity when it comes to tests, however, he seems to have become more aware of his capacity. Even though he is used to showing this concern with exams, after they are done he usually feels confident that he got good marks, and actually gets them. He has been improving quickly as an English speaker in the past year. He said he had had some experiences with learning English before but always gave up because of lack of time and other reasons. He affirms that this time he does not want to fail because besides work, he has a personal desire and satisfaction with this accomplishment. He always has the initiative to speak English outside the classroom and seems to care a lot about his peers. He does not have many chances to speak English, but he tries to create opportunities and uses the language whenever he can. He even wrote a poem in English!

Anna

Although Anna has been with the group for a shorter period of time if compared to the others, she got along with everyone quicker than I had expected. She is an intelligent friendly calm girl in her late twenties. She finished the English course once but returned after some years in order to recycle and improve her skills which are already really good for an intermediate group. She is fond of watching TV series and films in English. Her production in class does not reflect
her real capacity, especially when it is a controlled practice; she usually daydreams in class due to that constant tiredness. She does much better when it is a freer production moment. Although her receptive and productive skills are good, she seems to have forgotten some grammar rules and details so her last grade made her feel a little frustrated. She frequently gets lost in class and show signs of insecurity with new material; however, she assimilates them quite easily after a couple of classes. She sometimes has the chance to speak and listen to English at work.

**Diane**

Diane was the only real beginner in the group. She is a sweet nice spontaneous girl in her late twenties. It has been amazing to see how she developed fast and became interested in learning more and more every time. She also shares the demonstrations of insecurity and anxiety, especially when it comes to tests. In class, she is calm and even though she gets mixed up sometimes, she generally performs quite well. She has become more confident as time goes by. Just like the others, she usually gets good marks on her exams. She says she needs English in order to go further on her professional life. She has a great time speaking the language inside and outside the classroom. Even though she also has a tight schedule she works hard at home, never misses classes and is always on time. Together with Raff, she is the one who has the initiative to start conversations in English. She gets on well with everyone and it has helped her to feel more comfortable.

**Pam**

Pam is a sweet girl in her twenties, she’s talkative and nice. She has been studying because she works at a multinational company where employees must choose either English or French when talking to their superiors. In spite of having quite a few opportunities to speak the language during the week, she is the one who shows more frequent sings of insecurity, anxiety and lack of sense of achievement. Almost every class, she restates her self-doubt. Her performance is great for an intermediate student and she has an outstanding pronunciation and reading skills. Her insecurity occasionally jeopardizes her production in class, but she gets excellent grades on tests. She keeps on praising her peers’ production and
stating how she is below the average of the group, which is exactly the opposite. Whenever she gets a grade which is lower than usual, she gets really upset. She also had past experiences with English, and according to her, they were not enough for her to reach a good level of proficiency, especially regarding oral skills.

**Andy**

He is the youngest in the group. Andy has just turned eighteen but is the most mature at first sight. He is quiet, introverted and serious. He is the only one who does not shows signs of insecurity; and this excessive self-confidence may be causing him to get lower grades and have trouble performing in class, especially when it is a more controlled practice. That happens because he rarely studies at home. He has beautiful pronunciation and will surely become a fluent speaker one day; however, he had better make an effort and study harder. The older students try to interact with him during break time, but he seems satisfied with chatting on his cell phone. Although his grades have been average, his fluency when producing freely is better each day. He seems to have developed his L2 self quite well already, since he changes his tone of voice and even a little of his personality when performing in English.

**Van**

Van is a friendly woman in her early thirties. She is also usually exhausted in class. In terms of proficiency, she has been below the average of the group. She has state that she had to drop out of the course quite a few times before finally joining the group. According to her, she does not want to quit this time because she loves the way she gets along with the group and the need of English in her life has increased. She is really insecure when it comes to tests and her grades are just passing. She sometimes surprises the class with good free productions and funny jokes in English.

**3.2. Data-collection procedures**

As far as data-collection is concerned, this research made use of three different sources, respecting the tradition paradigm of multiple data sources. The
triangulation method is used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives, and is also often used to indicate that two (or more) methods are used in a study in order to check and reach the results.

Here both definitions of triangulation will be used. For data collection, the three sources which will provide the necessary information to answer the research questions are: class observations, classroom activity and students’ written narratives.

### 3.2.1. Class observations

Observation is the first and most powerful step towards understanding teaching practices. Daily observation reveals a wealth of information about students, their competencies and skills, and the work of the teacher.

The classroom observations were carried out during the period of two weeks. As students meet twice a week, it means that a total of four classes were observed. During this time, the teacher himself worked as an observer and kept an eye out for signs of negative and positive emotions, taking notes of these occurrences in various moments of the class: Introduction of new material, controlled practice, free production moments and also those moments before, after and during the class when students express their feelings towards some aspect of the learning experience.

As mentioned before, one of the reasons why this group was chosen for this study was because they shared similar reactions in class, and therefore, they were observed as a group in the first place, but never ignoring their individualities.

### 3.2.2. Classroom activity

The activity carried out with students in the classroom was fairly simple and it aimed at getting more information on how learners would describe and how they felt about particular aspects of the learning experience. The results of this activity were contrasted with those from the observations and narratives.

The teacher wrote on the board three topics, one at a time, which were considered important after the class observations: English classroom, teacher
correction and confidence. Students were supposed to share their views over each of these topics creating a spidergram for each one. These charts were contrasted with the narratives and the class observations in order to validate data. During this activity students would provide more positive and negative affective reactions which are the focus of this research.

3.2.3. Students’ narratives

This is the most important source of data for this study. The group was asked to write a short narrative answering the following question: How would you describe your experience as an English student? Their personal account supplied the necessary information to answer the research questions.

The analysis was based on affect theories. First of all, the aspects students considered relevant enough to mention in their account were identified. Then, their comments on each of these topics were compared to the results of the observation phase and the classroom activity. Finally, the positive and negative affective factors mentioned in the narratives and their effect on students was compared to the other data sources in an attempt of finding out how they influence students’ performance.

The idea is that, by doing so, it would generate valuable information on how to tackle affect in class towards a better cognitive learning. The results of such endeavor may guide future actions.

3.3. Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) states that individuals “interpret their experience and create meaning out of those experiences” (Jacelon & O’Dell, 2005, p.49). Data collection, analysis and theory are interwoven in this research methodology. The idea behind GT is that. “People sharing common circumstances… experience shared meanings and behaviors that constitute the substance of grounded theory.” (Hutchinson, 1993, p.180) If conduct properly, this kind of research may lead to a great guide for future action.

GT research goes from data to theory and not the other way round. The analysis of a particular social phenomenon should lead to the development of a
theory. This theory needs to be flexible enough to englobe a significant variety of distinct situations. As well as in Case Study, the data may come from many sources. GT offers a systematic way of analyzing and interpreting data: Establishing categories from qualitative data.

The topics mentioned in the narratives were divided in categories and the statements which contained any account of positive or negative emotions were organized in these categories. This way it was possible to recognize which aspects this group of students considered the most important for their development in terms of affective learning. Moreover, how these aspects are the cause for positive and negative reactions.

These findings, when combined with the classroom observations, led to the development of a hypothesis for this group’s responses to the English learning experience. It may guide future actions for this same group and promote methodological and epistemological diversity in second language research (e.g. Implications for the role played by emotions in the classroom).
4. Analysis

4.1. The Group

To begin with the analysis, let us take a look at the participants as a group. As previously mentioned, this particular group was chosen for this study due to their homogeneousness, and their tendency to share their feelings with each other and with the teacher outside and during class. In addition, their development as English speakers and their results on exams did not match their account regarding their feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Their close and friendly relationship is also a strong characteristic of this group.

4.1.1. Class Observations

All these particularities could be perceived during the observation phase. Quite often along the four classes, especially when new material was introduced, students would make comments and show signs of self-doubt, frustration and lack of confidence which could easily jeopardize cognitive learning (Arnold and Brown, 1999; Wolf, 2005; Rubio, 2007; and others). For instance, in one of the meetings, while the grammar topics “used to”, “to be used to” and “to get used to” were being explained, student felt frustrated because they could not use them appropriately at first. Most of them stated that they would not be able to use these structures properly while speaking, and that the book was too hard for their level of proficiency. Another similar moment happened when phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions with the verb “to put” such as “to put away”, “put up with” and “to put an end to” were to be used. Students were ironic and said there were too many expressions to learn, it was too hard to tell their meanings apart and that they would never be able to memorize or use some of them. It was crystal clear how the English language itself caused a feeling of fear on the students and was the greatest cause for negative reactions. It did not matter whether it was a freer production moment or a more controlled practice. Even though a better performance could be noticed while producing on their own, they did not seem to
realize how well they were doing and always looked insecure, anxious and asked for help.

On the other hand, their pleasant relationship helped soften this tension created by the difficulties of the learning process. Always making jokes, smiling and trying to help their peers, learners seemed to be having a great time every class, except for those moments when the tiredness of a three-hour meeting would strike them all, then, learning became even more problematic. Their relationship with the teacher was really good. However, the teacher’s efforts apparently did not help them overcome their Friday evening exhaustion. Besides that, no signs of negative affect regarding relationships in the classroom could be noticed.

On the whole, they seemed lack motivation to study outside the classroom. Homework, for instance, was rarely done. Nevertheless, a few times, not many, they shared accounts of the ought-to L2 Self, “which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcome” (Dornyei, 2009, p.29). It means that most of them had extrinsic reasons to believe they would benefit from learning, especially in their professional life. The ideal L2 Self is also something that some of them have been developing; they often revealed personal satisfaction and their goals as English speakers. Even though motivational aspects were strong characteristics present in their accounts, they did not influence their wish to study at home, according to them, because of busy routines and other priorities.

4.1.2. Narratives

Students’ written production corroborated what was observed in the classes. They were asked to write a short narrative answering the question: “How would you describe your language learning experience?” The narratives were analyzed according to one of the principles of grounded theory called in vitro categorization, which is when the researcher divides data into categories himself, following the aims of the research (Richards, 2003). Four main categories could be identified in students’ accounts: language awareness, social relations, past experiences and motivation. They were the reasons for most occurrences of positive and negative affect. One of the students also mentioned “tests” and “failing” in his narrative; however, it will be dealt with as a separate case.
Whenever any emotion or feeling was expressed in the narratives, it was isolated from the rest of the text and placed in one separate category, accounting for one (1) occurrence. After all the texts were analyzed, the final count of affective reactions was the following:

Table 1

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
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<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The number of occurrences for each category is represented in the graph below. It shows how there was some balance concerning the aspects that they considered relevant. Some gave more attention to one and others to another, but in the end, it seems that they agree that these levels of the learning experience are the most important. Besides examinations (one student talked a lot about it), no other aspect was significantly cited in their accounts.

Graph 1

Graph 2 shows how students’ narratives reflected what had been observed in class, with an extra source for negative emotions: past experiences. As we can see, the participants put down on paper what their reactions in the class demonstrated: negative emotions caused by language awareness and positive
feelings that come from social relations. Moreover, it can also be pointed out that, the group has a substantial amount of motivation.

Graph 2

Language awareness was the greatest source for negative affect. Four out of six students mentioned some anxiety or insecurity because of the language itself, its difficulties and their own performance. Some comments were:

- “Although people were saying I am good at English, I didn’t feel it…”
- “(…) for more that you are sure that you know what to say you just don’t do it because you have fear of fail.”
- “(…) I feel I need to listen more.”

This attitude towards language may be the reason for their poor production during certain moments, especially in those moments when they are expected to follow a more controlled kind of practice and use new material. Some students, on the other hand, could realize some of the progress they had been making, but always with some level of doubt:

- “(…) it has become easier.”
- “Although I have much more to learn than I did, I’ve already felt my vocabulary is getting better and, consequently, my confident too”
This increase in their confidence could be noticed especially when they had the initiative to produce in English before and after class.

All of them, as a rule, noted that the relationship with their classmates and teacher has been extraordinary:

- “(…) it let us more secure.”
- “(…) or the sadness of not seeing your classmates anymore.” ¹
- “I am a lucky guy. I’ve been learning with a great teacher, excellent professional.”

Day and Anna consider the “chat group” created by the teacher using the cell phone application “WhatsApp” one of the reasons why they get along so well and have always a lot to say in class. According to them, it is a great tool for practicing outside the classroom and to strengthen their relationship. It has surely been noticed that since this measure was created they have improved a lot in terms of confidence. They said:

- “Another interesting methodology is the use of the cellular application “whatsapp”. A group was created in order to stimulate the conversation among students during the week and it works perfectly: we keep in touch, practice the idiom and strengthen our relationship which makes the class easier and funnier”
- “The “whatsapp” group has helped me too much. We can talk about anything and put on practice our learning we’re speaking with each other almost daily”

Past experience, as the cause for negative affect, was something that could not be grasped in class. Except for Day, the only real beginner, they all brought up some frustration or anxiety regarding previous attempts to learn the language.

- “(…) I didn’t like my first class and I quit.”
- “I wish I could have enrolled at the course younger”

The motivational aspect was the one which caused the greatest impact and helped explain why their performance and grades did not reflect their negative attitude towards the language in class. Most of them mentioned both personal

¹ Translation made by the author. The student chose to write the narrative in Portuguese.
satisfactions and external reasons for trying to improve their language skills. Although it did not influence their study time at home, it makes them eager to learn and mainly to put into practice what they have learned. According to them:

- “(...) I realized how important English was …”
- “(...) this language is required to get a better job”
- “I decided to enroll myself in an English course to know a new culture and to improve my capacities…”
- “I’m sure that my “world” will be open after I finish my course…”

To sum up, by analyzing data from classroom observations and the narratives produced by the participants, some observations could be made for this particular group of students. First of all, the aspects that most of them consider relevant for their learning are: language itself and its complex nature, their relationship with peers and the teacher, their good or bad past experiences and the amount of motivation they have towards learning. These four aspects are the major sources for positive and negative affective reactions. Language awareness and past experiences are the causes for negatives responses among this particular group of students. Even though these feelings could endanger cognitive learning, according to affect theories, they compensate for their fears, lack of confidence and anxiety with a considerable amount of motivation, always counting on their friends’ support. Their friendly and close relationship has been crucial to keep them going in spite of the barriers they created to use the language. Therefore, they have been improving as English speakers each day despite all the lack of sense of achievement and their “moaning and groaning” before, during and after class.

4.1.3. Classroom Activity

In this classroom activity students were asked to give their impressions about some aspects that could be perceived during the class observations. One of them was the classroom environment itself; the second one was teacher’s correction, since it could be one of the causes for their insecurity; and a third one was confidence, as it seemed to be something students lacked in the classroom.
Three spidergrams resulted from the activity and it provided some more data to be contrasted with the narratives and the classroom notes.

The first spidergram shows that some students stated they felt comfortable and confident in the classroom, especially because the teacher was there to help them and correct them whenever they needed. This affirmation was somewhat different from what was observed and from their accounts during classes. However, their answer can be interpreted in a couple of different ways.

First, this huge reliance on the help of the teacher can mean that they are indeed insecure and uncomfortable with their own skills in spite of feeling protected by the tutor in class. Therefore, students’ demonstrations of negative feelings were in fact their way to show how dependent they felt of the teacher’s help, and showing insecurity and anxiety was their way of requesting this constant support. Or else, if they are actually confident in class with their peers and the teacher, their lack of confidence and fear may be towards the world outside the classroom. The fact that they will not have this assistance in real life, contrasted with the barriers that learning a language impose, may be frightening to the point of causing them to share these feelings in class.

Spidergram 1

The other two spidergrams did not say much about affective factors. The one with the main title “Teacher Correction” showed that students felt the teacher cared about their development when correcting them and it gave them confidence.
Regarding “Confidence”, most of them remarked that they became more confident as they made fewer mistakes in language. It means one of the main reasons for their insecurity, language, is also the major boost for their self-esteem.

As a data source, the classroom provided significant information to the conclusion of this study. One interesting thing that could be noted is that language proficiency, the greatest cause for hardships, could also be a valuable ally in increasing confidence. On the other hand, the teacher’s support, which according to them, was a major positive point, could be causing them to feel dependent, and, therefore, insecure.

### 4.2. The Individual Participants

In this section, let us take a brief look at the participants isolated from the group and see how they contributed to the results. This way, their comments in their narratives and during the classroom activity can be contrasted with notes from classroom observations and it can be the basis for future measures to help students individually. It could be observed that the data collected in class matches quite well with students’ narrative descriptions. Below, there is a summary of what the participants mentioned on their account of their learning experience.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Categories</th>
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<th>Negative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Relations</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Experience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Awareness</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Relations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Experience</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Awareness</td>
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<td>Past Experience</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
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</table>
As mentioned before in the description of the participants, Pam was the one who shared her feelings more often, and it was reflected in her composition. She had fourteen occurrences of affective factors. Language awareness was her greatest source of insecurity and anxiety, but also reason for positive feelings of confidence for being improving; exactly as some of them mentioned during the classroom activities. Differently from the others, she also exposed negative feelings towards social relations, but they were not towards classmates, who she apparently had a wonderful relationship with. Her negative comments were related to the fear of not being understood by other people. According to affect theories we can relate her success in learning to the plentiful amount of motivation she seems to have, especially for working in a place where English is necessary. Here are some of her comments:

- “(…) to be sure that the other will understand me, the things that I want to say, this is the real problem.”
- “Although people were saying I am good at English, I didn’t feel it…”
- “(…) for more that you are sure that you know what to say you just don’t do it because you have fear of fail.”
- “But now, the things were different, I had to make me understand, I couldn’t “no to say and just write”. So, in this situation I had no way, I had to start English classes again”
- “Nowadays, after the classes, I feel more comfortable speaking and this is making difference in my life and at my job.”
- “I can communicate with more confident and without fear of fail.”

Raff showed all his enthusiasm, mentioned during classroom activity and observed in class in his report of his English learning experience. His motivation comes mainly from his ideal L2 self:
• “I decided to enroll myself in an English course to know a new culture and to improve my capacities…”
• “The project is moving up!”

His positive affective reactions to the learning process have been reproduced in his grades and his performance in the classroom. He was the one with the greatest amount of positive comments. He mentioned the teacher and also some improvement in his confidence. Some bad past experiences were the only drawback for his development.

Day and Anna were a reflection of the group results. Both of them attributed their success in learning to social relations and motivation. The latter did not present any negative feeling towards the language and she seems to understand that cognitive learning depends a lot on her effort; she thinks that she could be performing better if she could dedicate more of her time to it. Perhaps because she is having her first language learning experience, Day showed a lot of concern with her language awareness and grammar itself seems to be the worst hardship for her. Regarding affective theories, we could probably say that, Anna’s positive affective reactions towards learning have caused her to develop significant language skills. Some of her comments were:
• “(…) my English was improved a lot since then…”
• “(…) I’m not studying as I should…”
• “(…) thanks to interesting classes I’m reaching my purpose…”

Some of Day’s comments were:
• “It was still been hard to stop thinking in Portuguese…”
• “Verb tenses confuse me until now…”
• “Before, the problem was the structure…”
• “I know how it’s important.”
• “(…) it has become easier.”

Andy who is the youngest in the class, eighteen years old, chose to write the narrative in Portuguese even though he is totally capable of writing quite well in English. He focused his account on tests and passing or failing.
• “The first exam is the worst. You can get really nervous in just a few seconds.”
• “(...) on the oral test, you freeze when you see the teacher who will apply the test...”
• “- I can’t pass! I haven’t done any homework!”
• “You either feel happy for passing or sad because you won’t see your classmates anymore”\(^2\)

He apparently associates his success in learning with good grades and passing at the end of the module. In addition to exams, he mentioned the importance of the teacher. The data from his composition did not add much to the results of the research, perhaps it would be a good idea to investigate whether the students’ age and the importance given to tests are intertwined, but it would be subject for a whole different study.

Similarly, Van did not contribute much to the research. Besides being quiet in class, her written description did not include many occurrences of emotions. Notwithstanding, the things she mentioned did match with the group’s answers: negative feelings towards past experiences and language, and a positive attitude regarding social relations. She probably lacks motivation and enthusiasm to learn – at least it was the impression during classroom observations.

To sum up, although each individual learner had his own impressions and answers to the proposed question, they all mentioned at least three of the four categories in their accounts. Most times they agreed upon the sources for their positive and negative emotions. These observations were really useful in drawing conclusions about this group and may base future actions to help each one of them individually.

4.3. **Discussion**

After analyzing the group and each individual student through the methods of classroom observation, narratives in writing and classroom activity we can come to some conclusions. To start off, it can be said that, for this particular group of students, the four most important aspects of their learning experience are: social relations in the classroom, which accounted for 29% of their comments,
language awareness 25%, motivation 22% and past experiences 16%. Their
demonstration of insecurity, anxiety, lack of sense of achievement and fear
concerning language, seen during the observation phase, was corroborated by
their narratives. It was probably the greatest drawback to their development. Even
though they noticed some improvement in their proficiency, they felt
uncomfortable producing in English; it ought to be worked on in the future
towards better cognitive learning and faster evolution. These negative affective
factors generated by “the imposition” of having to learn the language skills could
be contrasted with the positive feelings they shared with their peers and their
teacher. They lowered their inhibition, helped each other increase their
willingness to take risks and found in the figure of the teacher, someone to hold
on to and get the necessary assistance. Furthermore, their level of motivation has
been great and their L2 self has been evolving quickly and it has helped them,
even without the necessary dedication outside the classroom, develop their desire
to learn and reach their goals. Past experienced were the cause of worries and may
be tackled in future classes. Some particular cases such as Andy and Van ought to
be investigated more closely. Others are likely to be on the right track. Future
measures may include, collaborative learning, alternative assessment and
immersion in an English speaking environment outside the classroom in order to
improve their confidence in their language skills.

This research, as said before, besides triggering future actions for this
same group, may promote methodological and epistemological diversity in second
language research as well as be the basis for future investigations such as: the
relationship between age and the importance of tests, the usage of online chat
groups promoting positive affect, and how anxiety and insecurity can be
overcome with motivation.
5. Conclusion

To conclude, Arnold (2011), Schumann (1999), Dewaele (2005) and others state that both the affective and cognitive dimensions play an important role when it comes to language teaching/learning in the classroom. They have also shown the theoretical importance of emotion in understanding foreign and second language learning. In this article, with the help of classroom observation, narrative analysis and grounded theory, their work has been extended to show some learners’ emotional responses to foreign language learning in the classroom, the events which stimulated emotion and an account of their affective trajectory over their learning experience.

A particular group of students was chosen as participants in this study for the feelings they expressed did not reflect their good performance regarding tests and oral skills. A theory grounded in their experiences tried to explain this context: their emotional responses to the language learning process and their implications in their development as English speakers.

In this learners’ case, their affective responses in the foreign language classroom were grounded in four basic spheres: Language awareness, social relations, past experiences and motivation. Therefore, these could be focuses for future measures towards boosting positive affect. Moreover, according to the research findings, language was the major cause for negative reactions – something that could endanger their learning. For this reason, these students’ substantial development over the past year may have been supported by the positive emotions they get from social relations and the huge amount of motivation they seem to have. It looks like the positive feelings they get from these two aspects have been overcoming the barrier the language imposes and helped them develop cognitively.

Each learner in question, as well as his specific experiences, is unique. No claim should be made that other learners would respond in similar ways to similar experiences. Although it can be said this group works relatively homogenously regarding cognition and affect as well, each individual student was considered in their uniqueness and some different preferences and aversions were pointed out. Some of them presented very similar behavior, and even though some results were
based on the group, we should bear in mind that for a more specific analysis, other data sources would have to be used.

What seems evident, however, is that the affective responses of foreign language learners and, in particular, their responses to events in the classroom are still an area little explored in second and foreign language research. “Greater attention to affect in language learning is needed because of the emotional grounding of higher order cognitive and metacognitive processes such as attention, memory, planning, and hypothesis construction.” (Garret & Young, 2009, p.224) Thus, a secondary aim here was to promote methodological and epistemological variety in this kind of research.

Finally, when analyzing the behavior of particular students and their emotions concerning learning a foreign language, it may provide us with data for future actions and research. What has been proposed here is a way of finding out how a learner and/or a specific group of learners react emotionally to this language learning experience. Of course, as language teachers, we already have many areas of competence to attend to; however, by giving more attention to affect, instead of adding an extra burden to this difficult job, it may cause other aspects to become easier. Teachers should keep in mind that “the foreign and second language learning and teaching processes will be more effective if they are affective.” (Arnold, 2009, p.148)
6. References

ALLWRIGHT, D. Towards a new history of language teaching over the last five or six decades. Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2000.


7. Appendices

7.1. Students’ Narratives
My relationship with English

My first contact with English was when I was seven year old. My parents decided to put me in a english course because they knew it will be important for me in my future, but although they convinced me and I loved the idea, I didn’t like my first classes and I quit.

Two years later, I finally start english classes and after five years I finish my course. At that time, I thought it was enough: finish the course, understand lyrics, some movies and that was it! But I was wrong. In the middle of my college, I start looking for a trainee vacant position and I realize how important was the english, so I decided to go on a exchange to improve it.

After a while in the exchange, I could see some improvement but not enough to fall in to the job market with sure and property of it, but it was when I got a trainee position at a big company.

As a big company, english is the “mother language” and for my surprise, my boss at this company is a French guy, so no Portuguese or French, the way out was: Speak english.

That is the point where my problems begins. Read, write and understand never was the problem for me, but speak, to be sure that the other will understand me, the things that I want to say, this is the real problem.

Although people were saying I am good at english, I didn’t feel it, and I realize it was blocking my way, because the worst thing is feel that you are not being clearly and making yourself understand to the others and for more that you are sure that you know what to say you just don’t do it because you have fear of fail. But now, the things were different, I had to make me understand, I couldn’t “no to say and just write”. So, in this situation I had no way, I had to start english classes again.

Nowadays, after the classes, I feel more comfortable speaking and this is making difference in my life and at my job. I can communicate with more confident and without the fear of fail.
I began to study English when I was on highschool, and those classes has only the purpose to pass the degree. So, I decided to begging a course to study for vestibular exam and I studied for 4 years in a row. Was good vocabulary and fluency, albeit with some adjustments to be almost fluently I of truth in language. For reasons beyond my will, I started working and saw that lack of complement language study would not let me achieve good positions in good companies.

Ten years later, I returned to the classroom courses, but this time was chosen to be near the BRASAS from my last job and because the company was paying for my tuition. I did a placement test and entered the 3 book because it was pending in some aspects of the language, I have had some problems because of the hours of work and time to devote myself more than I should on my studies.

And so, since then, I continue my journey on the same course where yet I was lucky to find guidance from the best teachers you could have, after all, teach a language, be true to course methodology and still can hold the attention of students arriving tired from work is not for any professional. Undoubtedly the BRASAS makes a difference!!!
A área da aprendizagem nem sempre é composta por sucessos e aprovações. Muitas vezes, no decorrer do ensino, nos deparamos com problemas que nos deixam preocupados, aterrorizados e até mesmo confusos. No meu início tive pouca dificuldade com o aprendizado, mas com o passar do tempo novas matérias, conjugações e palavras vêm ficando pior de se assimilar. Mas nem tudo é tão ruim como a primeira prova, que podia te fazer de tranquilo, a nervoso em poucos segundos, então quando você pensa que nada mais pode te fazer tão nervoso, vem a prova oral e ao entrar na sala e ver o professor que aplicará a pessoa congela ao ponto de nem saber responder a pergunta Simples: What is your name? E após tudo isso vem sua nota. Geralmente ninguém quer ser o primeiro na prova oral mas na hora de ver a nota qualquer um gostaria de ser o primeiro, então mais uma vez você congela na espera tão incerta de saber sua nota, então você pensa:

- Não tem como eu passar! Não fiz nenhum “homework”!

Então você entra. Pronto você senta e não tem mais nada que você possa fazer para melhorar sua nota. Ou você sente a alegria enorme de passar ou a perversa tristeza de ficar e não ver seus companheiros de classe toda sexta-feira, pois tudo isso já vira uma agradável rotina na sua vida. Mas por uma grande felicidade você passa. Será sorte? Destino? Não, é quem te ensinou, talvez passar de livro pra mim e você é tão bom quanto pra ele, pois todo seu sucesso no futuro, falando inglês fluente será também porque o homem que te ensinou e acreditou em você e de um certa forma te fez acreditar em si mesmo, te ajudou. Talvez esse é o grande prazer de ser um professor: inspirar, e fazer uma nova geração de “inspiradores”. Para que esse ciclo nunca termine, pelo bem do mundo.

Aluno: Anderson Caldas Calral

Anderson C. Calral
Learning English has been an amazing experience in my life. For a long time it was a distant reality to me, because my education was always simple and learning a second language has never been a possibility.

I have been studying for two years and I still have one and half ahead until it's finished. Although I have much more to learn than I did, I've already felt my vocabulary is getting better and, consequently, my confidence too. Nowadays English is a need for all people, it doesn't matter where they are living and, for me, it's not different.

I decided to enroll myself in an English course to know a new culture and to improve my capacities, then prepare myself to new professional opportunities. I am sure that my "world" will be open after I finish the course. The project is moving up!

I am a lucky guy. I've been learning with a great teacher, excellent professional. Counting on his support has been so important during this journey. I wish I could have been enrolled at the course younger, but maybe I didn't have enough maturity to dedicate my time to take it seriously. So, in fact I can't complain about it.

I will keep on doing my best, I won't give up! I will turn the game. I will get it!

Rafael Moreira, September 26th of 2014.
I finished the English course at Brasas 12 years ago, since then I didn’t use English frequently, just to listen music and watch movies. A couple of years ago I began to work in a multinational company and the need to improve my English has been increased, so this year I decided to do a levelling test at Brasas and I was placed in book 6.

I was used with Brasas methodology since I studied at this school before, my teachers used to shout and clap their hands loudly in order to get the student’s attention and it works with me. At my first class with Emerson I really thought to myself that his class would be boring since he is a calm teacher, and a 3 hours class at Friday night couldn’t be boring, but I was surprised with his methodology; he catch our attention by asking questions which we have to be attempt to answer, and usually the questions are interesting or funny. Another interesting methodology is the use of the cellular application “Whatsapp”. A group was created in order to stimulate the conversation among the students during the week, and it works perfectly: we keep in touch, practice the idiom and strengthen our relationship, which makes the classes easier and funnier.

I returned to Brasas just 3 months ago but my English was improved a lot since then, I must confess that I’m not studying as I should but thanks to the interesting classes I’m reaching my purpose of improving my English.


My growing in English

I wanted to speak English sometime ago because it is a language I acquired to get a better job. I thought it should be easy since I used to listen music and watch shows in English.

At the beginning any biggest difficulty was the pronunciation and not to mix up all of words with the "quick" language, a practice that I acquired at highschool. It was hard to stop thinking in Spanish and to translate sentences in my mind. I shouldn't do this. Now, I need to understand words as a context, especially because the words have many meanings but the same meaning may has a lot equivalents.

Books always improve you until read several subject in the gospel because the don't have a make sense like this in Portuguese language. I've heard about that many times to understand and I also looked for exercises on the internet.

Before the problem was the structure. Now the problem is almost everything that is learned in the classroom do day after day.

The "whisperers" group has helped me too much. We can talk about anything and put our ideas, we're learning, all in speaking, with each other almost daily.

I think this way the can improve our vocabulary and we'll be more fluent. I will write this.

Actually I will need to listen more.

* This is my new year. Unfortunatelly I haven't had much time to listen the CDs and I know now it's important. Sometimes I try to watch some show. I'm able to understand sometimes but not all of words. The person speak too fast. The same happens with the CDs.

Recently I've started watching one hour of day at least, to study and doing the exercises.