

Reducing Affective Filter In Adult English Language Learning Classrooms

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This research paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Education

The Evergreen State College

March 12, 2011

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Date

Abstract

This action research study explored the role of affective filter in an adult English language Learner classroom. Natural approach, a prominent theory within Second Language Acquisition, suggests that when students' affective filter is high they will have greater difficulty learning. By observing two adult English language learning classrooms, surveying the students and interviewing their teacher, this study found that when adult affective filter was lowered, they used their target language more frequently and comfortably. Surveys responses from students suggest that the language learners were found that these students were intrinsically motivated by their life goals to learn their target language. In the teacher interviews created a collaborative learning environment to make students feel more comfortable with each other and reduce anxiety. The observation and interview data confirmed that student's affective filter was lower during cooperative activities when compared to whole class activities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW 4

Introduction	
Research Question	6
Definition of Affective Filter	6
Literature Review	7
Natural Approach	9
ADULTS LEARNING ELL	11
CHAPTER II METHODS AND ANALYSIS	12
Participants	13
Procedure	14
Data Collection	15
Data Analysis	16
Conclusions	17
CHAPTER III RESEARCH FINDINGS	18
Setting and Participants	18
Results	21
Observations	28
Interviews	28
Surveys	34
Discussion	42
CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS	
APPENDICES	

Teacher Interviews excerpts

Survey 1

Survey 2

REFERENCES

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As I stood in front of approximately 20 South Korean teenagers preparing to teach a grammar class, it was apparent from their cold, silent demeanor that it would be difficult if not impossible to teach these students anything about the English language. As the hour progressed, I would have to painstakingly draw out all interactions from these students. Before they had even entered the room, their receptiveness to learning had been shut off. They were at the end of a day that consisted of approximately 10 hours of schooling or studying and by now had likely lost all motivation to learn another subject. As teenagers, they would be highly anxious to offer any uncertain response which could draw out laughter from their peers and personal embarrassment for themselves. Being beginner English language students, any confidence in their language abilities was little at best. These three factors, low motivation, self-confidence, and high anxiety, had raised in them a mental wall, termed affective filter, (Krashen 1982; Dulay & Burt 1977) shutting off any aptitude they might have had towards learning English.

This affective filter is a mental barrier both teachers and students must reduce in order to learn. In my first year of teaching English Language Learners(ELL), I noticed this barrier, in varying degrees, in all students and classes I taught. It was clear even in the most proficient student that if this barrier was up they would not participate and learn as I hoped. At the same time, the classes that were the easiest to teach were always the classes where the students' apprehensions, confidence and motivation were the highest.

I also realized that aggravating students' affective filter is the way in which lessons are presented to the students. English language learner pedagogies frequently utilize language workbooks which frame learning through direct instruction. Al-

Shammari (2008) describes direct instruction “as a process that breaks down the pedagogical task into components.” For example a typical direct instruction grammar lesson in a language workbook might explain the correct use of gerunds, such as ‘ing’. Then the student would be expected to complete an exercise in which they write words with the correct gerund ending. While these workbooks leave room for teachers to present lessons in ways that are sensitive to students’ affective filter, direct instruction can often bore students and reduce their motivation.

Tools that have been suggested to reduce affective filter are movies, games, and music, as these can reduce anxiety while increasing motivation and self-confidence. (Krashen 1983; Lin, 2008) This study was initiated to investigate the use and success of these tools in reducing affective filter. However, it quickly became apparent that a study of factors which contribute to low affective filter would be more informative considering the venues available for conducting this research. It is at this point that I decided to focus my research question on the following: how do classroom activities, teaching methods and student **backgrounds** contribute to adult English language learner’s low affective filter? Along with these related sub-questions are: which class activities reduce student AF?; what attitudes and personal factors contribute to a student’s low affective filter, and; what methods are being used by teachers to reduce affective filter?

In addition, studies of the natural approach, as well as second language acquisition, are often framed within the context of elementary or secondary education. Fewer studies have researched affective filter in relation to adult students. While SLA theories should hold true across age groups, teaching approaches using SLA may need to differ for older students. Krashen (1982) puts forward that “The acquisition-learning

hypothesis claims, however, that adults also acquire, that the ability to "pick-up" languages does not disappear at puberty" (p.10). While Scheffar (2008) writes "that children and adults generally rely on two different learning mechanisms for language acquisition: implicit and explicit mechanisms respectively" (p.302). It is likely adult learners have the ability to "pick up" language while at the same time they are more geared to learn explicitly. In my experience, currently adult ELL pedagogies frequently utilize language workbooks which frame learning primarily through direct or explicate instruction. By investigating the affective filter specific to adults, I hope to examine how this aspect of SLA applies to adult language learners.

What is the Affective Filter and Its Effect on Language Acquisition?

First termed in late seventies, the affective filter essential is like a mental wall that raises in a students head reducing or effectively shutting of their ability to learn (Dulay and Burt, 1977). The three factors that contribute to affective filter are anxiety, motivation and self-confidence (Krashen, 1982) To reduce a student's affective filter, a teacher may need to lower student anxiety and raise motivation and self-confidence. Natural approach language methods utilize teaching strategies that reduce affective filter automatically (Krashen, 1981). The natural approach is method of teaching in which lessons are taught through the students' natural processes of learning.

Anxiety is a contributing factor to the development of a learner's affective filter.

When a language learner's affective filter is high, they will have more difficulty acquiring language. According to Krashen (1981), when language learners are anxious, input may not reach the acquisition part of the brain. Macintyre (1995) has concluded, "language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes,

and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students.” (p. 96). High anxiety has also been found to reduce performance on listening tasks (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Foreign language anxiety has been strongly correlated to unwillingness to communicate in language class. (Jackson, Meihua, 2008)

When self-confidence and motivation are weak, students will have more difficulty in learning language. Brilliant (1995) found that immigrants who had negative emotions related to their moving to the United States progressed slower in their learning of English than their counterparts who had more positive feelings towards their move. Brilliant contributed the students’ slow progress to their motivation and self-confidence. Using curriculum that is culturally relevant and interesting to the students can engage them, motivating to learn. When comprehensible input is made understandable students can grasp learning more easily building their self-confidence (Krashen, 1983).

Literature Review: Second Language Acquisition Theories and Their Relationship to the Affective Filter

Second language acquisition offers a set of theories that are based around the notion that a new or second language is learned through the process of language acquisition, similar to the process for learning a first language. There are five theories within Second Language Acquisition theories from which Krashen (1983) bases his natural approach pedagogy. These five hypothesis are; the acquisition hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis and discussed above the affective filter hypothesis.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis distinguishes acquisition as the process similar to how children learn language. In this way, language learners are aware that they are using their target language to communicate, but do not notice they are acquiring

language (Krashen, 1983). In acquisition, confidence in their language ability increases as the language is acquired. The learner is likely unaware of the rules of language or grammar they are using but can use their target language to communicate. “Learning” can be distinguished more directly as understand of the language such as syntax and grammar. Students who are “learning” their second language often can be relative experts on the grammar rules of their target language but unable to speak or use it in most settings (Krashen, 1983).

Natural order hypothesis is based on findings that show children and adults learning a language for the first time learn to use grammatical morphemes in predictable sequence. (Goldshneider & DeKeyser 2005; Bailey, et al. 1974). For example the morpheme ‘ing’ and plural ‘s’ in English was found to be learned early in speech production and the singular and possessive ‘s’ was learned later (Krashen, 1983).

The monitor hypothesis postulates that when a child is learning their first language, he or she is constantly monitoring their environment and modifying their language use to match what they are experiencing (Krashen, 1983). The language the learner produces spontaneously is part of their acquired knowledge and is checked internally for correctness with their 'learned' language. This same process occurs when a student is learning a second language. The monitor seem to be present in older students and possibly work better as Potterotto (1990) found that students age 18 to 19 attained language more efficiently then younger students when they were taught using lessons that utilized monitor strategies.

Input hypothesis argues that in order to acquire new language information, instruction provided to learners must be at a level just above that of the students’ current

level. This is can be denoted as $(i+1)$ where i represents information. For example an ideal $i+1$ activity for an early level language learning could be to have students match words to the appropriate pictures. Requiring students then to describe the picture or use it in a sentence would likely would likely be at an $i+3$ level above what the student can understand and internalize (Krashen, 1982). This information must be meaningful, understood, and at some point produce a response. This means that language learners need to be provided with comprehensible input in order to learn optimally. A study conducted by Rodrigo, Krashen, and Gribbons, (2004) found that reading programs who utilized comprehensible input methods were “more effective than traditional methodology” (p.59). Basically, to acquire language, a student must first understand meaning of languages parts rather their function.

Natural Approach

The natural approach then is based on the following four principles within second language acquisition theory. First is the idea that for students to acquire language they must understand the meaning of what is said to them. Second is that language acquisition progresses in stages, starting with nonverbal communication, then simple one word phrases then two to three word phrases, then simple phrases, complete and clear sentences, and finally full complex conversations. Third is that lessons must contain “communicative goals” that is, each activity should focus on in a meaning. The last principle is that the classroom setting and lessons should be designed to reduce students affective filter otherwise the input they received will not be internalized.

Curriculum based on SLA theory allows for how humans naturally learn, much like how a young child first learns language, by observing language use, and then trying

it until they figure out what is correct. Second language acquisition theories based on Krashen's natural approach support curriculum designed for English language learners through the development of basic interpersonal communication skills, which allows for students to produce language when they are ready, and stresses the use of comprehensible input for students to acquire language. (Krashen, 1982). That said, in order for learning to occur, students must have a low affective filter, be relaxed and feel unthreatened (Krashen, 1981, Dulay & Burt, 1977). When learning is stressful, the students' affective filter raises, shutting down their ability to internalize learned information (Krashen, 1983). Physically when a person is anxious or fearful, the amygdala releases adrenaline in the brain which shuts down parts of the brain which are necessary for learning (Zull, 2002). The three main factors that contribute to high affective filter include self confidence, anxiety, and motivation. When observing students while teaching, I have often noticed that it is these factors-which appear to restrain students from engaging and learning in class.

Second language acquisition is manifested in classrooms often through sheltered content-based teaching. In content-based teaching, a subject is taught to the students as it would be to native speakers except that the lessons are modified to help ELLs to understand the subject. () English language learners, especially adults, are often taught using the direct method. In this method, students are told what they are learning and how to use it. For example, in a grammar lesson the teacher would explain a grammar rule such as present tense then have students write words or sentences in the correct present tense format.

Adult ESL Learners

There has existed for some time now a general assumption that adults cannot learn language as well as young students. However, Snow, et al.(2000) found that although older L2 learners may fail more often at learning a L2 than their younger counterparts, this is unrelated to their potential ability to learn language as well or better than younger learners. Researchers have found that older language learners in a L2 environment acquire the language faster. They have also found that older students are more efficient L2 learners than younger students. Additionally, language learning classes for older students are often more intensive than those of younger students. Older students also learn more than younger students in the same amount of time. Adult learners performed better on tests if they learned in conditions similar to a young child's. Bilingual students that moved to their L2 environment at an older age learned both languages better. While their younger counterparts lost some pronunciation skills in their L1 after moving to the L2 environment. (Snow Et al., 2000)

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this action research project was to identify activities and teaching methods that promote lowered affective filter among adult ELLs. To study this, qualitative research methods were used. Observations, interviews and surveys were conducted in two classrooms with teachers had been trained to utilize methods that promoted low affective filter.

Previous research has shown that pedagogies which are designed to reduce affective filter helped students improve reading comprehension scores and word memorization; and at the same time lowered affective filter (Lin, 2008). However, the methods used by Lin, games, music, and movies, are neither available to all teachers nor acceptable in all curricula or educational institutes. Nevertheless, the need to reduce student affective filter is present in most if not all ELL classrooms. Therefore, this action research project investigates what methods were used to reduce the affective filter, together with which factors contribute to a student's affective filter. The data collected can help in teacher's curriculum design and confirm the affective filter hypothesis.

While this theory had been examined extensively with younger students, few studies have examined AF in regards to adult students. Second language acquisition researchers has been suggested to be uniform across age and ethnic groupings, yet adults differences between learning capabilities and aptitudes, both positive and negative, have been found (Snow et. Al) Therefore, it is reasonable then to question whether adult students are receptive to methods designed to reduce affective filter.

Participants

This study included two ELL teachers and their adult international students. The teachers were invited to participate primarily by their availability, willingness and familiarity with language acquisition that addressed issues related to affective filter. The teachers were recent graduates from a Master's of Teaching program at a local urban college.

Teacher of Classroom 1. Ashley taught the beginner intermediate ELL class. She had been teaching informally for over three years in an afterschool program. This included teaching students age kindergarten to second grade and training educators. Her prior experience working with ELL students includes ELLs from an afterschool programs and the five months teaching in this English language school.

Teacher of Classroom 2. Colby taught the upper intermediate level ELL class. Her teaching experience came from working in a variety of classrooms over the past 10 years from volunteering in classrooms to student teaching while getting her teaching certificate. Her experience in teaching ELL comes from working with ELL students in her student teaching classroom, a few ELL workshops and her five months working for this English language school.

Both teachers had recently graduated from the same Masters in Teaching program which encouraged teaching strategies such as psychology of learning, student-center teaching and culturally responsive teaching. Their understanding of affective filter came from brain physiology particularly the amygdala and how it reacts to fear. Ashley explained that "I understood affective filtering as the result of the amygdale being negatively stimulated by the surrounding social and physical environment. I understood

that if a student's amygdala was not soothed prior to or during instruction then they would not feel comfortable and would not be able to truly learn.” Similarly Colby added, “As far as I understand, the affective filter is closely tied to the amygdala. If I have a negative reaction to my (learning) environment, it produces anxiety. The anxiety sets off my amygdala which is an organ in what is often referred to as the "old brain."

Procedure

The research study began by observing each teacher for 90 minutes each week in their classrooms which was located on a local college campus. After the second week, the frequency of observation was increased to twice a week. This was done to gain a large amount of data. It was also revealed that the classrooms the teachers taught in changed from day to day. Since some classes were equipped with multi-media resources such as a video player, it was possible that the teachers would alter their lessons to utilize or exclude these resources depending on what room they were scheduled to be teaching that day.

In the third week of the study, the two teachers were interviewed together. The decision to interview both teachers at the same time was made in order to accommodate their schedules. The interview questions were chosen to gather information about school background, strategies used to reduce affective filter, objectives of class activities, differences in learning between student groups and personal experiences when using strategies to reduce the affective filter.

Finally, in the third week the students were given surveys designed to ascertain which activities were most effective in reducing affective filter, as well as their impressions of teaching strategies and factors which might contribute to low or high

affective filter. Three to five students were taken out of class to fill out the survey each week. After the first week, the survey was modified for clarity. In the place of 'anxious or anxiety' the word nervous was used because the students were more familiar with it.

Data Collection

Field observations. In class observations were chosen as a method for data collection because of the focus on ELL instructional strategies. Information about students' responses and how the teachers presented the activities could be accurately ascertained by observing and memoing in the classroom. A field journal was used. I compiled my notes during the classroom observations, During most observations I situated myself in the back of the room in a direction that would allow for me to see as many student faces as possible. This was done to help students forget the presence of the observer in hopes that they would act as natural as possible. On a few occasions, due to lack of seating choices, it was necessary to sit in the front of the room. When the students worked in groups this observer would casually walk around from group to group in order to better listen and observe student interactions. For the most part, students' classroom interactions appeared unaffected by the presence of the observer.

Interviews. The use of interviews was used to acquire a more detailed perspective of methods to reduce the affective filter and the teacher's classroom practices. Both teachers were interviewed at the same time for approximately 60 minutes. The interview questions investigated the teaching methods they used to reduce affective filter, their familiarity with AF theories and student and school demographics, The experiences of the teachers would also help to corroborate the findings of the classroom observations.

Together, this interview data, the results of the student surveys, and field observations supported the triangulation and validity of the data.

Surveys. Observations could only yield perceived information. It could be determined visible that students' affective filter was lowered. However, in order to establish if indeed the students were less anxious during tasks required additional data. Interviewing each student would have been ideal. However, due to the amount of students that would have been impractical. Therefore, a survey was created that sought to determine which instructional strategies were better at reducing the affective filter, as well as identify what factors contributed to their observed low affective filter. The questions used in the surveys were intended to explore student anxiety, and self-confidence in relation to class activities and teacher interactions; motivation was investigate in relation to personal goals and drive. It was necessary to revise this survey for purposes of clarity after it was fielded to the first group of students (Appendices A and B). This survey format allowed the researcher to determine whether students understood the questions by their response. Had multiple choice questions been used throughout the survey, it would have been difficult to ensure students understood the questions. While the students were filling out the survey, this researcher was available to answer questions to help clarify grammar or phrasing in the survey that students might not understand.

Data Analysis

The data then was evaluated to flush out what factors contributed to students high or low affective filter in the areas of motivation, anxiety and self-confidence. The observation data was coded by themes into categories of: descriptions of activities,

teacher presentation and interaction with students, student response, and observable affective filter. For the observation, participation and reaction to in class activities was a strong indicator of affective filter level. If most students were participating in an activity it was considered a low affective filter activity. Early on in the study, it was clear students had a low affective filter. The interviews and survey questionnaires were used to triangulate what class activities, practices, student background and personal perspectives information led to student's low affective filter. The survey questionnaire responses were coded by the affective filter concepts: motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. In the surveys, student **background** information provided data on student motivation while the survey questions pinpointed attitudes toward their teacher and in-class activities. The survey responses were collated in a master chart where response could be compared. All similar and unique responses were tallied and described. The interviews were analyzed by transcribing the teacher interviews. Data was grouped by concepts of affective filter and its sub-categories anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence.

Conclusion

While observations and survey results can shed light on a student's feelings of anxiety, motivation and self-confidence, quantifying emotions and internal thought patterns can only be determined in relative terms, especially considering the tools that are available to this action research project. The methods used were able to provide insight to the research questions. While the sample size and scope of the findings do not allow for definitive answers, the results do fit with current second language acquisition theories, which can add weight to their validity.

CHAPTER – 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at a local English Language school that is part of an international language teaching company that operates schools in over 40 countries and teaches numerous languages in a variety of settings. The company's goal is to provide the best educational services while at the same time providing students the chance to travel. The specific school has an estimated average enrollment of approximately 200 students at anytime and operates year round.

The demographics of the student population is difficult to estimate as their enrollment is quite fluid. Language learners that go to the school can choose to stay anywhere from two weeks to over nine months. One report of the student's demographics is 50% Asian, 15% European, 25% Latin American and 10% Middle eastern. However, the number of students that participated in this study were 44% Middle Eastern, 37% Asian and 14% Latin American and 3% European. These discrepancies between number groups could be due to unequal distribution of students in the participant classes or, more likely, a shift in the overall student population of the entire school since the enrollment reports were published. The school's student ages range from as young as 13 to late 20s, although students older than 30 do attend from time to time. The age range of students in both teachers' classes at the time of the study was between 16 and 28.

The younger students were said by the teachers to be part of a study abroad or high school completion programs. The older students were usually studying English to help them get a better job or for enrollment in either undergraduate or graduate schools in

the United States. One of the focuses of this school is in TOEFL test preparation classes which are often required for placement in certain universities both in the United States and abroad.

Before being enrolled in class, students take a placement test that is used to assign them to a general English classroom. The levels range from beginner to advance. They attend this class Monday through Thursday from nine to 12. In the afternoon, they went to elective classes with subjects such as; vocabulary, TOEFL or grammar. This research was conducted in the students' morning general classroom.

The curriculum provided to the teachers is based on a workbook created by the language company. It consists of topical units that use a variety of activities that teach different aspects of English Language. For example, one unit observed during the research focused on listening skills. This unit outlined what is considered effective listening skills. Students then talked about and practice oral skill in groups. They must listen to audio recording and answer questions. Another lesson in an intermediate level class uses phrases about luck. Students first read common phrases regarding luck, talk about their meaning and then create their own phrases. Not all units maintain a common theme as the unit about luck abruptly switches to talking about journals and diaries. Grammar practice and principles related to topic are always included in each unit. Workbooks similar to these are used commonly in English language curriculums, and as these examples illustrate, their quality can vary.

Classroom One. Classroom one was a beginning intermediate level class taught by Ashley. She presented herself in a friendly but formal manner around the students. This class had a total of 16 students. By the end of the observation period and when all

the surveys were completed one student had returned to his or her home country and a new student had entered the class. There was one student who declined from filling out the survey. The class's nationalities broke down as seven students from Saudi Arabia, two from Taiwan, and one each from Libya, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, France, and South Korea. In the survey nearly all of the students in this class expressed interest in learn English as a way to advance their higher educational goals or in order to get a better job. For the most part, the Arab and Latin American men tended to be the most out going, talking or asking questions several times a day. The Arab, Latino, and European women also contributed rather frequently, talking or asking questions two to three times a day. The Asian men and women contributed about once or twice per class.

Classroom Two. This class was an upper intermediate level class taught by Colby. Like Ashley she presented herself in a friendly but formal manner to the students. There were 14 students in this class of whom twelve participated in the survey. Demographically the class was comprised of four Saudi Arabian, one Colombian, one Japanese, two South Korean, two Taiwanese, and two Vietnamese students. Most of them were interested in learning English for a higher degree, because it would help with career goals, and of a natural interest in learning the language. Many students who were in the upper intermediate classes had been at the school for close to nine months. This made them veterans in the school and they tended to be more relaxed and accustomed to class and school procedures.

Results

The first few observations were focused on how students responded in relation to the affective filter and to activities that included multimedia such as video, clips, and movies. The secondary objective of these observations was to identify any classroom activities that were especially effective in reducing the student's affective filter. During these initial observations, it was noticed that students' affective filter were low in general, although activities in which students worked in groups or pairs seemed to reduce student affective filter the most. This researcher then hypothesized that the low affective filter of the students was due in part to teacher practices and the students' ability to regulate their anxiety, motivation, and self confidence. The interviews of the teachers helped confirm that their teaching methods lowered students' affective filter and also provided their perspective on classroom dynamics that impacted students' affective filter. A survey was given to the students to explore their perspectives about classroom activities, their instructors, and their personal feeling in relation to the affective filter. The survey posed questions to the students about classroom activities and learning English in relation to anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence.

Field Observations. Each classroom was observed eight times for approximately an hour and a half each time. For the first two weeks observations were done only once per week. Starting in the third week, observations were taken twice a week. In weeks four and five, observations were taken of an entire class from beginning to end. The focus on each was to document what the activity was, how the activity or lesson was presented, how the students responded and what was their visible affective filter level. It was immediately apparent that these students had a very low affective filter as all

students appeared to participate in all activities. Field notes were taken during the observations. These observations were then coded into four categories which follow: descriptions of activities, teacher presentation and interaction with students, student responds, and observable affective filter.

In classroom one, specific topics, learning goals, and activities could vary from class to class. For example, on the first day the teacher began with an activity where the students wrote down three hobbies in their notebook and then they discussed them with a partner who then asked questions or guess what their partners hobbies were. Activities that same day included, writing sentences using the past continuous verb tense about pictures from the workbook. Another activity entailed writing a story about a bad day, which a few students shared with the class. A similar activity with pictures of forms of transportation (airplane, bicycles, etc.) was used the next week. This unit focused on specific grammar rules but the individual activities weren't always directly related to each other.

Despite the variety of activities that were provided to the students, how they were to participate seemed to be the most constant. Depending on the teacher's instruction, students' worked individually, in pairs or groups or as a whole class. Individual work was usually writing or reading by themselves. Pairs and groups were used for discussions and for collaborative projects. Whole class activities were used for presentation style activities such as discussions, lectures, and presentations. Some lessons would use all of the above participation styles, while others would only use one or two of them. For example, one lesson began with the students' reading a biography about a famous person as part of homework. Then in class they first worked individually to create a list of

questions students could use to gather information another person. The teacher then made a list of these questions on the board with help from the whole class. Finally the students used the list of questions to interview a partner. In this activity all three participation types, individual, whole class, and groups or dyads, were used. Most activities were completed in class but occasionally the teacher would assign unfinished assignments mostly individual writing as homework. During the observation period group assignments were not given as homework.

A variety of methods were used by the teacher to present class activities. In many lessons, the teacher used a simple method of describing the activity. When the teacher used this approach, she modeled the students' next task. For example, when the teacher was initiating a discussion about luck, she first told the students a personal story about having bad luck. Before starting the activity about hobbies, she first wrote three of her hobbies on the board and then asked the students to guess and question her about what her hobbies were. To transition to the discussion of transportation methods, the teacher first showed the students a video clip of cars of the future. Using a writing exercise, she had students compose sentences on the board. Then invited one student to lead a discussion with the rest of the class on what was right or wrong with each sentence (error analysis). When beginning group activities, the teacher grouped students in a deliberate pattern. In an activity from the book, students were asked to write a dialogue for a phone interview between a male interviewer and a female caller. In this activity the teacher matched students in pairs of males and females. This left one pair of two males to work together. Before the teacher asked this pair to work together she asked them if it was alright if one of them would act as the female role.

In general, the teacher interacted with students in a friendly but respectful manner. When the activity/lesson did not require direct lecture or instructions the teacher assisted individual students by answering questions or clarifying directions. In a few whole class discussions, which tend to be dominated by five to six of the same students, she physically spent more time on the side of the room where the discussion is taking place. At the same time, she validated all students responses by saying “I like that.” On a few occasions, she clapped her hands to get the students’ attention. When she was trying to end a unit activity, she asked the students if they were finished and gave them a few more minutes to complete what they were doing.

In classroom two, the units had stronger central themes that were evident through out all the activities. The two units that were observed were titled “law and order” and “listening skills.” The teacher began the Law and Order unit by asking the class “why do we [societies] need laws?” which started a short discussion. Then she handed out notecards to each student and asked them to write down what peace meant to them. When they were finished with that she put the students in groups of about three and had them make a poster about their definitions of peace. At the end each group shared their poster with the class and each student talked about one aspect of the poster, as instructed by the teacher.

In the next observation, the unit on law and order continued with the students reading two sides of an argument between a husband and wife. After the students read they answered questions in the book about the two arguments. The teacher then had the students write their answers on the board, which they then discussed. Part of this discussion was about the use of past present grammar. Next the teacher announced that

they would be watching a video of a TV court show and asked the student to take notes on each argument made by the defendant and the plaintiff. At the end, students debated.

The other unit that was taught focused on listening skills. The teacher placed the students in groups and asked them to create a short skit that demonstrated listening skills. In the next observations the students listened to an audiotape and took note on the speaker's intonations. Then students were asked to write a personal story after which they were to share with a partner and pose questions.

Similar to in classroom one, students in Colby's class either interacted individually, in groups or pairs or as a whole class. Again individual activities were usually written, such as answering questions from the book or reading. Pair or group work was used for discussions, telling a story, or creating a skit or poster. Whole class work was usually discussion. Lectures were observed infrequently in this classroom.

When presenting an activity Colby would also simply describe what she wanted them to do with the students but would often have an example she had made to show the students, especially for poster presentations. This classroom worked more frequently to groups or dyads. When students were working in collaboratively or individuals show would often walk around the classroom answering questions and helping students understand what they should be doing. If a class discussion was ending Colby would often ask students who hadn't participated in a if they would like to say anything.

Since students either interacted as a whole class, groups or dyad, or during class activities it seems most reasonable to discuss students' response in relation to those categories. The students in both classes interacted similarly when working as a class, in groups, or individually. Students always participated in each unit activity, though

sometimes in different ways and degrees. In the group activities, most students appeared to contribute evenly as all talked in their groups or wrote depending on the requirements of those assignments. Participation did vary between activities and students. In the biography activity, most groups worked rather lively during the interview portion, but one group finished early and began the next step of writing, the while other groups continued to talk during until this activity was completed. When the teacher asked for students to hand in their written biographies some weren't finished and students were given the option to complete it as homework. In the pair discussion about transportation, most groups talked rather energetically about their views and experiences with transportation until the teacher regained their attention. Some finished their discussion early and left the room briefly.

In classroom two, groups or dyad work was more frequent and the students appear to be more accustomed to this type of interaction as they needed less description and coxing in order to start working. As in classroom one, all students were expected by the teacher to contribute during group work, so even students who appeared to be shy participated extensively during group work. The students from classroom two appeared more willing to participate in group activities as they complained less when collaborative activities were introduced. During an activity in which students were making posters to describe their thoughts on peace, this observer noticed that all students contributed part of making the poster and helped explain when it was their turn to present. Overall, group or pair works assignments made the room sound lively in both classrooms. It appeared that English was being used more often by a larger number of students then during other activities.

Individual or pair work was used almost exclusively for writing or reading activities. Students worked quietly on such assignments and appeared engaged for most of their duration. In both classrooms, it was sometimes difficult to tell if some students were working on the assignment or distracted by other things. Many of the students had translation software on their cell phones. This at first suggested they were using cell phones frequently rather than work on the current assignments, still this left the possibility that one or two might not have been working on their given assignments. However, during most individual writing times, almost all students spent the time working. Students intermittently asked the teacher questions about the assignment or English language uses. In classroom two the first 15 minutes were devoted to reading during which most students appeared to read silently.

Whole class activities were used for lectures, class discussions, and presentations. In activities where the entire class worked as a whole, challenge emerged when gauging student responses. For the most part, the same students in both classes ever seemed to be clearly engaged in discussions as these were the people who regularly asked questions or contributed to the argument. In the activity in Ashley's classroom where students worked in partners to write and perform an interview, an argument arose over politeness when talking on the phone. This argument dominated about ten minutes of the class with the same six students involved. The rest of the students sat quietly. Some appeared disengaged from the activity while the argument continued. About five or six additional students participated less frequently and the remaining few students would only occasionally contribute. One or two students would rarely, if at all, be involved in whole class participation. During lectures, when they were listening to the teacher, most

students would follow along or take notes. When the teacher allowed students to lead a discussion on grammar most students participated.

In observing, these classes it was apparent that students' affective filter remained low for most activities on any given day. The strongest indicator of low affective filter is the students' willingness to participate in their target language in all activities. Students in these class participated in all types of class interactions. Pair and group activities seemed to garner the most participation. Each student in the group or dyad consistently participated, although individuals and groups tended to finish at different times as others. When activities were done, most students appear to write or read according to those lessons instructions. Students' affective filter may have been the highest when they were working as a whole class. While part of the class always contributed or even led discussions, the rest of the students only participated occasionally to this type of class activity. Affective filter in class two seemed slightly lower than that of classroom one. This was evident because students from class two complained less about activities. There also appeared to be more students in this class that would contribute more frequently than those in class one.

Data Analysis—Teacher Interviews. After the initial observations, it was clear that the students in both classrooms had low affective filters. Since the teachers had more experience working with the students, it was likely they could shed light on outside factors that contributed to the students' low affective filter. Most importantly, they could elaborate on any specific techniques they used to help students lower their affective filter.

What seemed to be the foundation for providing a low affective filter atmosphere in the class was the promotion a strong and safe community-learning environment from

the beginning of the students' time in their English classes. When asked about what methods they use to reduce affective filter Colby identifies a couple specific strategies she uses to reduce affective. She said:

Pair, like pair work before it goes, it goes to full [work] so they can feel like someone there is with them at least using pictures if I can, although with my group it is not as important as it is with the lower group. ("Interview,"2010, p.2)

Ashley elaborates in depth on strategies she uses:

I usually start off, if I'm starting with a new group of students, I do community building activities.... I talk to them about entity theory vs. incremental, talk to them... like learning theory is learning set, you know, is intelligence set or is it something the moves and grows, and from there I talk to them about mistakes and how the brain works and if we make mistakes we can learn and change our minds, which is learning.... I also do some fun learn community building with... icebreaker in the beginning, getting to know you kind of what does it mean to be a learning community. What do we want it to look like as this specific learning community so I start of with that and then we start getting in to more academic stuff, so I spend roughly 30 minutes of community building time each time I get a new group of students... and then I've also have gotten into the habit of asking students, you know, 'how do you feel you learn best', 'talk about a learning experience that felt really good to you'...so I can get to hear, you know, the kind of thing they're into and then I tell them about my style and I say 'I want to get you guys up and acting, creating skits, I want to get you guys listening to CDs I

want to get you guys to view clips on YouTube', well do some posters, some drawing, so they can understand concepts as well.

Ashley frames her classroom around learning theory, and the freedom to make mistakes and a strong community-learning environment. Here she is also establishing what the students should expect while at the same time trying to provide insight into how the students learn, which she believes help students be less anxious in her class. While Colby didn't claim to give the same lectures about learning theories, she tended to agree with Ashley's comments and implied that these concepts are part of her pedagogy even if they were not stated. Central to both these teachers' methods for reducing affective filter are community-building activities, usually done at the beginning of a new class, to help build a cohesive learning environment.

When questioned directly on why their students appear to have low affective filter, Ashley explained that she taught them about the how the amygdale and fear work in the brain. She scaffolds her instruction for level one student but uses visuals to help explain these ideas to her. Her motive is to help students understand her teaching styles and to help encourage students not to be afraid to make mistakes.

Colby agreed with this approach. She also emphasizes building a personal rapport with her students by "keep up on with what is going on with them and if I know of something that's going on with them I try to check in with them about it." She said on Mondays she often asks them about what they did that weekend. Colby also said she avoids putting students on the spot. If one student doesn't understand something she will check and see if the rest of the class is confused as well. This keeps the spot light off on

specific person while allowing her to clarify misunderstandings that the entire class may have.

The community building activities Colby focuses on getting students to get to know each other while Ashley's chooses activities seemed that to be designed to help students relax and have fun. Colby explained:

I do community-building things as well. I do different ones then [Ashley] does....

I have them... so half of them stand in a circle facing out and the other half of them stand in a circle facing in so they're all across from a partner... they talk about their country and then every couple of minutes they rotate one person....

Colby and Ashley reduce the affective filter their students by using community building activities to help students become more comfortable with their peers. They also try to create an environment where it is okay to make mistakes. Both of these steps help to create a low anxiety environment where students can feel free to practice and learn English.

When asked how they motivate their students, both teachers say they try to find out what their students' educational goals are and use curriculum that attends to those goals. Ashley explained how she uses students' goals personal goals to motivate them:

Like well, in the beginning I figure out what are they learning English for.....what's, why is it relevant to them and I find many times ...I a... many of them are trying to get in to masters programs here. and so I try to remind them like you know hey this might be on the TOEFL... and so I guess I motivate them by asking what they want and need and then letting that inform my instruction as much as I as possible.

Similarly Colby said:

I do pretty much the same thing I pass out notecards to them roughly once a week and have them write out, you know, what they want to do more of, or what is hard for them you know, what they're struggling with in terms of learning English you know, like what they're intentions are, do they want to do things that have to do with the TOEFL have more TOEFL prep and I try to ask them what they want and include that as much as I can.

Yeah providing a rationale because then even if it seems like its just for fun they can go like oh 'we're not just making posters cause it s fun to draw' there is actually a reason there is something that we're learning by doing this.

By integrating student learning goals with their instruction these teachers help their students stay motivated. They also explain why they are doing things a certain way which helps students to understand their rationale, as well as where the lessons are headed. That way when students find themselves in an activity that perhaps they don't feel is helpful to them, they can at least know that it is some how related to their English language learning and by extension their own personal learning goals.

The teachers help their students build self-confidence in their English skills by encouraging them that it is okay to make mistakes. This step also reduces the student's anxiety by making the classroom as safe place to use their developing language skills. Ashley uses body language to help students know she is listening to them and that they are being heard and valued.

Yeah, I give my same speech every time, I, I, write the word mistakes up on the board and I say as an instructor and as a person, you know, really in life period I,... this is my mantra and I say 'mistakes are expected, respected and inspected.' I also just I just try to like when we're having discussions and students are talking to each other talking to me I try to hold, you know hold pretty sweet eye contact I try to lean forward to make them feel like what their feeling is important cause it is.... But I try to create a space were they can share like that cool thing that they have with other students ...and by giving them feed back on their writing.

Colby says:

I try to write back to them. They all write journals every day and so I go back through every journal entry they write and I write something back to them so and not, not like correcting the grammar more just on the content, so its this neet interaction and... I also try to compliment them on what they do well.

Ashley builds confidences in her students by validating what they say through body language. She also tries to create a space that, makes them feel safe to share their individuality. Both teachers provide positive feedback on student writing.

Student Surveys. Surveys were administered to participant groups of three to five each week. The survey sought to identify student motivations, feelings about class activities, learning anxieties, and self-confidence. Participants were surveyed in small groups to accommodate teacher preferences, reduce loss of class time for students, and allow the researcher to help and explain surveys to the students. Survey one was administered in the fifth week of the research study, of which six were filled out by

students in Ashley's class. Three were filled out by students in Colby's class. Week five was the first week surveys were submitted to students and it was decided to revise the survey for clarity. In survey one, questions five, six and eleven were revised to shorter questions in order to allow for greater clarity. Question three was rewritten to give the students the option of circling two in-class activities rather than just writing an answer. This was done because responses for survey one indicated that students thought the question referred to any class they were taking at the school and not the class activities performed in the observed teachers classroom. Students were provided one or two lines on which to answer open-ended questions freely. It also generated multiple answers for any given question. The remainder of the students were given the revised survey, survey two. Though the wording was different between some question from the original survey the information the questions elicited was intended to be the same. Survey question one asked about nationality and was used for establishing the demographics of the participants. Below are questions two through 12 , participant responses and analysis.

Survey question 2 -- Why are you learning English? A total of 15 students wrote a response that indicated that they intended to use their English skills to attend college whether in the United States or in their home country. Eleven replied that English would help them with getting a job or to improve their future. Twelve students wrote answers indicating an interest in English simply to understand and speak the language. Three students suggested English would be an aid in traveling around the world for them. One student's response was not germane to the question.

Survey Question 12-- How do you convince yourself to continue learning English when you don't want to? Eight students from Colby's class responded by saying

they remember why they are learning English such as for their future, job, or further education. One student related the question to a more singular struggle with motivation. They responded that when they don't feel like learning they take a break for a while but then go back to it. One student said he had always wanted to learn English. Two students response suggested they didn't understand the question.

Eleven of Ashley's students' responses were not related to the question which likely means they didn't understand the question. Two student said the always want to learn English. Two said they remember their families or college goals.

The previous to questions and their answer speak to student motivation. A majority of the students identify learning English as a necessity for their future career. This suggests that in a way their learning English is required for them to be successful in their life. Without English it is likely they cannot obtain the career or provide for a family in a way they feel they should.

Survey Question 3 -- Which in class activities do you enjoy the most? Circle Two Why? Table one shows the students response to question two. In survey two the students were able to select two answer while in survey one their responses were not limited.

Table 1

Favored Class Activities

	Ashley's Class	Colby's Class
Which in class activities do you enjoy the most? Circle Two	4 Listening	5 Grammar
Why?	5 Grammar	8 –Working in Groups
listening practice,	2 Working in groups	4 Listening Practice
grammar translation,	2 Reading	2- Lecture
writing, reading,	2 Lecture	0 -Reading
working in groups	Survey1	Survey 1
	3 Speaking	2 Vocabulary
	1 grammar	1 Writing
	2 No response	1 Grammar
		1 Lab

Survey Question 4 --Students Explain response to question 3 In Ashley's class, two students selected working in groups. One wrote that they liked it because they could get help from peers. The other said these types of activities were more interesting, they could learn, more and make friends. Six students selected grammar as one of the activities they enjoyed the most. Two felt grammar would help them learn technical writing. Two wrote that learning grammar was a better way to learning English. One thought grammar was better because they understood it and that it was better practice for them. Students that selected listening implied that listening was a more important aspect of learning language. Speaking was preferred by two students because they felt it was more valuable for every day use and that helped them learn English.

In Colby's Class Five, students said they liked working in groups it was because they enjoyed working with other students. Students who explained why they chose grammar expressed that it was an area they felt they needed to improve, while two students related this to taking a TOEFL test.

Survey Question 11-- What activity to you thinks is most helpful in learning English? In Ashley's class, seven students noted that grammar is the most helpful in

learning English. Three students explained that speaking activities are most helpful.

Three students identified writing as important. Two students said the general English? class or Ashley's class were the most helpful.

In Colby's class, two students identified TOEFL classes were the most useful in learning English. Four students said that grammar or grammar exercises were the most helpful in learning English. Two students felt academic writing was the most important. Three students felt group work or discussion were the most helpful. One student said her general English class was valuable, while two reported listening was equally important.

These questions, two, three, and eleven, were asked to determine which class activities students preferred. Since students appear to have the lowest affective filter during group or pair activities, this researcher speculated those types of activities would be seen as the most enjoyable and effective by the students. However, the survey results did not soundly support this conclusion. Working in groups was preferred in Colby's class decidedly, but listening and grammar were also favored. Few students in Ashley's class found working in groups favorable, and preferred listening and grammar. This could mean even though visibly their affective filter is low, they feel grammar or listening, are better ways of learning English because they enjoy them more. Colby's advanced group did seem to think rather favorably of working in groups. This could be due to the differences among learner language levels. Ashley's lower level students maybe closer to the pre-language production stage of SLA therefore they would be more apprehensive in high language use activity like working in groups.

Survey Question 5 -- Do you feel relaxed in English class? Why? In Ashley's class a total of 13 students provided a yes answer to this question. Of those responses

three students said yes because they felt English was easy or interesting to learn. Four students said they weren't nervous and mention they felt that was important for learning more easily or because they understood the material or they just weren't nervous people. Six students related their lack of anxiety to their teacher because she helped them feel comfortable. A few students said that it depended on the teacher. One said they weren't relaxed because they couldn't speak English very well. Two students gave a no answer with one student related their answer to their speaking ability the other was unsure why they were not relaxed.

In Colby's class a total of 10 student responded with a yes answer. Eight students relate being relaxed due to their teacher. Two student felt they were relaxed because that class wasn't too difficult. One student said no because they felt it the class was difficult. One student said 'sometimes' but the rest of their response to this question was unclear.

Most participants from both classes stated feeling relaxed in their English class. Participants from Colby's class strongly related their lack of anxiety to their teacher as did a bigger portion of Ashley's class. This suggests that the teacher plays a strong role in the student comfort in class. Difficulty was also associated to feeling relaxed by some students.

Question 6 -- Are there some in class activities that make you nervous? Are there activities that make you more anxious than others? What are they? In Ashley's class seven students said no or did not write an answer and did not explain their answer. Six participants responded with an answer that was either a yes or implies that they have some nervousness. Three students list specific activities that make them nervous. Those activities were interaction activities, grammar, writing. One participant states that other

students who don't care about learning or don't take it serious make them nervous. One student said that when his pronunciation is bad he is nervous.

In Colby's class three student said they weren't nervous in their English class, one of those stated they were nervous when they first arrived. A total of nine students responded with a yes answer. Some of those related their nervousness to: writing activities, listening activities, answering questions, low scores test scores on the TOEFL, and one felt nervous depending on the difficult of the class.

Survey Question 7 -- Which in class activities make you nervous? Why? In Ashley's class six participants didn't provide a response or gave a no answer, none of them provided an explanation. A total of ten student responded with a yes. Their reasons included: work, games, drawing, and listening activities which are to low for the students level. One student says they feel anxious when they don't understand what is being said to them.

In Colby's class, 10 students provide activities that made them feel nervous. Most listed a different activity for what made them nervous in class. Two students who related nervousness to test said they worried about how they did on the test. Other students said they felt nervous about writing because they felt they lacked knowledge or skills in that area. As did a student who express nervousness related to listening practice. One student expressed anxiety when doing activities that they felt where childish because these activities were disrespectful to an adult's age. One participant state they didn't feel nervous in class and another gave a no response. In both groups ten participants said that there were activities in class that made them nervous or anxious. Their explanations for their nervousness vary greatly and do not allow for drawing strong conclusions about any

one activity to produce more anxiety than another. The participant responses indicate that most classroom activities can produce nervousness or anxiety in at least one student.

Question 8 -- Do you find that your teacher helps you feel confident and you can learn easier? From Ashley's class a total of fourteen students answered yes with eight of those giving a one word yes response. Four elaborated that their teacher is good because she explains English well to them. One of the students said their teacher is better than their teacher in their home country. Two responses do not relate to the question specifically. None of the participants related confidence from teacher to helping them learn easier.

From Colby's eleven students responded with a yes to this answer. Four qualified their answer by saying "Usually", sometimes, some teachers or not all of them. The student that explained their yes noted that their teacher was helpful and friendly. One student responded with no but did not explain their answer.

Survey Question 9 -- In what ways does your teacher help you feel confident? Participants from Ashley's class each had a little bit different answer for this question. Students say their teacher provided confidence by being supportive, answering questions, helping students with problems, providing grammar study work, and including class participation opportunities.

Four students said that their teachers' encouragement helps them feel confident. Several student responses said that how the teacher responds to them helps them build confidence. Students said that actions by the teacher which build confidence included: providing information, being patient, and replying directly to the students either by

written or verbal response. There were four answers to this question which didn't directly relate to the nature or topic of this question.

The majority of participant responses to questions eight and nine confirmed that their teacher helps them feel more confidence. This indicates that they feel their teacher helps them feel more confident English language class. The varied response makes it difficult to point to one specific of action the teacher uses to build confidence. However all participant responses were related to the teachers communication with themselves such as providing feedback, clear explanations, or encouragement.

Question 10 -- How does your self-confidence affect how you learn English?

Nine student responses were not clear enough to draw conclusions related to the questions. Three students responses explain what makes them feel confident is when they can speak English well. Two students explain that confidence helps them not be afraid to learn and use English.

In Colby's class any of the answers, while they sounded related do not answer clear enough to provide usable data. There were a few students that did answer the question related to its intent. These students suggest that self-confidence helps them with speaking English even when they are uncertain about their language abilities.

The high amount of unusable answers from both classes suggests that the students had difficulty understanding the question. It's likely there was a misunderstanding of the questions which was common among most students. The participant answers that were usable suggest that student self-confidence helps them to carry on when anxieties or feelings of reluctance are high.

Discussion

The data from the field observations suggest that student affective filter was the lowest during cooperative learning activities, this was indicated by their increased participation when working in groups or dyads compared to individual work and whole class activities. Interviewing the teachers revealed that both teachers created a collaborative learning environment to help students reduce affective filter. The survey data showed that students did feel relaxed and confident in their class; some participants attributed this to their teachers for a variety of reasons. Student motivation was also likely to be high since their learning English was directly related to their future careers and education.

Often the terms cooperative learning and collaborative learning are used interchangeable in research related to work in groups. However, Oxford (1997) has distinguished cooperative learning by saying “cooperative learning has taken on the connotation of a set of highly structured, psychologically and sociologically based techniques that help students work together to reach learning goals”(p.444). and says “Collaborative learning is more philosophically oriented, with the goal of acculturating students into the immediate community of learners” (p.452). The use of community-building activities by these teachers was intended to create a “community of learners.” Whereas the activities the teachers used in could be described as “techniques that help students work together to reach learning goals.” The use of both cooperative and collaborative learning is likely what helped these teacher students feel comfortable and lower their affective filter in class.

The observation data is corroborated by data from the teacher interviews as the teacher claim us community building exercise to reduce affective filter. The data from the

surveys can only support this claim partial because the show that while students admitted to feeling relaxed, confident, and motivated, these feeling were not specifically to credited to any class activities. Teacher interactions can be correlated to contributing to lower anxiety and strong confidence and motivation. Each participant tended to identify different types teacher interactions in relation to feeling relaxed, confident, and motivated. One type of teacher interaction cannot be uniquely identified as contributing significantly to any one of these feelings, although several students linked encouragement, feedback, and providing explanations to these feelings. Teacher interactions could be considered an aspect of scaffolding which leads to the conclusion that positive scaffolding plays important roll in reducing affective filter.

The research data consistently pointed to cooperative learning exercises as a main source for lowing student affective filter. The observations data revealed that more students participate freely and comfortably when working in groups. This is consistent with studies of cooperative learning that have been shown to reduce students foreign language anxiety and increase performance on tests (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010; Tsay, M., & Brady, 2010).). At the same time cooperative learning activities motivate by “creat[ing] a situation in which the only way group members can attain their own personal goals is if the group is successful”(Slavin, 1995, p.16). Some of the research data from this study also suggests the students are motivate by cooperative activities as some survey participants stated that they enjoyed working in groups because they like interaction with their peers.

Central to the concept of collaborative learning is what Lev Vygostky termed zone of proximal development (ZPD) “that is, the domain of knowledge or skill the

learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help” (Myles & Mitchell, 1998 p. 196) For example, a child that understands how to add and subtract can soon be taught simple multiplication with instruction from a teacher. Learning to multiply then is within their zone of proximal development. However more complex math such as algebra would like still be outside their zone of proximal development. The learner needs scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976), incremental building of knowledge -similar to comprehensible input, from teacher and peers in order to build knowledge. This requires learning to be more of social. These teachers used community-building activities to create a collaborative learning environment. This environment allowed students to feel more comfortable with each other, lowering anxiety, and creating some level of friendship between students, increasing motivation.

In Ashley’s classroom students didn’t favor the cooperative learning activities. This could be due to their zone of proximal development. Since these students are in an earlier stage of language learning they are probably less comfortable with using their target language. Thus for them working in groups feels like going from adding or subtracting directly to solving algebraic equations. Many students in this class are probably have limited vocabularies and using their target language feels daunting at this point in learning English. This is likely due to patterns in Krashen’s natural order hypothesis that suggest students are quieter and less willing to produce language earlier in learn their target language. In class two eight students responded that working in groups was one of their two most enjoyable class activities. This also fits with natural

order hypothesis. Since class two students were more advanced in their English skills they would be more comfortable activities that require more language use.

In Ashley's class, and Colby's to a lesser extent, it was observed that the Korean and Taiwanese students tend to participate the least frequently in whole class and group activities. This could be related to one or all of the following reasons. Several studies have found that learning styles can differ between cultural groups. (Charlesworth, 2008; Cagiltay, & Bichelmeyer, 2000; Mitchell, et. al 2009) It is possibly that the learning style of Korean and Taiwanese students relies on listening to the teacher with few interactions. These students may have come from educational systems that focus more on writing and grammar but less on spoken word. Since verbal communication was a large portion of the observation data and classroom interaction, students who haven't focused on those skills would have been at a disadvantage in observation based assessments. Student participation patterns could also have been due to lack of culturally responsive curriculum. Cultural responsive curriculum is used to teach students in a way that is relevant to them and their cultural background. This usually means using subject matter that relates to student culture. The curriculum provided mostly focuses on grammar instruction and rarely frames learning through any cultural nuance. Another possibility is that the few amount of Asian students in class might reduce student confidence. Certainly in teaching classrooms with only Korean adults I found that they were relatively ready and easy participants in class. Most likely, I feel, the smaller number of Korean and Taiwanese students in class combined with lack of skill in verbal communications influenced these students to participate less frequently than other cultural groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this action research project was to explore what factors contributed to students' low affective filter. This study looked specifically at how class activities, teaching methods, and student **perspectives** each reduce affective filter. A low affective filter is important in learning because without it students will be more inclined to shut off to learning.

From the observation data, it is clear that cooperative activities were strongly correlated with lowered affective filter. These classrooms used cooperative activities like working in groups to create and present posters or dialogues. During these group activities students used English more frequently and were less hesitant than when the class worked as a whole. A few survey responses related that cooperative activities were enjoyable, suggesting that these activities reduce affective filter by producing a level of fun which likely reduces anxiety and increase motivation. Slavin's (1995) position that working in groups motivates by connecting their personal success with the group success, likely helped in reducing affective filter in these classes.

At the same time, the teachers' classroom practices directly addressed motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Both teachers established a collaborative learning environment through the use of group building exercises, which helped students feel comfortable, low anxiety, in their classrooms. Key to this collaborative learning environment was providing a place where students wouldn't feel bad about making mistakes. Ashley did this by stating to her students that mistakes were expected, respected, and inspected. Colby did this by not addressing any one student's mistakes in front of the whole class. This removes any fear of embarrassment and encourages

students to try to use their target language more freely. The teachers tapped into their intrinsic motivation by find out what students goals were for learning English. This allowed them to adapt their lessons and interactions with students in order to help motivate them. These teachers also made efforts to build student confidence by providing constructive feedback on student work and in class interactions.

Factors That Contribute to a Student's Low Affective Filter

Students were likely highly motivated to learn English by their educational and career goals. As learning English is likely critical for success in their desired educational and career paths. Student stated being anxious due to a variety of class activities these did not appear to discourage them from participating or learning. Although some students were likely anxious enough to restrict them from participating in whole group discussions, the observation data suggested that this anxiety wasn't great enough to discourage them from participating in other class activities and likely did not affect their learning. Data related to student self-confidence was inconclusive since most survey participants had difficulty answering this survey question related to this topic coherently.

Therefore, in answering the primary action research question, "How do classroom activities, teaching methods, and personal feelings contribute to adult English language learner's low affective filter?" this researcher found that cooperative learning activities reduced the affective filter by providing social and motivating interactions among students. The teachers in this study established a collaborative learning environment and provided scaffolding. Finally, students came to the classroom highly motivated by their educational and career goals.

The affective filter hypothesis suggests that students learn best when their affective filter is low (Krashen, 1983). This study did not investigate how well the students were learning in relationship to their affective filter. The findings suggest that affective filter was low and that student's produced language with little apprehension in these classrooms. This should lead students to learn their target language more easily, if not better.

The students indicated that their low anxiety and confidence in class related to their teachers' communication with them. This suggested that on some level students were getting adequate comprehensible input from their instructors. A few survey participants stated that they were sometimes more anxious if learning was difficult or too easy. These students were aware of the level of comprehensible input they needed to learn and felt anxious if input was below or above their comprehension level.

Implications of Affective Filter on Adult Language Learners

This study found that students who come to class motivated had lowered affective filter. Most students reported being motivated by their future career and educational goals. In answering why they were learning English one student wrote "I want to learning English because I look [to] complete my studies, masters, PhD, here in USA in major psychology." Another student wrote "I want [a] job but [employers] want to new person [who speaks] English very well." These responses were typical of most answers to this question on the survey. Clearly these students connect learning English to their prosperity Zull (2002) explains that when learning is related to students' life goals and personal identity motivation is "intrinsic" (p.53) and stronger. Both the teachers and students try to connect daily learning goals to students' long term learning goals, this speaks to their

intrinsic motivation. The teachers do this by identifying daily learning activities or pieces of information to what they know to be their students' long term learning goals. To give an example Ashley state she would inform students when her lesson related to formal language tests students need to pass to move on in their educational goals. This study then would advise adult language learners in general to identify personal goals for learning language with what they are learning as a way to motivate themselves. They would also be encouraged to embrace cooperative language activities beyond their language classes, for example, seeking study or language groups outside class should have the same effect of reducing affective filter as they did in these classes.

Recommendations

The results of this study emphasis the use of collaborative learning communities and cooperative learning activities in English language learning classrooms to reduce student affective filter. The language company in which this research was conducted would be advised to make collaborative learning techniques a more prominently feature of their curriculum. Possible curriculum could include activities these teachers used to help students get to know their peers. These activities should focus on helping students get to know each other without making them step outside their comfort zone.

Teachers as well should utilize collaborative learning activities to create low anxiety classrooms and make cooperative activities part of their teaching methods. At the same time, using these cooperative activities exclusively would not allow for complete learning. Individual and whole class activities play an important role in learning. Lectures provide teachers opportunities to disseminate information to all students quickly.

Individual work allows students to show their abilities with the hindrance or help of their peers.

Limitations

The observations were originally intended to evaluate the use of multimedia in these classrooms. It was discovered part way through the research that the rooms in which the class met changed from day to day and week to week, this likely had an affect on how the teachers taught there class especially in relation to the use of multimedia since not all rooms had access to the appropriate equipment. This largely hampered the original research investigation which focused on how the use of multimedia reduces affective filter and what other factors reduce affective filter. The researcher was forced to focus solely on the later due to a lack of usable data related to the use of multimedia.

The wording of questions 10 and 12 in the survey limited students' responses. These questions related to self-confidence. The majority of students did not respond or gave an irrelevant response to these questions, which suggests a common misunderstanding of these questions among survey participants. This resulted in a lack of reliable data as it was impossible to draw conclusions about the students' self confidence.

This study does not say that the other forms of class interactions observed, working individually or as a whole class, are ineffective in reducing affective filter. In fact the affective filter of students during individual work activities was visibly low during observations since most students appeared to work on these activities continuously during the time given. However verifying this would have required looking at students work, homework, journals entries, etc., which was outside the scope of this research. Compared to whole class work the cooperative activities used where more effective when

their purpose was to reduce affective filter. Each activity type has place in a language classroom. This study simply suggests group work as an effective if not favored method for reducing affective filter.

In summary, this study was able show that students were more comfortable using language in a group setting. Quantitative information such as test scores or course grades were not available to this study which could have shown that these methods improve learning. However, as found in this studies literature review, several researchers have shown that students motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety affect language learner performance. Particularly studies of language anxiety have concluded that anxiety can hinder students' language production (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Jackson, Meihua, 2008; Macintyre 1995) and that low motivation and self-confidence likely slow language learning progress. (Brilliant, 1995). At the same time other studies have found that students that had participated in cooperative learning perform better on tests (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010; Tsay, M., & Brady, 2010). Additionally Krashen (1983) suggests the use of groups can provide teachers and students opportunities for comprehensible input. This study may add to Krashens natural approach theory the findings of this current study which suggest collaborative learning environments and cooperative learning activities as methods for reducing students' affective filter that also has the likely benefit of improving learning.