The Power of Emotion in English Language Learning: Lessons from Neuroscience Illustrated in the Experiences of Beginning ELL Teachers

“What sets some classroom episodes apart from others is that the attention is accompanied by a significant emotional investment in the experience. These emotions then work in concert with our intelligence to produce a valued, memorable experience” (Intrator, 2003, p.129).

Abstract

Lowering the affective filter, or the emotional variables associated with the successes and challenges of acquiring a second language, has long been an important consideration in teaching English language learners. In recent years, findings from the emerging field of affective neuroscience illuminate just how powerful emotion is for learning. In this session, we will share several key ideas about emotion and learning from neuroscience and then examine examples of these principles in classroom practice, particularly in the classroom experiences of beginning teachers enrolled in the University of Wyoming ELL Endorsement program.

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Engaging Emotion
3. Exploring the Affective Filter in 2nd Language Learning: Research and Theory
4. Examining 3 Findings from Neuroscience that Support Attending to Affect in Teaching ELLs Students
5. Making Connections with Neuroscience Video Activity
6. Learning from the Experiences of 2 Student Teachers

2. Engaging Emotion

Pondering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think about and describe a time from this past week when emotion played a role in your classroom or school.</th>
<th>How was learning enhanced or harmed in this instance?</th>
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Partnering

Discuss your responses with a partner.

3. Exploring the Affective Filter in 2nd Language Learning: Research and Theory
4. Examining 3 Findings from Neuroscience that Support Attending to Affect in Teaching ELLs Students

a.) We can’t divorce emotion from thinking—emotion acts as a rudder for thinking (Damasio & Immordino-Yang, 2007).

b.) Building neural networks takes time, including time for stumbling and backtracking: How do emotions play a role?

c.) Regression is normal in building understandings: How do emotions play a role?

5. Making connections with Neuroscience Video Activity
Go to http://learner.org/
Go to http://www.learner.org/courses/neuroscience/
Go to http://www.learner.org/courses/neuroscience/videos/videos.html

Browse the video titles in:

Unit 2: The Unity of Emotion, Thinking, and Learning
- Measuring Emotional Response to Physics
- Depth of Field
- Emotion in Math
- Good Idea?

Unit 3: Seeing Others from the Self
- Music and Emotion
- Using Emotional Content in the History Classroom
- Empathy
- Peer Mentoring

With a partner, choose one video to view, stopping periodically to discuss how the information connects to ELL students and emotion and learning in your context.

6. Learning from the Experiences of 2 Student Teachers: Questions and Comments

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