

Affective English

Ruth Wajnryb, University of New South Wales

This lesson is designed as an ice-breaker at the start of a course or as a lesson to be given in the early days of a new course. With the usual adjustments and accommodations, it can be used with all levels from upper elementary onwards. It works equally well with EFL and ESL learners.

The lesson relies heavily on the emotive power of visual resources. The focus is on language learning in general and English in particular. ("English" can be adjusted in the case of another target language). The purpose is to have students "open up" about their feelings on what it's like learning English (and related matters). Sometimes it is only by being compelled to consider and talk about these issues that students discover what they really feel! As well, they usually find out that many of their own responses (which they may have thought were weird and worrisome) are indeed usual, quite normal and shared by their fellow students.

Preparation

The teacher will require a large collection of magazine cut-outs—at least 50 pictures. Half of these should be chosen because you yourself see a connection with language learning. The others should be chosen at random. Include quite a few that are open-ended and suggestive.

Procedure

1. Brainstorm "English"—write it on the board and then "collect" onto the board in random fashion all the words that the class associates with "English".

2. Lay the visuals out leisurely and expansively on the floor and allow students to watch the process.

3. Relax the students. Have them close their eyes. Ask them to think about being in the English language classroom, learning English. How does it feel? What emotions can they put a label to? Allow for "quiet time."

Then at your signal, they are to come out and have a close look at the pictures laid out on the floor. They should leisurely choose one that somehow "speaks" to them about what it's like learning English. (Some examples may serve here: one student of mine chose a picture of a farmer gazing at his crop because he said he saw "English" as the harvest at the end of his efforts; another chose a picture of a person peeping out from behind a window because he said he felt his weak English made him an observer of life rather than a participant; another said she chose a picture of a child's drawing because she felt learning a language was infantile).

After they have selected their picture, they should share their choice and their thoughts with another student, and then another, etc., (never having groups bigger than three; small groups reduce the potential for threat and allow for intimacy).

4. Conduct an informal feed-back session. Possibly as a result of the feed-back, have them sit in like-minded groups (or set up another seating criterion).

5. Hand out the task sheet (see Fig 1) to the students seated in groups. (As an

alternative to one long single sheet, it could be cut up into single statements and stapled together into booklets). Before filling it in with their own personal responses, they should "group read" it - i.e. checking comprehension with their fellow students.

6. After completing the statements, students should "mix and mingle", sharing their responses with people they themselves choose.

The teacher's role is to facilitate the activity and help out with any language items that are needed. Sometimes certain responses from learners elicit the teacher's spontaneous reaction (see Figure 2 for some samples of "affective English").

Note: This lesson owes a lot to Mario Rinvoluceri for inspiration and approach.

LEARNING ENGLISH

TASK SHEET

1. Learning English is like _____
2. When I learn English I feel _____
3. The thing that most bothers me about learning English is _____
4. When I'm with native speakers of English I _____
5. My English lets me down whenever I _____
6. The thing I most like about English is _____
7. The thing I most dislike about English is _____
8. If I could, the thing I'd change about English is _____
9. I wish native speakers of English would _____
10. In English I wish I could _____

Figure 1. Task Sheet

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| 1. Learning English is like... | —feel difficult and worry |
| —start a new life | —feel confused in using what I know about English language |
| —how to learn the music | —feel that I am afraid from understanding many words |
| —climbing mountains—very interesting journey, need hard work though | —always make incorrect English structure |
| —like a child | 9. I wish native speakers would... |
| —like jumping to the side of the world | —have experience like us |
| —like being born again | —be more patient |
| —like scratching on rock | —talk to me because I have no contact with people |
| 4. When I'm with native speakers of English I... | —be easy to me |
| —feel very uncomfortable because is like when somebody shut the door to me | —understand us |

Figure 2. "Affective English"—Some Samples