

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.

Although not directly related to language learning, this book discusses some of the concepts covered in this chapter in a highly accessible and informative manner. Theoretical concepts are illustrated throughout by examples of well-known public figures or discussions of the author's personal experience in a way that makes for a both powerful and enjoyable read.

Marion Williams, Sarah Mercer,
Stephen Ryan (2015). *Exploring
Psychology in Language Learning
and Teaching*. UK: Oxford
University Press.

5

AFFECT

Introduction

In this chapter, we consider how feelings and emotions connect to language learning. In the past, discussions of language teaching tended to be dominated by concerns relating to cognitive knowledge of the target language, specific techniques involved in teaching the language, and the mental processes and capacities required to learn it. While these remain important issues, the field has begun to recognize how all aspects of learning are also coloured by the complex web of emotions and feelings involved in learning and using a foreign language. As LeDoux (1998) explains in his book *The Emotional Brain*, 'Minds have thoughts as well as emotions and the study of either without the other will never be fully satisfying' (p. 39). In this chapter, we will use the umbrella term **affect** to cover all the emotionally related aspects of language learning, whereas cognition will be the term used to refer to a range of mental processes such as memory, attention, or thinking. Although we have separated emotional aspects of language learning in this chapter, these are, of course, intimately connected with our cognitions, beliefs, sense of self, motivations, etc. In reality, it is impossible to truly separate the affective elements of our psychology from other facets of our minds and from interactions with contexts and other people. Therefore, throughout this chapter, we will seek to highlight the links with other themes described in this book and show how our feelings and emotions influence the whole of our psychology.

We will begin the chapter by considering what we understand by affect, emotions, feelings, and moods, as well as why these are so very important for successful learning. The next section will explore the work that has already been carried out on the role of emotions and affective states in language learning. We will then turn our focus to the specific affective factor that has perhaps received the most attention, namely **anxiety**. In this chapter, one of our primary aims is to illustrate that emotions also have a facilitatory role to play in language learning; while negative emotions can impede learning, positive emotions can promote and enhance learning. In order to discuss the constructive role of emotions, we will consider aspects of psychology that have been less frequently examined in respect to language learning, such as positive emotions, positive psychology, and the role of emotional intelligence in teaching.

Activity 5.1 Positive and negative language learning experiences

Think about some of your own positive and negative experiences of learning and using a foreign language. Can you remember how you felt at the time and how you feel about the experience now? Make a note of the first words that come to mind.

	Positive experiences of learning and using a foreign language	Negative experiences of learning and using a foreign language
Then		
Now		

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It is likely that many of the words that you wrote down in this activity reflect a range of emotional responses. You may have come up with words like 'frustrating', 'boring', or 'stressful' for your negative experiences, or you may have thought of words such as 'fun', 'exciting', or 'pleasurable' to describe your positive experiences. This shows us that language learning, and also language use, can be an emotionally charged experience. It also draws our attention to the fact that emotions are more than just a response to an event at a single moment in time; the emotional tone of an experience can stay with us for some time and can also change.

What is affect?

Affect is an abstract concept and an umbrella term that covers emotions, feelings, and moods. The distinction between these particular terms is rather fine-grained and has been the cause of much debate within the psychology literature. We have taken the view that emotions refer to conscious emotional responses to an event. Typically, we can recognize and often even label emotions such as 'happiness', 'anger', 'joy', or 'remorse'. Feelings are different from emotions as they tend to be more specific and refer to our private and subjective reactions to events; so, for example, feelings of disappointment in ourselves for not performing well in a class are likely to be different from our feelings of disappointment when learners similarly fail to live up to expectations in class. There are a limited number of recognized emotions, but the number of ways in which we can feel is infinite. An emotion can be the product of several different feelings. If we think of love as an emotion, then it may comprise feelings of companionship, trust, physical desire, and excitement. Moods are understood as being emotional states that last for longer periods of time and which are generally believed to be less intense than feelings or specific emotional responses to events. Sometimes we may not be able

to identify what has caused our mood. For the purposes of this chapter and our emphasis on pedagogy, it is sufficient to note that affective states can vary in terms of their intensity, duration, identifiable cause, and whether they are more private or public in their expression.

Why are emotions so important?

One of the pioneers of modern psychology, William James, described a world without emotions as one where

[n]o portion of the universe would then have more importance than another; and the whole character of its things and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression, or perspective. (James, 1902, p. 150)

Very few of us would want to live in such a world. A world without any emotion would be cold and colourless. Think about emotions in relation to the experience of learning a language. Everybody who attempts to learn a language experiences feelings of embarrassment at making basic errors in front of other people; and yet the same language learners can also encounter tremendous feelings of elation at successfully performing even the simplest tasks in the target language. These emotional reactions are integral to the learning experience. At a most fundamental level, emotions mediate our learning, our use of language, and our behaviours and attitudes towards the language, the class, the materials, and even ourselves.

It can be difficult to predict how individual learners may respond emotionally to tasks, materials, and events in class; however, knowing something about our learners as individuals and their interests and motivations can make this a little easier. We know that emotional reactions occur when individuals are involved in situations or activities that they feel have relevance to themselves. For example, somebody with a keen interest in Formula One Grand Prix racing may experience an intense roller-coaster ride of emotions while watching a race, but another individual—one with no such interest—is likely to feel indifference watching the same event. The nature of the emotional reaction, the intensity of that emotion, and, indeed, whether there is any response at all, depends on the meaning a particular situation or event has for an individual (Gross, 2007).

Activity 5.2

How learners react to classroom activities

Look at this list of activities from a language classroom. Imagine you are a teacher announcing each activity to the class. What emotional reactions might you anticipate from different learners? Why might learners respond differently to these activities?

- 1 singing a song in the target language
- 2 a short vocabulary quiz about fashion-related language
- 3 watching a clip from a news programme in the target language
- 4 individual presentations on famous actors
- 5 a role play about a business meeting
- 6 reading poetry in the target language.



Most teachers would have produced quite an extensive list of possible reactions for each activity. In the case of the song, for example, some students may feel a sense of excitement or anticipation about an activity that seems fun or a little different, whereas other students—those with no interest in music—may feel a sense of anxiety, embarrassment, or even resentment. The news programme might be seen by some as challenging, real-world relevant, and interesting, while others might regard it as intimidating, daunting, or boring. A teaching activity does not itself produce an emotional reaction; the nature of any emotional response to our materials and activities is dependent upon the interactions between an individual, the task, the settings, and the meaning of the situation for the individual.

The nature of emotions

For teachers who want to get to know their learners better, it can be helpful to understand the nature of emotions. An emotional reaction is often described as having three essential components: a physiological element, expressive behaviour, and subjective feeling. Subjective feelings refer to how an individual interprets a particular event. For example, two language learners may do an activity together that they both find enjoyable and rewarding. Yet although they share the same emotional response, their personal experience of that emotion is unlikely to be the same. Expressive behaviour refers to how we externally express our emotions; an illustration of this could be a learner in a classroom blushing with embarrassment after making a mistake in front of others. In simple terms, we are talking about the body language that communicates our emotions. The physiological aspect of an emotional reaction refers to those physically measurable changes in the body, such as an increased heart rate, that occur when we are in a particular emotional state. As a teacher, it can be useful to become aware of and attentive to learners' facial expressions and body language in order to interpret their emotional responses to classroom life (Gregersen, 2003).

Activity 5.3

Positive and negative emotions in the classroom

Take a look at this list of emotions commonly encountered in language classrooms.

boredom joy excitement frustration anger amusement irritation anxiety

Where would you rank them on the continuum below from 'positive' (facilitative) to 'negative' (inhibitive)?



Are there any emotions that you found especially difficult to place on the continuum?
Are there any that you thought could be both positive and negative?

Learners' emotional responses can be better understood through an examination of some of the workings of the brain and how it processes emotions. In recent years, greatly assisted by technological advances, we have come to know a lot more about the functioning of the brain through an academic discipline known as **neuroscience**. This refers to the scientific investigation of the brain and the nervous system. We would like to offer a very brief discussion here of some of the key insights from this field and show how they may support teachers' understandings and observations of their learners.

John Schumann has long been a pioneer of research into the neuroscience of second language learning (1997, 1999). Some especially interesting findings in this area relate to how the brain processes affect in language learning situations and how language learners' brains evaluate external stimuli leading to emotional responses. These evaluations are known as **appraisals** and it is possible to identify five broad dimensions in which our brains evaluate events. (See Table 5.1.) An understanding of these appraisals can offer teachers a systematic framework that may help them both anticipate and understand learners' emotional reactions.

Novelty	the extent to which something is familiar or unfamiliar
Pleasantness	the extent to which something is appealing or otherwise
Goal conduciveness	the extent to which something is in harmony with one's current purpose or objectives
Coping potential	the extent to which one feels able to cope in a particular situation
Self-compatibility	the extent to which something is in harmony with social and cultural norms, or with one's current or ideal self-concept

Table 5.1 Framework for understanding stimulus appraisals and emotional responses (adapted from Schumann, 1999)

If we look at the first appraisal dimension, novelty, it is not simply the case that novel equals good while familiar equals bad: the emotional response stems from the individual's appraisal of something, whether one sees it as positive or negative. So, for example, a teacher may come into the class armed with a new activity that none of the learners have encountered before. Some learners may feel stimulated or refreshed by the change, while others may feel threatened or overwhelmed by it. When we add the other appraisal dimensions, then the picture becomes even more complex and interesting. Let us go back to the teacher's exciting new activity and look at it in the light of the framework above. The vast majority of the students in the class may be attracted by its novelty and they may also regard it as fun and appealing. However, the timing of the activity may be problematic if some of the students have a very important test the next day. If they see this 'fun' activity as incompatible with their immediate goals, it may lead to feelings of frustration or even anger. This framework can thus be a useful tool for understanding the various—and often unpredictable—emotional reactions we may encounter in the classroom.

Understanding emotions is especially important for teachers because the brain prioritizes emotional reactions. By this, we mean that when we experience a strong emotional reaction, it can often override other cognitive processes as the brain allocates its resources to this reaction. Emotions can both facilitate and inhibit learning. It is possible, for example, for a highly motivated student to be in a class immediately after having had a fierce quarrel with a classmate. In such a case, despite normally displaying high levels of motivation, the student may be continually distracted by feelings of anger and resentment, and thus be unable to focus on the activity at hand. This example shows us that it is impossible to describe motivation in a truly meaningful manner without acknowledging an emotional component and the context in which it arises. In fact, the same applies to most of the constructs we discuss in this book. If we think about beliefs, a language learner may subscribe to a particular belief and usually act in a manner consistent with that belief. Yet there may be occasions when certain emotional reactions override that belief, resulting in very different behaviour. Imagine a language learner who holds a strong explicit belief in the value of taking risks and not being afraid of making errors, but who makes a mistake while speaking and encounters an unexpectedly strong negative reaction from someone she esteems. This experience, and its attendant emotional resonance, may make this individual reluctant to take further risks in respect to making mistakes.

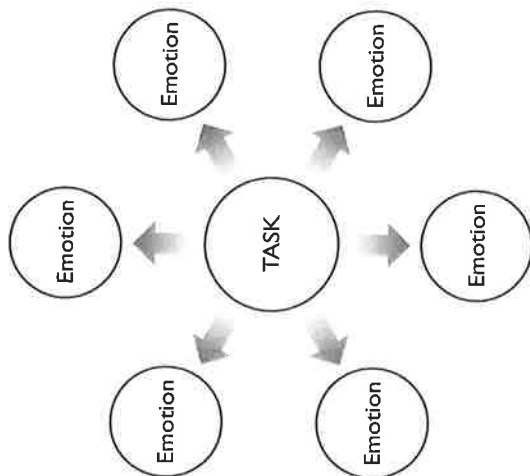
Just as emotions are complex in their formation, they tend to be complex in their effects. Imagine a young man learning Spanish after falling in love with a girl from Spain when visiting the country. He makes great efforts to learn the language, hoping to impress her and gain her approval. Unfortunately, one day they quarrel and she decides to end the relationship. What happens to his motivation to learn? We might expect him to lose interest in the language, but it is also conceivable that his anger and resentment may, in fact, fuel a desire to learn the language, to somehow prove her wrong. Although understanding our learners' emotional states can help us to anticipate some of the behavioural consequences, we also need to take care not to apply an overly simplistic, cause-and-effect relationship between emotion and behaviour. Emotion and affect are a significant part of all learning

processes, but there is an argument that they play an especially prominent role in language learning, a long-term endeavour consisting of numerous emotional highs and lows. In the next section, we focus our attention on how emotion and affect have been considered in connection to foreign language learning and teaching.

Activity 5.4

Exploring learners' feelings about using the language

- 1 Draw the following diagram on the board, with one big circle in the middle and six circles branching from it.



- 2 In the central circle, write down an activity the class did recently. Ask the students to reflect on what their feelings were when they did the activity, for example, 'anxious', 'bored', or 'excited'. In each of the adjoining circles, write one of the feelings the students reported.
- 3 Ask your students to copy the circle diagram four times. Ask them to think of four things they have done recently in the foreign language and write the name of the task or activity in the central circles. In the adjoining circles, they should write the feelings they had while doing the activity. Explain that they do not need to fill in all the outer circles but should try to think of at least two feelings they had while completing the task. Get them into groups and ask them to explain why they had those feelings. Ask for some feedback from the groups about the types of feelings people experienced during specific activities and why.
- 4 Collect in the circles, which students can give you anonymously if they like. What have you learned about your students? What have you learned about the activities you give them? What surprised you, if anything? Does this suggest you need to change anything about how you teach? How can you incorporate a consideration of students' feelings into your teaching?

Affect in language learning

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the field of second language education—just like most other areas of education—has been dominated by a concentration on the cognitive side to learning. One of the earliest and most influential acknowledgements of the central role of affect in language learning was Stephen Krashen's **affective filter** (Krashen, 1985). Krashen was interested in the distinctions between language learning in formal educational settings and natural acquisition of the language by being immersed in a setting which uses it. His basic position was that natural acquisition processes, especially those used by children learning their first language, were the ideal way to acquire a language. Thus, the aim was to replicate such processes in the classroom by maximizing the amount of comprehensible input—the input of language that can be understood—available to learners. This was known as the **input hypothesis**: the more comprehensible input learners were exposed to, the more effectively they could acquire language. He generated a model to describe these processes and one component of his model of relevance to this chapter was called the affective filter. According to Krashen, when the language learning/use situation contains a lot of negative emotions or feelings, the affective filter is raised. This means learners are blocked mentally through the negative emotions, which reduces the amount of comprehensible input reaching the learner. Conversely, with a high degree of positive emotions, the affective filter would be lowered and so learners would be more open to receiving and engaging with comprehensible input. Although this is naturally a somewhat simplistic model of language learning, it is also valuable in recognizing that emotions matter. **Essentially, the model provides us with a useful rule of thumb:** negative affect tends to impede language learning, while positive affect can facilitate it.

Activity 5.5

Exploring language learners' emotions

Read the following statements made by secondary school pupils about their experiences of studying foreign languages in England (Atherton, 2005). Which do you think express the most negative emotional reactions and which the most positive? Why do you think each learner responded in this way? How would you, as their teacher, try to help these pupils overcome their negative emotional responses?

- 1 'I think it's interesting. It's fun ... a little hard now and again.'
- 2 'It gives me a sense of self-esteem and sense of achievement. I really enjoy learning another language; it's different.'
- 3 'It's getting harder now, but it's enjoyable and satisfying when you feel that you have achieved something.'
- 4 'When I get it wrong I used to get embarrassed because everyone used to listen. So it feels like you get a bit gutted.'
- 5 'Sometimes it's quite fun to learn; it's different, and sometimes it's boring ... It kind of just drags on and on and I just don't get it.'
- 6 '[S]ometimes I think "Oh no, French is next", and I think "Oh, it's really difficult and I'm not going to be able to do it".'
- 7 'It's a completely new subject; you've never done anything like it, and it's really, really scary.'
- 8 'I was dreading it before I started but now I enjoy it.'

Anxiety

One specific affective factor which has received a lot of attention within SLA is anxiety. Anxiety is a negative emotion associated with worry and nervousness. Imagine a situation in which you have felt highly anxious. Would the people around you have known that you were anxious? How did you know that you were anxious? Often anxiety is accompanied by physical reactions such as a racing heartbeat, tension, sweating, and increased blood pressure. We may find ourselves pacing around, furrowing our brow, wringing our hands, and tensing our muscles and shoulders. While some people may tend towards being generally anxious individuals, there is a specific form of anxiety known as **foreign language anxiety**, which is related to using or learning a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Even though a person might not otherwise be especially prone to anxiety, it is possible that in the context of learning or using a foreign language, that individual suddenly becomes highly anxious.

So why does learning a language induce so much anxiety in some people? Using a foreign language is closely connected with self-expression and if we feel limited in our ability to communicate personally meaningful messages, then we may feel that we are not projecting what we consider to be an accurate reflection of ourselves. This limited and restricted form of self-expression and the ensuing frustration can be extremely face-threatening and can undermine our sense of self, confidence, and feelings of security. Imagine someone using a foreign language in a business environment. Despite being a confident, respected, and authoritative figure in his first language (L1), this individual may struggle to articulate ideas adequately in the L2 and therefore feel frustrated, uncertain, and anxious. At a more basic level, even the most apparently trivial aspects of language learning can cause anxiety, such as a learner feeling embarrassed about using an unfamiliar word or sound in front of classmates. The fear of being laughed at and judged negatively by others can cause a high degree of anxiety, especially for teenagers, who are often especially sensitive to threats to their identity, self-esteem, and social standing. Williams and colleagues, for example, found that secondary school boys were embarrassed to speak in a French accent in class for fear of sounding feminine and being laughed at. As one participant explained, 'French is the language of love and stuff' (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002, p. 520).

Obviously, as teachers, we do not want our learners to be in the position of feeling such negative emotions and discomfort, and we are intuitively aware of the detrimental effect this can have on their motivation and willingness to use the language. However, anxiety is also problematic in terms of language acquisition and achievement, as it can cause learners difficulties in language comprehension, processing, and production. In other words, it can prevent learners from understanding what other people are saying; it can limit their ability to store and retrieve language from memory; and it can inhibit their capacity to communicate their own ideas in both speech and writing. Even in the most stress-free environments, communicating in a foreign language can put an enormous strain on our mental resources as we work hard to decipher utterances, process

their meaning, and formulate our responses. The problem is that when learners feel anxious, they expend too much of their mental energy on worrying about their own performance or how they are being perceived by others, carefully evaluating their own output and monitoring the reactions of the people around them. The unfortunate consequence of this is that they are often left with insufficient mental capacity to carry out the communicative task at hand and their performance suffers accordingly. In such situations, even the most basic, formulaic utterances become potential minefields. Of course, a perceived poor performance can also produce even higher levels of anxiety, anxiety being both a cause and a result of poor performance and perceived failure. As a teacher, other learner behaviours that you may recognize as symptomatic of anxiety include suffering from mental blocks, freezing up during an activity, withdrawing from class participation, or offering limited, monosyllabic responses. In some cases, learners may also act the fool or deliberately disengage by using self-handicapping strategies (see Chapter 3) to protect their sense of self, hiding their anxiety behind disruptive behaviours.

A specific form of anxiety that has also been the focus of a large body of research is **test anxiety**, which is the form of anxiety closely associated with test-taking, such as before and/or during a test. There are few of us who relish taking a test or an exam, but for some learners, it is an exceptionally anxiety-inducing experience. This anxiety can lead them to perform badly on tests as they struggle to recall items of language, understand instructions, or produce text of any kind. It is perhaps unsurprising that those who anticipate a poor result and who may be weaker learners suffer most frequently from test anxiety. However, even learners who typically perform well on tests may put themselves under excessive pressure, especially if they tend towards **perfectionism**, and suffer from anxiety in test situations (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Meanwhile, for other learners, tests may bring out the best in them, and in the test situation they may perform at their peak, bringing off one of their best performances just at the critical moment.

All this points to a vital distinction in discussions of anxiety, namely, the distinction between **debilitative** and **facilitative anxiety**. All of our discussion so far has focused on debilitating anxiety—in other words, the negative anxiety that hinders and debilitates language learning and performance. However, researchers have found that a certain degree of anxiety can actually facilitate or even improve performance, and this is referred to as **facilitative anxiety**. Consider a learner who, for part of his final grade for the school year, has to do an oral presentation in class about his favourite singer. He may be anxious—especially given the importance of the presentation for his overall grade—but he works hard, prepares well, and is interested and motivated to talk about the topic. Before the talk, he may ‘psych’ himself up using positive **self-talk** and envisaging a successful run-through of his performance. It is, of course, likely that this learner will be anxious, but it is possible that this anxiety may work together with the other factors to help him give his best performance. What this example also shows is that anxiety depends on a range of other contributing factors, such as self-confidence, personality, beliefs, expectations about tasks, and motivation, as well as the stakes involved in a particular activity.

While different levels of anxiety may be facilitative for some and debilitating for others, it is nevertheless important for us, as teachers, to seek to reduce anxiety for all learners in order to ensure that there is as little impediment as possible to successful language learning and use. Many of us know from experience how important it is to foster a positive group atmosphere and a sense of trust, security, and community in the classroom. (See also Chapter 2.) Learners need to feel at ease, comfortable, safe, and unthreatened, and to be in a group setting in which peers support rather than judge and evaluate each another. One factor that can contribute greatly to the group atmosphere is how we deal with mistakes and the kind of feedback we offer to learners, as well as the manner and tone in which we give that feedback. We can work consciously at modelling a positive attitude of growth and learning in which mistakes are seen as a healthy, normal part of the process of language learning. We can also encourage learners to take risks and push themselves and their language use to the next level. (See also Chapter 4.)

Another problematic behaviour that can cause anxiety is when learners focus on their flaws and the inherent risks of failure, rather than on their strengths and their potential for growth and achievement (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014a). Therefore, we need to help learners focus on the positives and consider their progress and achievements. Ideally, we want to help them to develop positive **mindsets** and beliefs about learning, and to make facilitative **attributions**. (See Chapter 4.) It may be useful to discuss anxiety explicitly with learners, getting them to consider the roots of their anxiety and what they can do to overcome it. We can explore strategies for learning and using the language to help them to feel empowered to cope with language learning and thereby alleviate feelings of anxiety. We can also work with explicit strategies for regulating emotions, such as breathing and relaxation techniques or discussing anxieties with others and seeking support from them. Regarding goals, learners need to feel that these are realistic and potentially attainable. This means we need to work at scaffolding tasks to ensure the right degree of challenge and at helping learners develop their sense of agency and their ability to manage a task. (See Chapter 7.)

In respect to tests, we can work with learners beforehand to help them to feel prepared for the test and ensure that they know what to expect. Where possible, we can prepare a test at the right level of difficulty, with instructions that are clear and easy to understand and with explicit assessment criteria. We can also teach our learners about test-taking strategies, for example:

- getting sufficient sleep beforehand
- learning to manage and plan their time in the run-up to and during the test
- concentrating on their own exam and not what others in the room are doing
- using breathing exercises
- employing calming self-talk
- using techniques such as taking sips of water, sucking sweets, or wriggling fingers and toes to energize themselves and keep calm.

Finally, should we, as teachers, be present during a test, we can offer our learners a genuine smile. We know that our emotions can be contagious and so sharing a supportive smile with a learner at a critical moment can inspire some positive emotions to helpfully help counterbalance any negative feelings the learner may be experiencing.

Activity 5.6

Anxiety in language learning

In 2007, Han-Min Tsai interviewed college students in Taiwan to see if they felt anxious when writing in English and, if so, what caused this anxiety. His interviewees gave some powerful responses, showing the complexity of the causes of anxiety. Here are the words of four of his students, each with a very different story. For each student, decide what the causes of anxiety might be, and how you, as a teacher, could help.

- 1 'Some of my group members are really good at English writing. They always have good ideas and write quickly. This makes me feel anxious. My mind is always blank. The thought of my classmates being better than I keeps intensifying my anxiety level and mind blankness. It is a vicious cycle. I have told myself many times that I should give up this course.'
- 2 'I think it is related to my personality. I am a person easily getting worried. I think my childhood experience intensified such personality. In my primary school my sister and I were often blamed by my mother because of our poor performance in studies. My mother always thought other kids were better than her daughters. In her eyes my sister and I had few merits. So I have little confidence since then. Although I think my writing ability is worse than my present co-workers', I have a strong desire to make my English writing better. Such a desire for getting better has further intensified my anxiety level.'
- 3 'Another factor influencing my writing tests anxiety level is the importance of the subject concerned. English writing is very important not only for our department but also for my future, so I am greatly concerned about whether I can get good grades in it.'
- 4 'As an EFL student we do not write English every day, so when it comes to English writing we will naturally feel anxious in grammar and word usage ... My past experiences tell me that whenever I got my composition back there would be numbers of red marks from the teacher indicating that I made numerous errors in these aspects.'

You have probably come up with a number of suggestions for removing the barriers to these learners' writing. A clear practical implication of this line of research is that by developing activities which allow learners to write or speak about their feelings of anxiety, we may learn more about those feelings—while at the same time providing language practice—and be able to prepare future classes in ways which lower anxiety levels among those learners.

Positive emotions

So what about the role of positive emotions? Much of the research into emotions in educational psychology and in SLA has tended to focus on the negatives, typically looking at anxiety. As a result, there has been less work examining the positive emotions that can facilitate and promote learning. In recent years, there has been a move within educational and social psychology towards what is known as **positive psychology**. In the post-war period, psychology tended to focus on fixing psychological problems, which, of course, remains an important goal. However, advocates of positive psychology argue that psychology has an equally important role to play in understanding human strengths and in promoting positive psychological states and well-being. One of the key goals is to understand what we can do to help people 'flourish' (Seligman, 2011). In SLA, only very recently have scholars—such as Peter MacIntyre and Tammy Gregersen (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014a)—begun to consciously engage with the developments in positive psychology and consider their implications and relevance for language learning.

We have already considered the potentially face-threatening, anxiety-inducing situations that language learning can engender, but we must also remember that it can provide feelings of achievement, self-worth, enjoyment, and interest, as well as facilitating positive relationships and interactions with others. As with most things in life, learning a language is likely to involve a mixture of both types of emotions and neither should be denied. It is the appropriate balance between the two that is important and positive emotions can counter some of the effects of negative emotions, ensuring the positivity/negativity ratio is in proportion. However, positive emotions have other benefits beyond merely redressing the effects of negative emotions. In ways perhaps reminiscent of Krashen's affective filter—where negativity limited one's ability to take on board the language and positivity opened the mind to engage with new language—the psychologist Barbara Fredrickson (2009, 2013) has proposed a '**broaden-and-build**' theory of positive emotions. This suggests that positive emotions broaden people's attention and the way they think and act, in contrast to negative emotions, which narrow down people's thinking and wish to act. This means that individuals with more positive emotions are able to think in more diverse, creative ways and are more likely to actively explore and approach a topic or area, thereby tending to have minds more open to new experiences and learning. With this broadened range of thinking, individuals become able to build up a repertoire of skills, enabling them to become creative, more resilient to stress and setbacks, and also to build positive relationships with others. All of these, in turn, act as valuable resources to help people to enjoy more positive experiences in the future. A fundamental point here is that positive emotions not only constitute an indicator and response of a happy existence but can also lead to well-being and positivity. This implies what Fredrickson calls an upward spiral of positivity, in which having positive emotions can lead to further, increased positivity in the future.

One of the key issues that positive psychology has addressed is the concept of happiness. This is a surprisingly complex term as used in the literature and it involves multiple dimensions. Firstly, it refers to the more traditional understanding of the word in terms of positive emotions such as joy, love, and contentment—in other words, the ‘pleasant life’. This involves happiness gained from pleasure at maybe brief moments in time, a form of happiness that is potentially the most short-lived. But happiness can also refer to leading a purposeful and meaningful life. It has two dimensions. Firstly, there is the ‘engaged life’, when you use your strengths to engage deeply with challenges in a way that helps you grow and develop. This is exemplified by the concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow can occur when people become utterly absorbed in tasks that are not too easy but involve the perfect degree of challenge for their current abilities. The second dimension of happiness is understood as the ‘meaningful life’ (Seligman, Gillham, Reivich, Linkins, & Ernst, 2009). This is when people engage in activities and actions that have a greater meaning than personal gratification, serving a purpose beyond the individual and contributing to something larger than themselves, such as the environment, social organizations, or future generations. Clearly, teachers are potentially in a position to have such meaning in their lives, given their inherent role in supporting the learning and growth of future generations and of others.

For teaching, it becomes apparent that if we wish to have ‘happy’ learners, we must go beyond simplistic views equating happiness with momentary joy and fun. While these remain important dimensions to incorporate into our classroom lives—such as through the use of learning games, cooperative tasks, and humour—happiness also stems from being sufficiently challenged and able to develop one’s strengths. This means we need to support learners in becoming aware of their strengths and finding ways to employ them meaningfully in the pursuit of language learning. For example, learners whose strength is their sense of humour and playfulness can be encouraged to write a humorous story, act out a comedy version of a role play, or transform gap-fill sentences with humorous additions. It also suggests learners may reap benefits from approaches in which they use the foreign language through projects for social good. An example might be working on a project about a particular social cause and creating a magazine about the topic, which is then sold and the proceeds donated to a relevant charity.

The notion that happiness is associated with feeling challenged or able to realize one’s potential suggests that it stems from a purposeful life. This means that happiness is not gained from owning things, such as an expensive car or the latest smartphone—although they certainly bring momentary pleasure for many—but that real, lasting happiness comes from spending time wisely on positive experiences, positive social relationships, and in acts of kindness to others. The implication for the classroom is that we need to focus on language learning in terms of the positive experiences associated with it and the positive social relationships surrounding those experiences—inside and outside of class—as well as through a cooperative, positive community within a group. (See Chapter 2.)

One more dimension of the positive psychology movement that we wish to draw attention to is the concept of **optimism**. This links to our discussion of mindsets and attributions in Chapter 4. Optimism is concerned with positive expectations for the future and confidence about one’s goals and future outcomes. In contrast, pessimists are often full of doubt and uncertainty, tending to anticipate negative outcomes. As optimists expect positive future outcomes, they generally work harder, are less likely to give up in the face of challenges, and are more resilient to setbacks. The idea that we can change our position on the optimism/pessimism scale is reflected in the title of a book by one of the leading figures of the positive psychology movement, Martin Seligman (1990): *Learned Optimism*. Although we do not wish learners to be unrealistically optimistic, we would certainly want to promote a positive outlook and set of expectations while acknowledging that these must also remain realistic.

Let us think for a moment about two learners preparing to go on an exchange trip to a foreign country. One of the learners, Luis, is full of fear and anxiety, anticipating failure, embarrassment, and frustration at all the language challenges he is about to face. Ideally, he would like to avoid the trip, and he feels daunted by the prospect of using the language in any circumstances. On the other hand, Sami is full of excitement, curiosity, and interest, anticipating opportunities to have new experiences, meet new people, and try out his language skills. Naturally, Sami is also aware of the possible problems he might encounter in expressing himself, but, as an optimist, he tends to be aware that the consequences of making language mistakes in this setting are unimportant and that somehow he will get by. Ultimately, Sami might envisage being able to laugh about such instances, instead of dreading them and seeing them as major stumbling blocks. While Luis may hopefully change his feelings and attitudes during his stay, it is clear that Sami is in a better position at the outset to benefit from the experience.

So, as teachers, how can we work at helping our learners to be optimistic about their language learning while remaining realistic? Certainly, it can be beneficial to have some explicit discussion about learners’ anxieties, putting them into perspective. Seligman (2011) presents a three-stage model for thinking about feared negative events. He suggests thinking about the worst, best, and most likely scenarios and then considering how to manage the most likely scenario. Another way of promoting optimism is by having learners reflect on their explanatory styles—in other words, how they explain their experiences in language learning. Pessimists tend to blame negative events on permanent aspects of the self and any positive events on temporary factors not related to themselves. If we find learners using such explanatory styles, we can challenge their thinking, asking them what other ways this experience could be explained and how they can influence future events in a positive way. (See also Chapter 4.) We can also prompt learners to reflect on their positive experiences in using and learning the language, and to identify their personal strengths. We all have strengths and weaknesses (see the discussion later in this chapter on self-knowledge) and while it is important to be aware of our weaknesses and to work on improving them, it is vital also to reflect on our strengths, considering how we can build on them and use them wisely

for positive future outcomes. As teachers, we need to remember to comment on learners' strengths, rather than solely focusing on weaknesses, in order to model a culture of positivity.

Each learner is unique and what will help our students to feel positive and flourish in our classes is likely to be diverse and highly personal, varying across cultural and contextual settings. Yet, while we cannot easily prescribe what individual learners need to do to promote their well-being in class, we can seek to lead by example. If we work at developing our own positive attitudes, emotions, and behaviours in respect to language learning and use, then we can expect that our own optimism and happiness will promote similar positivity in our learners.

Activity 5.7

Raising awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses

Consider the various learners in the classes you teach. Think about some of the strengths and weaknesses you perceive in those learners. For example, one learner may tend to lower his voice or mumble unclearly when he is unsure of the language he is using. In contrast, another learner may be particularly good at using the language she already knows to compensate for unfamiliar items of vocabulary. Now consider the following points:

- 1 How aware are your learners of their own weaknesses in respect to language learning?
- 2 Can you specify which weaknesses they are aware of?
- 3 Now think about how aware they are of their strengths and identify which strengths they might be aware of.
- 4 Finally, think about how you can get your learners to play more to their strengths in your classes.

Emotional intelligence

We have stressed that one of the roles of teachers is to promote a supportive learning environment in which learners flourish and feel positive. An important skill for teachers is how to interpret the emotional reactions of the learners in their classrooms. One useful concept that is now beginning to attract attention within the field of language education is that of **emotional intelligence**. In this discussion, we will be guided by Goleman's (1998) definition of emotional intelligence as 'the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships' (p. 318). In this section, we will highlight some of the defining aspects of emotional intelligence, while considering what it has to offer language teachers.

The first element of the definition above is important, though often overlooked. This refers to what is known as **self-knowledge**. In order to understand and interact with others, we need to understand ourselves, realize our strengths and weaknesses, and feel comfortable within ourselves. This is something that is very difficult to achieve alone, so for teachers, it requires actively seeking candid feedback from both colleagues and learners. Self-knowledge requires

both listening to direct and indirect feedback from others and being honest with ourselves. Without adequate self-knowledge, none of the other aspects of emotional intelligence we discuss are possible. (See Chapters 3 and 7 on the self and self-regulation.)

The second feature of emotional intelligence is known as **self-management**. Self-management is essentially concerned with how we manage and control our emotions. A unique trait of humans is that they are able to control their emotional responses to various external stimuli. People have the ability to assess a particular situation, manage reactions, and control their behaviour in accord with their immediate goals. So, when we are anxious, we may decide that the best strategy is to conceal the anxiety and act confidently—such as during a job interview. Humans are, to some extent, always evaluating and managing their emotional reactions. Emotionally intelligent self-management occurs when individuals are able to manage their emotions in a way that takes into account the concerns of others.

Many language teachers have, at times, felt undervalued by their institution and frustrated or even angry with students. It is important that teachers consider how they process their emotions and manage them in the classroom. As teachers, we tend to exercise caution in our choice of words in front of students, but sometimes our body language can be revealing in ways we do not intend. It is possible to imagine a language teacher experiencing great frustration at a particular learner who continues to make the same error and does not appear to be learning from those mistakes. The teacher may go to great efforts to conceal the frustration through supportive words, but those feelings may be betrayed by an inopportune sigh or shake of the head. In such a case, all the teacher's words of support are likely to be undermined by the non-verbal communication. Correspondingly, teachers need to be able to interpret the various means of non-verbal communication used by learners (Gregersen, 2003), such as eye contact, facial expressions, and hand movements.

Related to this is the next element of emotional intelligence: **social awareness**. Social awareness is concerned with our ability to interpret what other people are experiencing and thinking—our capacity to 'read' people. To a certain extent, reading others involves entering their world, seeing the world through their eyes. Sometimes this requires teachers to look at themselves from the point of view of their learners. A particular challenge that many language teachers face is that they are often dealing with learners from different cultural backgrounds, who hold different core values. Language teachers need to be sensitive to these values and reflect upon how their own behaviour or values may be in conflict with the expectations of the learners in their classes. (See Chapter 2.)

The final component of emotional intelligence we need to consider is **relationship management**. For teachers, this is a huge consideration because our role in the classroom is pivotal: teachers can be the focal point, setting the general mood and influencing the emotional reactions of others. Successful learning is greatly dependent upon how we manage the various social relationships that occur in the

classroom. Key amongst these are the relationships between the teacher and the class as a whole, and the teacher's various relationships with the individuals that make up that class.

We have probably all, at some time in our lives, had negative experiences with a teacher, perhaps a teacher who seemed cold, intimidating, and uninterested in the lives of learners. The chances are that such teachers were lacking in emotional intelligence, unaware of how others perceived them, the effects of their presence, and the importance of social relationships in the teaching context. On the other hand, most of us have encountered teachers who appeared able to manage people and events efficiently without resorting to overt displays of authority and who showed empathy for and interest in their learners. This is usually the sign of a teacher with high levels of emotional intelligence, and the product of this emotional intelligence is that teachers and learners are able to work together in a pleasant and productive learning environment.

Summary

In this chapter, we have tried to show the importance of the emotional side of learning and teaching, and, indeed, that the emotional side at times overrides logical cognition. Our thoughts and actions are just as much a function of our emotions as they are of logical reasoning. We have shown that negative emotions—such as anxiety—can, at times, have a debilitating effect on language learning and use. In contrast, we have also discussed how positive emotions can enhance learning. Understanding and managing emotions in the classroom is a fundamental, though sometimes overlooked, responsibility for teachers. The basic guidelines for teachers have not changed since the time of Krashen's affective filter: negative emotion generally inhibits learning, while positive emotion facilitates it. The clear task for teachers is to create a classroom environment in which positive emotions may flourish. Of course, this is far more easily said than done. We have carefully avoided providing any form of prescriptive list of activities or strategies for encouraging positive emotions in the classroom because we remain acutely aware that everyone is different and that what works for one student or teacher in a particular context may not work for another.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Think of an activity you have done with a class recently. What emotional responses to this task did you encounter from learners? What was your own response? What cues did you use to evaluate learners' emotional reactions? How can you use this information in an emotionally intelligent way in the future?
- 2 In what ways would you consider yourself an emotionally intelligent teacher? In what areas are your strengths and what areas do you perhaps need to work on?
- 3 Have you had any teaching experiences in which you have experienced anxiety? Can you think of incidents when your anxiety was debilitating and when it was facilitative?

Suggestions for further reading

Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

In this book, the man who is widely considered to be the founder of the positive psychology movement offers a highly accessible overview of what positive psychology has to offer. Of particular interest to teachers may be the stories of positive psychology in action in educational contexts.

Arnold, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This edited volume may be regarded as essential reading for anybody with an interest in the area of affect in second or foreign language learning. Though written over 15 years ago, the wide range of scholarly papers in the book still feel highly relevant to a present-day audience.

Gabrys-Barker, D., & Bielska, J. (Eds.). (2013). *The affective dimension in second language acquisition*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

This book provides an up-to-date perspective on theory and research relating to affect and emotion in language learning. It may be of particular interest to teachers because not only does it discuss learner affect but considerable attention is also given to how teachers experience affect in their own professional contexts.