

Lowering the Affective Filter for English Language Learners Facilitates Successful Language Acquisition

By Veronica Vasquez | Categories: English Language Learners

What is the affective filter?

The “affective filter” is a theoretical construct in second language acquisition that attempts to explain the emotional variables associated with the success or failure of acquiring a second language. The affective filter is an invisible psychological filter that can either facilitate or hinder language production in a second language.

When the filter is high:

- Students experience stress
- Students feel anxious and self-conscious
- The lack of self-confidence might inhibit success in acquiring the second language
- Students are reluctant to participate and seek out opportunities to collaborate
- If modifications are not being made, the students will experience boredom and disinterest

When the filter is low:

- Students become risk-takers as they manipulate language
- Students feel safe in making mistakes without judgement and constant corrections
- Students feel empowered to interact with their peers and seek out models of language
- Students feel safe in answering questions and sharing their thinking with peers and the teacher

How do I lower the affective filter in my classroom within Collaborative Literacy?

- Try not to overemphasize error correction. In other words, instead of correcting the student; model the correct use of the language in a supportive stance.
- Utilize the ELL teacher notes laid out within the teacher’s manual to scaffold your instruction.
- Institute a policy in the classroom that prohibits students from making fun of peers or laughing at errors. This is directly supported by the social learning goals weaved throughout every lesson. This sets the expectations for how students work together as they collaborate.
- As students share and reflect at the end of each lesson, share your observations and facilitate the brainstorming of solutions to challenges
- Take advantage of the first units within Being a Writer and Making Meaning. This will build a strong literacy community and set up a safe place for learning.
- Equip strong language models with strategies to support their language learner peers.

- Consistently encourage risk-taking reminding students that your classroom is a safe place to learn.
- Set individual goals with students and celebrate growth!

When the affective filter is low, the learner is in an emotionally safe place. These feelings of safety lower imaginary walls, promoting more successful language acquisition. This type of environment becomes a welcoming invitation to keep learning!

This is part 2 of a blog series on supporting English Language Learners in Collaborative Literacy. You can read part 1 [here](#).