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CONTENTS

DOMANTĖ VAIŠVYLAITĖ, GABIJA BANKAUSKAITĖ Individuality and a Coherent Place: Representation of Identity within the Image of Home.....	6
ILIJA RUMENOV, LJUBEN TEVDOVSKI, ILE MASALKOVSKI, DONCHE TASEV The Victorious Youth Double Dilemma: From Heritage Networks to Origin and Back	26
CHRISTOPHER AMROBO ENEMUWE Democracy by Design? Unpacking EU and US Strategies and Tools in Nigeria’s Democratic Landscape	56
STEVEN SCHUIT, ADRIANE HERMAN The Emotional Values Auction: A New English as a Second Language Teaching Methodology, where Skills Meet Emotions.....	100
IRYNA KULYK, NATALIYA TSYPLIAK, TAMARA YANCHENKO Implementation of Approaches from Daugavpils University in the Educational Process of T. H. Shevchenko National University “Chernihiv Colehium” (Ukraine).....	116

THE EMOTIONAL VALUES AUCTION: A NEW ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY, WHERE SKILLS MEET EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Many teachers face common challenges, including limited resources, low student motivation, and classroom management issues. Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is a rewarding profession, but it also presents its own fair share of challenges (Azarov 2025). Effective responses include the professional development of ESL teachers (Schuit et al. 2016), making learning relevant, engaging and fun for students, and incorporating lesson materials that align with student needs. A recently developed technique, the Emotional Values Auction (EVA), may provide ESL teachers with a tool that students find not only interesting, but also emotionally relevant.

This research posed the question: if piloted and formally evaluated, would the EVA process, as indicated by students, demonstrate a significant level of learning and satisfaction? Would the EVA method prove to be an innovative interdisciplinary approach that blends social-emotional learning (SEL) with language skills development? The methodology aims to bridge art-based practices and ESL pedagogy, introducing a novel approach for engaging students both emotionally and linguistically. The piloting of the technique in two different ESL contexts (community members and university staff) provides real-world application evidence. The EVA process incorporates several characteristics of an actual auction: high energy, pressure, intensity, and excitement. It offers teachers in an ESL environment the opportunity to combine emotional subject matter content such as happiness, loss, and generosity with language skill development in the areas of writing, reading, listening, speaking and making presentations. It is a new pedagogic tool ESL teachers can use to make their curricula and classrooms more successful, and lessons more engaging for students.

Keywords: ESL, emotional values auction, social-emotional learning, pedagogic, milieu, comfort zone

INTRODUCTION

The idea of an Emotional Value Auction (EVA) originated as an art concept by Professor Adriane Herman (Herman). Through her lens of artistic observation, she noticed the difficulty people had “letting go” of objects they possessed, people in their lives who had passed, or relationships that had ended. Some people could not part with items in their lives, others resisted throwing things away or, in terms of terminated relationships, “moving on”. Giving things up – the concept of “loss” – is a challenge for many people (Spencer 2016; Ellison and Alexander 2022). In response, she designed an artistic process where people could offer their used items, or symbolic items of relationships that had ended, putting them on display in an art gallery, accompanied by a written statement describing what the item meant to them and why it was time to “let it go”. People attending the gallery who wanted a particular item could place a “bid” for that item. The “bids” – written descriptions of why a person wanted to receive the item – were collected and given to the owner who, after reading them, decided who would receive the item. An art show, in this context, becomes an auction where people can “release” their items to others.

AUCTION THEORY AND PROCESS

An EVA generally follows an actual auction process and, analogous to an auction, highly engages participants. Research suggests that auctions may be interpreted as economic games that basically have two aspects: 1) format or process and 2) information (Kumar and Feldman 1998). The auction process itself includes six basic activities that create an action-oriented trading environment:

1. an initial buyer and seller request;
2. setting up the auction event;
3. scheduling and advertising;
4. a bidding step;
5. the evaluation of bids;
6. the trade settlement, that is, the transfer of goods.

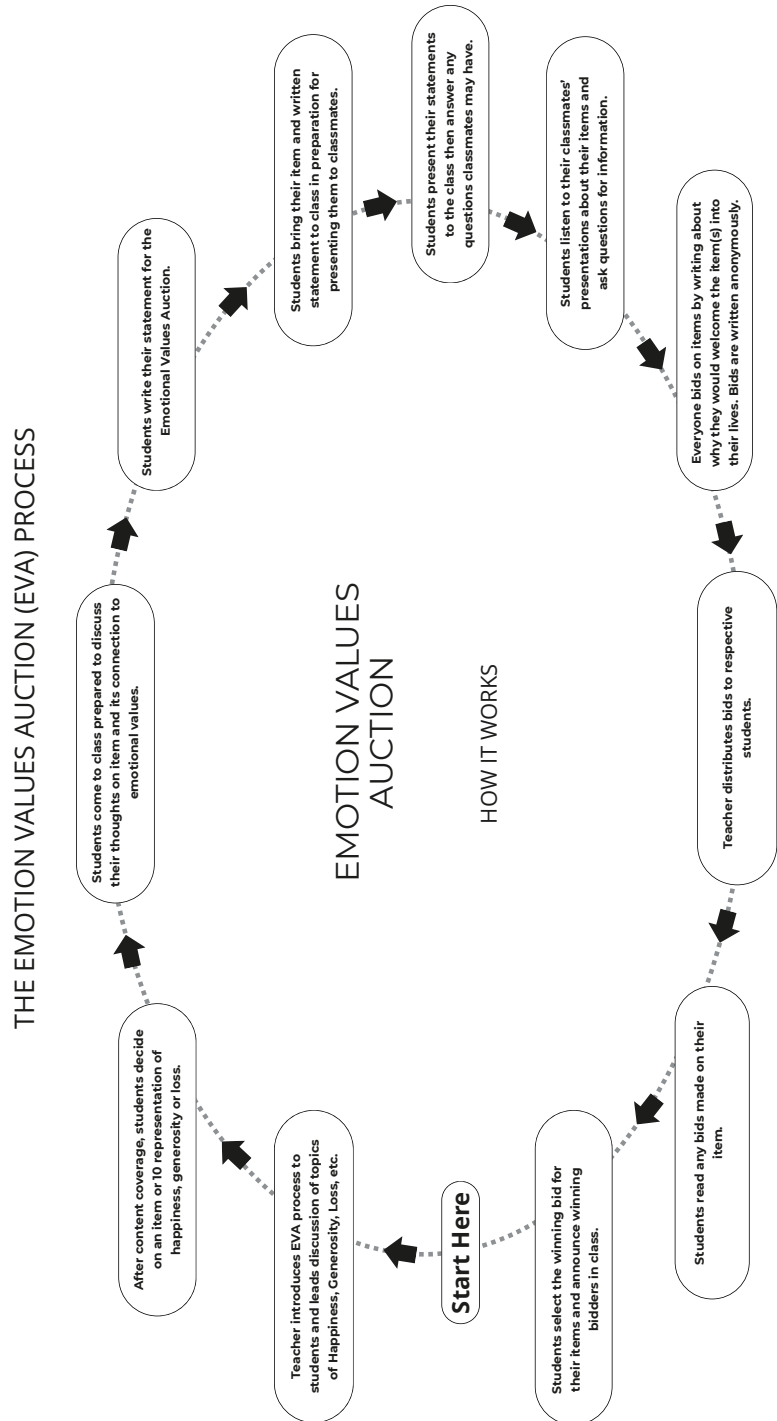
These common auction activities are both transferable to the ESL classroom and contributory to a learning environment that may

prove more interactive and stimulating than the “typical” ESL learning environment.

FROM ART CONTEXT TO EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGY

The authors, after analyzing the six basic components identified in both traditional auctions and their artistic counterpart, the EVA, theorized that the model had valuable implications for the ESL teaching environment. Where “loss” was the underlying consideration (emotion) in the EVA, the authors believed other emotions could be inserted in an educational application. For example, they worked with “happiness” as a subject in their ESL classrooms. The World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al. 2025) provided a plethora of information for ESL students that prompted rich discussions, comparisons of different happiness ratings amongst and between countries, and extensive opportunities for new vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, the emotion of “generosity” became a potential topic for the new educational version of the auction. They identified a relevant video that focused on “generosity” which, along with a set of guiding discussion questions, created a further platform that could be used in the new model. Using these resources, ESL students could now study happiness, generosity, and loss, and begin to consider their personal thoughts and views about those emotions. The EVA process, in this new ESL educational context, readies the students for the next step: the instructor guides students’ identification of what items might reflect “happiness”, “generosity”, or “loss” in their lives – in other words, guides the selection of the item they might consider donating or contributing to the auction. Figure 1 outlines the EVA process as implemented in the pilot program described and discussed here.

Figure 1.



The clockface numbers of 9, 12, 3 and 6 have been added to the model for discussion purposes. Referring to Figure 1, the teaching process commences at 9 o'clock and continues clockwise. That is, the model is presented to students and teachers introduce emotional topical content appropriate for their student audiences, such as happiness, loss, generosity, and other content choices. Students choose items that represent their interests, write about their connections to the selected objects, and then participate in the EVA. As with all learning activities, appropriate discussions and evaluations of the learning process should be undertaken by the teacher.

FROM EMOTIONAL VALUE TO EMOTIONAL VALUES AUCTION

Realizing that the process created thoughtful opportunities for ESL skill development in the areas of writing, listening, reading, speaking, and presenting, the authors designed the new educational model. The context becomes both cognitive and emotional. Students present their items to the class and expand on their experiences by writing about the items and presenting their stories to their classmates. Other students, listening to the presentations, can then "bid" on the items that they feel a connection to. Bids are made by writing about why they think they would be good stewards for receiving the items that are up for auction. The submitted bids, which are written anonymously, are reviewed by the student donating the item, and that person selects the final recipient. No money is exchanged. The "currency" is shared experience and learning. Students report positive levels of satisfaction with the process based on several factors.

The EVA might well have antecedents in social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL is an educational process that helps students develop and apply skills needed to understand their emotions, achieve positive goals, understand and show empathy, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011).

Throughout the EVA, these five broad interrelated social-emotional competencies can be observed coming into play. During the process, students build positive relations with their classmates while achieving goals, experiencing empathy for their classmates' experience, and making decisions about what personal

items they want to enter into the auction and also which items they want to bid on.

Many teachers know that high levels of student engagement, student self-initiative, and learning that is experiential rather than passive help foster learning in their classrooms. The EVA process provides a platform for activating these attributes for learning.

PILOTING THE EMOTIONAL VALUES AUCTION PROCESS IN LATVIAN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS

The EVA process was incorporated within the curriculum of two different classes during the Fall 2024 academic semester at Daugavpils University, in Daugavpils, Latvia. The emotional values incorporated as subject matter content were happiness, generosity, and loss. Students had no previous experience with the EVA methodology. Use of the model spanned six class sessions of 95-minutes each during classes held in November and December. All students in both pilot classes participated willingly.

Speaking, writing, reading, presenting, and listening activities were included as part of the methodology. For example, students were asked to write about the items they were choosing to place into the auction. Their assignment was to identify an item, describe the role it had played in their lives, and discuss which emotion – happiness, generosity or loss – was most relevant in making their donation.

Presentation skills were required, as students had to stand in front of the class to present and discuss their items with the other students. Speaking and listening skills were used throughout the process, as students discussed their ideas and perspectives about the emotional subject matter of happiness, generosity and loss. For example, students were asked to discuss their opinion about the validity of the criteria used in the *World Happiness Report* to assess a country's happiness rating. They were also asked to assess and discuss their own happiness ratings using a scale of 1-10. The content, in conjunction with the EVA process, provided a plethora of opportunities for ESL skill development.

The completion of the EVA process was marked by the students receiving the items they had "bid" on. In the two classes in which the process was piloted, most students received an item after placing their written bids. Students were eligible to bid on more than one item, but they had to write a bid for each item they

were interested in acquiring. Examples of items placed into the auction were quite varied. They reflected the values of the respective students, as well as which emotional content area was of particular interest to them. For example, one student entered his favorite English novel into the auction, reflecting the loss of his youth. Another student placed several handmade Christmas tree ornaments into the auction (happiness). A third donated two holiday cards she had made (generosity). Yet another student placed a wooden Finnish hiking cup into the auction, demonstrating the emotional value of generosity. Items placed into auction did not have to be physical objects. For example, they could be services such as English lessons or receiving a massage.

RESEARCH RESULTS

At the conclusion of the six-class process, a brief survey was administered to the students who had completed the activity. The EVA was undertaken in two different classes: the “community class” of adult residents of the general Daugavpils area and the “Daugavpils University class” comprised of faculty and staff from the university. A four-point scale was employed to ask the students to compare the Emotional Values Auction activity to the other English classes they had experienced during the semester. Students were asked to make comparative evaluations in terms of the chance to practice English, learning new vocabulary, taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zones, and having fun. Mean scores are shown for each class, as well as a mean score totals for both classes. In terms of participating in the Emotional Values Auction, each class rated “having fun” highest (3.65). “Practicing English” came second (3.35), with “taking risks and stepping out of your comfort zone” ranked a very close third (3.32), followed by “learning new vocabulary” (3.09). For the community class, taking risks (3.62) and practicing English (3.25) were rated second highest, while learning new vocabulary (2.75) was rated lowest, relatively speaking.

For the Daugavpils University faculty and staff class, practicing English and learning new vocabulary were rated second highest (tied at 3.44), while taking risks and stepping out of your comfort zone (3.01) was evaluated lowest on a relative basis.

Table 1. Emotional Values Auction Student Survey
Scale 1–4: 1=Much worse than, 2=Worse than, 3=Better than,
4=Much better than

Question	Community English Class (n=8)	Daugavpils University Class-Faculty and Staff (n=9)	Mean of Both Classes (n=17)
1. In terms of <u>practicing your English</u> , how did the EVA Activity compare to our other classes this semester?	3.25	3.44	3.35
2. In terms of <u>learning new vocabulary</u> , how did the EVA Activity compare to our other classes this semester?	2.75	3.44	3.09
3. In terms of <u>taking risks and stepping out of your comfort zone</u> , how did the EVA Activity compare to our other classes this semester?	3.62	3.01	3.32
4. In terms of <u>having fun</u> , how did the EVA Activity compare to our other classes this semester?	3.75	3.55	3.65
Class overall mean scores	3.34	3.36	3.35

DISCUSSION

These results, in conjunction with additional comments from the students who took part in the EVA learning process, demonstrate the outcomes suggested by SEL advocates: better understanding of emotions, demonstrating empathy, building positive relations, making responsible decisions, and developing healthy relations with others. The written (anonymous) comments received from students on the post-activity survey are included here in their entirety:

I liked the several steps in the process.

It's the first time in English when I needed to explain my English. It is simple, interesting, and brought me closer to other people. It's a story about us.

This was interesting. I had no experience with this.

In this auction we had to remember good and bad things from our past. I felt good and sad. We need to think about what we can bring to the auction. It was very hard for me. Choosing generosity was easier for me, rather than loss. At the same time, we had fun. We got something and gave something.

There were some additional benefits, I learned the interests and skills of my classmates and there was the element of surprise. The items were very different.

This was very unusual. I'd like to repeat it somewhere else.

It was something new for me. I never before participated in something like this in English or anywhere. I thought it would be hard, but in reality, it wasn't hard. It was interesting.

Speaking about generosity was easier to speak about than loss. I got some new vocabulary. We now know new facts about each other.

It would be interesting to use other emotions and adapt this for other audiences.

It forced my imagination to work, choosing items to represent my emotions.

Overall, these statistical results, in tandem with written comments from the students in the two pilot classes, suggest there was a significant level of learning and satisfaction. Students found the marriage of the emotional content with the highly engaging and interactive auction format to be an interesting and beneficial process to develop their skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Additionally, they indicated that this learning process brought them closer to the other students.

ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING IN LATVIA AND BEYOND

Though not part of the research presented here, the EVA process was also introduced to local European English teachers at four locations during the Spring 2025 semester. The in-service workshops provided an introduction to the EVA methodology. The workshops were offered to English language educators in Poland (Wroclaw) and Estonia (Tartu), as well as those from Riga and Daugavpils in Latvia. The interactive workshops were approximately 70 minutes in duration and part of teacher training conferences sponsored by local universities or city municipal English teacher training programs. Approximately 200 educators participated in the four workshops. Teaching Guides for the EVA methodology were offered to interested participants if they contacted the lead author following the workshop and made a request.

In addition to the positive feedback received during the teacher training workshops, post-workshop requests for the Teaching Guides suggested that the EVA methodology struck chords of both interest and enthusiasm with participants. An English teacher from Estonia commented, "I found the method both creative and deeply meaningful and it offered a refreshing perspective on how emotional values can be integrated into language teaching. Your approach to teaching emotions, particularly loss, as a pathway to growth and positive transformation, really stood out to me."

An English teacher from Poland said, "It was a pure pleasure to participate in your workshop. I think it is very engaging for

students and, as a lesson, goes way beyond language learning itself.”

A Turkish student studying at Daugavpils University in Latvia and training to be an English teacher, commented:

The Emotional Values Auction was unlike any traditional language activity I had encountered before. I found this approach fascinating as it blends reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in a highly personal and emotional way. It encourages students to be vulnerable, emotional and expressive, qualities that are often underutilized in language classrooms.

These comments are representative of the reactions received from participants in our English teacher training workshops. This non-solicited feedback may suggest broader applicability for the EVA methodology extending both beyond Latvia and the adult audiences studied in a university setting.

CONCLUSION

The EVA was adapted from an artistic venture, an idea originally conceived by artist, Adriane Herman. It was reinterpreted by the authors and developed as a new ESL teaching method. The purpose of the EVA, in this pedagogic context, is to combine emotionally based content such as happiness, generosity, loss, pride, and other emotional content subjects identified by teachers with the cognitive ESL skill development areas of writing, reading, presenting, speaking, and listening.

The EVA process was piloted in Daugavpils, Latvia, at Daugavpils University, a public university in eastern Europe. Opportunities for additional research into the EVA methodology are warranted. For example, how appropriate is the methodology for younger students, including those at the middle school and high school levels? The research presented here has focused on adult students participating in English language classes at the university level.

Additionally, what emotional content areas beyond those considered here might provide enhancements to the EVA process? For example, during one workshop, a participating English teacher suggested the relevance of “gratitude” as a potential emotional content topic. It is reasonable to assume there are many more

content areas that teachers could include in their implementation of the EVA process. Decision criteria might include the age and maturity of the students, as well as the relevance of specific emotional content topics to the curriculum.

Additionally, as the EVA model was piloted and evaluated in Latvian ESL classrooms, would these outcomes be consistent with those in ESL classrooms in other countries and cultures? Would the EVA process be appropriate in its current configuration for students in Africa, Asia, or other regions?

Class size is another consideration. Would the EVA method be adaptable in larger classrooms? Finally, given the broader relevance of remote teaching, can the EVA process be adapted to online teaching applications?

These questions suggest both the importance of, and opportunities for, further research on the EVA process. The EVA methodology, a new tool for teachers and their students, provides fresh opportunities to effectively combine both emotions and skills in ESL classrooms.

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