

Title: Speaking from Silence: Breath-Focused Practices for the Abatement of Anxiety in the Language Classroom

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Abstract:

Increasingly pervasive in all spheres of 21st century society, anxiety is arguably the most difficult hurdle to overcome in the language classroom. Be it the symptom of a clinical condition, the product of trauma or oppression, or simply the result of moderate xenoglossophobia, it is a common denominator for a significant portion of contemporary populations at American institutions of higher education. As such, accounting for its presence in the classroom ought to be at the forefront of every inclusive-minded language educator's consideration. While in some ways this is nothing new, and teachers have always been trying to minimize anxiety through a variety of techniques from games and videos to role-play and background music, the frequency, intensity, and variety of current anxiety trends warrant a renewed exploration of existing research on techniques to combat anxiety that would be suitable for implementation in language classrooms. A promising area of research in this arena comes from present investigations into the educational use of brief exercises inspired by mindfulness and meditation practices. There is a great deal of ongoing research into the numerous benefits simple contemplative exercises can provide in educational contexts, and much of the results suggest a number of advantages that could be tremendously consequential for language education in particular. Following a short discussion of relevant research, this paper will argue specifically for the use of breath-focused warm-up exercises that take up very little precious class time and require little to no training, while still incorporating much of the research into contemplative practices without any of the connotative weight of terms like mindfulness and meditation. Through these simple breathing exercises, a language teacher need not be an expert in psychology nor a meditation guru to benefit from the anxiety reduction potential demonstrated in existing research on contemplative practices.