

Learner Variables Activity

Overview:

Learner Audience & Level:

UT Russian Class

Intermediate

Activity Type: A project that help students explore their foreign language anxiety

Activity Goals: Make student aware the foreign language anxiety is very common and bring some suggestions (from their peers, as well as from instructor) on how to cope with it.

Activity: Anxiety-Awareness Activity

PRE-Activities

1. In class, students watch videos and interviews of people talking about language anxiety (can be found on You Tube).

2. For homework, students find an online source of native and non-native famous figures (politicians, celebrities, sports stars, etc.) making mistakes in their L2 (or L1) .

Examples might be found on You Tube, blogs or chat room. Students posts their online examples to the class website and “present” them in class the next day, initiating class discussion about the acceptability of mistakes.

3. Short writing task in L1:

Two prompts:

1. Describe a moment or moments when you are most nervous when using your foreign language?
2. What tasks are most difficult and anxiety-ridden for you to do in your foreign language?

The instructor encourages students to be honest and to write as though no one will read it.

4. Students submit and post their stories and most anxiety-ridden situations onto the class website, anonymously. All other students in class must comment on other student’s stories online (everyone must make at least 2 comments). Comments should do two things. They should:

- support or reflect over their peers stories
- provide situational skit ideas for the student's improvisational performance that forces them to face their specific anxiety.

DURING-Activities

5. After students have identified their anxiety and brainstormed ideas for situations, students design their own short experience that they will perform as an improvisational skit in a video recording. In their production, they have to try to imitate the environment that they documented in their “scariest foreign language moment”.

Students are encouraged to be creative – for those who are afraid of speaking, it may be easy to design a short spontaneous interview, but for students who are afraid of test-taking for example, they may need guidance or help designing an improvisational skit. Either way, the students must find a way to represent their anxiety on video. If students have anxiety while listening, they can try to find natives speaker and engage in a conversation with them. If they cannot find a native speaker to help them perform their skit, the teacher can help locate other native speakers to visit the classroom.

Note: Students who do not have report any anxiety can make a short video describing why they think they are not anxious, or they can interview or report on someone they know that has language learning anxiety.

7. Students then must watch their own video and write a reflective statement on what they experienced. The instructor provides feedback and suggestions about how to reduce a student's anxiety.

POST-Activities

8. Students who are comfortable with showing their video to the class or making it public will put their videos onto You Tube and will post them and their reflective statements to the website for the instructor and class to read and watch. Students can be evaluated on their creativity, not the quality of their second language performance.

Reflective Statement on Anxiety

The main goal of this activity is to make students aware that everyone has anxieties, to bring them out into the open, and to help them see that they are not alone. By recognizing their own anxieties, they can potentially overcome them or, at the very least, feel better about themselves knowing that others have anxiety too. Another goal of this activity is to force students to do what Horwitz recommended: to

desensitize students by making them do what they are afraid of again and again, and, hopefully, to see themselves becoming successful in dealing with it.

At the same time, the second PRE-Activity serves the goal to help students see that it is ok to make mistakes, both for themselves and to see others making mistakes too. One of the main reasons for anxiety amongst foreign language students comes from trying to be perfect or thinking that others judge them by the number of errors they make. Students need to permit themselves to make mistakes.

Designing an improvisational skit is a very creative task, and it's hard to tell exactly what a skit should look like. By giving students the freedom to come up with their own ideas and suggest ideas to their peers, we want to make them explore their anxiety and find reasons why they have it. Even if this activity does not help the student (it may perhaps make them more nervous or anxious), it will allow them to witness other people's anxieties and to try to help others overcome those anxieties.

This activity is also designed to help the instructor find out what kinds of anxiety his students have. By knowing what assignments make each of the students anxious, the instructor can try to adjust his teaching. For example, students having anxiety at tests, can take more time to finish it. Those students, who are afraid of speaking in front of a whole class can be given a chance to speak in front of 2 or 3 of his classmates instead.