



# *Emotions and foreign language learning in online classrooms: affective strategy applications*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article sets out to investigate the emotional aspects of foreign language learning in virtual classrooms. The pandemic has brought about a sudden transition to online and/or hybrid teaching in Italian universities, giving teachers and students new academic challenges while causing worry, stress, and anxiety. Since emotions are of fundamental importance to students' learning as well as their wellbeing, this study explores possible interventions in the online classroom that target the emotional realities of foreign language learning and are aimed at building a safe and collaborative learning environment. Such interventions, based on affective strategies (Oxford, "Anxious Language Learners"), promote mindful learning (Langer, "Mindful Learning") and autobiographical writing in the form of online journals in which learners can share their emotions using the foreign language.

**KEY WORDS:** foreign language learning; emotions; affective strategies; mindfulness; learner journals



for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so  
(Shakespeare, *Ham.* 2.2)

## INTRODUCTION

Since the year 2020, the pandemic has brought about a sudden transition to online and/or hybrid teaching in Italian universities, giving teachers and students new academic challenges, forcing them to adapt to unexpected forms of teaching and learning. Together with the difficulties and complications generated by this sudden change, the new situation has also caused worry, stress, and anxiety in the teacher and learner. Indeed, one of the consequences of the pandemic has been a poorer quality of life for students and university staff and a greater incidence of psychological disorders such as panic attacks, depression, and burnout; a problem that is not confined to the Italian academy. Teachers and students in many countries were forced to adjust to a new world and, in addition to this, they had to struggle with the pandemic effects on personal freedom, social relations, and mental health. Issues that have always been important in higher education have become more relevant than ever in this new context, including how to ensure teacher/learner wellbeing, how to establish a learning community and ensure collaboration, exchange, and interaction among students as well as between teacher and students, and how to foster learner autonomy (Ludwig *et al.*).

This article aims at shedding light on foreign language learning in online classrooms, focusing in particular on the emotional aspects involved in this learning environment. Since emotions are of fundamental importance to students' learning as well as their wellbeing, it illustrates possible interventions that take into account the emotional dimension of language learning in online or hybrid contexts. Such interventions are aimed at building a safe and collaborative learning environment and draw on affective strategies (Oxford, "Anxious Language Learners"), mainly through the promotion of mindful learning (Langer, "Mindful Learning") and the implementation of online learner journals, a form of autobiographical writing in which students can share and manage their emotions through self-disclosure in the foreign language (Beseghi, "Importance"; Karlsson, "Write"). After an initial section on the essential role of emotions in (language) learning, the article presents and discusses the interventions based on affective strategies that were introduced in an English Language and Translation course at the University of Parma.



## EMOTIONS AND (LANGUAGE) LEARNING

Today, most people would acknowledge that there can be no learning without emotion. However, it is only in recent decades that emotions have become a central theme in educational research, as well as in educational linguistics (Balboni; Arnold; Schumann). In the past, with a few exceptions, research had focused on the cognitive aspects of learning, neglecting the emotional dimension, and ignoring the considerable progress made in this area in other fields, such as psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and the humanities. Since the 1990s, educational research has instead experienced the so-called “affective turn” (Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia ix), with several edited volumes and special issues published in the 2000s that investigate different aspects of students’ and teachers’ emotions (e.g., Efklides and Volet; Linnenbrink; Linnenbrink-Garcia and Pekrun; Schutz and Lanehart; Schutz and Pekrun; Schutz and Zembylas). Scholars began to increasingly recognise that emotions are ubiquitous in the classroom: learners and teachers experience them every day, and these emotions are multiple, intense, and relevant. As a result, they are no longer seen as secondary manifestations, but they are considered a fundamental aspect of learning and teaching, as well as of the psychological health of learners and educators. In the same way that reason and emotion are not two opposite poles (Damasio), emotion and learning, both complex processes taking place in our minds, are also related phenomena. In other words, the emotional side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side (LeDoux; Zull *Art*; “Art”).

The experience of an emotion is “multidimensional” (Frenzel and Stephens 5) and is usually linked to situations, events or contexts that are significant for the individual. The learning process can arouse different emotional states in learners, such as joy, pride, satisfaction, but also frustration, anxiety, fear, or indifference (Pekrun *et al.*). Positive emotions, such as pleasure, enjoyment, and enthusiasm, can foster learning and, in turn, learning can generate positive emotions. On the other hand, negative emotions, such as anxiety, anger or frustration, can be the cause or effect of learning difficulties and can interfere negatively, though not always, with learning, creating real obstacles that sometimes lead to negative outcomes in academic results (MacIntyre). However, the distinction between positive and negative emotions should not be seen as an absolute dichotomy: for instance, some emotions may be seen as positive from one perspective but negative from another (Solomon and Stone). Moreover, some emotions (e.g., surprise) are neither positive nor negative (Shuman and Scherer 27). Above all, it is necessary to remember that each learner has a different story and experiences emotions in a very personal way.

### *Motivation and (language) learning*

Emotions and learning are also closely related to motivation: it is commonly known that when learning a language, motivation plays a key role. The word ‘motivation’ (from the Latin verb *movere*) is an abstract concept that we use to explain why people think and



behave in a certain way: it “refers to the processes underlying the initiation, control, maintenance, and evaluation of goal-oriented behaviours” (Dresel and Hall 58). One of the most influential definitions is given by Deci and Ryan in their seminal work on *self-determination theory*, in which they distinguish between two main types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action:

- intrinsic motivation, which implies behaviour as an end in itself (i.e., doing something because it is intrinsically interesting or pleasurable: for example, when a learner carries out a reading or writing activity solely for the pleasure of doing it);
- extrinsic motivation, which concerns behaviour performed as a means to an end (i.e., doing something because it leads to a specific result: for example, when a learner carries out an activity as a means to get a good grade).

The close relationship between intrinsic motivation and positive emotions is evident. In self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation, which in the context of learning is the intrinsic tendency to seek novelty and challenge, to explore and to learn, can be strengthened in the presence of three conditions, which satisfy the three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci and Ryan). Learners need to feel competent, they need to feel they are in a relationship with and cared for by others (teachers and peers) and to be autonomous (i.e., they need to know that they can make choices and determine their own actions).

### *Emotions, self-efficacy, and attributions*

Other theoretical frameworks that are useful when considering the relation between learning, emotions, and motivation are *self-efficacy theory* and *attribution theory*. In self-efficacy theory (Bandura), people’s beliefs become a primary explanation for motivation. If learners believe that they can achieve the desired effects through their actions, then they will be more motivated to persist in the face of difficulties. In self-efficacy theory, thoughts, expectations about one’s own abilities, and emotions have an influence on behaviour, performance, and learning. In this view, it is not so much past achievements that influence future behaviour, but the subjective interpretations and causal attributions of successes or failures that influence one’s self-efficacy beliefs. This is where *attribution theory* comes in, since it assumes that past actions, and in particular the way we interpret past successes and failures, determine current and future behaviour (Weiner). The process by which learners perceive themselves and evaluate themselves is thus also due to causal attributions. People often try to explain an event, such as a success or failure, by linking it to a cause, which may be internal or external to the person, stable or unstable over time, controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner). For example, luck and misfortune are external, uncontrollable, and unstable causes. In contrast, commitment is an internal, controllable cause. If a student gets a bad grade, he or she may attribute this failure to his or her own lack of ability (internal, stable, and uncontrollable cause) and therefore may struggle again in the future because he or she believes that the cause of the failure is something he or she cannot change. If, on the



other hand, the student attributes the reason for failure to his or her own lack of effort (internal but controllable cause), then he or she will be more motivated to try harder and do better the following time. Attributions are causes that are subjectively perceived by learners and are therefore not necessarily realistic (Dresel and Hall 58). Moreover, attributions lead to the emergence of emotions, both positive and negative. If learners attribute their failure to uncontrollable factors (whether internal or external), they will be inclined to think that negative results will occur again, triggering anxiety, pessimism, or distrust in their own abilities. When learning online, students may attribute the cause of their difficulties or failure to this modality, that is, an external cause which they cannot change, and which makes them feel stuck and anxious.

#### FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

In the field of language learning, language anxiety is certainly the most widespread emotion as well as the most studied one especially in reference to foreign languages (“foreign language anxiety”, Horwitz *et al.*)—being an experience as frequent as it is intense (MacIntyre). Foreign language anxiety is considered a negative emotional state and described as “the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient”; it is also characterised by “derogatory self-related cognitions, feeling of apprehension, and physiological responses such as increased heart rate” (Gardner and MacIntyre 5). According to Horwitz (31), foreign language anxiety is best conceptualised as debilitating, rather than facilitating, which means that it can interfere with language learning, especially when learners become frustrated to the point of feeling incompetent (Beseghi, “Emotions” 238). Furthermore, it is a complex experience, which can be considered “both a consequence and a cause of language performance” (MacIntyre 27), with “both internal and social dimensions” (MacIntyre 28).

Learners who suffer from foreign language anxiety tend to lack hope and optimism, thus experiencing negative emotions and feeling hesitant or reluctant when dealing with difficult situations (Oxford, “Anxious Language Learners”). Learner agency, which can be defined as the learners’ ability to act, is therefore closely related to foreign language anxiety. In fact, learners suffering from this type of anxiety often feel powerless, they do not have the power to act, since fear and worry can be paralysing. Agency increases when learners become aware that learning involves their own action and initiative, that they can be the authors of the “terms and conditions” of their learning and that they have the power to control their thoughts and actions (Oxford, “Anxious Language Learners” 185).

Another factor related to foreign language anxiety is the learning environment. In order to create a learning environment that minimises anxiety, where learners feel safe, teachers should aim at strengthening learners’ self-esteem—as this is a fundamental requirement of language learning—promoting learner agency, autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and optimism (Beseghi, “Emotions”). The learners’ emotional sphere and the way they channel positive emotions and manage negative ones therefore play a



crucial role in foreign language learning. The ability to recognise one's own emotions and those of others, self-awareness and empathy can facilitate self-regulation (the ability to manage one's own emotions) and foster motivation (the ability to generate feelings of enthusiasm, confidence, and perseverance, especially during difficulties or after failure).

Since the emotional impact of the pandemic has been significant on teachers and students alike, it is now more important than ever to consider the role of emotions in teaching and learning, and to think of strategies and interventions that can foster students' self-regulation, agency, motivation, autonomy, and collaboration.

## CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS BASED ON AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

This section presents two possible interventions aimed at building a safe and collaborative learning environment in the online classroom, taking into account the emotional dimension of foreign language learning. Such interventions were implemented in an English Language and Translation course taught at the University of Parma during the academic year 2020-21. The course was delivered online due to coronavirus restrictions and the number of students attending was around 100.

The interventions, based on affective strategies (Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies; Teaching; "Anxious Language Learners"*), consisted in the implementation of mindfulness practices in the online classroom and the use of online journals in which learners were able to talk about themselves in the target language (i.e., English).

Affective strategies are one of the six categories of language learning strategies described by Rebecca Oxford in her influential taxonomy (*Language Learning Strategies; Teaching*) which develops O'Malley *et al.*'s tripartite classification into cognitive, meta-cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. Generally speaking, language learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies* 8). Oxford identifies two major macro-categories: direct and indirect strategies. The second category includes metacognitive (to plan and evaluate learning), affective (to manage emotions and attitudes), and social strategies (to learn and work with others).

Affective strategies are thus concerned with emotional and motivational factors of foreign language learning. Their role is to help learners develop self-confidence and to deal with negative emotions, such as anxiety or fear, which might impede or hinder language learning. According to Oxford (*Language Learning Strategies* 21), affective strategies are aimed at:

- "lowering your anxiety": using relaxation, deep breathing or meditation (both inside and outside the classroom), music, and humour (jokes, role-plays, games, etc.);
- "encouraging yourself": making positive statements and rewarding oneself, taking risks wisely despite the fear of failure;



- “taking your emotional temperature”: listening to one’s own body, writing a diary, sharing emotions with others (e.g., peers and teachers).

Although learning strategies are consciously or unconsciously applied by learners, teachers can guide their students and encourage them to adopt certain strategies. By using affective strategies, learners can deal optimistically with difficulties: for example, they can learn to accept problems and complexities and to avoid viewing negative situations as permanent or uncontrollable. If learners reframe their explanations for personal failures (attributions), focusing more on the success factors that they are able to control, they can achieve higher levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem, while increasing tolerance of negative emotions and challenging situations. Following Horwitz, research in educational linguistics “should be guided by applied questions directed at understanding and helping anxious learners rather than more psychological questions about the nature of anxieties” (Horwitz 32).

Drawing on positive psychology, Oxford (“Anxious Language Learners” 190) claimed that a “reduction of anxiety can occur when learners are taught to control intrusive thoughts and images and when they share their feelings through constructive self-disclosure in a safe environment”. Indeed, the interventions presented in this article are aimed at reducing learners’ anxiety, especially—but not exclusively—when learning takes place online. In order to help students control negative and intrusive thoughts and deal with their emotions, mindfulness can be promoted in and outside the (virtual) classroom. Furthermore, students can be encouraged to write learner diaries and journals, where they can tell empowering stories about themselves as learners but also as individuals (autobiographical writing). Both interventions are aimed at building a safe learning environment where learners feel free to express themselves without the fear of making mistakes or being judged.

## MINDFUL LEARNING

It is often the case that students are overwhelmed by anxiety, stress, and worries. They project themselves into the past and future and thus do not fully experience learning in the present moment. This is even more frequent in a historical period that has caused widespread anxiety, fear, and concern in people’s lives.

It is nowadays widely acknowledged that mindfulness, the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn), promotes well-being (Brown and Ryan). Indeed, in recent years increased levels of stress and anxiety in educational contexts have led to a growing interest in mindfulness and mindful learning, with several studies investigating its benefits for students’ wellbeing and academic performance. Research has shown that mindfulness can improve learning, reduce stress, and enhance attention and memory, self-regulation, independence, empathy, and collaboration (Hawkins; Langer, “Mindful Learning”; Rechtschaffen; Schoeberlein; Zenner *et al.*). Langer (*Power*) sees mindfulness as a way to enhance how people learn and challenges the idea that intelligence is the best possible outcome of learning. In her view, mindful learning takes place with an awareness of



context and an acceptance of uncertainty. Without this awareness, learners rely on distinctions made in the past, rather than the present and see things from a single perspective, thus failing to consider the context.

Since mindfulness can help learners enhance their “emotional literacy” (Rechtschaffen 6), track their stress levels and emotional states, manage their emotions, reduce stress and anxiety levels, and improve empathy, it seems reasonable to implement mindful awareness in a foreign language course where foreign language anxiety might be a widespread issue. A series of mindfulness practices were thus introduced in the online classroom of the English Language and Translation course.

Such practices consisted of breathing awareness exercises and short meditation sessions held at the beginning or at the end of each online lesson. During mindful breathing, the teacher guides the students step-by-step, occasionally using a gentle sound to lead them into and out of the practice, and finally opening a discussion with questions such as, “Where did your mind go?” and “Which thoughts interfered with the breathing practice?”.

Another practice used during online lessons was that of “circle sharing” (Hanh and Weare 186), in which learners are invited to share their thoughts and feelings about language learning. In this practice, which can be carried out also in the virtual classroom, students are encouraged to connect deeply with their emotions and to accept them, even when these emotions are strong or negative. Following the principles of mindfulness, the teacher guides learners through the steps of emotional regulation (Hanh and Weare 134-35):

- acknowledging the presence of an emotion;
- accepting that the emotion exists;
- embracing the emotion mindfully, without fighting or suppressing it;
- looking deeply into the emotion;
- becoming aware that every emotion is temporary and that change is possible.

By sharing their emotions in a relaxed and supportive learning environment, students have the opportunity not only to monitor themselves, but also to connect with others. In a course delivered online, which risks creating distance among students and between students and teacher, exercising mindfulness represents a constructive approach that connects teacher and learners on an emotional level.

However, mindfulness is not something that can be taught or imposed: neither teachers nor students should view it as a skill that can be learnt methodically, a tool that can produce a result, a medicine that can cure negative mood, or—even worse—an obligation. Indeed, implementing mindfulness interventions in educational contexts without fully understanding or embracing its core values risks leading to a de-contextualisation from the very ethical foundations of mindfulness. The only way to benefit from mindfulness is to experience and practise it. For this reason, the teacher gradually introduced mindful awareness through a variety of practices that were not imposed on students, but simply suggested. Students were thus given the opportunity to become familiar with mindfulness practices as well as to explore them autonomously, both in and outside the classroom.





#### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: ONLINE JOURNALS

While mindfulness helps learners connect with their bodies and their minds, learner diaries and journals can offer students an important tool to connect with their Self, to further explore their thoughts and emotions and reflect on their identity as language learners. Indeed, reflective diary writing can give students the opportunity to share information about themselves, with no fear of being judged or making mistakes (Beseghi, "Importance"). The learner journal is usually a first-person account of a series of learning experiences. There are different types of learner diaries/journals (Moon): they can be structured or free, they can be focused on reflection on learning content and progress or they can be more personal and autobiographical, focused on the learner's experiences and emotions. In general, the learner journal is a tool for meta-cognitive reflection that can be compiled more or less regularly and easily implemented in any learning environment.

Journals can be "intrapersonal" or "dialogue" (Gebhard 80-84): in the first case, learners are both the writers and the readers of their own journals. While intrapersonal journals put emphasis on introspection, dialogue journals allow learners to gain awareness through connection with others (e.g., peers and teachers). In this perspective, the journal becomes a tool not only for reflection but also for sharing and becomes essential in a collaborative learning context.

During the academic year 2020-2021, the students attending the English Language and Translation course at the University of Parma were encouraged to keep an intrapersonal online journal, a free-form text available on the university e-learning platform which allows them to cover any topic on any day they feel like writing. Some basic guidelines were provided by the teacher: for example, they were encouraged to write about their progress in the target language, their learning strategies and/or difficulties, their past language learning experiences, as well as their wishes and expectations for the future. However, they were also free to write spontaneously about whatever came into their minds: their personal thoughts, experiences, feelings, emotions, memories, beliefs on themselves as language learners and on their "possible selves" (Ryan and Irie). In this sense, online journals are a form of reflective writing, almost a sort of "stream-of-consciousness" writing (Gebhard 80), which is also autobiographical, a personal narrative that reports the experience of language learners, a form of exploration that can generate awareness about themselves as learners and their learning. Indeed, autobiographical writing can be considered therapeutic (Karlsson, "Searching"; "Write"; "It's All"), "a process of personal growth, wellbeing, even healing and transformation" (Karlsson, "Write" 44), which can be highly significant for learners who feel anxious about foreign language learning. Indeed, reflective writing in the target language can alleviate foreign language anxiety, especially if it is done without linguistic pressure. Reflective writing is thus seen as a tool that students can use to construct a realistic vision of themselves as learners and users of English and to "speak as themselves" (Karlsson, "Searching" 413) in a safe, informal, and unthreatening environment. The students were encouraged to write in the target language, keeping in mind that this kind of reflective writing would not be corrected or assessed by their



teacher. In other words, this intrapersonal form of writing would not involve any kind of feedback, because in intrapersonal journals learners write for and to themselves.

In addition, the students were encouraged to write online dialogue journals, which could be read both by their peers and by the teacher. In this case, written communication is based on the dialogue between the writer and his/her readers, who can intervene with various types of responses, comments, and feedback. A dialogue journal establishes “both an audience for our writing and a relationship” with someone who is interested in our experiences and explorations (Gebhard 82). Students are fully aware that their entries will be read by others, so they can decide to be more cautious, not sharing information they feel is too personal. However, dialogue journals—like intrapersonal journals—are conceived as a safe space where learners can express themselves freely without fear of being judged. Dialogue journals are collaborative in nature: they create an ongoing discussion, a network that allows learners not only to co-construct their learning experience, but also to share their emotions, to talk about themselves, to tell their own stories to an audience, to support and encourage each other.

#### THE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVE

At the end of the academic year, the students were asked to give their opinion on mindfulness practices and online learner journals by completing a brief survey which consisted of two open-ended questions: 1. *What do you think of mindfulness practices?* 2. *What do you think of learner journals?* Since the main aim of the questionnaire was to bring out the students’ opinions without influencing their responses in any way, no closed questions were included in order to let them express their ideas freely.

The students’ answers to the first question highlighted some important aspects: first of all, not everyone participated actively or in the same way in mindfulness practices. Some of them were initially sceptical about this type of practice, but gradually began to participate and became more and more interested and involved. A few of them instead remained doubtful about mindfulness and did not engage with the practices or explore them any further. Others on the contrary were already familiar with mindfulness and took this opportunity to practise it further and explore its benefits in a (language) learning context. Most of the students were not used to practising mindfulness but reported that these exercises during online lessons were very helpful in managing anxiety and accepting the (transitory) presence of negative emotions and difficulties. Many students also stated that they started practising short breathing exercises or meditation before exams and before/after other online lessons, and in general at times of great stress during the day. This independent exploration of mindfulness, in and outside the online classroom, made them feel empowered and more in control of their learning. Some students also underlined that mindfulness practices during online lessons made them feel less isolated and more connected with the teacher and their peers, as many students commented on the importance of being connected to others especially when they could not meet in person. It is interesting to



note that several students wrote comments about mindfulness not only in response to the questionnaire, but also, more spontaneously, in their learner journals. They noted, for example, how mindfulness practices helped them deal with negative emotions which tend to emerge when they think about their relationship with a foreign language or their negative learning experiences in the past, or when they worry about future events, such as an exam. They also emphasised that mindfulness made them more aware of the fact that emotions exist and should not be considered 'taboo', especially in a learning environment. Moreover, some students wrote in their journals that mindfulness became a new interest to them, something that they started to further explore—and practise—by reading books, articles, and blogs and by watching TV programmes and videos. This new interest enhanced their motivation to learn and gave them hope during a difficult time.

The students' answers to the second question, concerning online journals, emphasised the importance of two aspects in particular that helped them gain more self-confidence: a stress-free environment in which they were able to express their emotions without being judged and collaboration with teacher and peers. Intrapersonal journals helped create a safe and relaxed space for self-expression in the target language as well as for emotional awareness and self-regulation, while dialogue journals played a vital role in establishing an online learning community based on collaboration, exchange, and interaction. It also emerged that, through both intrapersonal and dialogue journals, the students were able to shift their attention to factors over which they have control, focusing on what they can do rather than what they cannot do. Interestingly, many students noted how, thanks to mindfulness, their reflective writing became more and more focused on the present moment, rather than on the past or future, thus making them more engaged with the current learning experience.

In dialogue journals students shared empowering stories, for example describing how they were able to overcome obstacles and providing encouragement and support to their peers. Moreover, some students highlighted the importance of the teacher's role in dialogue journals, as facilitator and guide, giving support and encouraging the use of different strategies (for example, identifying realistically a problem, making adjustments to unrealistic causal attributions and to dysfunctional beliefs, etc.).

What clearly emerges from the responses to the questionnaire is that the relaxed and supportive atmosphere created by mindfulness practices and online learner journals helped the students enhance their intrinsic motivation, their agency, and their commitment to learning, while encouraging them to be more aware of—and to accept—their emotions.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has illustrated some affective strategy applications that can be introduced in an online foreign language classroom, where many students may suffer from foreign language anxiety, also due to the different teaching and learning modality imposed by



the pandemic. Since emotions are of fundamental importance to students' learning and wellbeing, the interventions presented in this article are targeted at the emotional dimension of language learning. Despite the attention given to the affective domain, there seems to be "a gap" in the literature between the recognition of the importance of the emotional factor in foreign language learning and the actual implementation of affective strategies and applications in the foreign language classroom (Rubio-Alcalá 198).

Practising mindfulness represents a constructive approach that connects teachers and learners on a more emotional level while promoting a relaxed and supportive learning environment. The responses to the questionnaire indicated that the students who tried to be more mindful, became not only more confident and autonomous learners, but also less critical of themselves, less judgemental, and more open to accept negative emotions and difficult situations, with the awareness that everything is transitory, and that learning is made of uncertainty, what Langer (*Power* xxviii) calls "the power of uncertainty." As far as online learner journals are concerned, students' responses to the questionnaire underlined significant benefits in terms of motivation, emotional self-regulation, and collaboration. By being more open to share their thoughts, experiences and emotions through self-disclosure, students also gave themselves a chance to become more self-compassionate and self-accepting.

Although some teachers—and some students—might consider mindfulness practices and learner journals 'a waste of time', if these interventions are proposed by the teacher and accepted by their students with genuine interest, they might become essential in supporting learners who experience anxiety, stress, fear, and low self-esteem. Classroom applications based on affective strategies should not be seen as a way to overprotect students or to provide false illusions. On the contrary, they should aim at empowering students to cope with negative emotions and difficult situations in a safe learning environment.

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