

# Review

## Fostering Positive Cross-Cultural Attitudes through Language Teaching

Denis Cunningham

David E. Ingram, Minoru Kono, Shirley O'Neill & Masako Sasaki. 2008.  
*Fostering Positive Cross-Cultural Attitudes through Language Teaching*.  
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244pp.

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In their study, Ingram and his colleagues address one of the presumptions of language teaching and learning: that language teaching promotes positive cross-cultural attitudes towards the target culture. It is this holy cow, which is investigated in this binational study, where the views of students (and teachers) in secondary schools are surveyed in Australia and Japan.

Our premise — that good language programs can contribute to achieving the global goal of peace — is the *point de partir* for investigating current philosophy and policies extant in the literature, as well as documents of major international bodies. The results of this literary investigation alone could be used as excellent evidence of the value of teaching languages. But, the enigma remains: that more harmonious intercultural relationships are central goals for language teaching, on the one hand and, on the other, the fact that the research literature reveals few empirical studies that conclusively demonstrate that language teaching has a positive effect on cross-cultural attitudes. The review of the literature (Chapter 2) on learning languages and attitudinal change provides an important, informative overview and is a valuable resource in its consideration of knowledge, cognitive processing, and community involvement. Such a review of the literature by exemplary scholars of the calibre of Ingram and his colleagues is most welcome and invaluable in analysing and producing a state of the art, just as meta-analyses provide results on the accumulation of studies. However, the results from the literature overview are not clear-cut.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough coverage of the student and teacher cohorts surveyed and details of the survey instruments. Again, the preparation and detail — the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background — is profound, as one would expect of this team.

The subsequent chapters outline the survey outcomes of the 598 Brisbane students in Australia (Chapter 4) and the 636 Akita students in Japan (Chapter 5). The report data are comprehensive but, as foreshadowed, inconclusive about the positive role played by language teaching in fostering positive cross-cultural attitudes. In fact, other factors appear to have a more beneficial effect, especially geographical visits to or oral communication with native speakers.

This, among other factors, motivates the writers to take a different tack: if the results of the study do not support the automatic positive effect on cross-cultural attitudes

through language teaching, what can we learn from the results to inform us what we can do about (course design and) language teaching to ensure that positive cross-cultural attitudes are achieved? Although the result of the study is disappointing — we would all like to believe that language teaching has an automatic, positive effect on attitude — it is in this shift of focus that the discussion becomes really interesting.

Informed by the findings of the study, the writers focus on salient factors contributing to positivity and use these as a premise to outline how courses may be prepared and conducted to enhance student learning and positive (cross-cultural) attitudes. This is excellent and, perhaps, the most important and valuable section of the text, as it informs all involved — the linguist, applied linguist, course designer, policy-maker, educator, and practitioner — on what works and can be done to maximise the potential of teaching time, student learning, motivation, and autonomous learning.

Before concluding, the writers refer to other studies in which they were involved to add support for their findings and recommendations. This is also valuable, as a rich pool of experience is available in (their) related research studies and projects, extensive work in the ISLPR (International Second Language Proficiency Ratings) and national investigations. One critical factor is the involvement of and with the community in focussing — rather than augmenting — courses of language teaching in an interactive approach with members of the target culture, whether this is done personally or through information and communication technologies.

In conclusion, the writers restate the inconclusive findings of the initial project objective — while stressing that doing it the wrong way can certainly have the reverse result: negative cross-cultural attitudes — and, expressing reservations about the limits of their study, recommend and pinpoint areas for future, thorough and longitudinal research for two major reasons: to ensure positive cross-cultural attitudes through language learning and, in so doing, contribute to a more harmonious and cohesive global community.

In summary, I would recommend this text as an important element of the research into the effects of language teaching on learner attitudes but, more importantly, as a thorough state of the art and especially as a foundation upon which to base the preparation and teaching of courses which **do** effect positive cross-cultural attitudes.

