Teaching language, teaching culture

Tony Young

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences,

University of Newcastle, UK
Abstract

This study investigates associations between multicultural effectiveness and effectiveness in the teaching and learning of languages. Such associations are apparent in both the language pedagogical and in the intercultural literatures,
and have influenced recent approaches incorporating ‘culture learning’ into language learning curricula. They have, however, been subjected to little, if any, previous empirical investigation. In our study, 176 teachers and sojourning multinational learners of English language in the UK completed the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, measure of multicultural effectiveness), a modified and exploratory subscale of the MPQ, designated Intergroup Cultural Empathy, and various measures of language learning and language teaching ability. The study found that the MPQ’s Openmindedness, Social Initiative and Flexibility subscales all predicted language learner ability as measured in objective tests. Another objective measure of language learning ability – the number of languages spoken to at least an intermediate level – was predicted by the Social Initiative, Emotional Stability and the Cultural Empathy subscales of the MPQ: the Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscale added significantly to the predictive power of the Cultural Empathy subscale in this instance. Self-reported language learning ability was predicted by the Openmindedness and Cultural Empathy subscales. Self-reported language teaching ability in multicultural classes was predicted by the Openmindedness subscale and by the new Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscale. The predictive validity of the MPQ is therefore supported by many of the findings of this study. These findings have very important implications for inter/cross cultural learning, and for learning and teaching languages, in a world where intercultural contact and effective intercultural communication is an increasingly vital aspect of more and more people’s lives.
Introduction

‘Interculturalists often overlook (or leave to language teachers) the task of
developing language competence, just as language teachers overlook (or
leave to interculturalists) the task of developing intercultural abilities, despite
wide acknowledgement that language and culture are dimensions of each
other, interrelated and inseparable.’ (Fantini, 1995: 44).

Convergence, enrichment and death of languages concerns processes of
interconnectedness and conflict between cultural groups. The view that
language and culture are inextricably linked is ubiquitous (Hall, 2002; Hinkel,
1999; Kramsch, 1998). There is widespread acceptance among educational
researchers that teaching and learning language inevitably involves teaching
and learning culture (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2002; Atkinson, 1999; Byram,
1997; Sercu, 2002). However, associations between multicultural
effectiveness, and language teaching and learning ability have been the focus
for very little research (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, in press). The aim of
this study is therefore to explore how multicultural effectiveness, as measured
by the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, relates to measures of ability in
the teaching and learning of English. In this article the terms ‘intercultural’,
‘cross-cultural’ and ‘multicultural’ are used interchangeably, as in much of
the previous literature (e.g. Santos-Rego & Nieto, 2000), all terms referring to
the ability to operate and interact effectively in different cultural environments
(e.g. Byram, 1997).

Although approaches to questions of what constitutes effective
communication between members of different cultures may vary, *linguistic*
competence is seen by most as a key element (Alred & Byram, 2002; Byram,
However, in the long history of empirical research into inter/multi/cross-cultural communication (for reviews see Hall, 2002; Koester, Wiseman and Sanders, 1993), research on linguistic competence has tended to be downplayed (Sercu, 2002). Similarly, research on language competence and pedagogy has generally underemphasized the role of an effective engagement with cultural difference (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, in press). Indeed, Byram (1997) and others involved in updating and revising language learning curricula (e.g. Council of Europe, 2002) assume that intercultural competence is a deeply embedded structure in the process of language learning and teaching, that perhaps requires no empirical substantiation.

While a great deal of research attention has been given to the experiences of individuals as second and foreign language learners, very little has been given to language teachers (Allen, 2000; Dörnyei, 2001). There are suggestions in the literature of a link between language teaching ability and intercultural effectiveness (e.g. Corbett, 2003; Sercu, 2002) but no empirical investigations have explored this directly. The teacher participant group in the study reported below was highly experienced: previous studies of language teachers have usually focused on either pre-experience teachers undergoing initial training (Dacheva, 2003) or teachers with a comparative lack of experience (e.g. Duff and Uchida, 1997; Lazaraton, 2003). The participants in this study included both teachers and learners. Very few other studies have investigated both teachers and learners (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, in press): although the studies of Flowerdew and Miller (1995), and of Pennington, Brock and Yue (1996), did investigate both teachers and learners,
neither study specifically looked into associations between intercultural competence and teacher or learner effectiveness.

The Study

Participants

176 people (117 females, 59 males) active on EFL learning programmes consented to participate. Of these, 74 were teachers (mean age 46) and 102 were learners (mean age 24). All participants were recruited in the UK. More than 75% of the teacher participants had at least 6 years experience as teachers of EFL. The learner participants were quite diverse, with over 30 different nationalities reported by the learners.

Procedure

Participants completed a consent document and the MPQ and other questions that obtained personal and anonymous information about their gender, age, nationality, language learning ability. With the learner participants’ permission, test results for each learner participant were obtained from the institution where they were studying. Teacher participants self-rated teaching ability, and gave details of their years of experience as teachers (more details of the measures are given below).

Although the majority of participants were not ‘native speakers’ of English, they were all at least upper intermediate level users of the language, and so the fact that the survey was in English was not felt to interfere with comprehension of the individual items. ‘Non-native’ speaker participants in both a pilot study and in the study proper reported no specific problems with
comprehension of items. Completion of the final version of the survey took about 30 minutes.

**Measures: The MPQ**

Van der Zee and van Oudenhoven’s (2001) English language version of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was used. This consists of 91 items, and is divided into 5 subscales. These are Cultural Empathy (CE), Openmindedness (OM), Social Initiative (SI), Emotional Stability (ES), and Flexibility (FL). Table 1, below, provides examples of the scales and internal consistency data. In addition to the 5 MPQ subscales, and for exploratory purposes only, following some pilot work, a new subscale was added to those in the original MPQ for the purposes of this study. This subscale measured CE from a specifically intergroup perspective by taking 13 items from the original cultural empathy scale of the MPQ and making them more specifically about empathy toward members of a different cultural group. In doing so, the new subscale aimed to explore the relationship between communication occupying the ‘high intergroup salience/low interpersonal salience’ quadrant identified by Harwood, Giles and Palomares (2005), and language teaching and learning effectiveness. Table 1, below, illustrates the subscales of the original MPQ and this new subscale, designated Intergroup Cultural Empathy (ICE).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPQ subscales</th>
<th>Example Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Empathy (CE, 18 items),</td>
<td>Tries to understand other people’s behaviour (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \alpha = .76 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openmindedness (OM, 18 items),</td>
<td>Is interested in other cultures (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \alpha = .80 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Initiative (SI, 17 items),</td>
<td>Takes initiatives (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \alpha = .78 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability (ES, 20 items),( \alpha = .75 )</td>
<td>Is not easily hurt (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility (FL, 14 items),</td>
<td>Likes low-comfort holidays (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \alpha = .70 )</td>
<td>Tries to understand the behaviour of people from different cultures (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup Cultural Empathy (ICE,13 items), ( \alpha = .82 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tries to understand other people’s behaviour (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes other people’s habits into consideration (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is fascinated by other people’s opinions (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes contacts easily (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is nervous (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes easily from one activity to another (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes into consideration the habits of people from different cultures (+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds it hard to empathise with others (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is often at conflict with others (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps to the background (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is often at conflict with others (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoids adventure (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds it hard to empathise with people from different cultures (-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The positive and negative signs indicate items contributing positively and negatively to subscale
Previous studies have found a high internal consistency among the MPQ subscales (e.g. Cronbach’s αs range .72 -.91 in Van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2001; van Oudenhoven and van der Zee, 2002a, 2002b). The Cronbach’s αs in this study are in the range .70 -.82, and so are acceptable in terms of recommendations by psychometric theoreticians such as Hinton (2001).

**Measures: Language learning effectiveness**

Various measures of linguistic ability were employed with all participants. These were:

(a) Multilinguality: number of languages spoken to at least intermediate level.

(b) Self-rated measure of language ability: an overall measure of language learning ability was created using several self-rating items on the questionnaire (all on 5-point Likert scales). This consisted of all participants’ self-rated knowledge of aspects of one foreign language (overall knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, and sociocultural knowledge), and as a learner of foreign languages in general (sociolinguistic knowledge and sociocultural knowledge). Reliability for this combined subscale, designated ‘linguistic ability’, was high (α = .79).

(c) Objective measure of language ability. With the learner participants’ permission, the institutions where they were studying supplied measures for the overall level of ability in English as a foreign
language of each individual learner participant (3-point scale). The level for all learner participants was determined by batteries of tests measuring knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. These scores were then related to the Council of Europe’s (2002) grid for language learning assessment and recorded for use in this study. In this way, 25 learner participants were found to be at Council of Europe level (2002) B2, corresponding to an upper intermediate level of achievement in English; 27 were at level C1, lower advanced; and 48 were advanced, at level C2 (4 learners’ data were missing for level).

**Measures: Language teacher effectiveness**

Teacher participants only were asked to self-rate in terms of their ability to be a good teacher of multicultural classes (5-point Likert scales). Specifically, measures were taken of ratings of their teaching abilities with learners whose nationalities they had ‘little direct knowledge of’ and ‘a lot of direct knowledge of’. Similarly, teachers also self-rated on their abilities to teach learners whose nationalities they had ‘little experience of teaching’, and ‘a lot of experience of teaching’. These four items were combined into a single scale measuring overall teaching ability: this subscale showed a high level of reliability (α = .82).

**Findings**

Stepwise Multiple Regression analyses were conducted to see how the various subscales of the MPQ predicted teaching and learning effectiveness: the
original MPQ subscales were entered at Step 1 followed by the addition of the modified ICE subscale at step 2. The outcomes of the analyses are reported in Table 2, and findings are summarised below.
Table 2: Outcome of multiple regression analyses predicting language learning and teaching effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors (Standardised Beta Weights)</th>
<th>Step number</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R Square Change</th>
<th>Open-mindedness</th>
<th>Social Initiative</th>
<th>Emotional Stability</th>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Cultural Empathy</th>
<th>Intergroup Cultural Empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of languages spoken¹</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>2.712*</td>
<td>.076*</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>.168*</td>
<td>.182*</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.195*</td>
<td>.202*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>2.708**</td>
<td>.014†</td>
<td>-0.093</td>
<td>.194*</td>
<td>.171*</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported language learning ability³</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>10.152**</td>
<td>.234**</td>
<td>.319**</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>.161*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>8.678</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.278**</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Multicultural Teaching Ability³</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>4.462**</td>
<td>.253**</td>
<td>.427*</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>4.889**</td>
<td>.058*</td>
<td>.317*</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.376*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Ability from tests³</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>3.950**</td>
<td>.175**</td>
<td>.225*</td>
<td>.215*</td>
<td>-.129</td>
<td>.311**</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>3.532**</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.302*</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.339**</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ¹ Df for step 1 = 5, 171; Df for step 2 = 6, 171; ² Df for step 1 = 5, 71; Df for step 2 = 6, 71; ³ Df for step 1 = 5, 99; Df for step 2 = 6, 99

†: p < .06   * p < .05; ** p < .01
1. To predict learner ability measured by objective tests, the original 5 MPQ scales were entered into the first step of the stepwise regression analysis. As shown in table 2, Openmindedness, Social Initiative and Flexibility predicted learner ability as measured by objective tests. Entering the modified Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscale in Step 2 did not add significantly to the predictive power.

2. To predict the dependent variable number of languages spoken by all participants, the original 5 MPQ subscales were entered into the first step of the stepwise regression analysis. Social Initiative, Emotional Stability and Cultural Empathy were significant predictors. In order to explore whether the modified Intergroup Cultural Empathy scale added further predictive power, it was entered in Step 2: the modified ICE scale did add significantly to predicting the number of languages spoken.

3. To predict self-reported language learning ability, the original 5 MPQ scales were entered into the first step of the stepwise regression analysis. Openmindedness and Cultural Empathy predicted self-reported language learning ability of all participants. However, entering the modified Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscale in Step 2 did not add significantly to the predictive power.

4. To predict self-reported teaching ability in multicultural classes, the original 5 MPQ scales were entered into the first step of the stepwise regression analysis. Only Openmindedness predicted self-reported teaching ability in multicultural
classes. Entering the modified Intergroup Cultural Empathy scale in Step 2 added significantly to predicting teaching ability.

It is especially noteworthy that the findings reported in Table 2 suggest that overall, the two objective measures – tested language ability, and number of languages spoken – were predicted by three of the five MPQ subscales. It is also noteworthy that Openmindedness is the most useful predictor, as it predicts 3 out of 4 of the dependent measures. The predictive power of other subscale measures was less clear-cut. For instance, Emotional Stability and cultural empathy additionally predicted the number of languages spoken, while Flexibility and Open-Mindedness predicted language ability as measured by tests (in addition to Social Initiative). It is also noteworthy that the modified Intergroup Cultural Empathy scale added significant predictive power for the number of languages spoken and for self-reported ability to teach multicultural classes. As this was a first, exploratory, use of this subscale, further reliability and validity testing of this modification of the Cultural Empathy subscale will be needed.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether an association existed between measures of effective learning and teaching of English as a foreign language, and the subscales of the MPQ. Previous studies had shown that the MPQ could successfully predict general professional effectiveness in intercultural settings (e.g. van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2000; van Oudenhoven, van der Zee & van Kooten, 2001; van Oudenhoven and van der
Zee, 2002a, 2002b). This study was the first ever investigation of an association between the MPQ and effective language learning and language teaching. A secondary aim was to determine whether a new subscale, designated Intergroup Cultural Empathy, would add anything to the predictive power of the Cultural Empathy subscale of the MPQ.

**Language learning and multicultural effectiveness**

Van Oudenhoven and van der Zee (2002a) concluded that Openmindedness and Cultural Empathy are the two MPQ subscales most specifically associated with intercultural effectiveness. This study provides confirmatory evidence that they are associated with language learning effectiveness. Very interestingly, and in contrast to much psychological research relying solely on self-report measures, this study provided probably the first evidence of a link between the MPQ subscales and actual behaviour as operationalised by one or both of the two objective measures - English language learning ability, and number of foreign languages spoken to at least an intermediate level of achievement.

To address findings related to Cultural Empathy first, this subscale correlated positively and significantly with the number of languages spoken, and with the self-reported measure of language learning ability. A person high in empathic tendencies, as defined in the CE subscale, is more able, for example, to show sensitivity towards the feelings and beliefs of others, to successfully read facial expressions and to clearly project an interest in others. On this evidence, a person with these characteristics is also more likely to be a more able, successful and self-confident learner of foreign languages. This
study has thus provided new evidence that the empathic tendencies described in the CE subscale correspond closely to many of the characteristics necessary for a successful language learner operating within a communicative approach to language learning. This approach centres on the successful negotiation of meaning between language users (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Canale & Swain, 1980; Larsen-Freeman, 1986). There is new evidence here that empathic tendencies may facilitate such negotiation, and consequently make for more effective communication.

Findings related to the OM subscale showed that individuals with open and unprejudiced attitudes toward outgroup members in general were more likely to self-rate as good learners of languages. They were also more likely to score highly in objective tests of their foreign language ability. This evidence complements that found in Canadian, second language settings by Gardner and colleagues (e.g. Gardner, 1988; Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner and McIntyre, 1991) which suggested that positive attitude towards outgroup members is associated with the degree of successful acquisition of languages. More particularly, this study has discovered an important connection between attitudes towards outgroups in general and language learning in a foreign language learning context. Dörnyei (2001) noted that such foreign language learners are likely to have little direct interpersonal contact with ‘native speakers’ of the language they are learning; he also noted that research into attitudes in such foreign language settings was rare. He suggested that a generally positive attitude towards all outgroups, and not just attitudes towards a specific target language-speaking group, may be salient for learning foreign languages. He argues that this is particularly likely to be the case with the
English language, where most learners worldwide have little, if any, direct contact with ‘native speakers’. This study has provided strong evidence that an association between attitudes toward different cultural groups in general, and foreign language learning effectiveness, hitherto only a suggestion, may exist.

Affective and cognitive flexibility, as measured by the Flexibility subscale, is realised in the ability to learn from mistakes, the ability to adjust behaviour to different contexts and the ability to learn from new experiences. This subscale bears some conceptual relationship to the qualities of the ‘good language learner’ identified in the investigations of Rubin (1975) and of Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978). These qualities include a preparedness to take risks, a successful adaptation to different learning environments, and the ability to recognise and learn from errors. A highly significant relationship between these characteristics, as delineated by the FL subscale, and objectively measured language learning achievement, was found in this study. This study therefore produced strong confirmatory evidence that risk-taking and adaptive learners who can identify and learn from errors, may also be flexible and adaptive intercultural operators.

The Social Initiative subscale correlated positively and significantly with both of the objective measures of language learning achievement (objective tests, and number of languages). Evidence revealed that learners who scored highly on SI, and who thus took an active approach to social situations, were more likely to rate themselves as good learners of languages, and to score highly on tests. SI corresponds closely to conceptualisations such as social style, sociability and introversion/extraversion (Sawyer and Ranta,
Dewaele and Furnham (1999) reappraised the research literature relating to extraversion and second language acquisition from the 1970s to the late 1990s. They concluded that while extraversion had been largely neglected as an independent variable, there was nevertheless some research evidence that there were significant and positive correlations between language learners’ degree of extraversion and their oral fluency. In a small-scale study of personality and speech production amongst Flemish-French bilinguals, Dewaele and Furnham (2000) found a positive and significant correlation between extraversion and oral fluency. The correlation was found especially in more stressful situations. Wakamoto (2002) also suggested that extraversion is a good predictor of the degree of fluency in oral second language production. This study has therefore provided strong indications that SI, and related conceptualisations (e.g. extraversion / introversion), which have been relatively neglected as independent variables in previous research (Dewaele and Furnham, 1999), may be associated with achievement as a language learner.

The Emotional Stability subscale bears some relationship to the much-studied notion of anxiety, particularly in the context of individual differences among language learners (e.g. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). An emotionally stable individual, in the formulation of Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman (1978) and Abe & Wiseman (1983), is likely to exhibit a lower level of anxiety in a stressful situation than a less emotionally stable individual. A generally negative correlation can thus be expected between anxiety and emotional stability. Research seems to indicate that the relationship between anxiety and language learning achievement is not linear (Scovel, 1978),
although the survey-based studies of Gardner and colleagues (e.g. Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991) seem to indicate a mildly negative correlation overall between level of anxiety of an individual in a classroom language learning context and achievement. Anxiety, in the study of MacIntyre & Charos (1996), was found to be associated with integrativeness, with less anxious language learners being more likely to interact successfully with speakers of the target language.

Evidence emerged from this study that language learners who scored higher on the Emotional Stability subscale were able to speak more languages to at least intermediate level than those with lower scores. This finding offers corroborating evidence for the view that the mildly negative correlation between a conceptualisation related to ES (anxiety) and language learning achievement, found by some previous research in second language settings (McIntyre and Gardner, 1991), may also exist in foreign language settings.

For the new exploratory Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscale, findings indicated that adding a specifically intergroup component did add significantly to the ability to predict the number of languages participants could speak. There are therefore indications that individuals with higher empathic tendencies relating to others with a different cultural background, may have higher levels of language learning achievement. It is also possible, on this evidence, to suggest that such individuals may be motivated to learn a greater number of different foreign languages.
Language teaching, personality and multicultural effectiveness

The Openmindedness and Intergroup Cultural Empathy subscales correlated significantly with the dependent measure self-rated teaching ability.

Confirmatory evidence was therefore found for the view that teachers’ personalities - and particularly language teachers’ personalities - are highly salient to their teaching effectiveness (e.g. Borg, 2006; Brosch, 1996; Penner, 1996). Little work has been done on the traits of effective language teachers, although there is a general recognition in the pedagogical literature of the importance of teachers’ personalities. Penner (1996: 45) made this point very strongly:

“One who teaches effectively teaches not only his subject, but himself. Personality is that part of the teacher’s self which he projects into every classroom activity, thereby affecting and conditioning every learning situation.”

Borg (2006) argues that personality is particularly central in effective language teaching, where teachers, in promoting interaction and communication, give more of themselves than those teaching other subjects.

There has been some research into the characteristics of effective teachers, but only the studies of Borg (2006) and of Brosh (1996) have actually investigated the specific traits exhibited by language teachers in detail.

A group of experienced language teachers in Borg’s study identified ‘almost essential’ (2006: 23) traits for effective language teachers. These were found to include ‘an ability to communicate freely and to radiate positive feeling’ (2006: 23). In Borg’s (2006) study, an ability to develop close relationships with students was also reported as a particular trait shared by effective language teachers. The high school teachers (not language teachers)
operating in a multicultural environment investigated by Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles (2005), were more effective if they demonstrated a caring attitude and were able to develop meaningful relationships with students. Similarly, Walls, Nardi, von Minden & Hoffman (2002: 43) found that the most important trait displayed by effective teachers of all subjects was their ability to create a ‘caring emotional environment’.

This study found that participants higher in empathic tendencies toward different cultural groups rated themselves more highly as teachers than those with lower empathic tendencies. Such teachers are more likely to be able to demonstrate a caring attitude towards learners from different cultural groups, and to develop meaningful relationships with them. Thus, the link suggested between teacher effectiveness and intergroup empathy in the studies of Calabrese et al (2005) and Walls et al (2002) is supported by findings from this study.

Openmindedness relates to a positive attitude towards cultural outgroups and was also highly predictive of self-rated language teaching effectiveness in this study. Positive attitudes, akin to the OM subscale, were demonstrated by effective EFL teachers in Brosh’s (1996) study. Similarly, Calabrese et al (2005) found that ineffective teachers were more likely to exhibit judgmental attitudes, particularly towards students of different ethnicity. Interestingly, both Brosh (1996) and Borg (2006) found that language teachers’ attitudes towards their own and towards other cultural groups were salient factors in teacher effectiveness. Thus, a positive attitude towards ‘native speakers’ was found by Brosh (1996) to be a significant factor in Israeli EFL learners’ and in Israeli EFL teachers’ perceptions of teacher
effectiveness. One group of language teacher participants in Borg’s investigation also stressed the importance of ‘intercultural skills’ (2006: 15), here framed quite narrowly as the ability to project a neutral or positive attitude towards the target language community. The investigations of Borg (2006), Brosch (1996) and Calabrese et al (2005) all found that a lack of prejudice and judgmental attitudes towards cultural difference were factors in teacher ability and effectiveness. Taken together, these findings are indicative that effective English language teachers are highly likely to exhibit openmindedness towards different cultural groups.

Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence for significant associations between effectiveness at operating interculturally – as defined and measured by the MPQ - and effectiveness in teaching and learning languages. Its findings suggest the importance of intercultural training for language teachers, and for language learners. In terms of teacher and learner training in intercultural competence, both of these are currently badly lacking, despite emphasis in some theoretical pedagogical literature on its importance (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, in press). This is especially the case in Europe and North America, which is very surprising given the increasing importance that intercultural training is being given in other fields such as business training. The findings also suggest the importance of language learning within intercultural training, again a neglected area.

The English language – a focus for study here - is a uniquely powerful sociocultural entity and a near ubiquitous means of communication between
people of different cultures at a time when processes of globalisation are producing an ever greater, ever more imperative need for effective intercultural communication. Language and culture are inextricably bound, and emphasising or ignoring one over the other puts at risk effective communication between members of different cultures in our increasingly interconnected world.

References


30