Positive Attitudes and Realistic Beliefs: Links to Proficiency

CORINNE MANTLE-BROMLEY
School of Education
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80526
mantle@condor.caht.colostate.edu

Middle-school-aged students in 12 classes of a 9-week Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) program participated in a study attempting to maintain and/or to improve students' attitudes toward French and Spanish speakers, replicating an earlier study (Mantle-Bromley & Miller, 1991) of first-year Spanish students. Students in the treatment group participated in culture-related lessons that used attitude-change theory in their design. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) procedures showed that the experimental group's mean score on a modified version of the Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1974) was significantly greater than that of students in the control group (p < .05). In addition, using the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1988), the study measured, in an exploratory fashion, students' beliefs about the language learning process. Results demonstrated that many young students enter their first language class with misconceptions about language learning that may hinder their progress and persistence in language study.

A MULTITUDE OF REPORTS, POLITICAL analyses, and economic forecasts indicates that the United States needs a multilingual and multicultural citizenry (e.g., Hamayan, 1986; Tye, 1990; The United States, 1987;). To this end, a recent national survey reports encouraging figures: Record numbers (38.4%) of high school students were enrolled in foreign language (FL) study in the U.S. during the fall of 1990 (Draper, 1992), but it would be hasty to infer from reports like this a national trend toward multilingualism.

One impediment is time. The average high school class meets for 50 minutes a day, for 180 days per year. Subtracting, conservatively, 10 minutes a day for administrative and management duties and an additional 40 minutes once a month for an assembly or sporting event, less than 115 hours of actual instruction are available in one year of secondary-level language study. Because only 6% of the nation's youth graduate from high school with more than 2 years of foreign language study (Draper, 1992), it follows that most secondary students will have no more than 250 hours of language instruction. This, according to the Foreign Service Institute, is not enough time to move the average language student from novice to intermediate level of proficiency, even under optimal learning conditions (Omaggio, 1986). Support for this estimate comes from Liskin-Gasparro (1982; as cited in Omaggio, 1986, p. 19) who found that the proficiency levels of 30 high school students who had studied Spanish for up to 4 years ranged only from 0 to O+ on the Foreign Service Institute's proficiency scale. Unfortunately, great numbers of students do not continue their language study at higher levels. In 1991, a mere 8% of the nation's college students were enrolled in a FL class; three quarters of American colleges and universities do not require language study (Lardner, 1991).

Thus, the apparent good news of increasing high school FL enrollments may be illusory because, although record numbers of students are enrolled in FL study, few of those students achieve even intermediate levels of proficiency.
American students, though they may enroll initially in FL courses in increasing numbers, do not continue language study long enough to achieve even minimal communication skills. This paradox is at the heart of the difficulty in achieving intercultural competency in the U.S.

Why does this paradox continue to exist? One explanation may lie in the reasons that students have for enrolling. The majority of students enroll in FL classes not because they are motivated to learn another language, but because 2 years of FL study are recommended or required for college entrance (Mantle-Bromley & Miller, 1991; Ramage, 1990). Such a requirement does not provide sufficient motivation to continue language study. Minert (1992) claims that over 71% of all students of German discontinue language study by the end of their second year. Northern California data shows a 50% drop in language enrollment after the second year of study (Ramage, 1990). Students often content themselves with simply fulfilling the perceived requirements and then discontinuing their language study. The unfortunate result is a nation of students who concede the value of language skills (Roberts, 1992), yet are personally unwilling to commit the time and energy necessary to attain them.

It seems obvious, then, that motivation is a major problem in achieving greater numbers of proficient speakers of second languages (L2). Both research and common sense confirm the importance of motivation in L2 acquisition. Although theoretical models of motivation continue to be examined and debated, most researchers now agree (and most teachers intuitively know) that students' attitudes and motivations have a great effect on their classroom achievement. In fact, participation in class (Gardner, Smythe, Clément, & Glikson, 1976), pronunciation accuracy (Guiora, Brannon, & Dull, 1972), and, ultimately, persistence in language study (Bartley, 1969; Clément, Smythe, & Gardner, 1978; Ramage, 1990) have all been authoritatively linked to attitudes and motivations in the language class.

ATTITUDE THEORY

If, as research and theory suggest, attitudes influence the efforts that students expend to learn another language, then language teachers need a clear understanding of attitudes and attitude-change theory in order to address these issues in the classroom. Common to psychological theories on attitudes is the notion that attitudes actually have three components: affect, cognition, and behavior (see Rajeccki, 1990; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). What is termed attitude refers to affect and is an evaluative, emotional reaction (i.e., the degree of like or dislike associated with the attitudinal object). For example, the degree to which a student likes or dislikes speakers of the language being studied is the expression of attitude toward those people. This affective component has received the most attention in attitudinal L2 research. Attitudes toward the teacher, the class, the language, speakers of the language, and cultures of the language have all been found to be statistically significant in their relationship with both students' achievement and their intentions to continue language study (for a comprehensive review of this research, see Gardner, 1985b).

Cognition refers to what a person knows about the attitudinal object. ("Know" is used loosely here and does not imply fact or truth. Any belief would be considered a cognition.) Students may regard as knowledge their belief, for example, that Spanish speakers are mostly poor and uneducated. For many students, their beliefs about the nature of language learning may constitute a serious impediment that could affect their language-related attitudes and behaviors. Very little is known about the beliefs that adolescents bring into the language class.

The third attitudinal component, behavior, has to do with intentions or actions related to the attitudinal object. For example, does the language student attempt native-like pronunciation? Seek out native speakers of the language? Intend to continue language study? These actions would represent the behavioral element of an attitude. It is these affective reactions (hereafter called attitudes), cognitions, and behaviors that comprise the overall attitude toward the language and culture.

These components are each important because this nexus of attitude, cognition, and behavior changes primarily when there is dissonance or disagreement within the components. For example, if my attitude toward Spanish is negative, and my cognition is that Spanish speakers are socially beneath me, and I consequently ridicule the language, my affect, cognition, and behavior are in agreement. However, if I then meet a Spanish speaker who I consider attractive and desirable, my cognition (that maybe we are social equals) is no longer in accord with the other two components. It is this state of dissonance that will most likely lead to attitude change (Eiser, 1994; Rajeccki, 1990; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991).
Morgan (1993) recently completed a comprehensive review of research and theory on attitude change as it relates to culture learning in the FL classroom. She concluded that four aspects of classroom persuasion should be considered in attempting to change attitudes:

1. Content delivery should require active learner involvement with complex, possibly even controversial material.

2. The classroom environment should be one of "change or novelty" (p. 73).

3. Students need to struggle with complex material and reach their own conclusions, rather than be just the passive receivers of information.

4. Students should become aware of their own attitudes toward language and culture, leading, we would hope, to greater acceptance of others.

Most research that has attempted culture-related attitude change in L2 learners has relied on out-of-class experiences such as exchange programs and travel. Many studies have demonstrated attitude shifts, particularly for those students who had greater contact with people of the culture being studied (e.g., Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Hoffman & Zak, 1969; Thomlison, 1991). Some studies, however, (Hanna & Smith, 1979; Tucker & Lambert, 1970) found no attitude change after bicultural exchanges.

Although most language teachers would relish the opportunity to provide their students with exchange opportunities, this is not a realistic vehicle for most classroom attitude-change programs. Two early studies attempted classroom-based attitude change, but without the benefit of attitude-change theory. Bals (1971) included cultural information on the daily lives of German teenagers in the language curriculum. Cooke (1970) used lessons on intercultural understanding in four Spanish classes, but admitted that most of her time was spent developing attitude tests rather than implementing actual lessons. Neither study successfully demonstrated a shift in attitudes. Clavijo (1984), however, did find positive shifts in university students' acceptance of closer ties with South America after introducing culture-specific information into the first 6 weeks of introductory Spanish classes.

More recently, Mantle-Bromley and Miller (1991) conducted a study to determine whether secondary-level students' attitudes toward Spanish could be improved if the researchers used attitude-change theory in lesson development. They tested this notion by incorporating attitudinal/multicultural lessons into the curriculum of 10 beginning Spanish classes, with 10 additional classes used as a control group. Classes were from both junior high and senior high schools. The results of this study indeed indicated a difference between the control and experimental students' attitudes, as measured by the Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1974). However, they recognized that several uncontrolled variables in the study (teacher, students' ages, and district differences) may have confounded the results. These weaknesses in the findings, as well as some design limitations, suggested the need for a replication study, one which controlled for additional variables. This article reports on a study of middle-school-aged students in beginning L2 classes that controlled additional variables.

FLEX PROGRAMS

Many students have their first exposure to FL study in exploratory programs, commonly called Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) programs. Usually a part of junior high or middle school curricula, FLEX programs tend to be self-contained, short in duration, and introductory. Curtain and Pesola (1988, p. 26) list five goals common to FLEX programs: introduction to language learning; awareness and appreciation of foreign culture; appreciation of the value of communicating in another language; enhanced understanding of English; and motivation to further language study. The National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages (1994) supports these goals.

Because many of the FLEX goals are attitudinal in nature, and because students need to begin their language study as early as possible if they are to attain communicative proficiency, the researcher selected middle school FLEX students as the population of interest. An additional reason to focus on middle-school-aged students in an attitude-change study is the disturbing evidence of students' attitudinal and motivational decline, in both domain-specific and general academic areas, between the sixth and seventh grades (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979; Harter, 1981; Marsh, 1989). Anderson and Maehr (1994) recently conducted an extensive review of research on motivations of middle-school-aged children. They concluded that most school-related problems during these years are motivational in nature.

The design of this study, guided by Gardner's
socioeducational model of language learning (1985b), was influenced by three factors. First was the tripartite nature of the attitudinal construct: affect, cognition, and behavior. Second was the foundation of attitude-change theory: A dissonance between affect, cognition, and behavior, or between two of these three, may lead to attitude change. Third was the knowledge base in each of the three areas. Most attitudinal work to date has involved the affective, evaluative nature of attitudes. It is already known that some students enter the classroom with less than positive attitudes toward the language, its speakers, and foreign cultures. Therefore, to further the knowledge base in this area, an intervention was designed; research questions focused on attitude change and were experimental in nature.

Less is known, however, about middle school students' beliefs or cognitions related to language learning. Therefore, research questions about beliefs are necessarily exploratory, asking what students' beliefs are as a necessary first step before assuming a need or possibility for intervention. The link between students' attitudes and beliefs, and their behaviors, is a logical one. Theoretically, those students with positive attitudes and realistic, informed, language-related beliefs, will be more likely to behave in productive ways (e.g., participate in class, strive for accuracy in pronunciation, work harder outside class, persist in language study) than will students with negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This replication study was designed to answer four research questions: three relating to the affective component of attitudes, one to the cognitive component. First, what were students' attitudes toward languages and cultures as they entered their first language class? Second, would this replication find, as the original study did, that after studying a foreign language, students' attitudes toward foreign languages and speakers of other languages actually become less positive? Third, would the attitudes of students who participated in experimental lessons (designed to improve attitudes toward other languages and cultures) be more positive than the attitudes of those students who did not participate in the lessons? And finally, did students new to FL learning enter their introductory language classes with misconceptions, with mistaken beliefs, or both that could cause frustration with the language-learning process?

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

During the 1991–92 school year, three teachers from three middle schools in a large suburban school district outside Kansas City, Kansas, agreed to participate in the study, which examined their students' attitudes toward and beliefs about learning a L2. The teachers taught both the Spanish and French portions of a 9-week FLEX class required of all seventh graders. The FLEX program in this district was one of four 9-week courses through which all seventh graders rotated; consequently, the teachers received new students every quarter of the school year. The three teachers in the study taught a total of six FLEX sections each quarter (see Table 1 for a breakdown of students by teacher and class). During the first 9-week sequence, the researcher visited the six classes (135 students) to conduct informal interviews and collect open-ended questionnaires. This first rotation of students helped to focus the adaptation of the experimental lessons to the needs of seventh-grade language learners. The results of this qualitative pilot study are reported elsewhere (Mantle-Bromley, 1994).

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Students in 3rd Quarter (Experimental) n = 94

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The students in the second 9-week rotation of classes were used as the control group. Of 122 students in the six classes, 114 (55 male and 59 female) completed all portions of the study; the remaining 8 were eliminated from analysis.
students completed a modified version of the AMTB (Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1974), once at the beginning of the FLEX program and again during the last week of the quarter. They also completed a modified version of the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1988) at the beginning of the program. The researcher administered all tests.

The third 9-week rotation constituted the experimental portion of the study. The three participating teachers, along with all FLEX teachers in the district, had been trained to teach the eight experimental lessons and to incorporate follow-up activities into their existing curricula just before the third quarter began. Of the 122 students asked to participate in the study, the data from 94 students (41 male and 53 female) were complete. Twenty-eight students were eliminated: 18 due to failure to complete all portions of the tests, 9 because of absence during the posttest, and one because of limited English proficiency. The third-quarter students completed the AMTB and the BALLI during the first week of the class, participated in the lessons throughout the 9 weeks, and completed the AMTB again during the last week of class.

The study's design attempted to control for teacher variation between groups—the same teachers taught both the control and experimental groups of students. In order to avoid contamination of the treatment's effect, the teachers did not receive training in the experimental intervention until they completed the second quarter (control) classes.

The majority of students participating in the study reported that they expected an A or a B in their FLEX course (88.3%) and had very little or no reported intercultural experience (93.2%). When asked how important their language study was to their parents, 47.1% reported "not at all" or "not very important," 39.9% said it was "somewhat important" to their parents, and 12.5% said it was "very important" to their parents that they study a language.

Measurement Instruments

The pretest consisted of a modified version of the AMTB and the BALLI. To assess the impact, if any, of the experimental lessons on students' affective attitudes, the researcher again administered the selected subtests from the AMTB at the end of both 9-week sessions.

The AMTB has been used extensively to measure language learners' attitudes and motivations. Reliability and validity information are reported in previous literature (Gardner, 1985a; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). The original test battery contains 19 subscales. Of those subscales, 11 are used to compute four composite indices, which are then combined to attain a composite score "which incorporates what currently appear to be the major attitudinal/ motivational characteristics associated with proficiency in a second language" (Gardner, 1985a, p. 8). This study focused primarily on the Integrative Orientation Index. Thus, only a portion of the comprehensive instrument was used.

Although the battery was validated and standardized on students in grades 7 to 11 (on anglophone Canadian students), and more recently on college students (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993), it is the researcher's experience that younger students are often impatient with such an extensive questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher selected only those subscales she believed to reflect most closely the FLEX program's goals of introducing students to language study and piquing students' interest to pursue language study as a part of their elective coursework. The "Motivation Composite" was eliminated, as was the composite "Attitudes toward the Learning Situation," because the FLEX classes did not require the academic rigor of a regular sequence of language classes. The subscales "Class Anxiety" and "Parental Encouragement," while providing important information, were not believed to affect students' performance in an introductory class. One additional change was made: collapsing the two subscales "Attitudes toward European French" and "Attitudes toward French Canadians" into one. The statements in these subscales that best reflected the range of attitudes of students in the U.S. were selected to create a subscale titled "Attitudes toward French Speakers." Then, each of those items was duplicated to create a new subscale, titled "Attitudes toward Spanish Speakers," substituting "Spanish speaker" for "French speaker" in each duplicated statement. See Appendix A for a list of the subscale categories and statements used for data collection.

The subscales consisted of statements that students would respond to on a seven-item Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). These subscales comprised 10 items on "Attitudes toward French Speakers" (ATFS), 10 on "Attitudes toward Spanish Speakers" (ATSS), 4 on "Integrative Orientation" (IGO), 4 on "Instrumental Orientation" (ISO), and 10 on "Interest in Foreign Languages" (INFL). A composite score was computed by
adding each of the subscale totals to obtain the “Attitudes, Interest, and Orientation Index” (AIOI). Care should be taken in the interpretation of the AIOI scores, because not all of Gardner’s original subscales were included in this study. However, each subscale within the original AMTB has recently been shown to have strong construct validity (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

The BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) was chosen to elicit students’ beliefs about L2 acquisition. The original instrument contains 35 items to which students responded on a Likert scale. The subsection “Motivations and Expectations” (four items) was eliminated because of its overlap with the AIOI. Furthermore, one item concerning the use of language labs in the “Learning and Communication Strategies” subsection was eliminated because the seventh-grade students in the study would not be exposed to language labs. One additional change was made: A question regarding the difficulty of the language being studied was expanded to include responses for both Spanish and French, because students would be exposed to both. A total of 29 items was used. All of the belief statements used, grouped by category of beliefs, are located in Tables 5 through 8, which appear later in this article. Students’ responses, reported in percentages, are included within the tables.

It is important to note that the BALLI is used here to gather descriptive information only. Hence, the application of the instrument in this setting was not in comparing groups but in determining, in an exploratory fashion, whether the seventh graders began their language study with beliefs and expectations that might be inaccurate or unrealistic. If that were true, it would point to the importance of further study on whether teachers could help students “rid themselves of preconceived notions and prejudices which would likely interfere with their language learning” (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283–284). We do not yet know enough about the nature of incoming students’ beliefs to design effective curricular intervention addressing those beliefs.

**Experimental Lessons**

The previous study (Mantle-Bromley & Miller, 1991) upon which this study was based incorporated eight lessons into the first semester of 10 first-year Spanish classes. The lessons used attitude-change theory and multicultural training techniques in an attempt to modify students’ attitudes. In order to adapt the lessons to the intended audience in this study, the researcher used teachers’ feedback from the initial lessons, along with information gained during the pilot study, in which she talked with 135 seventh-grade FLEX students at the beginning of the school year. The modifications were based on these seventh graders’ common cultural misconceptions, stereotypes, and motivations. The final experimental curriculum consisted of eight 50-minute lessons plus follow-up activities to be incorporated into the following week’s classes. In order to limit the amount of teacher variation, the lessons were highly structured and included the materials needed for all activities. As in the previous study, the lessons utilized attitude change and multicultural education theory and were influenced by the work of many authors in the field of intercultural communication, most notably that of Robinson (1988).

The lessons embraced five major goals: (a) to help students understand the value of knowing a second language and understanding its cultures, (b) to increase students’ personal reasons for studying a second language, (c) to increase students’ awareness of North American cultural variety, (d) to increase students’ awareness of their own attitudes and beliefs about languages and cultures, and (e) to increase students’ crosscultural communication skills. The underlying premises of the five goals were that cross-cultural understanding and communication skills are desirable; that students learn more effectively about others if they first learn about themselves; and that culture learning, to be meaningful, must actively engage the learner and be nonjudgmental.4

Five attitude-change methods, reviewed and summarized by Triandis (1971), were applicable to classroom use and were used, individually or in combination, in each of the lessons. Active participation of students was a critical element of each lesson. The five methods, along with an example from the experimental lessons, are described below:

1. **Cognitive dissonance.** Cognitive dissonance is created when one becomes aware that an attitude or belief is not supported by data. This was used, for example, in a lesson on Hispanic and Francophone stereotypes. Students were first asked to discuss various beliefs and stereotypes of Spanish- and French-speaking people. They were then shown slides of Spanish and French speakers and were asked to find data that confirmed or negated their beliefs.

2. **Acting in ways inconsistent with one’s beliefs.** In
the lesson on ethnocentrism, for example, students were asked to pretend that they wore uniforms to school the previous year. They were then asked to complete sentences, such as “I didn’t mind wearing a uniform when ______” and “The good thing about uniforms is ______” (Robinson, 1988).

3. Direct exposure to the attitude object. Students in the study received letters and pictures from students studying English in Costa Rica. They wrote return letters and were shown slides of the Costa Rican students in their own school settings.

4. “Fait Accompli.” In this method the teacher gives evidence that supports a particular stance and then asks students to evaluate the situation. One lesson asked students to discuss the importance of intercultural understanding in light of environmental and political issues. They were then asked to determine whether intercultural understanding was a luxury or a necessity.

5. Increased understanding of one’s attitudes, including how they originated and how they are maintained. This approach was used throughout the experimental lessons. One example was the lesson on stereotypes where students discussed where their ideas came from and were asked to look for ways that their beliefs were maintained (via media, friends, community, etc.).

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What were the attitudes, as measured by the AIOI, of students as they entered their first language class? If a student responded as negatively as possible toward all statements in the AIOI (indicating an extremely negative attitude toward French and Spanish languages and cultures), the score would be 38. A score of 266 was the highest positive score possible: 152 would be recorded if a student responded neutrally (neither positively nor negatively) to all 38 statements. The scores (of the control and experimental groups combined) ranged from a low of 52 to a high of 256, with a mean of 176 (slightly positive) for the 208 students. Forty-five students (21.6%) recorded scores lower than the neutral score of 152.

There were no statistical differences found between the control and experimental groups when analyzing the pretest data (t = -1.19, df = 206, p = .23). Interestingly, however, there was a significant difference between male and female students in their initial attitudes as measured by the AIOI (t = -4.13, df = 206, p < .00). The mean score of the seventh-grade boys was more than 17 points lower than that of the girls.

Research Question 2

Would this replication find, as did the original study, that students’ attitudes become less positive after studying a FL? The experimental group’s pre-AIOI mean score (X = 178.7; SD = 30.3) increased slightly by 2.8 points (post-AIOI: X = 181.5; SD = 33.6). The control group’s pre-AIOI score (X = 173.8; SD = 30.3) decreased by 7.4 points (post-AIOI: X = 166.4; SD = 30.3).

Thus, teachers should be aware that students’ attitudes do not (as we might hope) become more positive merely by being in the language class. Mounting evidence suggests, in fact, that without teacher intervention, students become not more, but less positive about other languages and cultures after initial exposure to language study (e.g., Gardner, 1985b; Mantle-Bromley & Miller, 1991). Admittedly, some of this slide may be attributed to students’ disinterest in retaking attitudinal test batteries. However, decreasing attitude scores have consistently appeared in a variety of studies, regardless of the measurement instruments used (Gardner, 1985b, pp. 88–89). Furthermore, the increase in the experimental group’s scores in this study indicates that the phenomenon is actual and that curricular intervention can maintain and even improve students’ attitudes. The statistical difference in these scores is discussed in the following section.

Research Question 3

Would the attitudes of students who participated in experimental lessons designed to improve attitudes toward other languages and cultures be more positive than the attitudes of students who did not participate in the lessons? The analysis of this last question was difficult because of an awkward situation that arose, something possible whenever research on human beings is conducted. During the statistical analysis of the data, it became evident that the variation of AIOI scores between classes was abnormally great. This variation between classes confirmed a concern manifested during qualitative class observations throughout the study: One of the participating teachers had difficulty maintaining a positive and constructive atmosphere in the classroom. The environment of this teacher’s classes had an apparent effect on the students’ attitudes and motivations, in both the control and experimental
groups. Because of the great variation, the analyses could not correctly be conducted on the students within treatment groups; rather it had to be conducted on the classes within treatment groups. The small number of classes included in this study would severely limit the power of analysis to detect differences even if they existed. After consulting with a statistician and several additional educational researchers, the researcher decided to omit this teacher (two control and two experimental classes) from analysis.

The rationale for this poststudy change was twofold. First, qualitative observation and data collection demonstrated this teacher’s inability to maintain a constructive learning environment or to develop a positive rapport with the FLEX students. It became evident to the researcher that Teacher 2 did not have the teaching skills representative of a competent teacher, making Teacher 2 different from the other teachers in the study and from most other language teachers in general.

The second reason for removing Teacher 2’s students’ postdata from analysis was statistical confirmation that Teacher 2’s students, within both the control and experimental groups, differed greatly in their AIOI scores, unlike the students in the classes of the other two teachers.

Initial data analysis showed a significant difference in AIOI scores between classes of students ($p = .00$). Follow-up procedures were conducted because of the qualitative concerns about Teacher 2. Multiple comparison of the AIOI class means (using Fisher’s LSD) demonstrated significant differences ($p < .05$) within both the control and the experimental class means of Teacher 2, unlike the class means of Teacher 1, who also had multiple sections. Furthermore, none of the class means from Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 significantly differed from each other; but they did differ from some of Teacher 2’s class means.

Vastly inconsistent data resulted from Teacher 2’s students. This researcher now recommends to others that each participating teacher’s instructional skills be determined prior to inclusion in research on student attitudes or on curricular innovation.

This circumstance, while unfortunate, supports the importance placed on the teacher in attitude-change efforts. Morgan (1993, p. 73) concludes that “the credibility of the presenter and his or her attractiveness” are critical components of persuasive efforts. It also shows, simply, that if a teacher is not competent in classroom control and instructional delivery, the ability to predict curricular success is greatly reduced.

The removal of Teacher 2’s classes (both control and experimental) obviously changed the numbers in the study, reducing the total number of students’ data analyzed for Question 4 to 147. Table 2 gives the modified breakdown of students by teacher and class. Research Question 3 was also reexamined, eliminating Teacher 2’s data from the analysis. In this analysis the smaller experimental group ($n = 68$) showed positive gains (pre-AIOI: $X = 178.6$; post-AIOI: $X = 185.7$) while the control group’s mean ($n = 79$) decreased by 8.4 points (pre-AIOI: $X = 177.7$; post-AIOI: $X = 169.3$). These mean scores do not reflect the slight statistical adjustments made for the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) procedure used in Research Question 4.

Table 2

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<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students in the study were randomly assigned to the four 9-week sections of FLEX within their own schools. They were also randomly assigned to the various class periods in the case where a teacher taught more than one section of a course. However, the treatment (the experimental lessons) was given to intact classes. Therefore, an analysis of classes within teacher was deemed appropriate. ANCOVA was used to determine if there were differences between the two groups, first taking into account any differences that existed in the groups’ attitudes before the experimental lessons were taught (see Table 3). The pre-AIOI scores were used as the covariate, which controls for any preexisting differences between the control
and experimental groups. The results of the ANCOVA procedure using Group (treatment/control) as the main effect, the pre-AIOI scores as the covariate, and the post-AIOI scores as the dependent variable, demonstrated a significant difference in the students’ attitudes. The attitudes of students who participated in the experimental treatment lessons were more positive than those of students in the control group. In fact, the experimental group’s mean score on each subscale within the AIOI was greater than that of the control group: three of the five subscales showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) using ANCOVA procedures (see Table 4).

The difference between the control and experimental group’s post-AIOI scores may reflect more of a maintenance of the experimental group’s attitudes than a positive attitudinal gain. The decrease in the control group’s overall score is greater than the experimental group’s increase. This finding highlights a misconception of teachers: Students’ attitudes do not become more positive merely by being in the language class. It is also important to note that the subscale “Instrumental Orientation” showed significant treatment-related differences but the subscale “Integrative Orientation,” a focus of several of the lessons, did not. Interestingly, Dörnyei (1990) has found instrumental motivation to be more helpful than integrative motivation in the beginning levels of language learning.

**Research Question 4**

*Did the seventh-grade FLEX students enter the introductory language class with misconceptions, with mistaken beliefs, or both that could cause frustration with the language-learning process?* Student responses on the BALLI from all classes were used to answer this question, because data were collected during the first few days of the FLEX classes. The BALLI is comprised of four belief-related categories of language learning: (a) The Difficulty of Language Learning, (b) Foreign Language Aptitude, (c) The Nature of Language Learning, and (d) Learning and Communication Strategies. The seventh-grade students’ beliefs will be summarized in that order. The percentage of responses for each category was calculated to determine the extent to which misconceptions or unrealistic beliefs about language learning existed.5

**Student Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning.** The responses to three questions in

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**TABLE 3**
Analysis of Covariance: Comparison of Treatment Groups on Post-AIOI Scores (Adjusted for Pre-AIOI Scores)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within Subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4202.27</td>
<td>7.67*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4805.76</td>
<td>8.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Within (Teacher by group + class within teacher by group)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>548.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Subjects</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58346.14</td>
<td>129.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups (Control/Experimental)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8526.55</td>
<td>15.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Between (Students within teacher by treatment)</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>448.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$
this subsection show cause for concern regarding the seventh-grade students' beliefs (see Table 5). A relatively high percentage (23%) of the students believed Spanish to be "easy" or "very easy" to learn. A lesser, but still significant number of students (13%) believed French to be "easy" or "very easy" to learn. While these languages may, in fact, be relatively less difficult for native English speakers than some others, these students are in potential danger of finding that their beliefs and their performance do not match.

A surprising number of students (51%) believed they would learn to speak another language. They also believed, by a majority of 69%, that one could become fluent in an L2 in 2 years' time or less. Students who believe that the language is easy to learn and who also believe that they will learn to speak the language well in less than 2 years may become frustrated with the class (it is letting them down) or with themselves (they must not have the ability to do this). This cognitive dissonance may cause their attitudes to become less positive, and they may apply themselves with less intensity. Ultimately, they may discontinue their language study.

**Students' Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude.** Three beliefs in this subsection may indicate future problems for students (see Table 6). A total of 41% of the students believed that some people are born with a special language-learning aptitude, whereas only 26% believed that they personally had that ability. Even though they had studied a L2 for only 1 week, these students were already equipped with a battery of logical reasons to explain a potential lack of success. Additionally, 31% of the students believed that those who spoke more than one language well were very intelligent. Not only will some students readily believe they are not meant for languages, it seems, they may also erroneously attribute part of their difficulty to lack of intelligence.

**Students' Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning.** The students also had misconceptions related to how one learns another language (see Table 7). A surprising 36% of the students did not believe that cultural understanding was necessary for language acquisition, and 33% of them did not believe that it would be better to learn the language in a country where the language was spoken. The students' responses demonstrated other misconceptions about language learning as well: 44% believed that language learning was mostly learning new vocabulary, and 34% believed that language learning was mostly a matter of translation from English. Many of these students, then, apparently entered the language class with mistaken beliefs about the skills and knowledge necessary for them to succeed. Students' study habits and what they attend to in class are influenced, in

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### TABLE 5
Percentage of Students' Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73. Some languages are easier to learn than others.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74. The French language is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language to learn.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak a foreign language very well.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than a year, 2) 1–2 years, 3) 3–5 years, 4) 5–10 years, 5) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94. It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99. The Spanish language is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language to learn.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100%, due to rounding and missing responses.
TABLE 6  
Percentage of Students' Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84. Learning another language is easy for me.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90. Girls are better than boys at learning foreign languages.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97. Americans are good at learning foreign languages.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100%, due to rounding and missing responses.

TABLE 7  
Percentage of Students' Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80. It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100%, due to rounding and missing responses.

part, by these beliefs. If class activities do not match students’ beliefs, or when their efforts in accordance with these beliefs do not help them succeed, the potential for damaging, unnecessary frustration increases.

Students' Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies. One belief in particular could cause unproductive inhibitions in the language classroom (see Table 8). A total of 23% of the seventh graders indicated that one should not speak the language until one can speak correctly. Combine that reluctance to speak before mastery with the percentage who feel self-conscious speaking the FL at all in front of others (37%), and it is easy to see where language-related anxieties can originate.

CONCLUSION

By demonstrating that not just any teacher can create a positive classroom environment, where mutual respect is the norm, this study strengthens the argument that classroom teachers can make a difference in their students' atti-
### TABLE 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78. You shouldn’t say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81. If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82. It’s O.K. to guess if you don’t know a word in the foreign language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87. I feel funny speaking the foreign language in front of other people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100%, due to rounding and missing responses.

Attitudes toward languages and cultures. From the data presented here, FL teachers may infer that such changes in students’ attitudes do not necessarily occur on their own. In fact, without teachers’ efforts, students’ attitudes may become less positive. Without a positive learning atmosphere, students may well gain little or nothing from new curricular infusions. Apparently, it takes a talented teacher and willing students for classroom innovation to be successful.

The data resulting from the BALL1 demonstrate, additionally, that students’ beliefs about language learning must also be addressed. This researcher strongly recommends that teachers design and implement lessons on the language-learning process that incorporate attitude-change methods. Research then needs to be conducted to determine if such lessons can, indeed, alter students’ beliefs.

Foreign language teachers have the weighty responsibility of convincing their students that language study is more than a college entrance requirement, more than merely a mental exercise or a clever way to speak in code with one’s peers (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Furthermore, teachers must first acknowledge that some students come to them with certain attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that may actually prove harmful to their success in the classroom. The evidence indicates that it is possible to help students overcome these blocks to language learning.

A significant increase in the intercultural/global skills of the American citizenry is logically dependent on an increase in the numbers of proficient speakers of other languages. If we are to move closer to having more proficient speakers, we must, of course, have students in language classes for more than just a short time. But that time, however, must also be productive. Thus, we must include in the FL curriculum ways to address the attitudes and beliefs students bring to the classroom.

If we attend to the affective and cognitive components of students’ attitudes as well as develop defendable pedagogical techniques, we may be able to increase both the length of time students commit to language study and their chances of success in it.6

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**NOTES**

1 Gardner (1985b) proposes the socioeducational model of L2 acquisition, where a variety of language-related attitudes, a desire to communicate with speakers of the studied language (integrative orientation), and effort comprise the motivation to pursue language proficiency. Lett and Keesling (1993) suggest that context plays a critical role in the effect of integrative motivation on proficiency. Dörnyei (1990) has found that instrumental motivation (e.g., studying for economic goals, college requirements, etc.) is more helpful for beginning-level language learners, but that integrative motivation is crucial if students are to persist beyond those beginning levels. Oxford and Shearin (1994) propose a more comprehensive model that includes aspects of general, industrial, educational, and cognitive developmental motivation theory—as well as Gardner’s socioeducational model.
The district’s student population, primarily middle- and upper-middle class, numbered approximately 30,000. Minority population in the district was just over 7%.

Although there were a number of other FLEX teachers in the district, the three participating teachers were the only ones who were qualified to teach both the French and Spanish portions of the course. Other schools split the FLEX courses between the French and Spanish teachers. In order to limit the variability between teachers, the study was delimited to those three teachers who taught the entire 9-week course.

Contact the author for a more descriptive account of the lessons used in the study.

For ease in narrative reporting, the percentages for agree and strongly agree, and the percentages for disagree and strongly disagree have been combined. The actual percentages for each possible answer, rounded to the nearest whole number, are shown in Tables 5–8.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, April, 1994.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author extends her appreciation to the MLJ anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their helpful comments.

REFERENCES


I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages. I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation. I wish I could speak another language perfectly. If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be the middle school of the nineties. Foreign Language Annals, 27, 59–62.

Attitude toward French Speakers

I would like to know more French-speaking people. Some of the U.S.’ best citizens are of French descent. For the most part, French-speaking people are sincere and honest. French-speaking people are very friendly and neighborly. I would like to know more French-speaking people. The more I learn about French-speaking people, the more I like them. I would like to get to know French-speaking people better.

Attitude toward Spanish Speakers

I would like to know more Spanish-speaking people. The more I learn about Spanish-speaking people, the more I like them. The Spanish-speaking people are very friendly and neighborly. I have always admired Spanish-speaking people. English-speaking Americans should make a greater effort to learn the Spanish language. Some of the U.S.’ best citizens are of Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) descent. Spanish-speaking people are trustworthy and dependable. I would like to get to know Spanish-speaking people better. For the most part, Spanish-speaking people are sincere and honest. I have a positive attitude toward Spanish-speaking people.

Interest in Foreign Languages

If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak the language of the people. Even though the U.S. is relatively far from countries speaking other languages, it is important for Americans to learn foreign languages. I wish I could speak another language perfectly. I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation. I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in another language. I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages.
If I planned to stay in another country, I would make a great effort to learn the language even though I could get along in English. I am definitely going to study a foreign language in high school. I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages. Studying a foreign language is an enjoyable experience.

**Integrative Orientation**

Studying a foreign language can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak that language. Studying a foreign language can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and talk with more and varied people. Studying a foreign language can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate other countries' art and literature.

Studying a foreign language can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups.

**Instrumental Orientation**

Studying a foreign language can be important for me because I'll need it to get into a good university. Studying a foreign language can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person. Studying a foreign language can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job. Studying a foreign language can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language.

*For complete test battery information, see Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1974.*

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**Announcing Special Issue**

Interaction and Collaboration in Language Learning
Guest Editors: Martha Nyikos and Rebecca Oxford

We are seeking papers centered on language learning, rather than on teaching. We welcome theoretical thought pieces, comparative review studies, and research-based studies, either quantitative or qualitative in design.

Articles on theoretical frameworks might include:
1. Definitional articles on collaboration, cooperation, or interaction
2. Critiques of cooperative and collaborative learning, including interpersonal, ethical, and responsibility-centered issues

Comparative review articles or research pieces might address the following areas:
1. Student-to-student cooperation or teacher-to-student collaborations in language learning
2. Research-to-participant collaborations, as in ethnographic approaches using participant observation
3. Electronically mediated collaboration among language learners
4. Learning styles or strategies, or both, as factors in interaction and collaboration
5. Written and oral interaction
6. Meaning negotiation, project completion, and processes leading to successful and unsuccessful cooperation or interaction
7. School partnerships where cooperation is for the purpose of teacher professional development
8. Effectiveness of different models of cooperative or collaborative learning.

This list of suggestions is by no means exhaustive. The guest editors invite full articles or an initial 1-2 page prospectus. Please send prospectuses to the guest editors and full articles to the MLJ following regular submission requirements. All articles will be sent for anonymous review as is MLJ policy.

Submission deadline for full articles is June 1, 1996, or until issue is full.

Martha Nyikos
Language Education-3044, School of Education
210 N. Rose Street, Bloomington, IN 47405-8272
nyikos@indiana.edu

Rebecca Oxford
College of Education, Department of English
Graves Hall/Box 870231, University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0231, roxford@bamaed.ua.edu