Motivational aspects of using near peers as role models

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Introduction

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a role model as "a person who someone admires and whose behaviour they try to copy". We can find role models all around us: for budding chefs their role models might be Jamie Oliver or Michel Roux, or for those who dream about becoming sports stars it could be Serena Williams or Lionel Messi. Role modelling is a natural process that we all engage in, and it is one of the reasons why language learners so often report believing that the best way to learn a language is to move to a country where it is spoken: so they can be surrounded by language role models (Murphey & Murakami, 1998: 1). A role model can have either a positive or a negative effect on someone's life. For example, modern 'celebrity culture' is sometimes considered to provide negative role models for children, and we do not find all of the role models that we look up to equally motivating.

Near peer role models are people who are comparable to ourselves in one or more fundamental ways, for example in terms of our age, gender, ethnicity, or past experiences. Due to the fact that they are our 'near peers', we are more easily able to relate to them on a personal level, and as such they appear to have a far greater impact on our motivation than someone who is very different from ourselves, even if that person exhibits comparable achievements. Near peer role models allow us to imagine, 'if they can do it, why can't I?'

This paper begins by looking at what defines a near peer role model and goes on to consider the differences between near peer and native speaker role models, before highlighting the key foundations of these ideas in the research literature. It will then look at the different ways we might exploit near peer role modelling in the language classroom and suggest practical techniques that we might use to do so. The paper concludes by considering other implications – for example, for textbook design and teacher training – and by making recommendations for further reading.

What is a near peer role model?

"Near peer role models (NPRMs) are people who might be "near" to us in several ways: age, ethnicity, gender, interests, past or present experiences, and also in proximity and in frequency of social contact" (Murphey & Arao, 2001: 1).

For a second language learner, NPRMs might be found all around. They could be within a learner's class or in their wider school context, they may also be students who have recently graduated, or sometimes even their teacher. Although non-native speaker teachers might, on paper, appear to best fit the description of NPRMs, in some circumstances native speaker teachers might also be able to act as NPRMs, for example if their students see them working hard to study another language (Murphey, Chen & Chen, 2005). It is interesting to note that after beginning university, students most commonly describe their NPRMs as their classmates, whereas at school it is their teachers that they most commonly describe (Murphey et al., 2005). The authors explained this as being due to the more interactive and communicative nature of English language classrooms at university, and the lack of interaction in many school classrooms leading to fewer possibilities for learners to be able to recognise their peers as NPRMs.

NPRMs might also be fellow language learners outside of the immediate classroom environment. For example, they might be people we meet on our daily commute to work or school, or people we see regularly while playing sports or engaging in other leisure activities. In their definition of NPRMs, Murphey and Arao (2001) explain the importance of this 'nearness' in terms of "proximity and in frequency of social contact", seemingly excluding people who are not personally known to us. However, because the internet and social media play such extensive roles in the lives of students in some contexts – and with the amount of information about celebrities and other well-known personas now so freely accessible – we might argue that these students do sometimes feel as though they actually 'know' their role models. Therefore, in some contexts it might be possible for them to function as 'near peers', if they also happen to be of a similar demographic to the learner.

In the context of second language learning research, the most complete body of work looking at NPRMs has been completed by Tim Murphey, his colleagues and his graduate students (cf. Murphey, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2003; Murphey & Arao, 2001; Murphey & Murakami, 1998). The findings of this research agenda can be broadly summarised in the below key points:

- It is important that a NPRM is a similar age to a learner (Watson, 1993). This includes the fact that NPRMs might also be slightly younger than the learner (Murphey, 1998).

- It is important that NPRMs are the same gender as a learner.

- It is important that NPRMs are of the same nationality as a learner, or that they come from a similar culture.

- It is important that NPRMs have similar backgrounds (for example professional, economic or social) and have similar past experiences as a learner.

- NPRMs at a similar, or even at a slightly lower overall linguistic level can positively affect change in learner beliefs (Murphey & Murakami, 1998), for example if the NPRM is modelling positive learning strategies.

Other key findings have provided evidence for the fact that exposure to NPRMs can result in immediate benefits relating to motivation and excitement, risk taking and the amount of English used (Murphey & Murakami, 1998: 14): In students' own words "I was encouraged by video because they said that even in Japan we can learn English" and "I'm encouraged by people in video. They said it's natural to make mistakes because English is not our mother tongue. I was impressed" (ibid., 15). There has also been evidence to suggest that these positive changes can be long lasting (Murphey & Arao, 2001), and that relatively little class time is required to achieve them (30 minutes in Murphey & Murakami's 1998 study). Finally, it is also the case that a learner may only want to emulate a single characteristic or ability of a NPRM, and not the whole person (Murphey & Arao, 2001): we do not necessarily need to particularly 'like' peers for them to be able act as our NPRMs.

> **Exposure to NPRMs can result in immediate benefits relating to motivation and excitement, risk taking and the amount of English used.**

Near peer role models versus native speaker role models

Historically, typical role models for learners have been native speakers of the language that they are studying. Published language learning materials such as textbooks have predominantly included native speaker examples, something especially true of materials designed for a global audience, which do not have the luxury of content tailored for specific learner groups. Since before the turn of the new millennium, however, there have been strong arguments put forward against the positioning of native speakers as the most desirable standard to which language learners should aspire (cf. Cook, 1999; Rampton, 1990). For example, Cook (1999: 185) argues that second language users "should be considered speakers in their own right, not as approximations to monolingual native speakers", and Rampton (1990: 98) suggests that we should instead

"speak of accomplished users as expert rather than as native speakers", when we discuss language proficiency.

Providing learners with lots of positive examples of NPRMs is, therefore, one way to position learners as "successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers" (Cook, 1999: 204). A child learning to ice skate is not considered a failure if they do not compete in the Olympic games, nor is someone studying physics considered a failure if they do not master quantum theory: "In all these other cases the learner's progress is not measured against an external target of perfection but set against standards appropriate to the learner's own nature" (Cook, 1995: 53). As Cook also highlights, competency judgements are often made in relation to "the competence of the monolingual, not the competence peculiar to L2 speakers" (53–54). This implies a further possible important characteristic of NPRMs: that they are multilingual, just as the learners themselves are.

Many students around the world still desire to be able to sound like or to pass as native speakers, and as teachers we should both be respectful of their personal goals and acknowledge that in some contexts, markers of 'non-nativeness' can be viewed negatively (for example in some contexts there can be prejudice or preconceptions surrounding accented speech). In some cases native speaker role models can be intensely motivating, although their motivational influence can also be less robust than that of NPRMs: "It is easy to be unimpressed with native speakers after the newness wears off ("Of course they speak the language, they were born there")" (Murphey & Murakami, 1998: 3). A loss of motivation can also occur when learners realise that the goals that they are investing so much effort in are ultimately unachievable (Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016).

NPRMs offer learners something different than native speaker role models. NPRMs provide real-life examples of people who have already achieved the success that learners are working towards, and can represent more achievable and believable motivational targets than native speakers (Brown & Inouye, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Having clear goals can be an important motivator, but not all goals are equally motivating (Locke & Latham, 1990). For example, research has told us is that having a series of smaller goals that map out a route to a larger end goal is particularly important, especially when we

want to be able to maintain motivation over a longer period of time (Bandura & Simon, 1977; Schunk, 1983).

Working with a NPRM helps learners to better be able to identify their own sub-goals. By seeing what a NPRM can achieve, this can help learners to see the 'next step' in their pathway to improvement. This relates to Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). A learner's ZPD is the difference between what they would be able to achieve if they worked on their own, and what they could be able to achieve with expert guidance or support from a more advanced peer. NPRMs can help learners to 'see the next step' in their language learning development, and for this reason can provide more achievable models than those whose proficiency far exceeds their own. "The principle hypothesis here is that when teachers highlight what fellow students are doing well, things that are leading to positive outcomes, then other students may have an easier time believing that it can be done and adopting the behaviour because it is within their range of (what they see as) possible behaviours" (Murphey & Murakami, 1998: 3). This can be especially important for lower-level or slower learners, as the distance between themselves and a native speaker role model can appear even more daunting (Murphey et al., 2005).

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Key theoretical foundations of near peer role modelling

Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory holds at its centre that learning takes place in a social context. Through a process of observation and imitation, behaviour change can occur from the modelling of those that we see around us – providing that the actions we observe lead to a positive outcome. As Bandura states: "seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities" (1997: 87).

Very simply, an individual's 'efficacy belief' is how strongly they believe that they have the ability to complete a task successfully. Bandura claims that this belief affects all areas of our lives, including how we think, feel, and behave, and also how we motivate ourselves (1997: 19). An important finding has been that even for learners with lower levels of motivation and lower levels of belief in their abilities, exposure to NPRMs can nevertheless have a positive effect (Murphey & Arao, 2001).

An important factor which influences an individual's efficacy beliefs is vicarious experience. As Mills (2014: 8) describes:

"Vicarious experiences, or the appraisal of abilities in relation to the accomplishment of peers, are an additional source of self-efficacy beliefs. Visualizing the successes of comparable individuals in terms of age, level, and ability can raise a person's efficacy beliefs by fostering the belief that s/he could also master comparable tasks. Conversely, observing a peer's failure can weaken an individual's belief in his/her ability to succeed. Vicarious experiences can therefore provide individuals with valuable information about their own perceived capabilities" (Bandura, 1997).

So, seeing the success of people who are similar to us not only provides models for us to imitate, but also increases our confidence that we might also be able achieve similar outcomes.

When we think about NPRMs in the second language classroom, two further ideas are also important: imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is likely that as you read this page now, you are a member of several different communities of practice. Communities of practice exist all around us, for example you may be a part of a community of practice with other teachers at work, with friends in a local running club, or with fellow volunteers at a local charity: very simply, communities of practice are groups of people who regularly meet together to talk about their shared interest or passion and to learn from each other. An imagined community is similar to a community of practice, except that it looks further afield than the immediate context surrounding us: "Imagined communities refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003: 241). In other words, we might imagine ourselves as part of an imagined global community that is interested in learning languages, travelling and experiencing new cultures: although this is not a fixed group of people that regularly meets (like a community of practice), an imagined community is a way for us to

imagine ourselves being accepted by and interacting with people very similar to those that we would like to become.

Bonny Norton writes that "a learner's imagined community invite[s] an imagined identity" (2001: 166), and we might also relate this to another key theory in second language learning motivation, that of the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). A learner's ideal L2 self is a part of a person's wider 'ideal self', which encompasses all of the things that a person would ideally like to become in the future. A learner's ideal L2 self is the language specific part of their ideal self: for example, this might be someone who can give a confident presentation in English at work, or someone who can buy train tickets at Paddington Station in London with minimal misunderstanding.

When we imagine our ideal L2 selves, we often imagine them participating in an imagined community, or interacting in a local community of practice that we want to join. This can also help us to create and refine our ideal L2 selves. As one student describes "I started studying English at a private school, and I dreamed to be like my teacher because she told me many interesting stories which she had experienced in foreign countries" (Murphey et al., 2005: 90). In this case, by opening up about her personal experiences the teacher acted as a role model for her student, helping them to create a clear goal and desired outcome for their language learning (that is, the teacher helped them to develop an ideal L2 self, and in doing so also helped them to better connect with a possible imagined community that was relevant to them and that they could aspire to).

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These ideas have direct relevance to our discussion about NPRMs. At any one time within a community of practice, each of us will be acting in multiple roles. As Haneda (1997: 23) describes of two students in her study, and of the community of practice she describes in their multi-level classroom: "Iris and Yuka successfully established new learning relationships, drawing upon their respective strengths and interchangeably playing the roles of expert and novice. Their individual areas of expertise were complementary, and it was this that made their collaboration successful." That is, the students in this classroom were able to view their peers as NPRMs and act as NPRMs for their peers simultaneously, as they changed from task to task. With this in mind, we might imagine a learner with a whole class full of near peer role models, each respected for a different reason.

Finally, Carpenter and Murphey (2007) also highlight the importance of contexts where there is a lot of interaction (for example, very communicative language classrooms) as being central to exploiting the opportunities that NPRMs can provide. The rise in popularity in recent years of communicative language teaching therefore provides an excellent basis from which we might begin to think about helping language learners to identify and make the most of these opportunities, to allow them to draw from the knowledge and skills of the NPRMs that are already in place all around them.

Exploiting near peer role models in the language classroom

It is important to remember that all students can function as NPRMs in the language classroom. All language learners have their own strengths and weaknesses, and part of the process of exploiting NPRMs in this context is helping learners to understand where their personal strengths lie. All of the advice in this section centres on the same basic principles, and as a starting point Murphey and Murakami (1998: 18) suggest the following three steps:

1. Decide on (or discover within your group of students) the characteristics of good learners that you wish other students to emulate. These might either be language features that are particularly relevant to a specific task or to the outcomes of a course, or they might be related instead to modelling the skills of 'good language learners', for example connected to effective strategy use (see suggestions for further reading for practical resources for inspiration).

2. Find examples of these characteristics already among your students.

3. Give these examples more exposure so that students can see, hear, or read about them.

Although these same broad principles are followed in all of the ideas below, NPRMs can be used to exploit many different aims and outcomes. Practical suggestions are made for each, although each one might also easily also be adapted to sit within a different section: in trying

these activities out, therefore, it might be most useful to consider a 'mix and match' approach, as appropriate for each learner group in each classroom context.

Acting as NPRMs can benefit the NPRMs themselves:

- It is important that a teacher ensures all students in a class are positioned in some way as NPRMs. It might be particularly beneficial if teachers are able to highlight examples of excellence in quieter or weaker group members. This could potentially benefit not only the class as a whole (in terms of highlighting and helping students to recognise NPRMs), but also benefit the learner themselves in terms of increasing their confidence, their feeling of belonging within the group, and their level of self-belief that they are able to be successful.

NPRMs can act as language models: NPRMs can be used to model specific language points, fluency or other L2 competencies.

- Teachers might highlight particularly good use of language, for example as used in role plays or other communicative exercises. This does not need planning or preparation, rather the teacher must simply listen out for excellent examples of language use and be ready to react. Teachers might also share stories about successful learners from previous years, or encourage students to share success stories

of people they know outside of the classroom – we might imagine this to be more effective still if any of these learners were able to speak to the group themselves (either in person or online, for example using video calling through Skype).

- Examples of positive language use might also be captured and made available for learners to listen to outside of the classroom. Ashton-Hay & Brookes (2011) describe a project in which short learner podcasts were recorded and uploaded to a website, the aim being to "provide positive and authentic models for mentoring and guiding" and to create "an innovative, independent and sustaining learning resource" (23). Photos of graduates were arranged on a web page alongside their first name and the flag of their home country, and students were also able to access a transcript of the recordings. Although resources like this are time consuming to put together, they allow students to listen to this input and these stories multiple times, and are a lasting resource. Although this could be used to achieve many of the possibilities of NPRMs described here, one use might be to ask graduates to discuss the ways in which they are currently using their English and its importance or relevance to them in their daily lives.

- It may be that some of these NPRM videos include some grammar mistakes. Although simple errors could be corrected in accompanying transcriptions, there is also evidence that because of the powerful nature of NPRMs and this type of input in this context these errors may take on a secondary level of importance: "the interviewees' enthusiasm was a much more powerful factor and in the end not a single student even commented on any errors" (Murphey & Murakami, 1998: 16).

NPRMs can act as models for positive learning habits: NPRMs might not only model successful language use, but they might also model positive communication strategies or other learning strategies.

- One way to do this might be to show groups of learners' short video clips of more advanced peers who are actively

using the communication strategies that a group is studying. For example, this might be asking follow up questions or offering clarification (several good examples of this can be found in Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011 and Miller, 2012). These videos could be used in many different ways in the classroom, for example students predicting what strategies they might hear, practicing using the strategies they hear in their own conversations, and by working with the recordings with/without transcriptions.

- An alternative approach might be to ask learners to keep 'action logs' (Murphey, 1993; 1996). Teachers might ask learners to focus on different aspects of their learning (communication/learning strategies they are trying to improve on, how they have overcome a specific challenge), and also anything they have seen their peers do that they think has been particularly good and that they would like to imitate. Good examples of students identifying NPRMs might then be shared with the entire group for inspiration.

- Regularly videoing student conversations (for example on a weekly basis) and requiring students to view them as homework has achieved very positive outcomes, even for the students who have

2008). There are concrete things a teacher can do in order to prepare students for periods of study abroad (for example helping learners to develop autonomous learning habits prior to departure, or setting clear goals; Roberts et al. (2001) provide a particularly good example of the latter of these), and a further tool at a teacher's disposal might be working with NPRMs. This could be achieved by students from the year above coming to lead a class 'question and answer' session, or by students completing video diaries whey they are abroad discussing problems (and solutions) throughout their stay, to be edited by the teacher and shared with students the next year before they begin their own periods of study abroad. Although study abroad opportunities are not relevant to all contexts, we might imagine similar approaches being taken to prepare learners to begin university, or to make the most of a set of upcoming classes with a native speaker teacher.

been initially hesitant (Murphey & Kenny, 1998; Murphey & Woo, 1998). As one learner describes:

"She shadowed the most important words in the sentences! So I could see she really understood me while I was speaking. And the other impressive thing about her was 'expanding questions'! She asked me "how was it?" … She tried to expand the topic and it was very helpful for me to continue the conversation. And at the end of the conversation, she said "So, let me summarize" and she summarized what I said briefly!! I was really impressed" (Murphey, 2001: 139).

Recording devices are becoming increasingly more affordable, and even if schools do not have or are unable to buy new equipment, in many contexts it is likely that students may even already own equipment they can use for these purposes (e.g. recording devices in mobile phones).

- Periods of study abroad can lead to considerable leaps forward in language development, although language gains are rarely equal between students, and they can vary quite significantly even between individuals who spend time in exactly the same environment (Churchill & DuFon, 2006; Kinginger,

NPRMs can offer encouragement and reassurance:
Even though learners might report knowing that 'perfect performance' is not necessary, this can be a difficult belief to act out in practice, and NPRMs could be used to support this. Indeed, in their study Murphey and Murakami (1998) state that the most commonly reported outcome students took away with them after being exposed to NPRMs was that it was natural for non-native speakers to make mistakes.

- One way to do this might be for teachers to find examples of fluent non-native speakers making errors in the media. Beginning with the accepted basis that these individuals are very successful users of English, it might be of value to highlight specific language errors that are made or any temporary breakdowns in communication. Highlighting 'errors' even in otherwise successful communicative encounters may help learners to overcome any fears of making mistakes and allow them to communicate more freely. For this to be successful, students would need to view these speakers as NPRMs, and so they would need to be carefully chosen by the teacher (likely with input from learners themselves).

- Another way to achieve this might be through students writing letters to their classmates. They could describe something they have found difficult and how they have tried to overcome it, and students might reply offering their own advice. This could also be set up orally, with students in small 'ideas exchange' sessions or through online discussion boards (for example, the teacher might collect problems students have difficulty with, and then upload these problems anonymously online for students to give their advice, with all students therefore having the possibility to act as a NPRMs for each other).

NPRMs can help inspire autonomous learning: Learning a language is a long-term process, and to achieve success it is important that learners are able to take control of their learning, for example by setting their own short-term goals to help them plan their next steps.

- One way to support learners in developing autonomous learning habits may be to explicitly talk to learners about NPRMs – what they are, and why they are important, and how learners might use them. Equipping learners with this knowledge in conjunction with other awareness raising activities may help them in the future to be able to better identity NPRMs on their own, without requiring direct instruction and intervention from the teacher.

- A related practice may also be through peer tutoring or teaching (Knop, 1975) or buddy-reading/cross-age tutoring (Samway, Whang & Pippitt, 1995). Although not explicitly related to NPRMs, if students are matched correctly we might expect that it could open up powerful opportunities for these same processes to occur.

NPRMs can provide feedback that teachers are not able to: This might be because a teacher simply does not have the information (for example, tips for 'Day 1' of a foreign exchange from a student who has recently experienced it) or because they simply do not have the time to give such regular, detailed, and personalised feedback to all students. There is also evidence that this type of feedback may be particularly important for harder to reach or less successful learners (Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011: 18).

- If a teacher has access to former students, they might act as NPRMs for current students through an 'ask the expert' forum. For example, university students could answer high school students' questions about settling in to university. This could either be done in a classroom context, through Skype, or even through an online discussion forum to which all members of a class are able to contribute. Questions might include best exam revision tips, what to do in the first month at university, or how to start reading more English outside of lessons. Answers could also be collated and shared by the teacher so students have a physical document with this advice to take away, or it might be given to other classes (who could then also take on the role of NPRM 'experts' and comment on and potentially refine/tailor this advice).

- In a similar activity, teachers might position more advanced NPRMs as 'myth busters'. For example discussing common beliefs such as 'Making mistakes means people won't be able to understand me', or 'Making mistakes is too embarrassing'.

NPRMs can change teacher beliefs: There is evidence that exposing students to positive NPRMs can also have positive effects on, and change the beliefs of the teacher themselves. The teacher in Murphey and Arao's (2001) study reported spending more time teaching speaking in response to their learners' change in attitudes after they had been exposed to NPRMs, and likewise they report that this result appeared to be both long lasting and cyclical "these new beliefs and behaviors may have further intensified the students' investment in learning" (9).

- While a teacher might not be able to 'plan' to change their beliefs, an important recognition might be that teachers must remain open to the possibility that this may happen, and be ready to embrace that change if it does. For example, if students gain confidence in their speaking skills or their willingness to communicate, they are likely to want and expect more opportunities to speak in class!

- NPRMs may also help to counteract unconscious teacher bias. Ogisu's (1998; reported on in Murphey & Arao, 2001) results again highlighted the importance of providing near peer role models of the same gender as learners. The following feedback was

received from one of several male students whose motivation actually went down after watching videos of NPRMs talking about their positive experiences of learning English: "they are 'girls' and […] 'teachers always praise girls'" (Murphey & Arao, 2001: 3).

- The above also highlights the importance of a teacher collecting feedback to understand the effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness) of any of the approaches to working with NPRMs that they have used. This could be done very simply (with a show of hands or a brief class discussion) or through short questionnaires at the end of a class (these again might be very brief, including only one or two questions, for example (1) what did you learn from viewing this video/reading this language learner history/talking to this person? And (2) what might you try to do differently in the future?). Positive comments about NPRMs might then be circulated around the whole class for inspiration.

NPRMs can act as the inspiration for the creation or refinement of a learner's ideal L2 self: Ideal L2 selves are known to have more motivational potential if a specific set of conditions are met. These include that an ideal L2 self must be vivid and elaborate, that they must be realistic, and – first and foremost – that a language learner must have an ideal L2 self (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). Being exposed to positive NPRMs may help learners be able to develop their ideal L2 selves in all of these ways, even possibly causing a learner to increase the complexity or the language level they imagine themselves capable of achieving.

- A 'vision inspired motivational teaching practice' (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) includes the following six steps: (1) Creating the vision, (2) Strengthening the vision, (3) Substantiating the vision (that is, making sure it is plausible), (4) Transforming the vision into action, (5) Keeping the vision alive, and (6) Counterbalancing the vision (that is, considering what might happen if the vision is not achieved – it should be noted, however, that this step should be used with caution and in moderation). We might realistically imagine language learners acting as NPRMs for each of these steps, for example a learner modelling examples of how they have managed to 'keep their vision alive' even in a busy school context.

- Sharing language learning histories (Oxford & Green, 1996) might be a further way learners are encouraged to think more about their ideal L2 selves. Students sharing their language learning histories would not only develop the group dynamic (e.g. by students learning more about each other; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), but could also act as a further way to model the ways that learners have overcome the challenges that they have faced in their language learning. These could then be collated and given out to other students in the group. This might be especially effective with learners who have studied in several different learning environments (for example in both more and in less communicative classrooms), as they may be more self-aware about how they learn best, and so be better able to recognise positive learning habits and skills both in themselves and in the NPRMs they see around them.

- Having an ideal L2 self is especially important for students studying in foreign language contexts where English is not spoken outside of the classroom. In this context, it can sometimes be very difficult for learners to understand why they are studying, other than perhaps to achieve a good grade. Rogoff et al. (2003) describe this as a lack of "intent participation" – that is, students lacking any intention to actually make use of what they are studying in the future. In this instance, NPRMs might be used to increase students' awareness of the ways in which a knowledge of English might help them access different life paths and opportunities in the future.

Other implications

1. Implications for the classroom

Although of central importance for all classrooms, for students to be able to view their classmates as NPRMs it is crucial that there exists a strong group dynamic (cf. Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). If students do not like, accept or respect each other, this must first be addressed. In the meantime, it might be that a teacher is able to highlight NPRMs outside of the immediate classroom context, or be able to act as a NPRM themselves.

Another important implication for the classroom relates to the level of communication between students. Although highlighting possible NPRMs through students' writing might be effective, to a limited extent, if students from a very disconnected class were to swap essays, it is likely that this would be more effective if the students knew each other. Without these personal connections, learners might be able to attribute any excellence that they see in their peers to isolated pieces of information that they know about them. It is likely that this information would highlight their differences more than their similarities (i.e., that they would find it difficult to view them as NPRMs), and there is no guarantee that this information would be either relevant or correct. For example, students believing that their peers are only able to do something 'because they have additional tutoring', or 'because they have an aunt who speaks English'.

Two final implications are worthy of consideration. The first of these is that the more a teacher is able to be consistent in highlighting the importance of NPRMs, the better. Even if a teacher does spend a lesson (or several lessons) helping learners to identify NPRMs and understand their value, if they neglect to carry this emphasis on it is likely that students will also place similar levels of importance on doing so. Secondly, it is important to remember that there is no guarantee of success the first time any of these ideas are

introduced to the classroom, and that different learners and learner groups may initially be more or less open to trying them: it is therefore important that teachers begin this process both prepared for failure, and ready to try again!

2. Implications for materials design

As long as textbooks are required to cater for a global market, it is impossible for teachers to be able to rely on them to provide reliable examples of NPRMs for their students. However, materials design in the future might include practical and adaptable activity ideas that teachers can use to encourage learners to think about and recognise NPRMs in those around them. Additional and more varied audio or video examples of NPRMs could also be a very valuable resource. This could give teachers more flexibility in choosing the content that they use, and allow them to be able to choose actors that are closest to the demographics of their learners: that is, to be able to choose actors that they believe most likely to be able to act as NPRMs for the students in their classroom.

3. Implications for teacher training

All of the same principles of using NPRMs might also be applied successfully in the context of teacher training (see e.g. Fujimoto et al., 1998; Murphey & Sasaki, 1998), and even for practicing language teachers too. As teachers, we have peers all over the world who are facing many of the same challenges that we are, and the internet has allowed us to connect with them in a way that would not previously have been thought possible. One platform that can be easily used for this is Twitter: by linking with peers in similar teaching contexts around the world, it is possible to easily build up an extensive 'personal learning network' of NPRMs, that we can use to both find – and share our own – advice, tips and experience.

Conclusion

The more similar a NPRM is to a learner, the greater the likelihood that they may be able to affect positive change. This similarity might be in terms of their gender, nationality, first language, profession, background, or other personal factors. Although native speaker role models can be motivating, the reason that NPRMs are so inspirational is because they represent a real-life example of someone similar to ourselves, who has already achieved what we are working towards. To repeat the question posed in the introduction to this paper, this leads us to ask: 'if they can do it, why can't we?'

A key question, however, remains unanswered: how 'near' is 'near enough'? There is unfortunately a limited body of research looking at near peer role models in the context of second language learning, yet even with this in mind it is important to recognise that this is a question that is likely impossible to answer in its entirety. It may be that we are able to find evidence of someone being inspired by a NPRM that 'violates' some of the principles that have been summarised here. For example, a learner being highly motivated by a NPRM of a different gender, or a non-native speaker teacher not being viewed as a 'near peer' role model by his/her students because of their exceptionally high language level. As one learner even describes of a classmate after they were too 'enthusiastically intimidating':

"I don't think I can have as many interests as them. They are so interested in English" (Murphey & Arao, 2001: 7).

There are also several other questions that we do not yet have the answers to. Further research needs to look into the effects of differences in the ways that NPRMs are presented to students (e.g. as language learner narratives, video clips, interviews in person), research might also look at "what beliefs and capabilities are most susceptible to change" (Murphey & Arao, 2001: 9), and the ways in which both native and non-native speaker teachers can most effectively act as NPRMs for their students (Murphey & Sasaki, 1998). Until then, the most important responsibility we have as teachers is to provide students with as wide a variety of positive NPRMs as we can. Whatever results further research presents to us, all the evidence that we have so far suggests that it is worth the effort: As Murphey describes, "Structuring classroom experiences to enhance near peer role modelling may be one of the most powerful ways teachers can enhance learning" (1998: 204).

Recommendations for further reading

The papers by Murphey and Arao and by Murphey and Murakami listed here may provide a good starting point for further reading about NPRMs in the context of second language learning. When thinking about features of good language learners that teachers might want to highlight through NPRMs, Oxford's *Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know* is an accessible book that also includes practical resources (e.g. questionnaires) that teachers can use to better help learners become more self-aware of their own strategy use, and to help them to better be able to recognise effective strategy use in NPRMs around them.

Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013) is a useful 'recipe book' style resource book that includes 99 classroom activities designed to support all aspects of a learner's ideal L2 self, and Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) provides an accessible overview about how teachers might develop and manage a positive group dynamic in their classrooms – a fundamental prerequisite for the success of using NPRMs in the language classroom.

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Christine Muir is Assistant Professor in Second Language Acquisition at the University of Nottingham, UK. Her background is as an ELT teacher, and she has previously taught around the world in countries including Russia, Finland, the Czech Republic and the UK. She is co-author of *Motivational currents in language learning: Frameworks for focused interventions* (Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016, Routledge).

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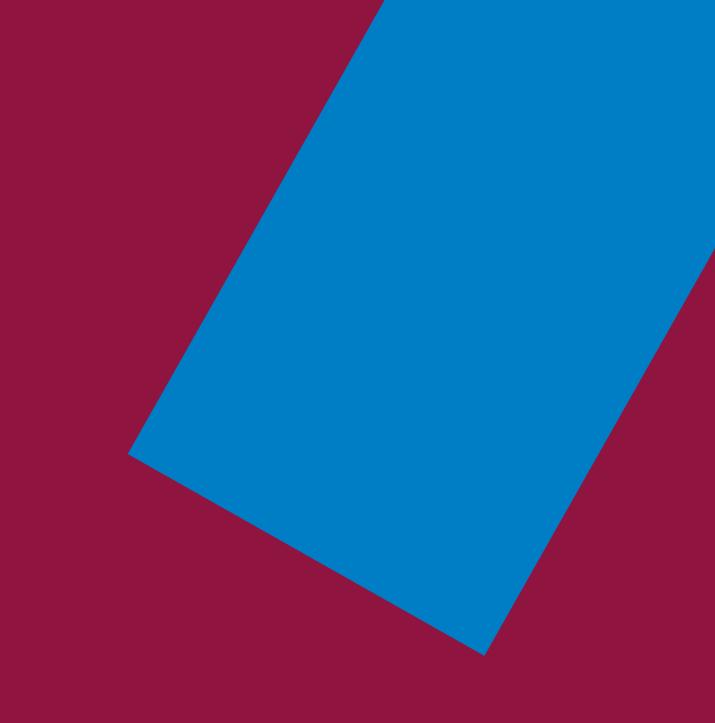
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