

## NEAR PEER ROLE MODELS

Tim Murphey ☆  
Nanzan University

Motivational and developmental psychology stresses the need for role models for developing individuals. Heroines and heroes, intellectual and financial wizards, and people in high and low places in histories, stories and society inspire us throughout our lives with their deeds and ideas. However, this little article describes some lesser gods, closer to home, and how they can perhaps inspire even greater learning.

Near peer role models (NPRMs) are peers who are close to our social, professional, and/or age level who for some reason we may respect and admire. Many people while growing up have had the experience of watching some student or sibling just a few years older and modeling their behavior. It may be that we only respect a characteristic or an ability that they have and not even the whole person. I can remember wanting to play basketball like my brother, wanting to get straight "A"s like my sister, and wanting to run as fast the girl who sat next to me in third grade. I may have never surpassed them but they stimulated a greater participation in life from me.

So the question becomes how can teachers find such potential role models and present them to their students-- for example, models who find learning languages fun and fascinating and whose proactive beliefs can inspire other students? Below are three examples taken from my own context which illustrate the use of NPRMs. Readers can possibly use these and certainly find others for their particular needs.

### Three examples of allowing NPRMs to become even more effective Action log Newsletters

Supportive comments from students journals, essays, or, in my own case action log reflections on class activities (Murphey 1993), can greatly enhance the effectiveness of classroom activities when they are given exposure. I simply copy supportive comments from students and put them on a sheet as a class newsletter with the heading "Some Comments from Students". For example, an activity I do with many classes is telephoning

classmates for homework and asking questions in English. About 50% of the students don't like it at first and would probably give up if they didn't read the supportive comments from other students in newsletters. These other students act as near peer role models with comments like "Wow, it was fun to talk in English on the phone. We spoke a little Japanese but we spoke for 15 minutes in English first."

### Video interviews

Four enthusiastic 2nd 3rd and 4th year students were video interviewed about the ideas below:

- 1) Making mistakes in English is O.K.
- 2) It's good to have goals in learning English.
- 3) Speaking English is fun.
- 4) Japanese can become good speakers of English.

The video material was edited down into a fast paced 8 minutes. In classes of first-year students, students first mark their agreement concerning the above four statements and then watch the 8-minute video twice. After viewing, they answer the agreement scale one more time and they themselves notice that they have changed their beliefs because of the video (because of the NPRMs). Data shows that students make significant changes in their beliefs as a result of the viewing (Murphey and Murakami, in progress).

### Graduate Student Action Research Publications

Foreigners in Japan are distant role models for students. Japanese teachers are potentially much more powerful because their students can identify more easily with them and that is why it is important that they hear them speaking English. However, many JTEs don't use English in front of their students. Again foreigners telling them to speak English are too distant as role models. An additional problem is that changing from Japanese to English is overgeneralized to an all or nothing task and seems daunting. Therefore I asked a group of graduate students to speak only a few words more each day for a few weeks and to get feedback from their students in an action research cycle. Then they wrote up short case histories (Murphey, 1996) and these were distributed to other teachers. Although it is still too early to measure the full impact, there seems to be a greater acceptance of the possibility that change can take place because now they have NPRMs of how it can be done.

**I wish I would've known that earlier**  
 Several years ago when we found out that when mothers asked their children what they did in school, the children learned much more (Hayashi and Murphey, 1993), I exclaimed to myself "I wish I would've known that earlier." In a way the mother we described became a role model for me and many other people who read about what she did. When my children come home I want to be waiting with cookies and milk to ask about school, to valorize their academic life with parental interest.

When effective means for inspiring others are discovered, we owe it to humanity to communicate this information as much as we can so that others can experiment with it and refine it. So now you know about NPRMs and three ways you can use NPRMs. You don't have to do the exact same thing unless it fits. You can apply the principle in many ways to your teaching. And you may be wondering how you might apply the idea of NPRMs to your own teaching situation as you loop in positive examples of proactive participation in life from those who are already doing it.

Finally, I think one of the basic principles that I am discovering (for myself) is that we reap what we sow and we don't always have to be super organized during the sowing to enrich ourselves and others. In other words, "Anything we do randomly and frequently starts to make its own sense and changes the world into itself. Anything you want there to be more of, do it randomly. Don't wait for reasons." (Ann Herber, Margaret M. Pavel and Mayumi Oda, *Whole Earth Review*, Summer 1994, p. 66.)

#### References

- Hayashi, S and Murphey T. (1993) Fun interactive homework. *The Language Teacher* 17 (9) 59.
- Murphey, T. (1993) Why don't teachers learn what learners learn? Taking the guesswork out with action logging. *English Teaching Forum*, Jan. 6-10.
- Murphey, T. (ed.) (1996). *The Medium is the Message: Japanese teachers of English using English in the classroom*. South Mountain Press. (Teacher educators can receive a free copy by sending as A5 SASE to the author.)

**Looking forward to seeing you there!  
 Where?**

**You know, . . . there!**

**Where people get really intensively into massively interconnected widely distributed simultaneously operating constellations of parallel processing!  
 Huh?**

**At the Teacher Ed SIG party! Sunday night. Come by the desk and for directions.**

#### Quotable Quotes for Reflection



I have come to feel that the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning.

--- Carl Rogers



### Teacher Education Get-together Meal and Party Sunday Evening November 3rd 1996

Join us for a get-together party over food and drinks, with Marie Nelson as our guest, on the Sunday evening of the conference! Details of where and when to meet will be posted in the Teacher Education area B2 Robby (Main Building). Make sure you drop by and sign up! See you there!

#### SEND YOUR ART-TICKLES

by snail (with disk) or E-magic to:  
 Mits Murphey \* Nanzan University  
 18 Yamazato-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya 466  
 tel 052-832-3111 fax 052-833-6985  
 E-mail: mits@ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp  
**Deadline Jan 20 1997.**