

## Self and Other Modelling: Strengthening Imagined Ideal Selves for Students and Teachers

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...observer interacts with observed through the process of observation. 'Grok' means to understand so thoroughly that the observer becomes a part of the observed—to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience.

*Stranger in a Strange Land*  
(Heinlein, 1961, pp. 213-214)

### Abstract

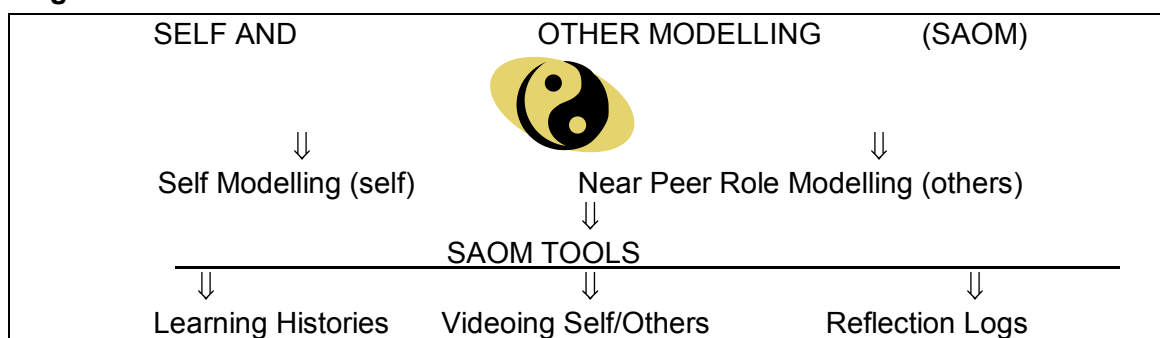
Self and other modelling (SAOM) describes the noticing of positive characteristics in ourselves and in others that help people learn more efficiently. While the words "self and other modelling" seem to present two distinct processes, I hope to convince readers by the end that it is the dialectic of these two modelling processes and their co-construction and scaffolding that bring us enhanced learning and new identities along with more agency. Teachers can facilitate and intensify positive SAOM for students through promoting self-modelling and near peer role modelling (NPRMing). I describe three tools for doing this: language learning histories (LLHs), longitudinal self-evaluated videoing (LSEV) and reflection logs. Positive SAOM becomes intensified through reiterative and intensive interaction between selves and others through using tools that highlight participants performative qualities allowing them to notice more and reflect more. However, teachers themselves are often in impoverished environments for observing others or themselves teaching and need to act with more agency if they are to develop intensively. While classes present potentially rich training grounds for students, teachers in most academic environments have little chance to interact intensively with other teachers and to grow collaboratively.

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### Background

Figure 1 below seeks to present self and other modelling and the outline of this paper at the same time. When I and others began researching self and other modelling, we were thinking about them as two separate processes which helped us to see certain attributes. However, more recently we have come to see the dialectic of these processes and how they involve each other in their own activation. Nevertheless, I still write at times as if they were separate concepts below. The tools on the lowest level are ways in which we are able to promote effective self and other modelling and will be described in more detail.

**Figure 1: SAOM**



The background support for other modelling (what I call *near peer role modelling*, NPRM, Murphey & Arao 2001) is well supported in educational psychology. Weiten, Lloyd, and Lashley (1991, p. 46) refer to Bandura's social learning theory to affirm that

[I]mitation is more likely when we see similarity between the model and ourselves. Thus, children imitate same-sex role models somewhat more than opposite sex models. [Also], we are more likely to copy a model if we see the model's behaviour leading to positive outcomes. . . [Furthermore], models have a great impact on personality development. Children learn to be assertive, conscientious, self-sufficient, dependable, easy-going, and so forth by observing others behaving in these ways. Parents, teachers, relatives, siblings, and peers serve as models for young children.

Bandura (1977a) suggests 'seeing or visualising people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities' (p. 87). This starts with the observation that 'we are similar' and then the realisation that what the 'other' can do should be possible for me. To an extent, we are imagining our own ideal self right beside our peers doing what our peers are doing. At this point, the question often becomes 'Are we modelling others or our potential selves?' which actually sets up an unhelpful dichotomy—in reality we are doing both, modelling others and modelling our projected ideal selves at the same time.

Bandura (1977b) also allows us to notice how sometimes inappropriate 'experts' might be in the learning process at times: 'Given large perceived disparities in experiences, children are likely to view skills exemplified by an experienced model as beyond their reach and are thus disinclined to invest the effort needed to master them fully' (p. 234). In second language learning, this calls into question the 'native speaker' model (see Cook, 1999) and adds support to non-native speakers being more appropriate models for each other.

Brown and Inouye (1978) state that 'observing a model of comparable ability achieve success would create success expectations in observers and thus enhance their task motivation' (p. 901). Note that this is not learners comparing themselves with their peers, but rather the learners observing their peers succeeding in the task which carries information that *they themselves also have the potential abilities to do the same thing*. The observing learners compare themselves with their potential future selves and become excited (motivated) about that potential. When receiving information about their own potential capabilities, learners learn that effort and success go together. Schunk (1983), for example, compared the effectiveness of proximal goals to social

comparative information and found that information about successful peers intensifies the idea that their own proximal goals are attainable.

Murphey and Arao (2001, p. 1) described near peer role models and reported on belief changes of near peers in Japan:

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. In two previous quasi-experimental studies, learners in a Japanese university English department were shown an 8-minute video of four exemplary, slightly older, Japanese in the same department who were expressing beliefs and attitudes thought to facilitate SLA. A pre- and post-questionnaire revealed positive changes in viewers' reported-beliefs.

Van Lier (2008) citing Gibson says

to perceive is always to co-perceive oneself ... the learner not only learns about the linguistic environment...but at the same time also learns about himself or herself, that is, every perception of the target language is simultaneously an act of self perception. Learning an L2 and becoming engaged in a new culture thus involves adjusting one's sense of self and creating new identities to connect the known to the new (p. 177).

This I believe is the process of self and other modelling, both happening simultaneously, helping to co-construct new learning, identities, and agency.

Obviously, we can also learn from thinking and problem solving on our own as well. However, the Vygotskian contention is that much of the spark for our beliefs in our abilities to do things begins intermentally, between minds in an activity, and then becomes intramental as we step metaphorically into the place of the other and begin modelling ourselves. Note this is not just one mind noticing another mind, but rather two minds noticing each other and creating a third space (Bhabha, 1994) in which learning can occur. After having internalised certain strategies, beliefs and attitudes, these can then help us further to learn on our own and from others in a continual dialectic.

My graduate students' MA research studies (Nishimura, 2005; Kobayashi, 2006; Yamaura, 2008) involved participant observation (Auerbach, 1994) in a longitudinal use of videoing and other forms of data collection. Nishimura found that while all students did self and other modelling, some were more capable modellers than others. Loners, who may have worked harder than others, still did not seem to progress as much as those who were very open to admiring and imitating others.

Kobayashi (2006) looked at the impact of video on teachers and students in primary schools. Whole classes were videoed together during their English lessons taught by guest English teachers (university students) and teachers were asked to show the tapes to students later. Not surprisingly Kobayashi found that the more that teachers reinforced the lessons by playing the tapes and playing with the language from the lessons, the more students seemed to identify themselves as English users. In one transcribed video episode with a fourth grade student on the playground, the student wants to speak English so much that she responds six times in English (albeit minimally with 'yes') even though Kobayashi is asking questions in Japanese. We see this as an example of the micro genesis of identity construction, learning, and agency.

Yamaura (2008) looked at the co-constructing concepts of motivation, competency, and English user identities in his study, with a special emphasis on student agency. He found that asking whether competency or identifying come first (chicken or egg?) is perhaps inappropriate in that they fluctuate in different social

contexts. Like Carpenter & Murphey (this volume), Yamaura found that agency, learning, and identity co-construct each other. Or as van Lier (2008, p. 178) says, 'In many ways, L2 development is the development of agency through the L2 (or the enactment of an L2 identity)'.

Below I look at some tools for SAOMing (learning histories, longitudinal self evaluated videoing, reflection logs) that I have treated in previous papers. Then I look at how they might be applied to teachers' professional development. I conclude with highlighting aspects of effective teacher learning groups that need more attention if more teachers are to engineer better learning environments and communities.

### **The Tools of Self and Other Modelling (SAOM) in Classes**

SAOM describes how people learn from modelling. Our eyes look out to see other people most of the time. Seeing ourselves happens rarely. Mirrors and videoing have greatly increased the possibility of self modelling for dancers, actors, and athletes but others have been slow to use these tools. Recently, longitudinal self evaluated videoing (LSEV, Murphey 2001) has been used to enhance language learning and identifying one's self as a language user. Dörnyei has postulated the ideal self (2005) and I in my 2007 ILA presentation used the term 'the imagined ideal self' (iis=eyes) both of which refer to our own constructed identities using both our seeing of others and ourselves. In plain words, when we see others that we admire, we may simultaneously construct an imagined ideal self alongside the other and imagine ourselves performing as the model performs. Performing a mental sleight of hand, we may step into their shoes, creating an imagined ideal self in our minds. This explains how movies and spectator sports can be so exciting for so many people due to viewers actually imagining *being* the people they see and doing the things they do. Indeed, books and oral storytelling work the same way, albeit, requiring more brain work to imagine the pictures.

### **Language Learning Histories**

We also see others, and ourselves in their stories, when we read or hear about them. Asking students to write their language learning histories and then to read each other's narratives allows them to view similar others' (NPRMs') strategies, beliefs, attitudes, and agency and to identify with these things at the same time. Schunk (1984) suggests that in school, students acquire information about their own capabilities vicariously through knowledge of others. Brown and Inouye (1978) claim that similar others, peers, offer the best basis for comparison. For example, Cloward (1967) studied the effect of a U.S. tutorial program that employed tenth- and eleventh-grade students as tutors for fourth- and fifth-grader pupils whose reading achievement was below grade level. Results showed that pupils with tutors of the same gender and ethnicity were highest in achievement. The sharing of language learning histories in classes greatly facilitate this modelling and becoming.

### **Longitudinal Self Evaluated Videoing Procedures**

A more direct way, especially for self modelling, is actually watching videos of yourself. Murphey & Kenny (1996a & b), Murphey & Woo (1998a), and Murphey (1996a, 2001) report refining video procedures over a number of years and gathering mostly qualitative data through regular observations in class and on video, and through students' transcriptions, action logs (Murphey, 1993; Murphey & Woo, 1998b), semester reports, and year-end feedback. Students speak with 5 to 8 partners during the videoing time, having multiple extended conversational opportunities (MECOs), changing partners about every five minutes, and are recorded during one of these 5-minute segments. Students interact intensively for about 45 minutes per 90-minute class and can take a 5-minute video recording home each week to analyse and view. At the end of a term, students have 10 to 12 5-minute video clips of their performances

and write papers analysing their progress by comparing early transcriptions with later transcriptions (see Murphey, 2001 for a more detailed analysis and list of activities).

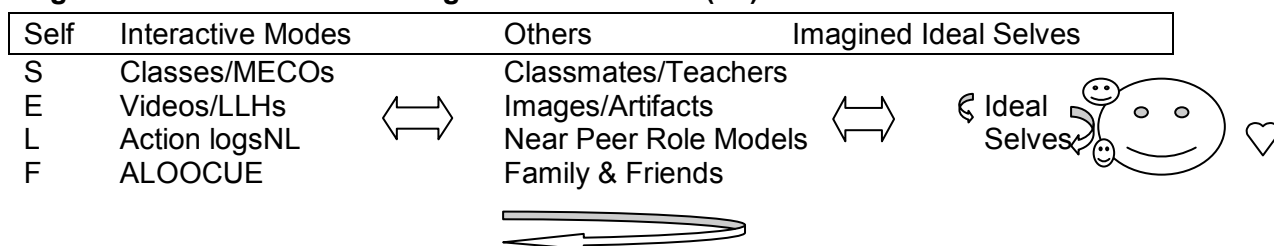
Such intensive interaction presents students with many near peer role models. However, in addition to this other modelling, students also watch themselves and can appreciate what they are doing well and do more of it, what Peter Dowrick (1983, 1999) has called 'self modelling'. It is actually rare that we get to see our own conversations again from the view of a spectator. Having this view does allow us to change things we don't like and to do more the things we like. Students regularly see what they need, mistakes they make, and how they can change these. Gradually over a semester, they make changes in their performances and see undeniable, visible and measurable, growth in their learning. Within a class, modelling can be further stimulated through multiple extended conversational opportunities (MECOs).

### Reflection Logs

When students write their reflections in logs (student written reactions to activities, originally called 'Action Logs', Murphey 1993), and record their 'action logs' of 'out of class using English' (ALOOUCUE), they become more meta-cognitive and can deepen their own self-modelling. When teachers take some of these reflections and put them on newsletters (anonymously) to share with classmates, they are encouraging other modelling and self-modelling of effective strategies and attitudes. When teachers read such reflections after every class, they can learn what is liked and helpful and what has not been understood, they can discover how students learn in and out of class.

Language learning histories, LSEVideoing, and Reflection Logs create 'artefacts' in Merrill Swain's terms that allow students to further reflect on themselves, their peers, and their performances and deepen their learning. Figure 2 below seeks to show how the self, through interacting in these ways with others creates imagined ideal selves in students.

**Figure 2: Student-Created Imagined Ideal Selves (IIS)**

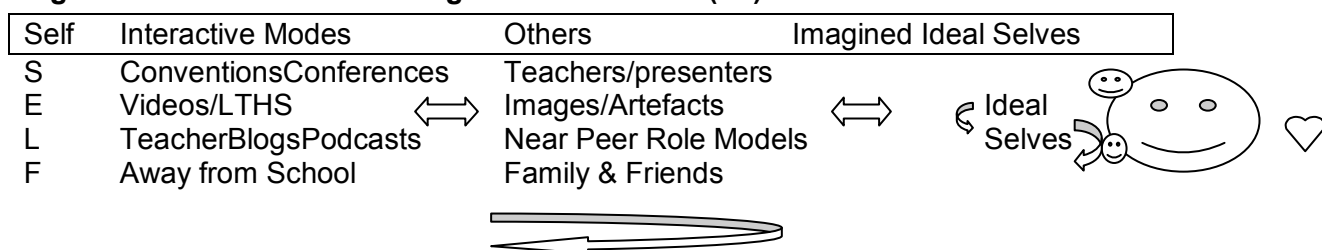


### SAOMing for Teachers

Progressive educators have realised that learning involves one's co-learners and what you do together. In teachers' groups for positive SAOMing to occur, we need to somehow structure more time for teachers to interact about their teaching, to observe each other, and to reflect with each other. I can only learn from the expertise in my faculty if I have regular access to them, to observe them teaching and to reflect together about our teaching. Constructing time and places for this to happen should be a major concern for administrators who wish to see progressive development among their teaching community. Merely, putting people into the same room does not mean they are learning from each other, as common faculty rooms and everyday classrooms confirm. What people do, how they interact, and the concerns they discuss are as equally important as structuring time together. Self and other modelling will always be happening. But teachers presently seem to spend little time among inspirational colleagues discussing their work of teaching.

Figure 3 below attempts to describe the opportunities that teachers might have to benefit from SAOM: going to conferences and hearing other teachers present and presenting themselves, watching videos of others and self, reading language teaching histories of others and self, accessing and creating teacher blogs and podcasts, and their interactions with others away from the language classroom, for example teaching sports to others. All of these ways are potential ways to model others and the self and might be constructed to be more performative.

**Figure 3: Teacher-Created Imagined Ideal Selves (IIS)**



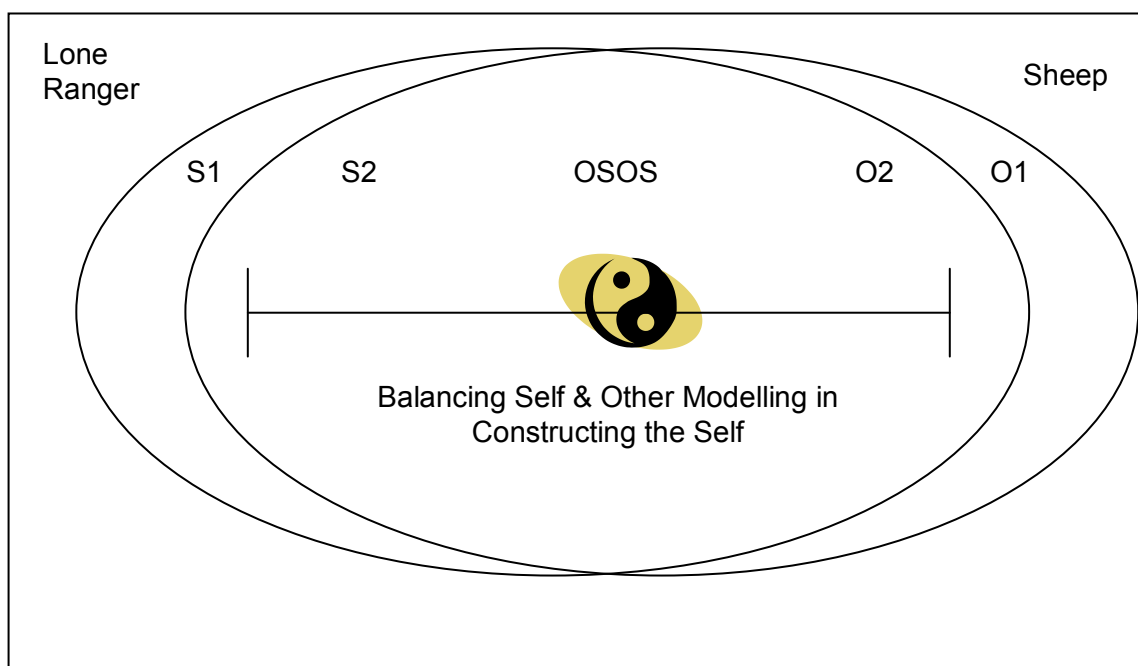
The main benefit of watching *others* seems to be that it increases *motivation* as we see peers doing something that we feel we might be capable of doing. The main benefit of *watching one's self* improve and perform well is increased *confidence*. Teachers however rarely get to watch each other or themselves and often may lack motivation and confidence in their teaching. This can be alleviated by structuring more observation time into our work and looking at videos of others and ourselves. I would suggest that teacher development researchers investigate the possibility and productiveness of increasing:

- teachers observing each others' classes
- videoing their own classes for self viewing
- watching videos of fellow teachers' classes
- regularly discussing and planning lessons together
- engaging students more in the negotiation of lesson planning with teachers
- getting regular feedback from students on their evaluations of activities
- creating collaborative teacher learning communities

## Discussion

Figure 4, below, attempts to capture the dynamic movement that one might deal with as we continually construct ourselves. I conceive of the space of self construction as a continuum within two overlapping circles as below. At the far left, at S1, we have the extreme self modeller who risks being the lone ranger, alone and isolated with no opportunities to model others (which many teachers may actually feel). On the far right, at O1, we have the extreme other modeller who only seems to model others and has little or no personal agency, represented by a sheep following a heard. In the middle between S2 and O2, we have a continuum that seeks to capture what we think is a more ideal positioning in which we might be able to model others and our selves at different times to create a more critical collaborative autonomy (Murphey and Jacobs, 2000). In these inner circles of movement, other and self become blended categories in a Bakhtinian perspective in which we ventriloquate and coarticulate each other (Holquist 1990).

**Figure 4: SAOM Continuum and Extremes**



Thus, after starting from the assumption that self and other modelling are two distinct processes, now we began to understand them as overlapping and complementary in the process of identity formation, learning, and agency. It appears that in intensively interactive situations these discrete categories cease to exist and that we may indeed be learning in a state of flow with no need to distinguish between other and self. The usefulness of creating classrooms of intensive collaboration and interaction in which learners can take away artefacts that capture a bit of the classroom ecology and that can intensify learning and identifying, is somewhat captured in the student quote below:

I had never experienced such a long conversation in English... especially taping and videoing. I was encouraged by the comments in the NLs, action logs, and Language Hungry. I noticed that most students in class felt just like me (being afraid of mistakes, tensed up, and so on)!...I could also learn interesting skills such as shadowing, repeating, and summarising. These changes brought a breakthrough in my speaking ability at the end of the spring term at last! Before I knew it, I found that I could speak English really fluently and enjoyably especially when I talk about my favourite topics like movies, arts, and vacations. Moreover, I got much more confidence after I dictated [transcribed] my conversation because I could confirm how long and natural my English were and how effective the skills and thoughts I got from class. After I obtained a real confidence, my natural desire to learn started to overflow and begun to imitate other's good model more actively in many points to my surprise. [Stimulated recall/reflection of one 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, written and remembered after reviewing action logs and 21 video conversations 12/2004, highlighting by the author]

A useful goal for educators would be to somehow get students into different positions and out of a single one in order to perceive things differently. Experiences of being an 'other' and of being subjected to 'othering' may be ultimately crucial in promoting a more peaceful planet (a topic that will have to wait for another paper).

Education that excessively prolongs observation and attempts internalisation without participation would seem to create non-participants with dysfunctional and truncated identities toward the target activity. Education that excessively forces practice without time for reflection and SAOM seems shallow. We need participation and time to participate in reflection. The artefacts described above seem to help and we need to find more.

## **Conclusion**

Let me end on a lighter note appealing to most people's right hemisphere with a poem that perhaps captures all of this better than my prose and was included in the conference handout.

**Weeee!**  
**Who is this "We"?**  
**It's U and me**  
**That's who this "We" ...is**

**When I see me**  
**Through your iiis**  
**I see we**  
**For U make me**  
**Be what U see**  
**Inside U and me**

**So U see, U see U**  
**I see me**  
**When seeing iiis**  
**In a world to be**

**Constructed**  
**By**  
**Weeee!**

**Tim Murphey November 11, 2005 under the influence of the movie "What the Bleep do we know?" and radiances of hilariousness. Best appreciated when read aloud.**

I recently re-found Susan Krieger's *Social Science and the Self* (1991) and discovered that she was saying much of what I was grasping at above:

[W]hen we discuss others, we are always talking about ourselves. Our images of 'them' are images of 'us'. Our theories of how 'they' act and what 'they' are like, are, first of all, theories about ourselves: who we are, how we act, and what we are like...understanding others actually requires us to project a great deal of ourselves onto others, and onto the world at large. It also requires taking others into the self in an encompassing way (p. 5).

Facilitating this 'crossing-over' of self and other knowledge and identity processes may be one of the greatest accomplishments of interactive, participatory education. I continue to be fascinated by the unveiling project of seeing the social (myself and others) in autonomy and independence.

## **The Author**

Tim Murphey (MA University of Florida, PhD Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland) is the series editor for TESOL's Professional Development in Language Education four-volume series. He co-authored *Group Dynamics in the Language Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) with Zoltán Dörnyei. His *Language Hungry!* (McMillan Languagehouse 1998, Helbling Languages 2006) for students and teachers has also been translated into Chinese (Caves, 2005). His present research and teaching interests lie in socio-cultural theory, socialisation, and critical pedagogy with particular emphasis on student voice, identity and community construction, motivations, and the use of narratives and video as intensifiers. He teaches at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan.

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