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Identifying and “Identifying with” Effective Beliefs and Behaviors

Introduction

Modeling, or the imitation, of those around us is a natural learning process which goes on all our lives as our multifaceted identities are continually co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed (Norton, 1997). In the area of foreign language learning, native speakers of a target language may not be available for modeling and/or too big of a jump for most learners to imitate and identify with. However, other learners are around them most of the time and within their range of imitative behavior, or in Vygotskian terms, within their zone of proximal development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1962/1934).

This article describes an investigation into whether highlighting the beliefs and behaviors of proactive learners can help other students to model them and acquire those qualities thought to increase second language acquisition, i.e. increased motivation and metacognitive awareness. Results of qualitative observations and several small quasi-empirical experiments, described below, support the procedure. Further theoretical justification is found in research on peer counseling.

NLP of course is “the modeling science” *par excellence*. However, even in NLP, there may have been too much emphasis on the expert, the end product, rather than macro-modeling the more natural modeling process of near peer role modeling (NPRMing) that is happening all around us. This article suggests that proximal near peers’ behavior might be more easily and quickly acquired, achieving a more ecological step from one stage to another, rather than the frustrating grappling with too many things too far beyond their present abilities that many learners experience. It is assumed that the reader is already familiar with modeling in NLP; thus in this paper we attempt to stretch the readers’ mind a bit by referring mainly the second language acquisition literature and mainstream psychology.