

# Voicing Learning

Tim Murphey

SAMPLE

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## Part 1. Preliminaries

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## About this Book

A multi-voiced narrative to help educators understand the worth and procedures of ideal classmates, action logging, social testing, juggling, songlets, storytelling, and class publications through developing educational well-being, meaningfulness and positive psychology.

## About the Author



Tim Murphey (MA University of Florida; PhD Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland) is a visiting professor at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. He juggles while skiing and makes lots of miss-steaks in order to increase his opera-tunes-it-teas for learning. Contact Tim at: [mitsmail1@gmail.com](mailto:mitsmail1@gmail.com)

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## About the Series: *Positive Pedagogical Praxis Series*

### Overview

This series contains short, practical, exciting, and useful books for educators seeking to enhance their ways of teaching. Books in the *Positive Pedagogical Praxis Series* focus on practical activities, procedures, and principles that can create more profound learning in a variety of ways. The books can be described in the following ways:

- The books are easy to read and the procedures and activities easy to implement.
- The books are written in a teacher-friendly, down to earth, non-abstract style.
- The books are focused on activities; theory is given briefly and with ample references for further reading if teachers desire more.

Titles in this series seek to provide teachers with practical ways to implement profound ideas little by little into their classrooms. The books could also be used for in-service training, workshops, and teacher-development sessions at conferences.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks go to students, staff, and faculty members at Aoyama University, Dokkyo University, International University of Japan, Kanda University of International Studies, Montmirail (Private Lycee Neuchâtel), Nagoya University of International Studies, Nanzan University, Université de Fribourg, Université de Neuchâtel, University of Florida, University of Hawaii, Hawaii Pacific University, Wayo Women's University Graduate School of Human Ecology, and Yuan Ze University (Taiwan). It takes a lot of dedicated students, staff, and administrators to allow teachers to grow critically and dialogically. Many thanks especially to readers for their insights and advice: Manuela Cohen, Marc Helgesen, Emiko Hirosawa, Dan Hooper, Curtis Kelly, Jo Mynard, Satoko Watkins, and my 2020 students. Special thanks to Dick Allwright, Dwight Atkinson, Douglas Brown, Patricia Byrd, Mark Clarke, Jennifer Claro, Edward Deci, Zoltan Dornyei, Ana Barcelos, David Epstein, Eric Fromm, Tammy Gregersen, Johann Hari, John Hattie, Diane Larsen-Freeman, Sarah Mercer, Christine Muir, Christine Porath, Diane Ravitch, Wilga Rivers, Richard Ryan, Robert Sapolsky, Earl Stevick, Merrill Swain, Steven Thorne, and Edward O. Wilson, who all impressed me greatly over the years and inspired this book.

## Artwork

Drawings: E. Hirosawa

Text and Photos: T. Murphey

## Notes on “Correct” English

The passages here are from students’ learning English, their real voices, and thus sometimes there are errors and mistakes to keep their authenticity. But they are all comprehensible, understandable, and interesting. Students can be asked to underline the parts they think may be mistakes and talk it over with classmates and teachers in class.

## Characters in the Book

While no single character corresponds to any single student or teacher in my past, they all represent multiple amalgamations of learners on three continents.

First Published 2021: Thanks to Hiro, Sana, Nana, Yukari, Yoshi, Yuki, Junko, Jun, Nobu, Mami, (all fictitious names based on thousands of amalgamations and mixed memories of magic students).

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## How this Book Might be Used

Teachers and students can talk about and decide what to do or not to do and to what degree. A more democratic classroom involves all voices. Voicing Learning is respecting everyone. Readers could do any one or all of the ideas below:

1. Ideally students and teachers could read the book like a novel.
2. They could discuss why the students in the book like certain activities or not.
3. Perhaps after each major chapter they could discuss among themselves what was actually done and how it benefited the students and the different views they had. (Especially teachers in training.)
4. Then students could be asked to try the activity out for themselves, to see how valuable the idea might be for them.
5. They could be asked what part of the activity seems useful and what part do they not like.
6. Teachers could listen to what students say and write and consider their advice seriously.
7. Students might be asked to describe the teacher in the book, whose voice we do not often hear except through the comments of the students.
8. This book isn't big enough to be a good "paper-weight," but it is small enough to be loaned to friends and family as a gift.
9. It could be used in teacher-training courses to give ideas to becoming-teachers and suggest to them to listen more to their students. We need ways to hear our students' voices.
10. It could be given to administrators so they would understand how growing people need a voice in their education, also called agency and autonomy and developing identities.

# Glossary

Terms and explanations as described by students first (Ss) // then a teacher-view (T)

## ***Action logs / action logging***

**Ss:** Those notebooks we have to turn in once a week. They were troublesome at first. Now it is my favorite book forever, cause I wrote it! And it tells me everything I did in the classes. I look at it more now that I have graduated so I can do some of the activities with my junior high school students that I teach. (Junko)

**T:** A log/notebook in which students list all class activities and evaluate them for usefulness, interest, and difficulty so the teacher can see what things students judge are more useful and interesting to do in class. Students can also write comments freely. It can evolve into a very valuable exchange of ideas and feedback to make the class better and give more agency to students. (See *references* for academic articles.)

## ***Agency***

**Ss:** Ms Engel tried to explain to us what agency was and we did not get it. But it worked better when she gave us examples. She said “When Nobu decided to sing when doing his job and how his co-workers decided to sing too. They were all showing agency, the ability to make choices and act.” (Sana)

**T:** Agency is the active side of autonomy, when you decide to do something that perhaps you have never done before and it usually makes you proud because you are growing yourself up!

## ***Class publications***

**Ss:** We got to decide what topic we wanted to write about. I talked to lots of people about it. I did some Google searches and read a few articles before I wrote my article for the class publication. Ms Engel also was a source. It was nice to see my name in print on the front and inside with my article. (Yoshi)

**T:** Allowing students to choose what they want to write about and giving them some freedom in what they want to say and then publishing it in a small booklet as a class publication can really motivate them. Make extra copies to show the students in the following year. Tip: It is a lot of work if you do it all by yourself. Get students to proofread each other’s drafts and give advice to each other too. Let them see themselves as a community of writers helping each other. (See *Resource F1* on pages 56 and 57 for examples.)

## ***Exit slips***

**Ss:** The teacher asked us for some feedback about today’s lesson, what we liked and didn’t like, and suggestions for improvement. I never had a teacher ask me for such advice before. It was interesting. (Sana)

**T:** With any group at the end of a session you can distribute recycled scratch paper and ask them to write down 1) what they remembered that they did, 2) what they liked, did not like, and 3) what they would suggest for improvements and what to do next time (or any other questions you would like feedback for). When

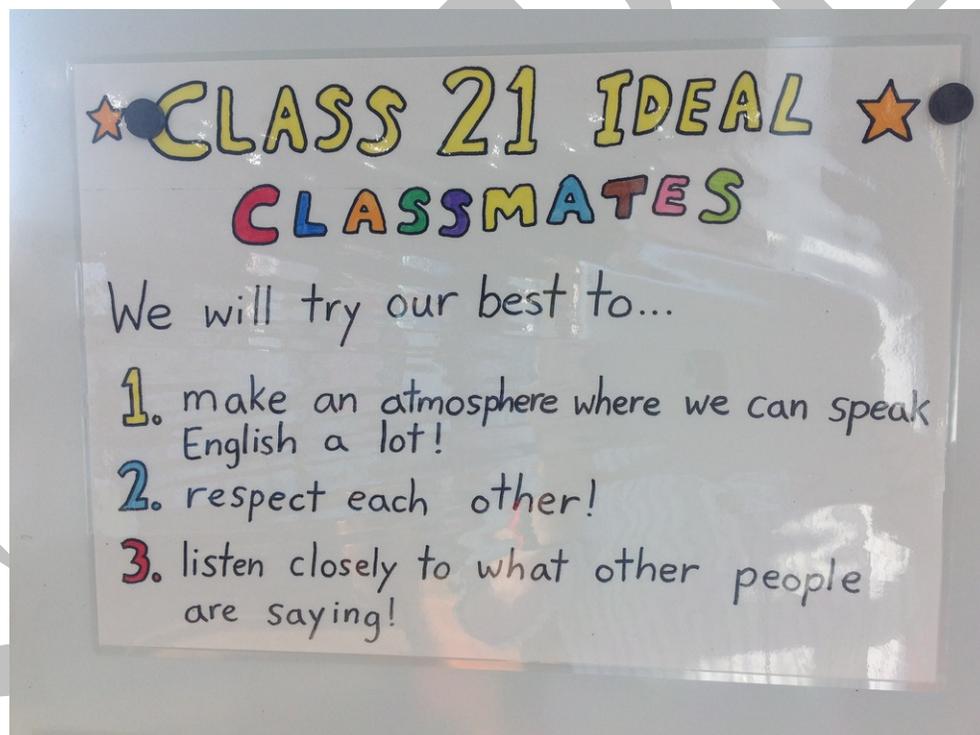
teachers/leaders get feedback like this a few times, they will see the value of feedback and may want to make it more regular with *action logs* that can last a semester or a year.

### ***Ideal classmates***

The Ideal classmates prompt asks students: “Please describe a group of classmates that you could learn English well with. What would you all do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably?”

**Ss:** We got this question at the beginning of the semester and answered it. Then in the next class we were surprised to see all our answers on a handout and we read through them and talked to our partners about the comments. (Nana)

**T:** Students can write on scratch or recycled paper or send you their answer online. After they do it, the teacher puts all of their answers on one handout without their names and gives it back to them in the next class to talk about with their classmates. This is a great way to show students that they can control the classroom and their learning with positive behaviors.



Example of a Student-Produced Poster

Thanks to Septina Nur Iswanti for this poster from her high school class circa 2014 from a school in Indonesia, (the teacher posts some ideas from students' answers to the *Ideal Classmates* prompt so they can keep the ideas in mind throughout the class.)

## ***Juggling***

**Ss:** “Otedama” we call juggling in Japanese! Our teacher said that you learn from make mistakes. Let the balls fall. Just doidagin! It’s OK. (Hiro)

**T:** For young people especially, physical moment is crucial for keeping the brain alert and learning. Getting them out of their seats every hour is recommended. Juggling is just one of the ways to get them moving and enjoying something physical. But it is also a good metaphor for how we learn. Collective group throwing routines are great for bonding and laughing!



Students Enjoying Juggling in Class

## Part 2. Learner Narratives

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# 1. Ideal Classmates

## ***Hiro's Voice***

Our teacher Ms. Engel asked us this question on the 1st day of class, and to write our answers for her:

*"What could your classmates do (ideally) to help you learn better and enjoy your classes better?"*

I rote: "I don't want them to laugh at me. Especially when when I miss take. I make many miss takes. If they laugh at me I become red. And I don't want to be there. I don't want to be anywhere. I want to go back to bed and cover my head with blanket. And make everything go away."

Next class she gave us handout with all our answers on it. But no names. I'm glad my name was not on. My comment was first. It somehow made me feel good. I am never first in anything. Maybe my comment was good, I think. Maybe important? Then I wished my name was beside it. I was little proud.

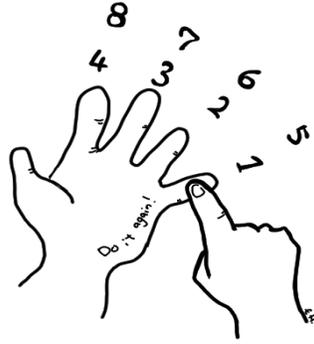
## ***Sana's Voice***

Today Ms Engel gave us "Ideal Classmates" paper. It had all our comments from a question — from the first class, about how our classmates can help. I thought it was good idea. I want them to help me. My comment was simple, just one word — "smile!" My classmates look worried often. They don't smile. And I wish they could. I noticed I get happy with peoples smiles. The song we learned to sing in class says it, "*Smiling brings you happiness, let it show the way.*" Ms Engel taught it to us in English and Japanese. It's a kotowaza (proverb?) in Japanese, and so true! I taught the song to mom. Now she sings it a lot. Every time she see's me. She thinks I should more smile. Since dad left us.

## ***Nana's Voice***

I was absent first class. So i did not have a comment on today's handout -- ideal classmates. But Ms. Engel asked me to write something later and give it to her. All my classmates wrote interesting things. I asked today's partner Hiro which one was his and he wouldn't tell me at first. Then later he got brave and told me it was first one. I read it and I agreed him. He looked happy. I told him I make lots of mistakes also.

Amazing today we sang a song about mistakes too! And Ms Engel sang it with a Japanese kotowaza, (saying?) too. It used a Christmas song-tune so it was easy (maybe Santa Comes to Town?). I taught it to my club mates after class. Ms Engel said that the best way to learn was to teach things. And we should teach something from every class to someone out of class. And write about it in our action log. (Not sure what "action log" is. Hiro said he would tell me). But the song went: "Do it again (x8). Make many mistakes and do it again." When Engel sang it to us she touched her each 4 fingers 2 times on one hand each time she sang doidagin. That made it easier to remember. And the Christmas song. I drew to remember. I like drawing.



**Doidagin (x8) !!! Make many mistakes and doidagin!**  
(to the tune of 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town.'  
Count on your fingers the 8 times and it is easier to remember)

### ***Yukari's Voice***

Today Ms. Engel wrote "doidagin" on the board and asked us what it meant and what language was it. I had no idea. It did not look like English, what we study. Then she said it a few times and some other students shouted "do it again!" haha!

Ms Engel explained -- words that are said together sometimes get pushed together and she said like "wanchan" in Japanese. Then I got it. So, I've been singing doidagin in my head all day. Ms Engel said that if anyone asks you "How do you succeed?" We have to answer with this song. And when anyone asks us "Why do you smile?" We have to answer the one we learned on the first day. (Smiling brings you happiness, Let it show the way!) Then she quickly asked us to ask our partners these questions. Maybe we will have one song a day all semester! Wow! I love sing! I just want "doidagin" and again. Doidagin sounds so **rap**, and it makes me wanna **clap**, and dance (I'm in dance club). Nobody wrote "singing together" on the handout today ideal classmates. I added it at the bottom of mine.

I know Ms. Engel said we were not supposed to write "doidagin". that way. But we will hear it that way in songs and movies and reel life. But in school she said we must write "do it again" just like in movie subtitles. She said, "The reel life of school is sometimes different from the reel life of outside world."

Somebody wrote a really long word on today's handout, "enthusiastically" I think it was. I had no idea what it means. I overheard Yoshi and Yuki talking about it. They liked it and it sounded cool when they said it out loud many times.

### ***Yoshi's Voice***

The handout today with what we said about what we want from our classmates was fun. I said I want my classmates to speak "enthusiastically" more in English, in and out of class. But I didn't tell anybody that is what I wrote. But my partner Yuki said that that is exactly what she wanted to say. Yuki said, I am going to steal that word. We spoke together all in English today. Except for the Japanese line in the speed dictation, Yariba dekiru naseba naru (x2) nana korobiya oki! The Japanese kinda helped us get the English "do it again", so I guess a bit

of Japanese sometimes is OK. But we hate it when someone just starts speaking all in Japanese in an English class. I am paying my way partly through college with part-time jobs. My parents help sometimes. I don't want to waste their money, or mine. I am here to learn English. I want everyone to speak it more, in and out of class.

### ***Yuki's Voice***

Yoshi was my partner today and he was very enthusiastic (I looked it up, he said it to me several times). He is enthusiastic about speaking only English. I understand how he feels. Because he also works part time to pay for school, so he really does not want to "waste money and time", he said several times. Our teacher though sings "songlets" often half in English and half in Japanese. I think they help us understand things better in English. And it is interesting how she has chosen interesting kotowazas (sayings, maybe?) to help us learn English better.

After class, I asked Yoshi if he wanted to eat lunch with me and talk more in English. We went to the cafeteria and I had my bento. He did not have one. I thought he would buy something but he didn't. I thought he was just so crazy about speaking English, he forgot about eating lunch. Then I thought maybe he didn't have enough money, or he was saving. After we talked a lot, and I ate, we had to go to our next classes. I did not finish my sandwich and offered the last half to him instead of throwing it away. He said something about "hating to waste food" and he ate quickly. He thanked me, and I repeated: "I hate to waste food, too. Thanks."

### ***Junko's Voice***

I really had a good time today's class. Me and my partner agreed that most comments were really good for ideal classmates. There was only one that we disagreed with, it said: "I want my partners to correct me when I am wrong and to tell me the correct way to say things." My partner Jun and I both thought correcting might make us stop talking. Or maybe there is a softer way to correct just by repeating what your partner said in a more correct way. Ms Engel suggested that too. That might be OK I think. Jun agreed. He looked tired at the end of class. But he was smiling.

### ***Jun's Voice***

I was really lucky to be with my partner Junko today. She was very nice and talkative and helpful. We read each of the phrases written by our classmates. We agreed with all the sentences and descriptions, except one that asked for corrections. She said that she might stop talking if someone corrected her too much. I agreed with her. I said that maybe that person did not think very deeply. Maybe the person just answered what he thought the teacher wanted. Junko, nodded and said yes maybe. I did not tell her that I had written that one.

I was a little sleepy today. My part time job was until midnight and I got home around 1 a.m. and I got up at 6. This class keeps me awake and is fun, but the other classes make me want to sleep. And sometimes I do.

### ***Nobu's Voice***

I wrote "My Ideal classmate does not talk too fast. She asks lots of questions. And she is happy." I know it is sometimes hard to be happy in school, because we have to take tests. And do what the teacher tells us. Read. Write a lot. And listen and learn. But I noticed if you happy no bother you so much. Mami was today's my

partner. She smiled a lot and looked happy. Reelly even when I made mistake. I thanked her after class. I hope my other partners are like her. Helpful. And she makes me hoping.

### ***Mami's Voice***

I want to thank Ms Engel for ask that question in the first class. It made me think and imagine. Today's class could be special. We read all our answers. We could learn a lot and have a good time. I have never been so hoping and positive in an class before. I like to speak English a lot. I love improving, usually with high-level learners. Today my partner was a bit low. Ms Engel said that your main goal in this class is to "help each other learn. And remember 'the wise person is one who can learn from anyone.'"

I have two little brothers, and I am always learning from them, sports, games, and funny things (they are "adorable"-new word for today). So I guess I can apply that to classes too. And I like the idea that we can learn from everybody. Today I didn't learn any English from Nobu. But I learned how genki (excited?) he was to try to learn. I want to be like that. Wanting to learn is really important for learning. I remember I used to be afraid of school and of doing bad. Then my younger brothers started going to school and they were afraid. My mom asked me to tell them that school was fun and they would be OK. So I acted like school was not scary but fun so they would go and learn more. I guess I convinced myself as much as them! It's funny how pretending something can change you!

## 2. Action Logging

### Yoshi's Voice

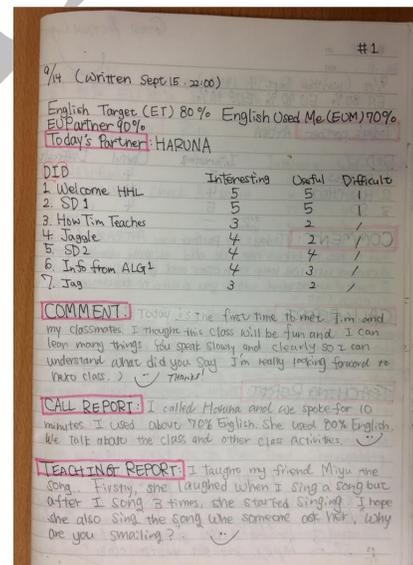
I am amazed at how we are doing this class. It really is a lot of fun, but sometimes I feel lost. But I know I can just ask somebody if I don't understand. Then I feel found. And when I ask and they tell me, I feel like I discovered a new library. Each person is a library. Sometimes closed. Sometimes wide open.

We have to have a different partner every day. We call them up each evening to talk in English. We go over what we learned in class. The first time on the phone it felt awkward. But I am starting to get used to it. I guess my classmates are too. We usually talk for 5 or 10 minutes about class and things. And if either of us needs some help with something we give it. I don't think I have ever been in such a helpful class.

At first I thought the action logs would be boring to do. But now I am starting to like them. Ms Engel writes the list of things we will be doing on the left side of the board every day. Then we copy it and give a number for the activities. During or after class. We do our homework, Comment, CALL-Report, TEACH-Report, and maybe other things. Then we are suppose to turn our action logs in once a week. Ms Engel reads them and sees what we are doing / thinking. She said in the first class, "You control me with your action logs. Tell me what you want more or less of." I told her I wanted her to make random partners because I am shy about finding a partner. She put my comment into a newsletter with other students comments and we read them to each other. She did number us off to make random partners in one class and it was OK. But then she went back to having us decide. I guess both ways are OK.



Action Log Drop-Off Box



Example of an Action Log page

## Resource G. General References of Importance

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## Note K. Why 'Voicing Learning'

I literally changed the title every day for about a month before I settled on this one. The title is meant to be pluralistic and open to the readers' interpretations. For me, yes, we are literally listening to the voices of learners in the act of learning which I hope every teacher does and at the same time realizes how useful it is to get this information so that we know "Where to go next" (Hattie & Clark, 2019). Obviously doing Ideal Classmates surveys, Action Logging, Social Testing, Class Publications, etc. directly help students to voice their learning so teachers can obtain/activate these "voicings" which point them in the direction of planting more possibilities of students' agency and autonomy, and of students harvesting them.

One crucial point is that when teachers can get students to use their voices in the target language to express themselves (correctly or not) they have engaged the brains to promote learning naturally. Interaction is a big part of how we learn, and even interacting with ourselves while writing or thinking can improve proficiencies: ~~Learning Voices~~ (oops I changed it to *Voicing Learning!*) can mean all this. As the archaeologist/anthropologist Steven Mithen wrote, "...once the Early Humans started talking, they just couldn't be stopped" (1996, p. 211). That is pretty much what happens to motivated learners.

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**Positive Pedagogical Praxis Series**

<https://www.candlinandmynard.com/ppp.html>

Edited by Tim Murphey

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*Conversation Strategies and Communicative Competence* by Christian Jones

*Learner-Controlled Tasks for the Autonomy Classroom: A Teacher's Resource Book* by Christian Ludwig and Lawrie Moore-Walter

*Voicing Learning* by Tim Murphey

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