

Teacher Autonomy in the Language Classroom  
Paul Arenson  
Miyazaki JALT Pan-SIG  
Lifelong language learning in the workplace forum  
LLL SIG  
May 11, 2014

## 1) The Corporate Agenda and Language Education

Choice and empowerment are two words associated with learner autonomy, critical pedagogy and other notions of student-centered teaching. And yet the workplace can be littered with obstacles that limit a teacher's own autonomy and job satisfaction. Some lay the most blame squarely on what Gray and Block call the "marketization" of education.

In a discussion of the overemphasis on testing in language education, Scott Thornbury quotes Gray and Block, who say

*"Students are increasingly seen as customers seeking a service and schools and teachers are, as a consequence, seen as service providers. As this metaphorical frame has been imposed... the semantic stretching of keywords from the world of business... has become commonplace. Thus terms such as "outcomes", "value added", "knowledge transfer", "the knowledge economy" and above all "accountability" have become part of the day-to-day vocabulary of education."* (from The Marketization of Language Education and Neoliberalism.

Retrieved from <https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/tag/outcomes/> )

## (2) Teacher Perceptions

In my talk and in questionnaires prior to the talk, I asked teachers to consider the extent to which the institutions that employ us help or hinder our efforts to foster autonomous learning. I was particularly interested in teachers who identified with concepts, approaches and methodologies including, for example, global education, critical pedagogy, learner autonomy, and cooperative learning and if they found a conflict between their values and corporate values which underlie what they are asked to teach. By inviting them to examine and share their attempts to create a supportive learning environment in the face of such workplace limitations, I was hoping to gauge the extent to which a corporate agenda got in the way of promoting learning. The use of the term "corporate agenda" should not be misconstrued as applying only to business English teachers or those teaching in companies but people teaching at all institutions where the corporate ethic dominates.

Also, I wanted to know how such teachers responded, if they chose to try to avoid dealing with the conflict by conforming to corporate values, if only to be able to have steady work, or if they resisted those values somehow. I was hoping to find teachers who were willing to be subversive in their choice of materials and how they managed their classes.

Also, regardless whether or not teachers felt threatened by their students' needs and interests being defined by top-down, corporate values, I was also interested to know if teachers were struggling to make ends meet, working umpteen hours a week. This is an often overlooked issue directly related to the marketization of education where, as mentioned above, teachers are viewed as being expendable.

Responses revealed a great deal of concern about a deteriorating working environment, such as professors finding themselves looking for work at the end of a fixed term contract and others being forced to betray their own values as educators by having to teach a TOEIC or TOEFL prep course. I believe this is a direct result of the corporatization of our institutions, which see teachers as expendable and secondary to the needs of perceived markets.

(Appendix 1: Teachers Speak Out)

### **(3) Values Underlying What We Do**

In a related poster session one day prior to my talk, I detailed my own initiation into a progressive world view. I included this because I do not believe education is neutral or values free and that our early experiences help guide us in how we approach learning in a corporate environment, such as exists where many of us teach. A short history of the highlights of my life can be found in Appendix 2: Underlying Values.

### **(4) Testing Blues**

Gray and Block's critique of the marketization of education has much to say about how a single company has done so much to sabotage the efforts of those of us who are trying to make our classes relevant to our students as human beings, not just classify them and facilitate a top-down agenda.

Maybe it is just a grudge. After all, in my interview for the Teachers College MA program, they told me that I had scored near the bottom in the math portion of the GRE exam, although I was near the top in the English portion. They accepted me all the same. The same held true in high school for the SAT.

The villain in both these cases is ETS, a company which has received much bad press about alleged bias in its standardized tests, these tests now part of the broader debate about high stakes testing and how schools have ceased being places to develop the whole person but just facilitators of that same old corporate agenda of ranking and classifying people.

The company just rakes it in, suckering Japanese learners by convincing them that they are somehow deficient in the learning gene. In reality, it is because just about everyone and her aunt is persuaded they need this test in order to lead a happy life and reach enlightenment after death, that more people take the test in Japan than

anywhere else. This naturally drives scores down. And profits up for ETS. (TOEFL and TOEIC are marketed by different companies in Japan, but it is the same old ETS.)

Publishers and language schools follow suit, and even whole university programs are based around these tests (or similar ones), as revealed by many of my respondents. Even JALT presentations are not immune. Sooner or later, everyone is looking for advice on the best ways to use the tests, the best ways to use your classes to prepare for them, the best ways to increase students' tests scores, and yes, since everything revolves around these and many similar tests, language education is just one big test preparation course.

Scott Thornbury says:

*I have an almost pathological horror of testing and assessment... Things can be going along just swimmingly until the day of the test, or the day when I'm required to post a grade. Then all hell breaks loose. The cozy relationship I had built up with my class or with individual students is shattered irreparably.*

*Often this has to do with failing a student, but just as often it has to do with a student not getting the A grade they had always got in the past. Or, worse still, not getting the one percentage point that will make the difference between continued funding or having to leave the program for good.*

*[Testing] provides feedback, in accordance with principles of validity, reliability and fairness. But, at the same time, testing is evil... [b]ecause it assigns a value to the learner, and, since the value is almost always short of perfection, it essentially de-values the learner.*

*Worse, testing typically involves measuring students one against the other, thereby destroying at a blow the dynamic of equality that the teacher might have judiciously nurtured up until this point.*

*It] is evil because it is stressful for all concerned, and because the conditions under which testing is conducted (separated desks, no mobile phones, etc) imply a basic lack of trust in the learners.*

*It is evil because it pretends to be objective but in fact it is inherently subjective. Why... subjective? Because, as Johnston (op. cit: 76-77) points out, 'the selection of what to test, how it will be tested, and how scores are to be interpreted are all*

*acts that require human judgment'. Ultimately, it is the tester – not the test-taker – who decides what counts as knowledge, and how you count knowledge.*

*In an invigorating swipe at the culture of accountability, Frank Furedi, a sociology professor in the UK, condemns outcomes-driven education as 'a technique through which a utilitarian ethos to academic life serves to diminish what would otherwise be an open-ended experience for student and teacher alike.'*

*And he adds, 'Its focus on the end product devalues the actual experience of education. When the end acquires such significance, the means become subordinated to it'. The means become subordinated to the ends. Isn't this, finally, the real problem of testing?*

Retrieved from "O" is for Outcomes:

<https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/tag/assessment/>

## **5) The subversive nursing school teacher**

For most of us, we are conditioned to think of subversion as a no-go area, no matter how unbearable the situation we find ourselves in. In Japan the *gambare* spirit, the appeal to harmony and not making waves is held up as a cultural given when, in fact, much of it can be traced to the Meiji era and a nationalist ethic. Nevertheless, it can be extremely hard to be subversive in this context, and so I offer one personal example, which although not concerning a language teacher, can be quite instructive for those of us looking for a way to reassert our values in the classroom.

My wife taught nursing for the first and last time two years ago in an extended high school program (3 years plus 2). Though her students had already completed their 3 years of high school, she was still required to check their skirt length and make sure their hair had not been dyed.

20 years earlier, before she herself had become a nurse, she studied at a progressive school for social work and took humanistic education courses. And yet here she was in a teaching situation that demanded she play the role of authoritarian.

At the entrance ceremony, there was no way that she was going to promote patriarchy and sing *Kimigayo*. Though she would have liked to sit down through it, she stood but did not open her mouth.

In the classroom, the students reflexively stood and bowed whenever she entered the room. This did not sit well with her, so she decided to go and stand with the students and bow in the direction of the blackboard with them.

“Why,” I asked, “didn’t you just tell them you didn’t like hierarchical customs like that and ask them not to stand?”

“But then they would still have had to obey me. Too authoritarian,” she replied.

## **6) Conclusion**

The responses I received from teachers (Appendix 1: Teachers Speak Out) provide a great many insights into how teachers who value student autonomy are themselves thwarted as educators by a system that tries to fit both teacher and student into the corporate mould. Those teachers who do not conform, and even many that do, are tossed out on their ears when their services are no longer needed. Employment insecurity— at least in the case of non Japanese nationals—could affect both visa and health and pension status and potentially lead to destitution and/or deportation.

Clearly the biggest issue for many of us is how control of the curriculum has been taken out of the hands of the teacher (or, ideally, students and teachers). In several of the responses, we can see how teachers subverted the system, and were able to provide something more meaningful to students than they otherwise could if they had only followed the agenda. (See section f in particular).

But being subversive carries risks. Whether or how to resist, then, is a question that many of us have to confront. I hope this article will serve to stimulate discussion on how to be a subversive, but at the same time, a safe and still gainfully employed language professional.

Appendix 1: Teachers Speak Out (below)

Appendix 2: Underlying Values (below)

## **Appendix 1: Teachers Speak Out**

### **Sections**

- a) Rare and Relatively Good Places to Work**
- b) Ageism**
- c) Working Conditions**
- d) Macdonaldization of Language Education**
- e) Overtesting**
- f) Little Subversities**

As noted above, I asked a number of teachers how they perceived the issue of teacher autonomy and subversion of corporate values. This was done in person at my places of work, by email with friends and by online questionnaire. Here are some of their stories, illuminating the issues I have brought up in this paper.

### **(a) Rare and Relatively Good Places to Work**

Teacher A: 26 years at the same vocational school. Our students came 5 days a week, 5 hours a day, We were given responsibility for creating an integrated curriculum with clear goals, and yet we could meet those goals in our individual, creative ways. Many of our students were elite business people, but others were young people who had failed college entrance exams. I gravitated toward the lower level classes, since they lacked confidence. Also, as I had failed science all through high school, I had a lot of empathy for them. We were paid like professionals, and though we fought all the time about methodology, it was a time of considerable personal growth.

## **(b) Ageism**

Teacher B: Mine was also an exemplary institution, where teachers took pride in their work and students progressed at their own pace (with very little testing done by the teachers). Yet we did have a few cases where the administration violated their policy of no forced retirements in order to attract younger, non Japanese teachers.

The year I arrived, two 65 year-old English teachers—Mr. Motokawa and Mr. Kitagawa—were forced to retire. Both died within a year. But it was the exception. One popular teacher, Ms. Ono, kept teaching on into her late 80s until one day when she just forgot that she had any classes that day. The students loved her because she loved teaching and loved them and did not conform to the stereotype that if you are a woman you should just get married one day and give up your career. In fact, she always counselled her students not to.

Teacher C: I was surprised that our otherwise progressive union members voted to accept the administration's proposal to institute a mandatory 65-year old retirement age in exchange for the promise to give retirees a certain number of part time hours. The irony is that many of our older teachers were still good at what they did and some of the younger teachers had no idea what it is like to grow old and become unneeded in the eyes of management. And how hard it can be to make ends meet after you hit that arbitrarily determined age limit. The market wants new and fresh, not experience or even dedication.

## **(c) Working Conditions**

Teacher D: I have been full time for 12 years, but the cost of job security at my school is that you have to tow the line and teach the way the committees designate. And you are forced to publish and present. How many dull presentations have I sat through, presentations only done because you have to do them. Many full timers are jealous of some of the part timers, who they see as lazy, since they do not need to do committee work. They also complain that part timers have no loyalty, but what do you expect when you treat them as expendable? I think we are, all of us, in this together, and that is why I started a union for full and part timers at my school.

Teacher E: I have taught for 15 years in Japan, mostly full time, but never more than 3 or 4 years at a single school. By the time I become acclimated to one job, it's time to start thinking about where I will be living and working next. I'm a nomad and a nervous wreck with weak ties to the institution and the community.

Teacher F: I have taught for 18 years, mostly part time. In the beginning I liked the freedom, since part timers are often given greater latitude in how to teach a course. But 18 years teaching at 6 or more schools per year, having to pay your full health and pension premiums yourself, is taxing. You do the same work, but you are a second class citizen since you get no bonus either. I can't wait to start collecting my meagre pension.

Teacher G: Many people work because they need to, even if they hate what they do and they have no time for a life outside of work. That is what attracted me to teaching: here is something I was sure I would love doing and that I would never tire of. But then you are worked to death in a nominally full time job that ends after 4 years at half again as many hours as tenured faculty (of which there are fewer and fewer these days). I love my students and I love teaching, when I can sum up the energy to do it. Sometimes work just gets in the way.

Teacher H: As far as job security is concerned, ageism and sexism are a huge factor. I have none and have reached an age (54) where I can no longer expect that. I can at best only expect one more contract, and then when my strength is less, will have to take many koma and rush around from university to university as a part-time in order to provide for my family. Despite spending a lot of money and time on doing a PhD, I was told to keep the research quiet when applying for jobs as 'that might take away from your English teaching duties'. Were I a man, I would have more contacts and access to information and solidarity about employment, and more inside chances of being promoted in to a position. But I am not a man. In my current teaching position, for which I had to take a huge cut in rank and income (I was formerly an associate professor at a national uni, but of course only on contract) I am one of only 2 women in around 20 instructors and am consequently generally othered and excluded in many ways

#### **(d) MacDonalidization of Language Education**

Teacher H: I teach at a company which sends us to businesses to teach English. They have very nice brochures which explain how well thought out the program is, how we tailor our lessons to the business needs of our clients, and how our teaching correlates with higher scores on standardized tests. But it is all a bunch of malarkey. Nothing much to do with language acquisition theories. Not that those tests measure the essentials, anyway.

Teacher. I: Business people are STILL people; they still inhabit the same world as other people, and the language skills they need do not differ markedly from what others need. But to our companies, and increasingly, universities as well, we are service personnel and they are our clients. And we are offering a standardised one-size fits all product, with commercial texts or in-house materials churned out under sweatshop conditions.

Teacher I: You can only do so many pie charts and simulated business meetings. It would be far better to read and discuss the news, or debate the wisdom of maintaining nuclear power. In fact, I would go out on a limb and say that for some of our clients (er, students) who have very little need for English despite the company forcing them to take the course, it would be far better to engage them in real world issues. Many tell me (sometimes in Japanese) that this is the first time for them to talk about these topics.



Teacher J: We are kept busy shuttling from office to office trying to add as many clients as possible to cover our bottom line. I think the overworked employees we teach understand they have a lot in common with us as exploited human beings, My company gives me more and more busy work on top of the classes-grades to enter via computer, attendance records which go to HR, etc. I end up taking my work home on weekends and haven't had a day off in months. I am basically *working poor*, even though we maintain the illusion that we are offering an elite product for elite customers.

### e) Overtesting

Teacher K: My suggestions for program improvement at the part-time workplace (a national public university) have gone unnoticed. Additionally, the public university has instructed the faculty to set an average score for their students' grades at 73%—a completely arbitrary number with no basis in statistics to support it. When asked why and how students are divided among classes in a way which supports the setting of such scoring standards, the university has failed to provide a response.

Teacher L: I teach at a company English program, and what I hate is how we suddenly started adding more and more tests (which we have to squeeze into our limited classroom time and which we then have to spend even more hours grading and entering into a computer program). All this testing gives the client company the impression that we are an elite educational service company.

Never mind that we test things that are arbitrary, where even the teachers can not agree on the right answer.

Some examples (out of a much longer test), with expected answers shown in green.

Choose the best response for each sentence:

- 1) Watch where you are going!
- a) Thanks, I wasn't looking.
  - b) I'm not blind.
  - c) You watch where you are going!

I failed my driving test again.

- a) How unfortunate.
- b) You should try harder.
- c) I failed a few times also.

My husband's sister died yesterday.

- a) Was she sick?
- b) I'm sorry to hear that.
- c) Oh dear me. Death is so painful.

The teachers were suddenly told they had to do 3 of these a semester as well as an oral interview (all of which they “should have no difficulty with if they are attending regularly”). Which begs the question, “why test them then?”

Of course this left no room for the syllabus we planned. Moreover, the students, as well as the teachers, had nothing but trouble. As one student, Yasunori, explained re the driving test:

*Well, we all know the driving test is not difficult, so it is only natural that someone who failed twice in a row was obviously not working hard enough.*

#### **(f) Little Subversities**

Teacher L continues: At first I thought of not doing the test at all, but the company wanted us to submit them afterwards in case there was a question about grades. So then I hit upon the idea of making the test itself a lesson, explaining that the teachers were testing tests that management was proposing and wanted to see how students did on them in order to modify them if necessary.



We actually did the test once for practice, which of course I was not supposed to do, but I chose to do so anyway. And then we talked about the results. While some still wanted to believe that only one answer was possible, and wanted to know what the correct one was, others immediately expressed their surprise that their chosen response was deemed “not correct”.

I then used Yasunori’s comment (above) to illustrate that more than one answer can be appropriate. We went deep into this, talking about context, body language, stress, intonation, relationship between the speakers and more. I then explained as best I could why the expected answer was what it was and how there was disagreement between teachers about some of the items.

We also talked about standardised tests like TOEIC and how there is debate about their usefulness, biases, and business models (implying that Japanese speakers are the “worst” at

doing their exams when the reality is that many more people of varying proficiencies take the tests here than elsewhere, so it is natural that average scores are lower).

Even where the expected answer was not problematic, we used the time to talk about structure, register and more. The students got more out of this than they otherwise would have. When it came time to retest, most remembered what we had discussed and their scores, though not perfect, looked acceptable to the company. This is one way to subvert: give the impression you are doing what is expected, *but without betraying your own values*.

Teacher M: In the sweltering factory where I teach, the students are engineers and nominally white collar workers, though at first you are fooled since everyone, blue-collar subcontract workers and engineers alike, wears a factory uniform. The give-away is the colour of the helmets.

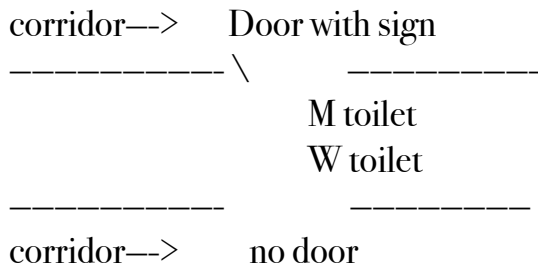
Despite signs all over the place warning of the need to maintain a proper intake of salt and water, a blue collar worker died one year. I only knew that because it was whispered to me one morning by one of my engineer students. When I asked him if the deceased hadn't had time to cool off, my student said it was all a facade: the workers simply had no time to stop and rest.

But white collar workers are not immune, especially the new employees. One of them told me he had to work 3 days and nights in a row with no sleep. *I was supposed to mark him late or absent when he had to miss 30 or more minutes of class. I never did. Last I heard, he is still alive.*

Another had to take a leave because he was depressed. I gave him a passing grade, as a failing grade would have put more pressure on him from Human Resources. I wrote to him recently to see how he was doing, but he didn't write back. I am worried about his mental and physical health.

The same student who told me about the dead contract worker also pointed out the new sign on the door leading to the toilet. For some reason, this not particularly spectacular toilet with tanks that sometimes fail to shut off and blinking overhead lights was now off limits to everyone except guests. What about the toilet on the other end of the hall? That one was for managers. The one at the far end was for workers. White collar ones at least. I suppose the blue collar workers have their own toilet somewhere even less convenient. Or maybe they just have to hold it in all day.

I noticed that most of the younger students took the sign literally and just used the designated toilet without complaint, while a few of the older employees just ignored the sign, especially in the morning before the managers arrived. *But there was one more form of civil disobedience: Some people just walked along the corridor to a second toilet entrance without a door.*



I related this to my students. The next week we did the Woody Guthrie song, *This Land is your Land*. We

talked about how the last few verses (about private property) were virtually unknown in the U.S. since school songbooks did not include them.

This led to a discussion of the notion of private property, privilege, censorship, school textbooks, and the gap between rich and poor. I thank the far sighted managers for helping to promote not only English ability but the notion of empathy.

### This Land Is Your Land

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This land is your land This land is my land  
 From \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ island;  
 From the \_\_\_\_\_ forest to the Gulf Stream \_\_\_\_\_  
 This land was \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,  
 I saw \_\_\_\_\_ me that endless skyway:  
 I saw \_\_\_\_\_ me that golden valley:

\_\_\_\_\_

I've roamed and rambled and I \_\_\_\_\_ my footsteps  
 To the \_\_\_\_\_ sands of her diamond deserts;  
 And all \_\_\_\_\_ me a \_\_\_\_\_ was sounding: \_\_\_\_\_.....

When the sun comes shining, and I was strolling,  
 And the wheat \_\_\_\_\_ waving and the dust clouds \_\_\_\_\_,  
 As the fog was \_\_\_\_\_ a voice was chanting:

As I went walking I saw a sign there  
 And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."  
 But on the other side it didn't say

nothing,  
 That side was made for you and me.

(In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,  
 By the relief office I seen my people;  
 As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking  
 Is this land made for you and me?)

Nobody living can ever stop me,  
 As I go walking that freedom highway;  
 Nobody living can ever make me turn back  
 This land was made for you and me.



Teacher N: I was told to make students sing an embarrassing song that they clearly didn't want to sing. I refused and then I got fired. But note- this was after the team teacher in the class cornered me and grabbed my arm to try to convince me to do it. *I complained about her saying that we were having communication problems, she got me fired.* Lovely. (This is not in my current position but in a position at a high school that I was sent to through a temp agency).

Teacher O: Many years ago, I was asked to be a judge in a speaking contest at a small university I was teaching at. I hadn't given it much thought beforehand (I was just beginning to teach at universities), but realized within minutes of the event, how my views were fiercely opposed to the whole premise of a ranking event. It was a travesty. There were only 6 contestants, but a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prize, with elaborate gifts (flowers, trophies, money) to the 3 winners. I believed all the students had "won" because of their hard work and their willingness to take the challenge. Even by conventional standards, all the students had won . . . all showed strengths and weaknesses, and all were at a similar level once the complexities were considered. Yet, we had to rank, so we did, all of us judges coming up with a different verdict, based on different premises. I was sick to my stomach when we nevertheless had to come to a consensus. The whole thing stunk of mendacity. I could do little at the time though I wished I had the courage to speak out anyway. *I did however, write to all the students at length, congratulating them and explaining my thoughts on the matter in great detail. I also, from then on, turned down any requests to judge at speaking events for the reasons I've written here.*

Teacher P: I'm tenured and, nominally at least, in charge of a large language Centre (600 classes per year, 70 or so teachers). As you say, there are numerous "corporate" demands, pressures and so on. Most of these, though, are not at the level of what teachers do in the classroom, but at a policy level. For instance there's a continual push for TOEIC to be used as a means of evaluating the success or otherwise of the program, by means of using it as a placement test and an achievement test. This is nonsense, of course, for many reasons, not least that the median level of our students is way below any meaningful TOEIC score - the test would neither stream students well for placement (since at very low levels random chance plays a large role in test score), nor for measuring gains. In this case rather than subversion, my role, as I see it, is outright opposition to these educationally meaningless pressures. At the same time, though, I have to accept that in a time of falling enrolments, if having the word "TOEIC" prominent in our publicity material results in arresting the decline in enrolments we have to consider how to do that without making a nonsense of the program. *If the university folds, many people lose their jobs and potential students lose the skilled teaching they might otherwise have had. If we manage to continue, by a policy of hinting that students who come here may expect to increase their TOEIC scores to meaningful levels (which is patently untrue for the 90% with only modest levels of motivation), we may in fact give those students good quality education, and a minority may go on to develop an interest in developing their skills in later years, as a result of their experiences here.*

Teacher Q: *I do not follow the university's policy of grading in such a fashion as to guarantee an average grade of 73% in my classes. I have not done so for the previous 4 years and the university has not mentioned anything about my failure to meet this directive thus far.*

Teacher R: I was on an entrance exam committee and suggested a grammar sentence dealing with two people of the same gender getting married. I was told the committee did not want to use the sentence so as to not make the students confused. *I backed down. I thought that there are other ways to approach the issues (after the students enter the uni).*

## **Appendix 2: Underlying Values**

Who we are as human beings and as teachers has as much to do with what we were exposed to as children as what we studied on the road to becoming educators. Here is a brief history of significant events that affected me.

1964-1970 I was a rebel: my mother was thrown out of the PTA for trying to integrate my all white elementary school, Public School 64, Ozone Park, New York. At John Adams High School my friends and I were targets of the football team because we refused to stand up and say the Pledge of Allegiance during the Vietnam war. I also started writing poems and protest songs in 1966, which I have continued until the present.

1972: At Queens College, my professor's brother was Michael Schwerner, killed by the KKK in Mississippi (see poster). I handed out flyers against Honeywell's land mines that were used in Vietnam. A detective from the New York City "Red Squad" called my parents and asked them if they knew what their son was doing. My father told him to "fuck off" and hung up the phone. I was prepared to go to jail or Sweden rather than fight in the war. They never called me, though.

1977-78: I went to graduate school, where Fanselow and others encouraged us to look beyond orthodox methods and methodologies (I never did learn those orthodox ways, by the way). My first boss at Queens College took off points when I dropped my Silent Way pointer during observation. She said she did not like those "new fangled methods". I taught writing at LaGuardia Community College to inner city freshmen whose previous teachers had called them stupid because they wrote and spoke a non standard dialect. I can't forget Sandra, who wrote a beautiful essay about about the day she realised she was not stupid.

1979-2013: I have been a full and part-time teacher in Japan and was a co-founder of my first school's (1979-2006) labor union. From 2009 until 2012 I helped my wife as a homeless volunteer in Tokyo's Sanya area. We moved to Miyazaki in 2012 after the Tepco nuclear disaster, and gave up our jobs. This coincided with a degenerative back

problem, but a year ago I began teaching again for a company which used slave labor in World War II. Then again, IBM helped the Nazis, so there is no escaping ethical dilemmas. Though some of us prefer to look the other way, they are everywhere if we choose to see them.