

# **May Higa: Personal and Professional Identity of a Pioneer Asian American Woman Teacher**

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## **Abstract**

This study expands the current knowledge base of teachers by exploring and analyzing the historically excluded voice of an Asian woman teacher in the United States. More specifically, because Asian Americans are a diverse group and their experiences are varied and complex, this qualitative study focused on the personal and professional identity of a pioneer Nisei woman teacher. This paper highlights May Higa's oral history, from 1916 to 2007.

Reviews of literature on teachers of European descent (Alsup, 2006; Casey, 1993; Hoffman, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Middleton, 1993; Pieroth, 2004), African Americans (Dougherty, 2004; Foster, 1997; Taylor, 1994; Walker, 1996, 2001), and Latino/a American teachers (Ochoa, 2007; San Miguel, 2001) were considered in identifying significant aspects of teaching. This paper also reviewed literature on Asian American women (Adler, 1998; Kim, 2000; Matsumoto, 1978) and women in the Pacific Northwest (Blair, 1988). An examination of the Japanese American history from the Second Generation Era to the current time also clarified historical aspects of May Higa's oral history (Matsumoto, 1994; O'Brien & Fugita, 1991; Okihira, 1994). Collectively, they helped to frame consideration of how an Asian woman teacher's experience was similar and different from the general teaching population. Using the oral history methodology and the intersectional framework helped to gather and analyze data for this paper. The findings describe how May Higa's personal and professional identity intertwined at the intersection of teaching.

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## **Key words**

Asian woman teacher, teacher identity, Nisei teacher, teacher leader, culturally responsive teacher.

## Introduction

In order to understand teaching and learning, we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are (Varghese *et al.*, 2005, p. 22).

The goal of this study was to advance our understanding of teaching and learning by exploring the personal and professional identity of a pioneer Asian woman teacher in the United States. May Higa, one of 13 Asian women teachers in a larger study (Kang, 2008), is 93 years old. She attempted to enter the teaching profession in 1939 when the public school districts in the United States did not welcome Asian women as teachers. Through her oral history, we will learn how she negotiated and claimed her identity as an Asian woman teacher in Washington, Ohio, New York, and California during the Second Generation Era, the War Era, and the Civil Rights Movement Era.

## Framework

To illustrate the multifaceted aspects of May Higa's identity, the lens of the intersectional framework was used to analyze her experience as a woman and teacher. Previous researchers have recognized a need for using an inclusive framework when studying a marginalized group, such as women of color (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991, 1996; Ferber, 2007). Krane, Oxman-Martinez, and Ducey (2000, pp. 2-4) claimed that because each [women] in the world sits at the intersection of many categories, and because some of these categories are central to her being and her ability to act in the world, they state that, while some categories are not important, some categories, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, are important most of the time. They claimed that these categories are not considered as individual characteristics, but are fluid and flexible and are shaped at the intersections of various elements of social location, which are continuously being negotiated within everyday relationships.

Carter, Sellers, and Squires (2002, p. 111) also wrote, because the intersectional framework stress[es] the idea that race (or ethnicity), class,

and gender (in addition to other social forces) are not separate and additive, but rather interactive and multiplicative, the framework is becoming more useful in research. Collins (1998) also elaborated on the development of the intersectional theory. She wrote that an intersectional framework has gained much scholarly attention in the 1990s as scholars attempted to examine gender, race, class, and other markers of differences simultaneously. Prior to determining this framework as the most appropriate lens to study my participant, other frameworks around scholarly work on teachers, such as sociocultural theory (Laskey, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), feminist theory (Armitage & Gluck, 1998; Hurtado, 1998; Oakley, 1981; Scott, 1986) and critical race theory (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; Yosso, 2005) were considered. However, because these theories focused too heavily on one aspect of a person, such as gender, race, and/or social context, the intersectional framework, with its emphasis on examining gender, race, class, and other markers of differences simultaneously was chosen.

Stanfield (1993) added that gender, age, and other characteristics in historically specific contexts also complicate what it means to be a person of color. By using an intersectional framework, which helped to articulate the relationship between different aspects of one's social standing and their interactions with systems of oppression, researchers investigating women of color provided insights into the operation of power in the construction of and responses to describing these women in relationship to social, cultural, and historical contexts (Stanfield, 1993, p. 2). These insights helped to explain the relationship between the personal and professional experiences during the historical context of the Second Generation Era, the War Era, and the Civil Rights Era.

In summary, an intersectional framework was used because it allow[s] for an exploration of the multi-aspect context of people's lives (Krane *et al.*, 2000, p. 2). In addition to the participant's personal identity as an Asian woman, this researcher was also interested in her professional identity a teacher, and how she negotiates and prioritizes different aspects at the intersection of teaching.

## Research Methods

If we can rethink traditional methodologies and revise them, and design and apply new ones, we will begin to see racial and ethnic matters as they really are (Stanfield, 1993, p. 7).

Despite the increased literature on teachers, until recent times, the fact that most teachers are women has not been included in research or scholarly work as a factor influencing the nature of teaching (Spencer, 2001, p. 804). In order to better understand what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be a woman, Weiler and Middleton (1999) proposed using narratives as a research method to explore teachers. Thus, utilizing the oral history methodology was appropriate for this study.

As stated by Facio (1993, p. 86), Collecting oral histories can be exciting, emotional, and frustrating, as well as time-consuming. However, because May Higa is in her nineties, it was important to collect her life history, from childhood to retirement, to present time. By capturing her life history, this researcher was able to gather data about all aspects of her personal and professional life, and examine the relationship among multiple facets of her identity. Oral history was also an appropriate methodology for this study because, while Asian Americans are the largest minority teaching group in Washington State, the literature on Asian teachers is sparse. As Barnickel (2006, p. 65) wrote, oral history will fill in gaps in written records and give voices to those who have been overlooked or left out (intentionally or unintentionally) of the historical record. Through the oral histories of pioneer Asian women teachers, this study aimed to fill in this gap and provide a clearer picture of their personal and professional experienced lives.

## Findings

The purpose of this section is to present May Higa's oral history and to provide analysis of her personal and professional identity during three historical periods: the Second Generation Era, the War Era, and the Civil Rights Movement Era. During these critical periods in history, May Higa's personal identity as a Nisei daughter, wife, and mother intersected with her professional identity as a culturally responsive teacher and

teacher leader. As argued by Alsup (2006), an exploration of teacher's identity is incomplete without an exploration of teacher's personal identity. A holistic study on teacher identity is necessary because, to ignore either part of the mix [the personal and the professional] can result in an overly simplistic, essentially unsuccessful work, according to Alsup (2006, p. xiv). Furthermore, because Alsup (2006, p. 32) reminded the readers that the history of the African American teacher is a little different than for the white teacher, through an exploration of an Asian teacher, we may also glean knowledge about another minority teacher group.

May Higa, the first Japanese American women teacher in the Seattle area, sought to teach in Washington State in 1939 with her teaching certificate from Central Washington Teacher's College. To illuminate May Higa's life history and to describe the intersection of her personal and professional identity, the findings have been organized into three parts.

First, the findings of May's childhood during the Second Generation Era, 1916 to 1930s, will be presented to introduce three aspects of her personal identity-race/ethnic, gender, and age-and to illustrate how they intertwine with one another. May Higa's stories will follow next to illustrate who May Higa is. In providing aspects of her personal identity simultaneously, the readers are also encouraged to know who she is and how her experiences were shaped because she was a Nisei daughter growing up during the Second Generation Era.

Following the overview of May's personal identity during the Second Generation Era, will be the intersection between her personal and professional identity during the War Era, including the pre-war and post-war years of 1940s and 1950s. Next, the findings related to May Higa's racial/ethnic, gender, and generational identity, and the discussion of how her Japanese heritage and gender identity intersected with her professional identity as a pioneer Japanese American woman teacher during the 1940s to 1950s will be presented.

The last section will illustrate May Higa's professional identity as a teacher who demonstrated aspects of cultural responsive teaching, considering the relationship between her professional identity with the aspects of her personal identity: racial/ethnic, generational, and gender identity during the Civil Rights Movement Era (1960s to 1980s). Describing May Higa's personal and professional identity during the Civil

Rights Movement Era is important, because as note by Taylor (1994), although racial crisis focused on black-white dichotomy prior to 1960s in Seattle, many of the younger Japanese Americans during the 1960s began to identify with African Americans' anger and aspirations. He writes, [Japanese Americans] were similarly marginalized and alienated in a society that refused to recognize racial diversity regardless of educational or economic success (Taylor, 1994, p. 224). However, the leaders in the Japanese American community agreed that education was the key to Nisei advancement and as many as 458 Japanese American students were enrolled at the University of Washington by 1941, compared with ten African American students. Like the African American and other students of color, Japanese Americans knew the limits of employment opportunities in their community and that success in education was not translated into commensurate employment opportunities during the late 1930s and 1940s (Taylor, 1994, p. 132). However, May Higa's experience may have been different. Although she was not encouraged to attend college because she was a Nisei daughter and a student of color, and even though teaching was not open to Japanese Americans, May Higa completed college and became a teacher.

### **Part I: The Second Generation Era**

The Second Generation Era is described as the period in which most Nisei children were born and raised. As documented by Yanagisako (1985), about 80 percent of the Nisei in Seattle were born between the latter half of the 1910s and the first half of the 1930s. Although the Nisei are Americans by birth, Miyamoto (1984) claimed that it was difficult to describe their identity vis-vis majority White Americans during the 1930s because of the discriminatory laws that kept them isolated or at best functioning as in dual roles as Japanese and as Americans. An exploration of pioneer Japanese American women in Washington is also worthwhile because, according to Nomura (2001, p. 284), they were the largest group of nonwhite ethnic women in the state during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Despite their large representation in Washington and their roles in establishing a viable Japanese American community in Washington, Nomura added, little is known of the history of these women. More recently, Lee (2005) expanded on Miyamoto's

concept of dualism, being both Japanese and American, in her dissertation as she sought to understand what it meant to be Japanese American in Seattle from 1900 to 1942. While this author was interested in extending previous scholars' work on Japanese Americans in Seattle during the 1900s, there was also an interest in exploring aspects of dualism, being Japanese American, within Japanese American's professional identity as teachers through the broader historical contexts of the Second Generation Era, the War Era that followed, and the Civil Rights Movement Era. Rather than focusing on aspects of internment and discrimination during these eras, an attempt was made to extend inquiry by focusing on how these early experiences intertwined with professional identity. An exploration of teachers' early childhood lives is important because, as Goodson (1992, p. 13) noted, many earlier studies completed during the 1970s and 1980s that focused on the teachers' own experience as pupils were useful in understanding teacher identity. He wrote that scholars have argued that teachers' own experiences as pupils is seen not only as important as the training periods but in many cases more important. Because most previous studies focused on teachers of European descent, we do not know how the childhood experiences of teachers of color interplay with their professional identity as teachers of color.

### **Nisei: None of Us Liked Japanese School**

May Higa identified herself as a Nisei whose parents immigrated to the US in 1890. Growing up, she attended Japanese language school and Seattle Public Schools during the 1920s and 1930s. May recalled, I used to go to Japanese language school. We went right after our regular school-I guess it was about 3:30 or 4 o'clock. And then we stayed until 6 o'clock. And fortunately the school was not too far from my home so I could go home and have a snack and then go to Japanese school. May, like many Nisei, spoke English to their siblings, but with their parents, they spoke Japanese, and attended Japanese language school after their regular school day. According to Dubrow, Graves and Cheng (2002), in addition to public schools, most Nisei attended Japanese language schools called *Kokugo Gakko*. Organized in 1902, the first Japanese language school established in the United States was located in Seattle and many Nisei, including May, attended Kokugo Gakko during the

1920s. Dubrow, Graves and Cheng (2002, p. 109) wrote, the language schools played a significant role in shaping the hybrid cultural identity of Nisei by promoting a shared set of cultural norms . Usually held for about 90 minutes each day following public school, the children learned traditional Japanese concepts such as status relations between the teacher and student and the parent and child, while learning the Japanese language. Even though May did not understand why she had to attend Japanese school when the language was not particularly treasured or thought of in a good way in her society, she and others attended because their parents insisted (May, 2007). According to Miyamoto (1984, p. xvi), most children regarded it as an onerous duty to attend the language schools, although May commented that none of us liked Japanese school.

Because the racial covenants against renting or selling homes to Japanese were written into real estate contracts in many parts of Seattle during the Second Generation Era, despite their U.S. citizenship, May and her family were restricted to live and attend schools within the Central Area of Seattle. She attended Bailey Gatzert and Washington School in the center of the Nikkei Community. According to Miyamoto (1984), due to the segregation of Japanese Americans, 95 percent of the students at Bailey Gatzert School were Japanese Americans during the Second Generation Era. Pieroth (2004, p. 131) confirmed that Nikkei were the majority among Asians at Bailey Gatzert and Washington Schools.

According to Pieroth (2004, p. 138), "Washington School was the quintessential Progressive laboratory of democracy during the twenties." She also described how the teachers sought to cultivate in their students a sensitivity to ethnic heritage and toleration of diversity under the leadership of Principal Sears. Despite teachers' and the principal's effort to promote diversity, some of the students did not interact with others. May described Washington: Even though many different ethnicities and races attended Washington School, they stayed to themselves out of school; all of my friends were Japanese (May, 2007). As an elementary school student at Washington School, May remembered Miss Lowman as her favorite teacher. She liked her because she related to her because she was lively and she was up-to-date and she interacted with the students very well (May, 2007). May also mentioned that Miss Lowman listened to her students and provided hands-on activities, which was unusual



during the Second Generation Era. May also believed that teachers liked her because she raised her hand to answer questions and spoke up during discussion, even when she did not have the right answer. She said:

At least I tried. As they say, the Japanese students don't speak up. And I know teachers, when I was teaching, and they said they didn't like to go into a Japanese town because they didn't get the reactions from the students that other students give. That they are reluctant to speak up unless they are absolutely sure they are right. That made my fellow teachers say oh, I don't want to teach Japanese children. But I guess I was different, and I would raise my hand whenever I thought I had the right answer.

Because of the large Japanese American student population, the local public schools were also seen as an extension of the Japanese community, according to Miyamoto (1984). As a Nisei daughter, May learned the values preferred by her Issei parents and as an American, she learned to excel in schools and to participate in school activities. As illustrated by May and noted by Taylor (1994, p. 108), because Japanese parents brought cultural values from Japan which were consistent with and complementary to the middle-class values emphasized in American society, Nisei children were able to achieve status through education. The Issei parents instilled in their children respect for their teachers and the drive to do their best in schools. May Higa's mother was also an active participant in the Parent Teacher Association. She recounted:

My mother tried very hard, you know, there were eight of us. She tried very hard to attend everything at the school and she encouraged her neighbors to go. But very few went because they couldn't speak [English] and my mother couldn't [speak English] either. But I did admire her because she came to everything that went on at the school.

May believed that her parents' support for her academic success and her family values contributed to her personal identity.

### **We Sort of Looked Down on Anything Japanese**

May Higa claimed Japanese American as her race/ethnicity because, as noted earlier by Yinger (1985), she shares a common origin or culture resulting from shared activities, such as attending Japanese language school. Thus, an exploration of racial/ethnic identity within the social and historical context is worthwhile. As stated previously by Alsup (2006, p. 107), The family and community into which individuals are born determine their social class, ethnicity, race, and ideological frameworks or foundational beliefs.

Reflecting on her Washington School, May remembered: As a child in elementary school, I wasn't aware of any kind of feelings towards us. My experiences were very positive when I was in elementary school. The fact that I didn't have many Caucasian friends at that time didn't seem strange to me. Because of her racial/ethnic identity during the Second Generation Era, May and the other participants' interactions with the Whites were limited. Nonetheless, May enjoyed and excelled in schools. Despite her excellence in schools, some teachers failed to acknowledge her potential and discouraged her from pursuing higher education and a career in teaching. In fact, May explicitly described her least favorite elementary school teacher as the one who did not look at May and the other students as human beings. She remembered her elementary teacher:

Miss W was the worst. She never asked obedience from the students. She would dictate everything and you just had to take it from her and no questions asked I remember, and she scolded the students for very slight infractions. I don't know, she just didn't look at us as human beings. She expected us to do exactly what she wanted from us. I think that she was like a dictator.

At times, May also felt discrimination from her peers, as illustrated in the quote below. May described how she did not participate in the social functions during high school because she felt that they were White social gathering, not intend for Japanese American students. As May got older, she reported experiencing increased segregation in high school:

When we went to high school, it was a different story because our school, Garfield, has very poor people going and very rich people going, the upper Seattle community. So these were white[s]. So for the first time, we interacted with these rich, white people, and they with us, and it was not a happy experience. We were segregated, not by officials but because we felt safer, better so the Japanese were together, the African Americans were together and it was sort of a segregated situation. However, the teachers were good. It was only during social functions; we didn't go to them. I guess we felt it was a white social gathering and there was no indication that they wanted us to attend too. I didn't go to a senior prom or a junior prom or anything in high school. High school was not a very happy experience for me.

Despite May Higa's parents' high regards for education as a source of status achievement as well as a survival strategy, some differences in their attitude towards education for their girls was apparent in their stories. Although most Japanese parents valued education, some parents felt that their daughters did not need the same level of education as their sons. Thus, an exploration of their gender identity is necessary to fully understand these pioneer Japanese American women teachers. An example of Issei parents' belief and gender discrimination is apparent in May Higa's oral history. May explained, well, when you say my parents valued education, they did. But my father felt that girls didn't need the education that boys needed. So he was anxious for his sons to go to school, but he didn't care much whether his daughters went to school. Even when May's brothers were not interested particularly in school and all of the girls just loved school, May's father did not think he needed to support his daughters' education. In spite of her father's belief that only boys need college education, all of his daughters worked through college to support their higher education. As noted by Miyamoto (1984) and echoed by May Higa, in the matter of sending their children to college, opinions were divided among the Issei parents. Miyamoto reported that while many placed strong emphasis on college education, many did not recognize its necessity for girls (p. 56).

### **I Was Determined To Be A Teacher**

At the intersection of teaching, gender nor race/ethnicity, helped May to move forward in her career path. According to Pieroth (2004), while women made up 94 percent of the elementary teaching population in Seattle during the twenties due to the district's reputation as a good place for a young teacher to build a career, the opportunity was not open to women of color. When May declared that she wanted to pursue college and become a teacher during a meeting with a school counselor at Garfield High School, her counselor discouraged her from going to college because of her Japanese heritage. The counselor informed May about the limitations of the professional careers for minority students. Thinking back to her high school year, May said:

I went to the counselor and I told her that I wanted to go on to college. And she said, To college? What college? And of course, I didn't know anything about college at the time. And the only college, you know you look through magazines and different colleges have their ads, and I said, Swarthmore and she said, What? You'll never make it into Swarthmore. I don't think you should try for college. I think you should see what kind of work you would like to do and train for that. And that was a critical moment because I thought, well, I am going to show this teacher that I can make it into college-maybe not into Swarthmore, we could never afford it in the first place. But it was the only school that came to mind because I was looking at magazines. That was a moment when I thought well, they don't expect me to go to college but I am going and I'll make it.

Even though May Higa graduated with honors and took college preparatory courses, she did not attend college immediately. Because May encountered challenges and was encouraged to consider other career choices, she took a year off to work as a school clerk in 1934. May Higa was one of the first Japanese American to be hired as a school clerk in Seattle School District. When the family moved to Ellensburg, she applied to Central Washington Teacher's College and was accepted.

However, on the first day of class at Central, she felt unwelcome. In describing her first day at the Central Washington Teacher's College in Ellensburg, Washington in 1935, May said:

I'm sitting in the classroom [at Central Washington] and I am the only Japanese in the school. [Dr. Hitch] was calling out the names of the students and he says, Oh, Auto. He couldn't pronounce 'Ota' [May's maiden name]. Where are you? I raised my hand, he says, Honey, what are you?, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, what's your name? I said, it's Ota, and I am Japanese American. And he says, Japanese American? What are you doing here? You don't belong here. You can't-you'll never get a teaching job. And what are you doing here? Go someplace else. I was so stunned. Here I am a little Japanese girl scared to death, going into a school with all Caucasian and unsure of myself, and he said that to me. He said, You just get out of here and go someplace else.

The following year, because she was discouraged from becoming a teacher and informed that teaching jobs were not available for Orientals, May Higa transferred to the University of Washington in 1936 to try journalism. Working as a house girl she attended the University of Washington for one year. After a year at the University of Washington, determined to become a teacher in spite of warnings, she returned to Central and graduated in the top 10 percent of class, receiving her teaching certificate in 1939.

After successfully completing her teacher education program, May Higa sought teaching positions in Washington State as well as other parts of the country. She explained:

Well, I applied all over, even in remote areas. And I got no response from anybody. I said, Dr. Hitch was right; nobody is going to hire me. So I didn't go to interview with anyone because no one said, Come and there is a job for you. And even the lowest ranking student in the class got a job. And I thought, Oh my god, even she but I thought there got to be someplace I can teach I just felt so worthless. And I was very depressed because out of the class, even the very poorest student

got a teaching job. I applied to all the different counties and cities in Washington. And there was not one that would accept me. And that was so depressing.

May believes that she was the first Japanese American student to graduate from Central Washington (in 1939), and that neither the teachers' college nor the school districts in Washington were prepared for Japanese American woman teacher like May Higa. As the eldest participant in this study, May reached working age before most second generation Japanese Americans in the Seattle area did. The earliest record to capture Japanese American Nisei's desire to become a teacher was noted by Fugita and Fernandez (2004). They reported that about 5 percent of Japanese Americans planned to become teachers in 1941. According to the authors, two women from the Densho Project reported that they considered teaching, but did not become teachers (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004, p. 228).

As noted by Pieroth (1979) and Taylor (1991), Seattle Public Schools did not consider hiring teachers of color until 1948, at which time, the district hired two African American teachers. Even though the Seattle school board voiced concern over an aging teaching corps and in 1938 brought compulsory retirement to the forefront of issues for teachers, the district was not prepared to replace aging teachers with quality teachers of color like May Higa.

Once again, the readers witness how May's professional identity is shaped by her Japanese heritage and her age. Had May Higa sought a career in teaching at a later time, she probably would have had a chance of becoming a teacher without racial barriers.

## **Part II: War Era**

### **I Never Gave Up My Hope of Teaching I Never Did**

Regardless of the social and political context during the War Era, May was determined to become a teacher. Soon after being turned away from teaching in Washington State, May went to Japan to explore teaching opportunities. When her father saw that his daughter was unable to get

a teaching job and was depressed, he thought she could find a teaching job in Japan, and encouraged her to visit Japan. Although he did not pay for May's college education, he was always supportive of May's decision and he even bought a boat ticket for her. When May visited Japan for the first time in 1939, she was glad that she was familiar with the Japanese language. According to May, she hadn't understood why the Nisei children had to learn the Japanese language when American schools did not value it. Later in life, she learned to appreciate the Japanese language and culture.

Ironically, in Japan, May Higa was not considered a Japanese person, but was regarded as a foreigner by the Japanese people. She remembered that she dressed differently from the other Japanese women and spoke fluent English, which they admired. Although May Higa was viewed as being different, Japanese women taking her English class demonstrated their admiration for her ability to speak English and for her fashion style. She reported that life was good in Japan, but after almost two years in Japan, the political tension rising between the U.S. and Japan influenced May to return to the United States. May remembered, the American government had sent me a letter saying, if you do not leave Japan by I think it was May, 1941, that they could no longer be responsible for me, as an American citizen.

### **Hell With Being Japanese, We Were Individuals Who Had Our Rights**

As Foster (1997) wrote, oral history offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives of individuals to society. The identities of individuals are strongly connected to society, especially during critical times in history. One of the critical events that shaped the personal and professional identity of May Higa and other Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest was the Executive Order 9066 (EO 9066).

Ironically, upon returning to the states, rather than receiving the fair treatment due to an American citizen, she was discriminated against. She was again denied a teaching job, but was hired as a school clerk for the Seattle School District. She returned to work at Washington Elementary School, now with about 20 percent Asian enrollment. Because the principal knew that May Higa had a teaching certificate, he asked her

to interpret and tutor in addition to clerical work. But her school clerk employment came to an abrupt end when May and 26 other Japanese school clerks were forced to resign in 1942 (Shimabukuro, 2001). As Shimabukuro (2001, p. 91) reported, the Executive Order 9066 triggered the Seattle School District to forcefully ask Japanese Americans to resign as employees because their employment was a deterrent to the school district. The parents at Gatewood Elementary School sought petition to dismiss all Japanese office girls and justified their actions by commenting that, because the school did not have Japanese students and because the school is a white district, Shimabukuro (2001, p. 93) their actions were justifiable. Even though these employees were American citizens by birth, May and others were wrongfully dismissed in 1942. May was directly impacted by the Superintendent Samuel Fleming's decision to form a directive for the termination of all Nisei clerks during this volatile time in Seattle Public Schools. Through the life history of May Higa, one learns how the school clerks were forced to resign, as previewed in Shimabukuro's *Born in Seattle* (2001).<sup>1</sup>

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued the EO 9066 proclamation, which mandated that all persons of Japanese ancestry would be removed from the west coast of the United States. Fugita and Fernandez (2004) captured uprooting and incarceration in *Altered Lives, Enduring Community*. They wrote, On March 2, the U.S. Army encouraged the Japanese to voluntarily move out of the Pacific coastal zone. However, because they encountered hostility by local citizens in the receiving interior states, on March 27, the Japanese were forbidden to migrate (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004, p. 50). The proclamation arbitrarily suspended the civil rights of U.S. citizens like May Higa. Half of those incarcerated were women and 60 percent were U.S. born citizens (Matsumoto, 1978).

After a few months working at Washington School, May received a frantic call, asking her to come down to Jimmy Sakamoto's office by three o'clock that afternoon. Describing the event, May remembered how upset Mr. Sears, the principal of Washington School, was and how he promised to stand by her, if anything terrible happened to her. Mr. Sears

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<sup>1</sup> May was also interviewed for the Densho Project, which Shimabukuro used for *Born in Seattle*.



and his teaching staff members' concerns were also captured in *Seattle's Women Teachers of the Interwar Years* (Pieroth, 2004). Mr. Sears said that no matter what race or color you are that you are all American citizens and that even if your parents came from a country that is fighting against us that we had nothing to do with it (p. 56). Knowing that Mr. Sears supported her, May went down to see Jimmy. May explained:

Jimmy was a publisher of our ethnic paper and he was well known in the community. He was blind, but he did a lot of work for the community. And he and his wife published this newspaper. He called and said, 'I want all the clerks to meet at my office.' So Mr. Sears had a feeling that something was going on and he said to me, 'if they are going to take you away from me, I'm going to protest, so don't let them talk you into doing that.' We gathered in this little tiny office, which is about the size of our kitchen there-a tiny office and here we are all crammed in there. And Jimmy stood there, and we all knew he was Jimmy. You know, and he stood there and said, 'I got a letter from the, I think it was the Board of Education, asking that you all resign.' And I, of course, we wondered why. The board had gotten letters from parents that said the clerk can contaminate our water, and clerks want to do harm to our children, and we want them out right away. So rather than to quell the parents, they just decided they are going to make us all resign and get out and not fire us, they asked us to resign. So we were standing there pretty much in shock and Jimmy says, 'I have your resignation all typed up, would you come up and sign it?' And I said, but Jimmy, why should we resign? He says, 'That's the gracious thing to do. Japanese don't fight, they do things graciously', and he said, 'you have to sign this.' I thought about it and thought, *this isn't right*. Well Jimmy didn't like my protest; I don't think any of the others spoke up much and so I finally signed it.

Feeling that she did not do the right thing by signing the resignation letter, May remembered calling Jimmy from a nearby payphone to ask him to delete her name from the resignation letter. She asked, Jimmy, please cross my name off the petition. But it was too late. May

continued, he said, "I'm sorry, May, it's in the mail. I mailed it already." So there it went. I resigned from the Seattle School System. May blamed Jimmy for forcing the school clerks to resign. At the same time, May remembered thinking, I wonder whether he was threatened or what? Regardless of the reasons, May was still angry at him for saying, you have to graciously do it, you are Japanese. May added, hell with being a Japanese, we were individuals who had our rights. That was very painful, very upsetting to have relented to such an absurd request. Why couldn't they have fired us if they didn't want us? Why make us resign? Fire us if they were afraid to have us there.

After being forcefully terminated from her job, May continued to experience the negative impact of the war. After almost 70 years, she vividly recalled:

We lost everything. A woman came in and she says, 'oh you poor things, I just feel so bad that this is happening' and she says, 'I'm going to take everything you got. I'll buy everything you have, don't sell it.' She says, 'I'll come back and we'll make a transaction then.' She didn't come, she didn't come and I kept calling her and calling her and she wouldn't answer her phone. Finally, I should have sold it, finally the night before we were to leave, see I couldn't get in touch with her, she comes, oh before she left she says, 'the only thing I want is that sofa. I'd love to have that sofa.' I said, 'well, could you pay me for it?' She gave me ten dollars for the sofa and then she left. And then she came back the night before we were to leave and she said, 'I don't want anything, I don't want any of your furniture, give me back my ten dollars.' I said, 'but you have our sofa.' 'Give me back my ten dollars.' And I refused I said, 'you have my sofa.' She says, 'but I want my ten dollars back.' 'Terrible.' So we had a fully furnished house, gone, gone, we couldn't take it. And even a lawyer we called a lawyer that my father had used, and I called him, I think his name was Williams, and I said, 'would you please try to sell our furniture?' So the lawyer sent us \$25.

Soon after, May and other Japanese Americans were incarcerated. Although incarceration was a horrific event in history, because Japanese

Americans are tenacious, as noted by Miyamoto (1984), many made most of their opportunities during incarceration. May explained that incarceration led Nisei women to consider different routes in life. Many Nisei left their families in camp to pursue higher education and careers in teaching—even during a time when the teaching field was closed to Japanese Americans. Kitano and Daniels (1995) expressed the idea that incarceration may have opened doors for the second generation Nisei. Although it was unfortunate for Nisei to lose some of their critical years in camp, incarceration provided an opportunity for many Nisei in this study to discover their interests and to consider an alternative career choice, such as teaching. For May, teaching had always been her top career choice and during incarceration, she was given an opportunity to teach and direct the educational program for the War Relocation Authority at Camp Harmony in Puyallup, Washington. For May, within the barbwires of camp in Washington, she could hold such jobs as teacher and director of education, which she could not hold on the outside. As May began to teach informally in the camp in 1942, we begin to see the intersection of May's personal identity as a Japanese American Nisei and her professional identity as a teacher. Although she was able to finally teach, she was later encouraged to leave Camp Minidoka. She remembered the time when the director of the Minidoka hospital, a Japanese doctor, called May in and he said, I want you to take your two sisters and get out this is almost a demand; you get out before you get sick.

In 1943, an individual sponsor from Chicago sponsored her to leave camp and to relocate to Chicago. It was the same year that the Seattle School District began to hire married teachers on an emergency service basis, due to severe labor shortage (Pieroth, 2004, p. 57). May reminded it was really easy to leave camp if you had a sponsor. And there were people in Chicago, New York, all over, who were Japanese Americans, who said they would be sponsors. In Chicago, she worked as a switchboard operator at the Chicago YWCA, from May 1943 to fall 1943. As she described it, incarceration may have also provided the Nisei group an opportunity to explore new territories. Prior to the war, most Japanese Americans like May lived in the Central Area of Seattle. However, during the war, Nisei women relocated and explored other parts of the country.

### Professional Identity As a Teacher

May identified with the teacher role from an early age. She remembered how in childhood she liked to be the leader and how they would play school. She said, I would always be the teacher. One year, the group of girls even organized a bazaar like the one their parents organized at church. She also described how she later taught Sunday school for two years when she was 15 or 16 years old.

May Higa's next teaching opportunity was when she was incarcerated. She was appointed as the Educational Director of Area B at Camp Harmony with about 300 people during the initial assembly center days. For about 3 months, she was in charge of the curriculum and leadership during the spring of 1942.

But once out of the camps, May dealt with discrimination in hiring as she sought teaching jobs in the Midwest and East Coast. After a few months in Chicago, she moved to New York with her sister. She took a job as a secretary at the National Headquarters of the Congregational Church in 1943. But she remembered thinking, I don't want to be doing this the rest of my life, I have to get back to my teaching. In this statement, May explicitly describes her determination to teach as she sought pathway to teaching. As she described her experiences, May illuminates the linkage between her personal and professional identity, despite the hindrances to her securing a teaching job. Even at a time when teaching was viewed as a woman's profession and teachers were in short supply, neither her skill, nor gender were sufficient to help her secure a job doing what she wanted to do.

May Higa desperately wanted to teach. In New York, she considered teaching the blind because blind children would not be able to identify her as a Japanese American. She believed that the blind children would not discriminate against her because she was a Japanese American—they wouldn't see her handicap. She said:

I took a night class at Columbia. I took a night class for handicapped and after two sessions in the class, you know the kids in there either Braille or had hearing aids or something, Dr. O'Brien asked me to stay after school - after class- to talk.

He said, 'what are you doing in this class? What's your handicap?' And I said, 'my handicap is being Japanese American.' And he said, 'what do you mean?' And I said, 'well, I figured if I taught the blind that they wouldn't object because they can't see me, you know.' And he looked at me, and he said, 'no, that's not a good reason for being in my class.'

One of the professors at Columbia Teacher's College, Roma Gans, recognized May's determination to teach. She offered May a teaching opportunity as well as a leadership opportunity through a one year teaching fellowship in 1944. May was asked to run a nursery school for the children of faculty members at Columbia. As the director of the Bancroft Nursery School in New York City, she had a positive teaching experience. May felt that the parents of her students were very considerate and helpful. They were also respectful of her ideas about teaching and early childhood education.

In 1945, because she still was unable to find a position in the public schools, May explored opportunity to teach in a private school, Hamilton School in New York City. This teaching opportunity provided a second positive experience for May because she claimed that she had the freedom to develop her curriculum for the four years old nursery school children. Even though the owners of the school hired her, May also remembered that some of the parents took their children out of May's class because they didn't like a Japanese teacher teaching their children. Meanwhile, other parents asked specifically for May as their child's teacher.

Although May enjoyed her work in the private school, she continued to apply for a teacher position in public schools. When she moved to Cincinnati with her husband in 1947, she sought a teaching job in the Cincinnati Public Schools. She was again told by the school district there that they couldn't hire her because she was Japanese American. She summarized the event:

I went to Cincinnati and I applied for a job there. In Cincinnati they said, 'This is one of the best applications we have gotten, but we can't hire you.' And I said, 'Why?' 'Because we don't know whether to put you in a white school or a black school.' Cincinnati was above the Mason-Dixon line. They had

black schools and white schools and she didn't know which one she wanted to put me in. I said, 'I don't care which one you put me in, I'm willing to teach anywhere.' 'Yes, but we'll get complaints from the teachers if we put you in a white school.' Then the black teachers will say, 'How come she's not white and she's in a white school?' So, they said, we can't hire you.' And I looked at them and said, 'That's not right. Isn't that unconstitutional, not to hire a citizen because the color of her skin?' They said, 'Well, I know, but we really are in a bind, we don't know where to put you.'

At the intersection of teaching, once again, May's race/ethnicity prevented her from pursuing her dream. Despite her high qualifications, the Cincinnati School District denied her employment because of she was neither White nor Black. However, May did not easily give up and she sought assistance from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to fight for her civil rights. With the support from the ACLU, she gave the district one year to hire her or threatened to take the district to court. After teaching in the suburb North College Hill Elementary School for a year, she secured a teaching job with Cincinnati Public Schools in 1947. She was placed in Sands Elementary School, known as the Black ghetto-a very difficult assignment. Fortunately, May remembered the year at Sands as one of her best years of teaching, even though it was challenging. May was initially responsible for one hundred kindergarten children. After she threatened to quit unless she got some help, the district provided May with some teacher assistances. She then had a pleasurable year, and was even selected as a "teacher of the year," featured in *Mademoiselle* magazine. Looking back, May reflected that she had never taught black children prior to Sands, but found them so intriguing because they are so spontaneous. She recalled how she enjoyed teaching them and found them to be the most responsive children.

Although May Higa did not claim leader as a part of her professional identity, this author has assigned the term, teacher leader, to her, based on her multiple leadership roles as well as her activism within the educational context. Lieberman and Miller (2004) note that teacher leaders can make a difference because they are in unique positions to make change happen. As a teacher leader, she did influence change. She

implemented teaching strategies that are now touted as good teaching. At times, May recalled how other educators looked down on the types of things May did with the children, such as finger painting, clay work, and other creative things. This progressive teaching May Higa employed years ago is still viewed as sound teaching today.

As the director of Camp Harmony Assembly Center and as a director of the Bancroft Nursery School, May Higa led other educational stakeholders to create an environment for learning that influences the entire school community (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p. 91). In the last section, the Civil Rights Movement Era, the reader will find additional examples of May Higa's identity as a teacher leader and a culturally responsive teacher.

### **Part III: The Civil Rights Movement Era**

At the intersection of teaching and gender roles, May Higa's personal identity as a daughter, wife, and mother were often given priority. But after a brief stop, May found ways to continue moving forward with her teaching career. However, she vowed not to pursue teaching in Seattle, even though May and her husband Walter moved back to Seattle to start a family and be closer to her family. During that time, she did not seek teaching positions with the Seattle School District. However, it is interesting to note that historical records (Pieroth, 1979) show the Board's consideration of May Higa as a kindergarten or first grade teacher at Bailey Gatzert School. According to Pieroth (1979), The agenda for the School Board meeting on April 22, 1949, included the election of teachers, which, in this case, called for special consideration. Superintendent Fleming alerted the Board to expect the recommendation of Mrs. May Higa, a Japanese girl (p. 11). Pieroth (1979) report that Superintendent Fleming felt that she would be accepted by the community and that she was entitled to their favorable consideration. Although the board unanimously approved Superintendent Fleming's recommendation, it is important to include May Higa's comments to highlight her lack of knowledge on this hiring decision. When informed about Pieroth's (1979) work and the board minutes (1949), May reported that she never reapplied to the district that did not hire her in 1939 and wrongfully terminated her clerkship in 1942. Although she briefly

returned to Seattle to be near family in 1948 while Walter was teaching physics at Seattle University, the family moved to California in 1950 because they found it difficult to survive on a faculty member's salary with three children.

As stated earlier, at the intersection of teaching and gender roles, May's role as a wife and mother were often given priority. For example, in 1956, May moved to California because her husband Walter took a job with the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). Better known as JPL, it is the leading US center for robotic exploration of the solar system. May Higa did take some time off from teaching to care for her three children, as some of the other study participants did. However, as stated earlier, she always managed to return to teaching, often to difficult teaching assignments. When she was ready to return to teaching in her new community in Pasadena, California, she applied to the cooperative nursery school in Pasadena and took the job because she was able to take her youngest son with her to work. Once May's son was ready for kindergarten, she left the cooperative nursery school and took a teaching job at the Apperson School in Sunland, California.

In addition to the challenges May encountered at the intersection of teaching because she was a Nisei seeking teaching employment during the 1930s and 1940s, May continued to contend against aspects of her personal identity during the 1950s. As a wife, she followed her husband, Walter, as he completed his education. She moved to multiple cities because Walter had to move from a master's program to a doctoral program and, then for jobs as a physicist. May even gave up her opportunity to complete her master's program in teaching because Walter felt that she did not need to have a graduate degree. According to her personal records, May attempted to return to graduate school many times, including Columbia Teacher's College and California State University, Northridge. As a mother, she took a leave from teaching to raise her three children or taught in a school where she could accommodate her children.

As Miyamoto (1984) concluded, although the gender role expectations for Japanese American women was consistent with gender role expectations in the larger American society, taking care of families and children was likely to have been reinforced by the Japanese gender ideology that the Issei passed to their Nisei offspring. As wives, Japanese



American placed importance on their families. May is a perfect example.

By now, the reader will agree that May is different from the Issei women. Although she seemed to carry out the prescribed duties of lifelong obedience for women by obeying her father when she was a single woman and following her husband when she married Walter, unlike the Issei women, May did give priority to her own desires to teach (Tamura, 1993, p. 97). Unlike the stereotype that labels Japanese American women as docile and quiet, May challenged the teacher hiring practice in three states across the United States. In the following section, the reader will also find that she is a teacher who values culturally responsive teaching. As noted by Gay (2000), May acknowledged the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, built bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experience, used a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles, taught students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages, and incorporated multicultural information, resources, and materials.

### **Professional Identity As a Culturally Responsive Teacher**

Throughout her professional life as a teacher and teacher leader, May also demonstrated teaching values aligned with the culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. As a child, she was influenced by her father to explore other people's religions and differences. For example, May recalled a time when she explored other parts of town because she was curious about other religion. She said:

I think my father was a very thinking man and he searched other religions. I mean he studied them, although he was not faithful to our church. But he looked into other religions and I used to think, 'Oh papa, you are so smart.' And I loved my father. I guess I took after my father because, on the way home, we'd walk from 18<sup>th</sup> avenue down to 12<sup>th</sup> avenue. And then at that time, 12<sup>th</sup> avenue was a black area. And the black men, several of them would be drunk, and so would be hanging around and singing. So, one day, I took Main St. up and there was a black church. And so I went in there. And I was alone and went in there. And it turned out to be a Holy Roller

church, and it was so interesting. And I sat in the back of the church and watched these people go into their trances and rolling around. That was an education to me. So I left that church and none of the people said anything to me because I sat in the back and left. Then the next time, I went into a Jewish synagogue, which is on 18<sup>th</sup> on Yesler. And I went the back way, way up to the balcony. And watched them go through the whole process of the chanting, very interesting. I think I must have been a very strange child to do that all by myself.

Although May Higa did not claim her identity as a culturally responsive teacher as she told her life story, probably because the term, culturally responsive teaching was not coined till 2000. This author labeled her as a culturally responsive teacher because May embraced the idea that all students should have an equal opportunity to learn. Gay (2000, p. 10) wrote that ethnicity and culture are the foundational anchors of all other behaviors. Because cultural identity strongly influences teaching and learning, this paper examined May Higa's personal identity in relation to her professional identity as a teacher. The author's premise is that she demonstrated aspects of culturally responsive teaching because of her personal identity as a Nisei woman. Thus, her professional identity intertwined with her personal identity. Because she had endured challenges associated with her racial, gender, and generational identity, she may have been more open to accepting differences. An earlier example of May Higa's professional identity as a teacher who valued culturally responsive teaching pedagogy occurred during the summer of 1944. May Higa participated in an Intercultural Workshop directed by Carl Voss. She described how 40 young people from various countries and various communities lived and worked together for two weeks in Shawnee, Pennsylvania. The following year, she volunteered as a camp counselor for the American Friends Service Committee, an interracial summer camp. She was one of four counselors to work with children in Deception Pass, Washington, during the summer of 1945. This kind of prior experience with diversity and interest in equality may have contributed towards her culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, for the fieldwork component for the master's

program at California State University, Northridge, she chose to work with the St. Mary's Episcopal Pre-School, actively participating in nursery program with a majority of Asian American children. She supported non-English speaking parents by providing interpretation during parent conference during the fall and winter of 1972.

Another example of culturally responsive teaching was when May Higa was hired as a Special Education Program Developer for the Pasadena Unified School District during spring of 1973. May Higa developed a special Asian American studies program. She taught this multicultural curriculum to five 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes at Audubon School and Altadena as a pilot program. It was adopted and is in use in the school district.

Even when Japanese Americans were finally accepted, when May Higa witnessed inequity, she voiced her concerns. One of the examples she recalled was when her concerns were voiced in her local newspaper in 1977. Below are her thoughts on teacher and student integration written then:

It's strange and sometimes uncomfortable to be, for almost the first time in my life, among the chosen ones. The major part of my life has been spent in fighting for a little piece of equality-for equal opportunities in housing, education and employment. When we first came to Tujunga 22 years ago looking for a house to buy, we were threatened with a rifle and called obscene names. We were pioneers in a community that did not want us or understand us.

We have had varied experiences in this community. Minority people are fortunate in that those who choose to associate with them are of the highest calibre. We have many fine friends. On the other hand, we have suffered indignities and abuses which were painful for a mother to relive with her children.

Today, after over 15 years of teaching in this community, I am now in an enviable position. You're a minority so you don't have to be bumped. Your children are grown so you can be in favor of busing because you have nothing to lose. You can back integration because you're safe.

Yes, finally I can say that I am safe. However, safe only in the fact that, I cannot be displaced. I may be safe from being forced into making changes, but I am not safe from the types

of people who tried hard 22 years ago to keep us out of the community. As fear mounts over the integration problem, the same people are again rearing their ugly heads and encouraging racism. Although I've made it and can smugly stand by, knowing the pain and heartache of being a victim of injustice, I am compelled to take a stand on this difficult problem. If busing is not the answer to the problem, and I doubt that it is, we have to go along with it in the interim until we find the real solution.

The real solution, in my opinion, is to change housing patterns. Living and sharing our lives with others provides the only way to understanding. My short range goal is to help implement the court's order for integration in a peaceful manner. My long goal is to achieve permanent integration by working hard to make neighborhoods more interesting and colorful.

In the letter to the editor above, May Higa illustrates how culturally responsive teaching pedagogy influences her personal life as an Asian. May is an example of a pioneer teacher who took time off from teaching to pursue personal goals, often to take care of her family, but managed to return to teaching in three different states. She took her final leave from teaching in 1972 when her husband retired. Although she jokingly commented that Walter told May that she must retire with him, in reviewing her personal artifacts, I found the following journal entry. May wrote, [I] took a leave of absence as I became overly frustrated over my powerlessness in making changes and inability to function without support and cooperation.

Huberman (1993) remind us that teachers who were engaged in issues beyond their classrooms, at larger contexts of schools and district, often leave their careers with feelings of disenchantment and bitterness. May Higa may have felt frustrations because she was a teacher leader who was engaged in larger issues education, such as equality in hiring practice and placement of teachers as well as equality in instruction for all children.

After retiring, May continued to attend classes. She signed up for a program course at the Pasadena Mental Health Center and became a counselor, volunteering for two years with the Pasadena Mental Health

Center. She also briefly tutored and taught at Pacific Oaks College. Almost seventy years later since she claimed her professional identity as a teacher, this author knocked at her door in Arlington, Washington to collect her oral history to enrich our lives as well as to inform the readers about the personal and professional identity of pioneer Japanese American woman teacher. Through her oral history, the readers learned who the pioneer Japanese American woman teacher is and how she entered the teaching profession within the historical contexts of the Second Generation Era and how she incorporated culturally responsive teaching during the War Era and the Civil Rights Movement Era.

Considering personal identity May claimed as an Asian woman with her professional identity she claimed or are assigned to-a teacher, teacher leader, and culturally responsive teacher some of the intersections have been located and how the aspects of her identity interplay with one another. As the intersections are explored within the historical and social contexts, this paper contributes to literature on teacher identity by presenting a voice of sensei.<sup>2</sup> May Higa's oral history enriched our understanding of teacher identity by allowing us to listen to a marginalized teacher of color whom we have not hear from in previous research studies. It also clarified historical documents and contributed towards our knowledge of Asian American teachers, the largest non-White teaching population in Washington. Most importantly, we learned how May Higa contributed towards student learning as a teacher, teacher leader, and culturally responsive teacher.

### **Implications for Future Study**

This study was specifically designed to inquire into the experiences of May Higa's personal and professional identity during the Second Generation Era, the War Era, and the Civil Rights Era. This paper highlighted oral history of one of 13 Asian women teachers. Future study should look into the experiences of male teachers who shared the

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<sup>2</sup> Sensei is a Japanese term for teacher.

historical periods and have taught in the Seattle area. It will also be worthwhile to explore the experiences of other Asian women teachers in other countries.

Focused research is also needed because, when we are better able to understand teachers of Asian descent, we can attract role models of color for our increasingly diverse student population. The author believes that current research has begun to identify the need to modify our existing thinking in working with Asian American students. Perhaps, by exploring teachers' background and experiences more carefully through the use of the intersectional framework, the next step is to consider how we work better with Asian American teachers.

### **Contribution to Teacher and Teaching**

This study examined the personal and professional identity of May Higa. It contributed to the field of teachers in several ways. While time consuming, the use of oral history methodology in exploring teachers helped to illustrate the connection between the personal and the professional life. It clearly described how the early childhood experiences shaped teaching and the interplay between their personal and professional life.

While the intersectional framework was helpful in considering multiple aspects of Asian women teachers, it seemed limiting at times. Through this study, the findings revealed that characteristics of one's self are not the only factors that influenced one's social standing. Further, depending on social and historical contexts, these markers of a person are constantly shifting at the intersection of teaching.

Lastly, while the Seattle Public School housed a large collection of historical archival materials, it seemed like not many researchers utilized the treasures found in the District. This study allowed the author to consider existing artifacts in making sense of the stories told by the participant. Boxes of archival materials from the participant as May sought a future home for her personal artifacts from her teaching years were also collected. This will provide valuable resources to future researchers who may consider extending our knowledge about Asian women teachers.

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