Narratives of Identity and Culturally Relevant Practices of Japanese Descent Teachers

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This study used a qualitative, narrative research approach in order to explore the life narratives of three Japanese descent teachers and the ways in which these narratives informed their understanding of children’s needs and their teaching pedagogies. One of these teachers was also the researcher. The findings, in general, indicate that our three autobiographies as bi-cultural, bi-racial, bi-lingual, and transnational beings are foundational to our understanding and woven throughout the decisions we make about working with children of Japanese descent and of facilitating their success in classrooms. In particular, the findings indicate that our work with children focuses on supporting them at the interpersonal level within the context of multiple relationships, acting as cross-cultural mediators, and finally supporting children’s identity development in the context of multiple and often competing identity locations so that they are able to live both in, between, and beyond two or more cultures. These findings are used to create an emerging theory of culturally responsive pedagogy that I call Pedagogy of しなやか, Shinayaka. Pedagogy of Shinayaka is situated in the literature on culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching but speaks directly to an absence within this literature which is the work of Japanese descent teachers with Japanese children.
To all of the women who have shared their lives, inspirations, wisdom, and love with me
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The dynamic demographic reality in the United States has been transformed in this era of globalization. The number of immigrant families, which are mostly of Latino or Asian background, has been increasing significantly. This phenomenon suggests an urgent need for studies about these new populations of immigrant families and their children in the United States from a much more authentic and sensitive perspective. It also suggests the need for research and scholarship on effective schooling and teaching practices for these growing communities of immigrant children.

Hernandez and other researchers have stated that “By 2000, one of every five children and youths (20.1%, or 14.6 million) was the child of an immigrant” (p. 404) (Hernandez, 2004; Qin, 2006), and the numbers are expected to continue to increase. Although the background and lives of immigrant families in the United States are widely varied, it is also important to acknowledge that most immigrant children and youths come from either an Asian or Hispanic background (Hernandez, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2007). For example, according to a U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 65% of all Hispanic children and youths and 87% of all Asian children and youths were from immigrant families in 2000 (Hernandez, 2004).
In addition, the phenomenon of immigration and immigrant families’ realities have been changing dramatically. Porte and Rumbaut (2007) claim:

Immigration is a transformative force, producing profound and unanticipated social changes in both sending and receiving societies, in intergroup relationships within receiving societies, and among the immigrants themselves and their descendants (p. xv).

For example, compared to early immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, who mostly came from European countries, many of the more recent immigrant families and children have stronger social, cultural and economical connections to their countries of origin as well as to their own ethnic communities (Levitt, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006; Wong, 2007). This transnational way of living has started to become a new way of life for many immigrant families and children. Globalization and technological developments have made this new trend possible not only in the United States but also in the rest of the world.

With this kind of rapid change in the immigrant situation, it has become an urgent necessity for us to discuss how to better prepare the educational environment for immigrant children and children of immigrant parents. There are two main discussions among scholars studying recent issues surrounding education for immigrant children. One of them is the urgent need to increase teacher forces from diverse backgrounds. For example, the demographic imbalance between teachers’ and students’ backgrounds has been one of the most important topics in current discussions about teacher preparation and teacher education. Therefore, the argument for recruiting more teachers from diverse backgrounds has gotten a lot of attention from scholars and administrators (Villegas &
Clewell, 1998; Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999; Sleeter, 2001; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004). However, research about student teachers and in-service teachers from diverse backgrounds remains limited. This neglect has contributed to the lack of opportunities these teachers have had to have their voices heard, valued and respected and to have their identities and agencies be nurtured and empowered in teacher education programs and the educational field. Dillard (1994) cites a conversation she had with a young Mexican American woman during one of her university education recruitment programs:

If I come to your university, will I be more than a number? I guess what I mean is, if I come to WSU, can I be a Mexicana and a teacher? (p. 9)

This kind of fundamental discussion about how to prepare teachers from diverse backgrounds while letting them hold on to their cultural background and experiences needs to be sought out more.

Recruiting and preparing Asian American teachers has also been challenging. For instance, studies on future teachers and in-service teachers of Asian descent are very limited. Sheets & Chew (2002) made an important contribution towards allowing us to hear the voices of Asian descent teachers through the Title VII Chinese Bilingual Cross-Cultural Teacher Preparation Program (ABC project) at San Francisco State University, which lasted for five years. Most of the students in the project came from a Chinese-American background. In spite of their innovative attempt and dedication to the program, in the end, Sheets and Chew expressed that they faced major struggles and disappointments because their curriculum and program were typical, so they could not
help these students bring their own voices and cultural experiences into the program as much as they would have wished.

The other discussion prevalent in scholarship on education for immigrant children is how to teach them more effectively using culturally relevant approaches and curricula (e.g. Howard, 2003; Li, 2006; García, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002). These two main discussions still leave out important issues, especially because authentic voices from immigrant communities are not reflected enough in school education. The complex cultural, racial, linguistic, and socio-economic realities of immigrant children, their families and communities are remarkably diverse (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). As a result, many teachers in schools are not familiar with these immigrant children’s cultural and social realities (Wortham & Contreras, 202; Li, 2006). It is just too difficult for most teachers to take into consideration the varied cultural and social backgrounds immigrant students in daily pedagogy and curriculum (Minami & Ovando, 2004; Li, 2006; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006).

The other significant problem in the education of the Asian descent population is a lack of depth of knowledge and public interest about the population (Kodama et al., 2002; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003). The Asian descent population in the United States has been hidden by oversimplified stereotypes, such as the model minority and high achiever in the educational field (e.g. Lee, 1996; Goto, 1997; Suzuki, 2002; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007; Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004; Nag & Lee, 2007). Obscured by the dichotomous white and black discourse in multicultural education and politics, Asian families, children, teachers, and scholars have not articulated their own positionalities using their own voices (Kim, 2007; Zhou, 2007). In addition, the image of the model
minority and high achiever let the situation continue for a long time in educational settings in the United States (e.g. Pang, 1998, 2001, 2004; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Li, 2006; Yu, 2006; Qin, 2006; Hgo & Lee, 2007).

In order to provide culturally relevant pedagogy for all children in schooling, it is especially important to give social and cultural knowledge shared by experts such as parents and teachers from each cultural background its due value (Seidl, 2007; Seidl and et. al., 2007). Adults, especially teachers with the same kind of cultural experiences and backgrounds as their students, have a great potential to become highly effective resources and role models by sharing their insights to help make sense of the dynamic and complex positioning of immigrant children and use their culturally relevant knowledge and experiences in teaching. However, as Pang claimed, there have been hardly any studies about Asian descent students, families and communities from teachers’ perspectives (2004).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the voices of teachers of Asian descent, in particular the voices of teachers of Japanese descent, within the complicated cultural, social, and political contexts of education and to consider how these teachers’ narratives can shape a culturally relevant pedagogy. I especially want to examine how immigrant teachers use their knowledge, border crossing experiences, and transnational identities in their teaching.

Understanding the teacher participants’ (Maki-san, Kei, and myself, Gumiko) bi-cultural, bilingual, biracial (in the case of Kei), and transnational life experiences will illuminate how their life experiences are woven into and shape culturally relevant
pedagogy and communication in schools. This study will also seek to provide an understanding of culturally relevant teaching for Asian immigrant children and other immigrant children, through the fresh and rich bicultural and transnational perspectives of our teaching experiences in cross-cultural settings.

**Research Questions**

In this study, my purpose is to explore teachers of Japanese descent’s voices within the complex cultural, social, and political contexts of education and to reveal how these teachers’ narratives can shape culturally relevant pedagogy. In particular, I explore the following three questions:

1. What narratives of life and experience do these three Japanese descent teachers perceive as influencing their lives as teachers?
2. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to interpret the needs of immigrant children and their families and, in particular, those of children of Japanese descent?
3. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to provide supportive education for immigrant children and their families and, in particular, children of Japanese descent?

**Significance of the Study**

Studying the narratives and pedagogies of Asian descent teachers was extremely challenging because there were only a few relevant studies in the field. In addition, I felt that only using literature about minority students, families, and teachers’ experiences and culturally relevant pedagogies in the field of education would not be enough to construct,
conceptualize and support the foundation of this study. Such studies relate mostly to African American populations in the United States, and since there are significantly different cultural, racial, historical and social experiences between African Americans and Asian Americans in the United States, much of the research would not be applicable.

Studies about families and children of Asian descent in relation to schooling and education are limited or seen from narrow perspectives such as from the *model minority* angle; in fact, there are hardly any studies about families and children of Asian descent from teachers’ perspectives (Pang, 2004). “Positive” images such as that of the *model minority* and Asians as *high achievers* have often made people of Asian descent appear quiet and apolitical in the United States (Lowe, 1996; Nguyen, 2002; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). Sheets & Chew (2002) point out that the serious lack of research on Asian and/or Asian-American teachers causes the *invisibility* of Asian-Americans, who are active participants in the education field. Given these perceptions, populations of Asian descent, including students, families, and teachers, have rarely been at the center of educational studies or the focus of educators, administrators and policy makers, but have generally been on the margin. Therefore, in order to undertake this study, it was necessary to examine how to uncover the invisibility of the Asian descent population.

Among the research about new minority teachers, there are very few studies focusing on teachers of Asian descent (Suzuki, 1998; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Subedi, 2002). One exception to this trend is Li (2006), who has conducted a study about cultural conflicts between mainstream teachers and Asian immigrant parents in literacy education and schooling. There are also a few doctoral studies focusing on Asian descent teachers’
experiences of racial identity (Suzuki, 1998) and Asian immigrant/American teachers’
cultural identity negotiation in schooling and their cultural practices in teaching (Subedi,
2002). Some research has also been done on teacher recruitment and education of
teachers of Asian descent (Park and et al., 2009; Sheets & Chew, 2002).

In spite of all these studies, there is hardly any research that provides insight into the
ways in which the narratives of Asian immigrant teachers, which hold rich life
experiences, can shape culturally relevant pedagogy. The uniqueness of this study stems
from the fact that all three participants have authentic bicultural, bilingual, biracial (Kei),
immigrant and transnational experiences not only as teachers but also as, for example,
students, mothers, daughters, spouses, and women in Japan and in the United States.
This study shows how these teachers’ multiple identities and experiences are woven into
their teacher identities as well as their motivation to teach culturally relevant pedagogy.
This study is also unique because its participants have teaching experiences and
backgrounds in both general classrooms and ESL focused teaching environments, which
have often still been divided in teacher education programs, school communities, and
academic fields of education. This separation between mainstream classes and ESL
classes is going to be more and more problematic since the numbers of immigrant
children and language minorities are continuing to increase.

These participants’ stories and pedagogical knowledge are as unique and important as
that of other minority teachers and contribute greatly to the multicultural and global era
of education. I believe that this study will be helpful for educators and researchers in
discussing culturally relevant pedagogy and schooling for students of Asian descent and
other immigrant backgrounds in order to provide more effective, caring and inspiring
learning environments for their academic, emotional, psychological, social, and life fulfillment.

Theoretical Framework

In this study I drew from narrative theory, theories that define culturally relevant pedagogies and transnational theories as they intersect with the culturally relevant practices of these teachers. Firstly, I used narrative theory as a theoretical lens to understand the rich and authentic experiences of Japanese descent teachers, who live and teach in both Japanese and American cultural contexts. I was especially interested in understanding Asian descent teachers’ voices and wanted to capture the richness, complexity, and multi-dimensionality of these teachers within the social, cultural and political contexts they inhabit. The focus is on exploring these teachers' goodness through the use of rich descriptions (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Secondly, I used the theoretical framework of culturally responsive pedagogies in order to analyze and theorize the participating teachers’ lives and experiences and to articulate how they use their life experiences, teaching experiences and cultural backgrounds to employ culturally responsive approaches in their teaching. I use studies of transnationalism and transnational immigration to demonstrate a specific aspect of a culturally relevant approach.

Narrative theory. I drew from narrative theory to understand the rich and authentic experiences of these teachers, who live and teach in both Japanese and American cultural contexts. Numerous scholars have focused on the close relationship between narrative and culture. For example, Bruner (1986, 1996) focused on the relationship between narrative and culture in the continuous process of identity construction. This particular
strength of narrative theory became the theoretical and methodological foundation of my study.

I drew from narrative theory to have a clearer epistemological stance as a researcher in determining the meaning of knowing (Dillard, 2006). Narrative epistemologies let me situate the nature of knowing and identity-making as storied in nature (Bruner, 1986, 1996). Narrative theory helped me to focus on how people make sense of their identities in particular cultural contexts through narrative (Bruner, 1987, 1994; Kanno, 2003).

Since the voices of women and teachers of Asian descent have not historically been articulated and voiced enough in the United States, it was particularly important for me to help my participants and myself to articulate our rich life experiences throughout the process of this study. For this reason, I drew particularly from feminist scholars’ life history approaches and narrative inquiry. Employing narrative inquiry with a feminist approach helped me to challenge and deconstruct normalized historical, social and cultural knowledge in society and to co-contract and theorize the teaching and life experiences of each of the participants (e.g. Belenky et al., 1986; The Personal Narrative Group, 1989; Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Helle, 1991; Chase, 2005; Dillard, 2006).

Using narrative theory as my epistemological point of view also helped me to determine the role of language, in this case English and Japanese, in this research. Through the study, I particularly wanted to pay attention to my research participants’ (including myself) multiple and intersecting identities in cultural, social, and/or racial terms, and how these multiple identities influenced their understanding of self and the way that they teach. In order to do so, it was crucial for me to use both English and Japanese in a fluid narrative environment. Narrative theory helped me to see data in such
a way that would not only capture their identities in *a culture(s)* but also to “theorize” the complexity and dynamics of cross-cultural living. For this reason, the use of both languages, English, Japanese and/or “Japan-(E)nglish” simultaneously is very crucial for this study (Waterhouse, 2006).

In this study, I wanted to understand my participants’ voices beyond the simplistic and limited images of Asian American women in multicultural discourse in the United States. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) claims that she and her colleague, Davis, shifted their research stance from searching for the weaknesses of research participants to searching for their strengths, which led them to pursue *goodness*, a “generous and critical stance – the mixture of strength and vulnerability” (p. 143). Especially at the beginning of the research, I needed to examine deep inside my consciousness my own preoccupation and hidden ‘desire’ to focus on victimized voices of people of Asian descent as I felt Asian descent people must be seen as victims in order to be heard by mainstream educators and scholars. The spirit of narrative theory helped me to break through my unconscious stance by focusing on *goodness*, a complex, holistic and dynamic understanding based on rich descriptions of who my participants and I are as transnational beings and teachers (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Culturally relevant pedagogies.** I draw from culturally relevant or responsive pedagogies as theories that focus on social, cultural and critical theorist approaches. I was especially interested in how the participants of this study use their life experiences and their bi-cultural, bilingual, bi-national, transnational and biracial identities in their interactions with students, their families and other teachers as salient aspects of their pedagogy. Sociocultural theory helped me to understand and analyze the interactions of
each of the teachers in the study within cultural and social contexts.

One of the most common goals of using culturally responsive teaching is to reduce the gap or “mismatch” between minority students’ home culture and the pedagogy used in their school so that educators will be able to provide more effective learning environments for minority children (e.g. Au & Jordan, 1981; Phillips, 1982; Ogbu, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). Although many children of immigrants suffer from the often large and not always acknowledged gap between their home culture and school culture, many educators as well as immigrant parents do not know how to effectively bridge these gaps. Through the study, I wanted to explore how participants of the study use their bicultural, bilingual, biracial and transnational identities and experiences to bridge these gaps and to help other teachers and parents learn about the gap.

I also draw from culturally responsive pedagogy with critical theoretical perspectives. Most immigrant children and their families are in politically weaker positions in schools and in society so that they usually do not have strong voices to participate politically. This characteristic is reflected in the environment around ESL students, ESL classrooms and ESL teachers at schools as well. ESL teachers for immigrant students, therefore, need the knowledge and strategies to provide better learning environments for their students at school. As Freire (1990) claims, critical consciousness is essential in order to understand and analyze such political and historical aspects of society and a macro view of school is necessary in order to make a liberatory pedagogy possible. Through this study, I wanted to understand the critical consciousness of the three participating teachers regarding the political situations of immigrant children and their families as well as ESL classes and their positions as ESL teachers in schools. I also wanted to understand how
the three of us use our critical consciousness in our teaching not only in the classroom but also outside of it in our teaching. Ladson-Billings (1994) defines *culturally relevant pedagogy* as not merely a pedagogy which leads *diverse historically oppressed students* to academic success but as a pedagogy that also “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to import knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Using this kind of critically conscious and active perspective of culturally relevant pedagogy helped me understand and analyze these participants’ pedagogical stances in their fundaments and from a macro perspective. In addition, I especially paid attention to the meaning and practice of caring in culturally relevant pedagogy in this study. Howard (2001; 2003) and Gay’s (2002) theory of caring helped me to articulate caring in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Transnationalism in a postmodern global era.** Recently there has been a move to study transnationalism in an effort to understand the unique identities and needs of people living between and among different cultures. Transnational theory provides new directions for culturally responsive pedagogy for new demographic movements in the global era. Such teachers have started to be more commonly used among scholars in order to theorize, express, discuss, and analyze the new era of demographic change or Diasporic movement in the United States as well as in the world. Transnational theories embrace the duality of people’s lives and experiences and detail both the benefits and challenges of living in separate worlds and realities as well as the continuous creation of fluid spaces by people who live such lives (Levitt, 2001; Potter, 2001; Espiritu, 2003; Simal, 2004). Although studies of transnationalism are relatively new and still a fragmented concept in the field of education, transnational theory helped me “uncover”
the reality of immigrant generations not only from a cultural point of view but also from their dual or multiple memberships as social, cultural, political, and historical beings who live in realities that cross multiple conceptual border lines.

**Definitions of Terms and the Use of Descriptors**

Following is an explanation of how I used some of the terms in this study, reflecting my theoretical lenses and positioning as a researcher. In this global era, words have multiple dimensions, multiple realities, and hidden connotations in different political and social contexts. However, many of the terms used in this study are not used in the way that they are commonly understood in regular speech. In addition, I have also used some Japanese terms and metaphors in this study. I offer a brief definition of my usage of these terms as well.

**Bilingual and Bilingualism.** Although the term bilingualism has been casually used to mean fluency in two languages, there is no consensus definition of bilingualism among researchers, since bilingualism includes multidimensional factors (Butler & Hakuta, 2004). Many scholars have started to adopt a broader definition of bilingualism, acknowledging such multidimensionality. Butler & Hakuta (2004) define bilingualism as a complex psychological and socio-cultural linguistic behavior. I adopt their definition of the term:

(B)ilinguals are individuals or groups of people who obtain communicative skills, with various degrees of proficiency, in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society (p. 115)

This definition allows early-stage L-2 students to be recognized as legitimate members of each language society. In addition, the broader definition of bilingual and bilingualism
allows me to shed light on multidimensional aspects of bilingualism in analyzing data in this study.

*Asian descent/descendant.* I used this term to refer to a person who has Asian cultural, ethnic, social and historical heritage regardless of their legal national identity.

*Bicultural/multicultural.* Individuals or groups of people who obtain some degree of knowledge of the culture, social rules, and communication patterns of a particular culture in order to live in more than one culture or society.

*Biracial and ハーフ, half.* I used the term biracial to denote biracial culture, life experiences and identities, which have not been given due attention in educational research. ハーフ, haafu [half] is a term for biracial in Japanese. *Double* is also used with the same meaning in Japan.

*Classroom teacher.* General classroom teachers. I used this term in order to distinguish between ESL class teachers and so-called mainstream class/classroom teachers.

*ESL students.* Students who attend ESL classes or receive linguistic support from ESL or language aid teachers due to the results of exams measuring their English proficiency. I also used this term if the student’s English is not strong enough to allow him or her to function in some area of academic or social life in schooling and needs appropriate support.

*補習校, Hoshuko.* Saturday Japanese School (detailed explanation in Ch.3)

*居場所, Ibasho.* Ibasho is a metaphorical term I use to describe a space where people can feel a sense of belonging and acceptance and can also practice membership in
the community by contributing to others while experiencing a sense of agency. Because immigrant children still have fluid multiple cultural and social backgrounds compared to their parents, their senses of identity are more vulnerable and dependent on the gaze of others; for them, whether and where they feel a sense of belonging usually depends to a greater degree on outside factors.

**Immigrant and immigrant children/youth.** Regardless of their parents or caregivers’ legal status, I use the word immigrant children to describe all children for whom one or both parents/caregivers have moved from another country and all children who have moved from another country. I also use the term regardless of their parent(s)/caregivers intention to stay in the United States permanently or not.

**Japanese American.** I used the term Japanese or Asian American as a political term in mainstream discourse in the United States.

**Local school.** Public schools (K-12), which my participants work in or referred to. Their students attend local schools in the public school system during weekdays. The majority of Japanese descent students also attend a supplemental school, ひしゅう校, hoshuko, every Saturday. Therefore, when I use the term schools in this research, I distinguish between local schools and hoshuko (see hoshuko).

**Mainstream culture.** In this study, I used this term to imply upper-middle class Euro-American culture, which is mostly recognized as normal or that people desire to become due to cultural influences, including media.

**Monoculture.** The concept of monoculture is somewhat controversial since everyone experiences multiple cultures in their lives. In this study, I use the term monoculture to refer to a person who has mainly grown up in one significant cultural setting.
**Monolingual.** A person who mainly only uses one language in his/her life.

**Nationality. (e.g. Japanese).** A person who has a cultural, social, ethnic or national sense of identity rooted in Japan. I used this label regardless of legal status or place of birth. Therefore, it is possible that a person identifies herself/himself as Japanese as well as American. I used this post-modern understanding of the nationality label in this research; for example, I used the term Japanese to describe certain individuals, even though they are 1.5 or second generation immigrants.

**Space.** I used a number of different terms including Ibasho to describe metaphorical spaces where identity practice can take place.

**やりがい, Yarigai.** Sense of reward resulting from engaging in challenging activity or working with commitment and responsibility on something related to one’s own sense of identity and commitment to the world.

**Transnational.** Referring to immigrants who maintain social, economic, and cultural contact with both the sending and receiving countries (Wong, 2007). I also used the term transnational to refer to the lifestyle that immigrant people create in order to preserve their original cultural and social contexts within the United States so that they can maintain both the sending and receiving countries’ cultural and social contexts.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study is to explore the voices of teachers of Japanese descent within the complicated cultural, social, and political contexts of education and to examine how these teachers’ narratives can help shape culturally relevant pedagogy. In this chapter, I provided a background on the history of Asian descent immigrant communities in the United States. I then explained the rationale behind this dissertation study and
described its significance. I also described the theories, concepts, and constructs I have utilized in this study. After defining specific research questions, I listed my understanding of several key terms and descriptors used throughout the dissertation to help readers clearly see my theoretical stance and assumptions.

In Chapter 2, I discuss literature on Asian descent people and education and examine how scholars have examined the issues and realities of culturally responsive pedagogy in order to learn from scholars and previous research seeking to provide more effective learning environments for minority students. I also study how educators and scholars have discussed and understood such kinds of pedagogy for children of immigrants and of Asian descent.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of my research journey and methodological considerations. In Chapter 4, I present three Japanese descent teachers’ views of their life experiences and how they use their bi-cultural, social, racial, national and political experiences and identities in their interactions with their students, families and other teachers. I then examine how these experiences inform their pedagogies.

In Chapter 5, I discuss and conceptualize the findings and the implications of this study for educational research on diversity, pedagogy and the practices of schooling, as well as for teacher education.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The goal of this study is to understand the voices of teachers of Asian descent, especially in an era of multicultural and global education. In other words, this study is about understanding teachers of Asian descent’s knowledge and wisdom in order to include them in the discussion of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy.

More specifically, in this research, I am especially interested in exploring the ways in which my research participants engage their identities, experiences, and narratives in their work with students who are first or second generation immigrant children, many of whom are still in ESL classes, and who come mostly from Japan or from a Japanese background.

There are two bodies of literature that inform this work and that I will explore and discuss in this chapter. The first is the work on Asian descent and Education in which I discuss, firstly, the population of Asian Descent in the United States in general and the issues surrounding them; secondly, the complex relationship between Asian descent and education; and finally, the situation of teachers of Asian Descent and teacher education as represented in academic literature.

The second body of literature I review is the history and background of culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy and some characteristics of this kind of pedagogy, such as caring. Towards the conclusion, I explore new directions and needs for culturally
responsive/relevant pedagogy, focusing especially on immigrant and Asian descent students in the global era.

**Asian Descent and Education**

**Introduction**

Under the “model minority” myth, especially in educational institutions, the lives of people of Asian descent have been heavily oversimplified by the public or dominant society’s point of view. As a result, people of Asian descent tend to be seen as no problem or the least problematic racial group (Kodama et al., 2002; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003). This kind of myth obscures the needs, voices and multiple realities of individual students of Asian descent in the United States, as well as those of their families.

In the field of education, Asian immigrants’ and Asian American people’s realities have been discussed in a limited way in socio-cultural, political and historical discourse and scholars have been searching for voices that can reach people of Asian descent as well as dominant society. However, in an atmosphere of competing to see who is the most serious victim in multicultural society, especially in the context of multicultural education, many realities about the complex lives of people of Asian descent, who are expected by society not to have problems, have not been revealed or fully articulated yet.

Because of a lack of discourse to express their socio-cultural, political and historical reality, for instance, some Asian descent scholars have been trying to use existing White and Black dichotomous discourse in multicultural contexts. In other words, Asian descent scholars had been borrowing discourses (Kim, 2007; Zhou, 2007) in order to describe Asian descent issues and realities to get attention from mainstream society in order to improve the learning environment for people of Asian descent and to legitimize
their voices and active citizenship participation in the United States. At the same time, there have been many efforts, mostly among Asian descent scholars from many different disciplines, such as Asian American cultural studies, women’s studies, English, sociology, anthropology and education, to replace the oversimplified image of people of Asian descent in the United States and to unpack the complex realities of these populations. It is crucial to rectify the oversimplified image of people of Asian descent and to come to a better understanding of the complex needs of these students and their families.

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to reveal the complexity of the diverse realities of people of Asian descent and their children in the United States in this global era, and to discuss them in order to improve their educational environment and give them more effective learning opportunities in educational institutions. First, I discuss the population of Asian descent in the United States in general and the issues surrounding the population. Second, I discuss the relationship between Asian descent and education in depth in order to understand the realities and needs of these students better. Finally, I discuss the present situation of teachers of Asian Descent and teacher education using academic literature.

In this literature review, I used literature from inside and outside of the education field. I used literature related to Asian American and Asian immigrants from the field of education in order to summarize the main discussions taking place in the field. I also used literature related to the population of Asian descent from outside the field of education in order to expand on theories and discussions, incorporating more diverse perspectives to
capture the complexity of the lives of people and students of Asian descent in the United States.

Who Are the People of Asian Descent in the United States?

People of Asian descent are highly diverse, hybrid (Lowe, 1996) ethnic groups including over 50 different ethnic groups. They are not only ethnically diverse but their languages, socio-economic status, levels of education, religion, nationalities or regions of origin, traditions, customs, and cultures vary greatly. Many people of Asian descent have a tendency to respect their traditional cultural/social values as passed on by previous generations (Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004; Li, 2006).

In addition, the population of Asian descent in the United States has a significant population of bi/multiracial and/or bi/multiethnic children and families. Around 14 % of people of Asian descent are bi-or multiracial. Historically, the United States’ military involvement of soldiers and personnel after World War II has been the reason for the high population of bi-racial children and families (Pang and et al., 2004). Multiracial and multiethnic children and families are a forgotten population and are rarely acknowledged. Studies about Asian descent multiracial and multiethnic children and families are important in understanding these groups better and in providing them with a better education and better educational support in school.

Oversimplified “Model Minority”

Issues surrounding the model minority have been the most frequent theme in academic writing about students of Asian descent, and they have been discussed in academic papers in and out of the field of education (Min, 2004). The stereotype of “model minority” is a so-called positive image, which is attached to people of Asian
descent. Because of the fact that it is treated as positive, it is difficult for even people of Asian descent to discuss and articulate how the image of “model minority” negatively influences their daily lives. As a result, both the “model minority” stereotype and “forever foreigner,” (another stereotype attached to people of Asian descent) make Asian descent students and their families quieter as members of their school communities and American society, covering up their real voices, strengths, opinions, and needs. Because of these stereotyped images and the fact that some Asian descent students are doing “well” according to their academic records, “too many US educators” act on the belief that they need less help compared to other ethnic or racial groups of students (e.g. Lee, 1996; Goto, 1997; Suzuki, 2002; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007; Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004; Nag & Lee, 2007). Numerous scholars, mostly from Asian backgrounds (Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004), have been making an effort to expose the complicated realities of students of Asian descent so that we, as educators, will be able to see individual students’ strengths and needs better and be able to teach them better or create a more effective environments for them.

One of the reasons why Asian populations in the United States have been seen as successful is because of existing socioeconomical data, such as Census results. However, many scholars claim that we need to analyze these data more critically. For example, some data (e.g. U.S. Census, 1990, 1993, 2000) appear to suggest that people of Asian descent have a higher annual income average than Caucasian households in the United States. But using other scholars’ in-depth data analysis (e.g. Hune & Chan, 1997; Wong & Nagasawa, 1991; Woo, 2000) and re-examining her early work in 1977 regarding the model minority stereotype, Suzuki (2002) revisited myth of the model minority
stereotype and examined the influence of the model minority image on students in higher education. Suzuki argues that the results such as those from the Census resulted from the fact that families of Asian descent had more people who contributed to the family income and that they mainly lived in high cost of living and high-income areas such as San Francisco, New York, or Boston (Suzuki, 2002). In fact, more than 80 percent of the entire population of Asian descent is concentrated on either the West or the East coast.

The other paradox that is hidden under the successful image of people of Asian descent is that educational achievement is not necessarily equivalent to their income or career promotions. Compared with their counterparts in white or other racial groups, people of Asian descent’s increases in income or promotions in their work places tend to be slower and smaller after graduating from school (Hune & Chan, 1997; Wong & Nagasawa, 1991; Woo, 2000; Suzuki, 2002; Pang, King & Pak 2004; 20-80, 2008).

Some scholars apply the concept of Orientalism and post-colonial theory to understand the Asian descent population historically. The term Orientalism was coined about forty years ago by Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary theorist, Said (1978) theorizes the concept of Orientalism as the Eurocentric vision of Europe as “us” and the rest as “other”, and the hegemony of European “high” culture/ European identity as superior. He claimed that this concept is the result of a Euro-centric notion about the other which is Utopia based, exotic and never really clearly “negative” in meaning, but never better than Europe. The concept of Orientalism has been used in the field of education “to identify students from Asian roots” (Pang and et al., 2004).

Besides many existing studies about how labels of “oriental” or “model minority” in American dominant culture and society have an influence on the process of identity
development among the Asian population, we need to develop further studies about how children of Asian descent and their families perpetuate a negative self-image by internalizing the image of Orientalism or model minority. Studies also need to examine how teachers can support such students in developing positive images of themselves and generating a name for themselves using their own voices.

The Relationship between People of Asian Descent and Education

Too few educators are able to recognize and respond to the diversity of educational strengths and needs of Asian Pacific American students. To many teachers, counselors, and administrators, Asian Pacific American students are “model minorities” who seem to look and act alike.

- Asian Pacific American students by Pang, Kiang, & Pak (2004, p. 542)

This statement by Pang, Kiang, and Pak was one of my strong personal motivations in selecting my dissertation topic, remembering the faces of my students who came from Asian backgrounds. These students ranged from preschool children to Master’s students in a university. All of them were unique individuals who had their own strengths, potentials and difficulties at school. However, their personalities and their needs seemed to have been easily covered by stereotypes attached to students of Asian descent, such as the idea that Asian students are quiet and a model minority. For this reason, it was sometimes difficult for their teachers and peers to see their “real” personalities.

In this section, using a number of different scholars’ voices, I try to demonstrate how stereotyped images about people of Asian descent, such as the model minority, forever foreigner and/or invisibility, have an influence on the educational field so that the kinds
of realities such students face, as well as their strengths and needs, have not yet been properly covered or recognized.

Demographic changes in children and families of Asian descent. As I demonstrated previously, the dynamics of the demographic reality in the United States have been re-shaped in this globalized era. The numbers of immigrant families, mostly from Latino or Asian backgrounds, have been increasing significantly. This phenomenon suggests an urgent need to study these new populations of immigrant families and their children in the United States from much more diverse and complex perspectives.

Hernandez (2004) and other researchers (Qin, 2006) stated that “By 2000, one of every five children and youth (20.1%, or 14.6 million) was the child of an immigrant” (p. 404) (Hernandez, 2004; Qin, 2006), and the numbers are expected to increase even more. Most immigrant children and youths are either from Asian or Hispanic backgrounds (Hernandez, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2007). According to a U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 65% of all Hispanic children and youths and 87% of all Asian children and youths were from immigrant families in 2000 (Hernandez, 2004).

In the midst of such demographic changes in the Asian population in the United States, it has become even more problematic and difficult to understand cultural, social, economical, legal, and political realities and issues surrounding Asian students and their families using simplified stereotypes such as that of the model minority or forever foreigner. Although not having enough studies on people of Asian descent has been a problem, this new phenomenon has helped to start to draw more attention to Asian populations in the United States. For example, there have been increasing numbers of social science scholars focusing on 1.5 generation immigrants (who were born abroad
and immigrated to the United States before or around the age of 12) or 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Asian immigrant children or youths and their families in the United States. These studies are easier to get funds and research sites for compared to studies about longer term Asian American generations (e.g. Espiritu, 1994; Zhou, 1997; Zhou, & Gatewood, 2000; Kibria, 2002; Min, 2004; Zhou & Lee, 2007; Li & Skop, 2007; Parrenas, 2007; Portes, & Rumbaut, 2007). Most research related to these Asian immigrant populations has been conducted by 1.5 or second generation Asian immigrant background scholars from fields are as varied as sociology, psychology, and Asian American cultural studies, and have mostly been carried out using personal interviews and narratives as part of their methodology (Pang \& et al., 2004). These studies have greatly helped to shed light on and bring varied perspectives to our understanding not only of newer Asian immigrant populations but also to people of Asian descent in the United States in general. Many studies are directly and/or indirectly related to ethnic identity/ies and help unpack the complex realities and voices of 1.5 and second generation Asian immigrants, especially focusing on their childhood and their lives as young adults as they are caught between two worlds: “dominant American” culture/life and their “original” culture/world in and out of the United States. Many of these studies also show the implications for other Asian American populations who have lived in the United States for many generations.

Although these kinds of studies have been increasing, the number of studies directly on or related to the field of education is far lower. Therefore, studies about Asian children, youths and their families in the field of education have greatly benefited from these new emerging studies from outside the field.
Challenging issues and realities of Asian descent children and youths. As I have illustrated in the previous sections, there is great diversity among the Asian descent population in the United States. In this section, I demonstrate the complex realities, issues, and needs of Asian children and youths based on academic literature.

Unpacking the “successful model minority myth”. School success, especially among people of different races and ethnicities, has been heavily measured by SAT scores and school retention rates. However, these simplified measurements of academic success do not address the diverse needs and strengths of individual students. Since students of Asian descent have a tendency to be seen as the “successful model minority”, their real personalities, strengths and needs have been even more likely to be covered and unknown (e.g. Pang, 1998, 2001, 2004; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003; Zhou, Knoke &Sakamoto, 2005; Li, 2006; Yu, 2006; Qin, 2006; Hgo & Lee, 2007). Now a number of Asian descent scholars have been claiming the importance of re-examining the meaning of school success (Zhou, 2000; Suzuki, 2002; Min, 2004; Pang and et al. 2004; Qin, 2006; Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Ngo, 2008) so that educators will be able to understand each student’s strengths and needs and create a better environment for these students in education.

Development of self-concept and other struggles. One of the serious issues and needs of students of Asian descent hidden by the common notion that “Asian children/youth are doing fine” or that they present “no problem,” are the issues related to their low self-esteem, lack of self-image, confused self-identity, and emotional and psychological struggles. Numerous studies point out that many American-born Asian American and Asian Immigrant children and youths’ inner conflicts, such as negative
self-image and vague self concept, are serious issues that need attention (e.g. Lee, 1996; Pang, 1995a; Kiang, Pang, and Pak, 2004; Park, 2007). Furthermore, sometimes apparently academically good or assumed successful groups of children and youths of Asian descent are more likely to need attention for their psychological and emotional health. These needs and issues are among the most complicated and urgent matters that educators and teachers need to understand better in order to support these students.

Difficulties that people of Asian descent often face on a daily basis, such as cultural and social conflicts, economical difficulties, and prejudice and/or discrimination, may sometimes contribute to serious mental struggles, low self-esteem, self-hatred and depression. Among the very limited studies available about Asian Americans’ mental struggles, studies that focus on Filipino Americans, which have many common factors with other children, youths and families of Asian descent, can help us to understand the many complications of their struggles and how these struggles have been covered up from public view, including from educators. In the next section, I use the case of a Filipino American youth and family in San Diego, and some other cases to explain some of the struggles that Filipino but also other Asian descent youths have been experiencing.

**Emotional and psychological struggles disguised by academic success and the model minority myth.** Filipino American/immigrants’ children and youths are one of the groups that have been consistently achieving increased academic success in recent years (Hernandez, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Heras, 2007). According to Hernandez (2004), especially first and second generations of Filipino adolescents achieve higher grades than white non-Hispanic adolescents. However, this academic success hides serious mental conditions among the Filipino American population she is studying.
According to surveys conducted by the Federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the San Diego Unified School District (1993, 1995, 1997, 1999), the adult Filipino as well as the Filipina teen population had significantly higher serious suicidal attempts or suicidal rates compared to any other ethnic group in the region (Espiritu, 1994; Pang, 1998; Kiang, Pang, and Pak, 2004; Heras, 2007). According to a 1993 survey, “45.6% of Filipino American women who filled out the survey had seriously considered suicide; this compared with 33.4% among Hispanic females, 26.2 among Caucasians, and 25.3% among Black females” (Kiang, Pang, and Pak, 224, p. 554).

**Isolation in the “white” middle class community.** As a result of this shocking data, there have been several discussions among the Filipino American psychologists’ community to find out what could be the cause of this devastating situation. Using her personal conversations with Filipino American counselors, Pang (2004) illustrated that Filipino American parents in the San Diego Unified School District were on survival mode, often working multiple jobs so that they could maintain a *middle class lifestyle* for their children. They believed that this would give their children better educational opportunities. This kind of lifestyle created a lot of pressure as well as physical and mental difficulties for their children. Ironically, it also caused serious isolation for their children, who did not get to spend enough time with their parents to get the needed mental support from them while they were facing cultural conflicts and assimilation pressures in their school communities (D. Villa, interview, San Diego, 1995 cited by Kiang, Pang, and Pak, 2004).
The struggle to construct a positive self-image and general self-image issues among Asian children/youths in middle class neighborhoods have hardly been discussed yet, but some studies and articles have shown that many of them face emotional and psychological struggles and damage from living in White middle class neighborhoods and not being able to develop positive self concepts and feeling isolated from “others” every day. In *A letter to My Sister* (1997, 2007), Lisa Park wrote about young Asian Women’s struggles to develop a positive self-concept and image using the format of writing a letter to her older sister who attended a “nearly all-white university” and eventually committed suicide after many attempts. Talking about her sister’s multiple plastic surgeries, she writes,

> It began with your eyes and nose, and …You tried to box yourself into a preconditioned, Euro American ideal and literally excised the parts that would not fit. But plastic surgery is irreversible, and so were the twenty-one years of assimilation. (p. 426)

Park pointed out how the “model minority” myth made her sister and herself feel powerless.

> …how can you reform something that is so structured, so absolutely essential to the constitution of this society? (p. 427)

Remembering the moment she witnessed her sister dying but still felt forced to feel nothing was wrong, Park thinks:

> Do you see how our culture of pain worked...Silence was disciplined into us. How did we get to be so utterly ruined? How did we get to the point where we turned our backs on one another? (p. 467)
Zhou & Gatewood (2000) claim that Asian American children/youths in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods experience “traumatic, even suicidal, identity crises, in which they feel ashamed of who they are, try to become who they are not, and end up being neither” (19). In the case of inner-city ethnic communities, it is sometimes easier for youths to use their own cultural background in their everyday life without attaching a feeling of shame but feeling proud instead. Community members support each other in their lives as well as in education (Zhou, 1998; Zhou & Lee, 2007). For example, “working class” parents of Asian descent in China Town, New York, had great networks to support their children’s education and each other, eventually allowing them to send them to prestigious Universities in the United States (Zhou, 1998). Because of the density of the Asian descent population in both the East and West Coasts, there have been only limited studies about Asian descent populations that are scattered in the middle of the United States, especially in suburban middle class neighborhoods (Pang and et al., 2004). However, these areas have even stronger model minority stereotypes and pressure to assimilate into the community. Therefore, there is an urgent need for educators to understand the kinds of emotional and psychological struggles that Asian descent students endure and to support them in developing positive self-images and identity development.

**Divided by two cultural/social values.** Heras (2007), a psychologist in San Diego, has also offered a number of reasons to explain Filipino Americans’ mental health conditions in her article, *Psychotherapy with Filipinas*. Firstly, Filipino youths need to face two different cultures everyday, *dominant American culture* and *Filipino culture*. Parents of Filipino descent expect their children to truly respect their traditional cultural
values and to demonstrate “loyalty to and dependence on the family and kin group,” which is very different from dominant American culture. These conflicting demands could cause not only emotional and psychological confusion among Filipino children/youths, but could also create conflicts between the children/youths and their parent(s) at home.

Disconnected relationships between Parents/caregivers and teachers/school also generate difficulties for children/youths who must manage between two worlds. There are only a very few studies available about the relationships between parents/caregivers and teachers/schools (Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004; Li, 2006). On the other hand, there is data that shows that parents of Asian descent have shown low rates of participation in school activities or communication with teachers. According to Siu (Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004), although parents of Asian descent put a lot of emphasis on their children’s education, “there is not a matching interaction between school personnel and parents” (p. 641). Focusing on the Chinese Descent population in New York City especially, Siu analyzes the various causes for this. Firstly, because many parents work long hours, it is difficult for them to participate in school activities. Secondly, some parents are not fluent in English and may therefore find school involvement challenging or may feel fearful or inferior and therefore hesitate to participate in school activities (Lee, 1995; Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004). Thirdly, the fact that some Chinese immigrant parents do not have official school experience or had a very different school experience back in their homeland make it difficult for them to interact with teachers or the school community. One of the most important and interesting points made by Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein (2004) is that, regardless of socioeconomics or the length of their
stay in the United States, Chinese immigrant and Chinese American parents value school education as an opportunity for their children’s future, but they do not necessarily trust “American” schools to be better than Chinese traditional or cultural education. Conflicting educational values between “American” schools and families may not only present an obstacle to communications between the two but may also create difficulties for children and youths of Asian descent who are left to negotiate between two conflicting values by themselves without sufficient support from adults (Kibria, 2002; Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004; Li, 2006).

**Relationships between Parents and Children/Youths.** In many cases, regardless of socio-economic status, many children/youths of Asian descent are under serious, high academic expectations not only from their parents but also from their relatives. These parents’ high academic expectations may cause stronger test anxiety among Asian students (Pang, 1991, 1995, 2004). In an effort to please their parents, many children of Asian descent study very hard and “The quest for approval through doing well becomes internalized, though students are typically unaware of the process” (p. 555).

These efforts may also cause these students to deal with a negative social image among peers (Goto, 1997; Pang, 2004). When they become identified as nerds by their peers in school, it becomes even harder for them to communicate with other groups of students in school, which may cause them to be “singled out” (Goto, 1997). Without knowing how to seek help and unable to articulate their struggles to others, or even to themselves, many of these students become isolated and develop an identity crisis as a result of this isolation (Park, 2007; Qin, 2006).
In addition to this, in the case of the Filipino youths in San Diego, Heras (2007) explains that not only must children deal with their parents’ inability to understand, validate, and provide help for their serious mental struggles but they must also deal with the family’s strong tendency to keep problems within the family, like many other Asian groups, which puts their children in a difficult situation. A lot of research shows that the Asian descent population is the ethnic group which is least likely to seek professional help for emotional and psychological struggles and depression (Min, 2004; Pang, 2004; Heras, 2007; Kawahara & Espin, 2007; Park, 2007).

**Losing ethnic identity and language.** Losing a sense of solid ethnic identity and “first” language puts many people of Asian descent in a fragile state emotionally and psychologically. Numbers of studies show that first immigrant families have more positive and hopeful attitudes. However, they have a tendency to lose the positive perspective and motivation later. Although there are numerous reasons for this, such as economical difficulties (regardless of high education), social pressures and cultural conflicts, loss of ethnic identity and language is one of the main reasons (et al. Zhou, 1998, Kibria, 2002; Qin, 2006; Heras, 2007).

Wong (1991) demonstrates, providing significant evidence, how it can be easy for immigrants to lose their native language in the process of learning English, which can eventually lead them to lose their culture. Heras (2007) explains that losing solid ethnic identity contributes to a loss of sense of belonging. In addition, the long history (about 450 years) of Spanish-American colonization makes many Filipino Americans perpetuate internalized oppression from one generation to the next.
This kind of social positionality has led Filipinos to depend on their families more in order to secure a sense of belonging as well as a sense of personal and social safety (Heras, 2007, p.67). This could create a supportive role for family members but it could also lead them to become isolated from the rest of the community and to develop dysfunctional family relationships under a lot of pressure and mental struggles, which each family member must deal with daily.

**Teachers and Students of Asian Descent**

As I demonstrated in the previous section, Asian descent children/youths have many complex needs. Although the number of studies about students of Asian/Asian Pacific descent seems to be growing, there has not been much research on educational issues related to Asian/Asian Pacific descent students (Pang & et al., 2004). In addition, studies related to teachers for Asian descent students and Asian descent teachers have been one of the least studied areas in education for the Asian descent population. For example, Pang (2004) claims that there have hardly been any studies that look at the teachers’ perspective on Asian descent students and their parent(s)/caregivers.

**Population of Asian Descent Teachers.** Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries (2004) claim that the demographic imperative is one of the most important issues to discuss regarding teacher preparation in American society, especially due to current and future demographic changes. They recognize that the cultural gaps between students and teachers have been increasingly significant in P-12 schools (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Hadgkinson, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). For example, Hadgkinson (2002) points out:
…as student enrollments become increasingly racially diverse (about 40%, although the state range is from 7% to 68%), the teaching force is actually becoming increasingly White, due mainly to the striking decline in Black, Hispanic, and Asian enrollments in teacher education programs since 1990, with a proportionate increase in minority business majors (p. 104).

The demographic imperative in education, however, causes far more complex and serious problems for educating students from diverse backgrounds, such as those of Asian descent (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004).

Preparing teachers for culturally responsive teaching is one of the most vital missions of multicultural teacher education. In this demographic imperative situation, there have been many efforts to prepare culturally responsive teachers, like cross-cultural immersion experiences, multicultural education courses, and different program adaptations (Sleeter, 2001).

The other significant role of multicultural teacher education has been to recruit future teachers from diverse backgrounds. Due to the effort to increase the number of prospective teachers of color, the most common debate in teacher education has been how to recruit, retain and select prospective teachers in order to increase the number of teachers of color (Villegas & Clewell, 1998; Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999; Sleeter, 2001; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004).

**Teacher education programs and future teachers of Asian descent students.** The quality of teacher education for minority pre-service teachers, however, has not been much discussed or researched in multicultural teacher education. Montecinos (2004) claims that the paradox of multicultural teacher education is that students of color are
treated as objects but ignored as subjects. Sheets & Chew (2002) arrived at the same conclusion as a result of their research on the Title VII Chinese Bilingual Cross-Cultural Teacher Preparation Program, the so-called ABC project (A Bilingual Cantonese Project), at San Francisco State University, which lasted five years. Although the majority of the students were from minority cultural backgrounds, that general and multicultural teacher education courses and curricula in the program were still designed for White students, probably due to the availability of materials, historically accumulated curricula and the ethnicity of the instructors for these classes. Some Chinese American students in the program expressed their disappointment and discomfort at either being treated as “white” or objectified as Chinese so that they were assumed by other students in the program to know everything about Chinese American culture. As a result, these Chinese students expressed their disappointment that they felt that they were in the program to share and teach Chinese culture to other students instead of learning something to prepare them to become a better teachers in Cantonese bilingual classroom contexts in the future. One of the Chinese American students in the program expressed her disappointment about the content of the program as follows:

Even though the Chinese are the largest group in San Francisco, all of the modeling was about bilingual Spanish classes. Spanish and Chinese are totally different (Ann) (p. 134).

Although this program provided a wonderful challenge, it also faced major struggles, which many institutions have been experiencing. Sheets & Chew (2002) concluded, “our university may be typical” because most faculty members did not attend or teach in K-12 schools with significant numbers of Chinese American students and “most have neither a
deep knowledge of Chinese American culture and Cantonese language nor a conceptualization of Chinese American pedagogical cultural knowledge” (p. 139).

Due to their minority status, in terms of their racial, ethnic, cultural, language, sexual, socio-economic, disability, religious, and nationality diversity, minority pre-service teachers have been found to hold great potential to bring a wealth of multicultural knowledge to teacher education programs, as well as to schools as teachers in the future. However, many current teacher education programs have not necessarily been providing the support necessary to create culturally relevant teachers. Instead, the programs make such teachers feel assimilated into dominant discourse or objectified in the programs and schools (Sheets & Chew, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Dillard (1994) cites a conversation she had with a young Mexican American woman during one of her university education recruitment programs, which she describes as follows:

If I come to your university, will I be more than a number? I guess what I mean is, if I come to WSU, can I be a Mexicana and a teacher? (p. 9)

Teacher educators need to ask how we can create supportive and caring learning environments for pre-service teachers from diverse backgrounds in order for them to be allowed to truly be who they are, including their multiple cultural identities

**Asian descent teachers in schools.** Many scholars have been claiming the importance of increasing the number of Asian background teachers, who are significantly fewer in number than Asian descent children/students (Gordon, 2002; Goodwin, 2002; Goodwin and et al., 2006; Ng and et al., 2007; Ogbe, 2002; Rong & Preissle, 1997; Pang and et al., 2004; Suzuki, 2002). According to Pang (2004), Asian/Asian Pacific background teachers account for only 1 % of teachers, and school administrators,
researchers, and policy makers amount to an even smaller percentage in the United States.

There are a number of reasons for the shortage of Asian descent teachers in the United States. One of the unique reasons that apply to the Asian descent population is the strong parental influence on children’s career choices (Rong & Preissle, 1997; Pang et al, 2004). Compared to other ethnic groups, Asian parents have a tendency to exert more influence on their children’s career choices, and teaching careers are “neither encouraged nor esteemed” by them (Rong & Preissle, 1997). This is not necessarily unique to the United States. This tendency relates to many Asian cultural values and relationships between parents and their children. Thoroughly familiar with the phenomenon, Pang suggests, “Parents should consider encouraging their children to consider education for their careers” (p. 559)

Among the very limited number of studies about Asian descent teachers, two recent studies include a study about Chinese American pre-service teachers in a bilingual Cantonese/English teaching program at San Francisco State University by Sheets and Chew (2002), and a study about Asian American in- and pre-service teachers who were selected from different parts of the United States, by Goodwin et al. (2006). Both studies revealed that the Asian descent teachers in their studies, felt silenced, marginalized and treated as “foreigners” in their working environments in certain situations. At the same time, these teachers were not voiceless in person and were willing to develop voices as educators (Sheets & Chew, 2002):
The voices of Chinese American teachers from this research, demonstrate that the invisibility perceived by the dominating culture is not really the way in which the teachers in this study understand their place as educators (p. 139).

Clearly, we need to develop more studies with/about Asian descent teachers. Further studies about, for example, how Asian descent teachers use their cultural competence while they teach Asian descent students are needed.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

This part of Chapter 2 reviews culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy. This section is organized into three parts. In the first part, I examine the historical growth of culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies, especially focusing on social constructivist and critical theorist arguments around theory and practice. In the second part, I examine the content of culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies, especially focusing on some characteristics related to my dissertation topic. In the third part, I examine the emerging new directions of culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies for new demographic movements in the global era in the United States.

**Historical Background of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

**Culturally responsive pedagogies with social constructivist perspectives.** Cultural adjustments of pedagogies for ethnic and racial minority students have been greatly researched, studied and theorized by numerous scholars and educators, especially during the last four decades in the field of multicultural education. Culturally relevant pedagogy originated thanks to the efforts of teachers and researchers who worked with ethnically and racially minority students in their classrooms or districts. The most common goal for culturally responsive teaching is to reduce the gap or “mismatch” that exists between
minority students’ home culture and school culture and which is evident in teaching materials, instruction, curricula and teaching practices that are based on *white middle class dominant* cultural norms and values, so that these students can learn more effectively and seek academic success (e.g. Au & Jordan, 1981; Phillips, 1982; Ogbu, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000).

This idea is strongly supported by sociocultural theory, which was developed by Russian psychologist, Vygosky, and his research group in the 1960s (e.g. Moll, 1990; Au, 1998). Vygosky developed a sociocultural theory of human development that diverged from Piaget’s widely-accepted child development by age stages. Before Vygotsky and his research group, children’s cognitive and language development was merely understood and analyzed in terms of the individual child’s developmental stages by ages. However, Vygotsky contributed to establish “the link between the social and individual” (p. 152) in learning. As Vygotsky (1962) puts it, “We propose that the essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). In other words, children’s cognitive development is determined by *language*, which requires highly socially interactive experiences, and children’s sociocultural experiences. Therefore, learning is always cultural, social, and historical.

Various scholars have conducted qualitative ethnographic or narrative research to bridge the gap between ethnic and racial minority students’ home and school cultures. These cultural pedagogical approaches have been known by various names and have sometimes gone unnamed or uncategorized. One such example is culturally congruent
pedagogy (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981) which was a study of Native American students focusing on teacher-student interaction patterns, culturally appropriate pedagogy (Au & Jordan, 1981) with Native Hawaiian students, culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g. Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Au, 1993; Gay 2000), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), which is about successful teachers for African American students. There are other significant culturally relevant pedagogical approaches, such as Lisa Delpit’s pedagogical analysis/approach, which was introduced in *Teaching Other People’s Children* (1995), a book mainly about African American students, and Moll et al.’s *Fund of Knowledge* approach (1992; 2004; 2005), which is mainly focused about Latina/o students’ household culture.

The first movements of culturally responsive pedagogy stemmed mostly from pedagogical perspectives of literacy education by social constructivists strongly influenced by Vygosky’s theories of language and sociocultural theory. For example, Au and Jordan (1981) conducted a case study on Native Hawaiian children, mainly focusing on the populations of low economic status. The project is called the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP). In this case study, Au and Jordan (1981) focused on the meaning and comprehension of reading and rather than taking a phonemic approach in language arts. This project has been known for its great success. One of the significant pedagogical approaches they used was “*talk story*”, which is deeply embedded in Native Hawaiian culture and social interaction style. Their approach helped the students learn reading in a learning environment which was ethnically and culturally relevant and which helped them not only to engage but also to learn more effectively in a culturally familiar
way, compared to common reading instruction, which is more relevant to the white middle class norm.

**Adding critical perspectives to culturally responsive pedagogy.** African American scholars or scholars working with low economic status African American students started to challenge culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, which had been theorized and conducted mostly only from social constructivist or sociolinguist points of view (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings emphasizes that the earlier social constructivist and sociolinguist approaches of culturally responsive pedagogy failed to see a broader picture of society and the United States. Ladson-Billings also (1995) analyzes cultural pedagogies that have been developed in the last thirty years and she argues that many culturally influenced pedagogies such as culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible pedagogical approaches probably work merely to accommodate students’ culture to mainstream culture in order to teach them more effectively; however, Gay’s (2000) culturally responsive pedagogies have successfully included and captured a more dynamic picture of the gaps between school culture and students’ home culture or community using critical consciousness.

Many African American scholars or scholars working with low economic status African American students, such as Ladson-Billings (1994) and Irvine (2003) insist that merely focusing on instruction to bridge cultural and interaction style differences between school and home is not enough because such an understanding of schooling ignores the politics and history of education in the United States. These scholars claim that it is important not only to focus on the micro aspects of schooling and students’ cultural background, but also on the macro aspects, covering a much wider view of social
dynamics historically, culturally, and politically. For example, Villegas (1988, 2002) also points out that considering students’ cultural background in teaching is not enough. She claims that it is crucial for teachers and educators to have the critical consciousness to question why children of color or poor communities have been struggling in schools and why they have a lower social status compared with white middle class people.

Also building on Ogbu’s work, Irvine (1990) analyzes socially and historically institutionalized schooling from a macro perspective:

…schools operate overtly and covertly to institutionalize the “caste-like” (Ogbu, 1978) status of black children. Instead of existing to expand opportunities for economic success, as the prescriptive view suggests, schools often institutionalize the unequal distribution of resources and serve as an instrument by which the powerful maintain the status quo (p. 4).

Ladson-Billings (1994) makes a similar point, “Culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 17).

Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogies should not only make an effort to understand students’ backgrounds in order to teach them more effectively academically, but they should also seek to challenge and change the world to create a more equal and democratic society for all children. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogies also have a critical side. Ladson-Billings (1994) positions culturally relevant pedagogy as not merely pedagogy which can lead diverse historically oppressed students to academic success but also as something which “empowers students intellectually, socially,
emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to import knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382).

**Characteristics of a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive pedagogy, in what I believe to be one of the most comprehensive definitions, as follows:

[Culturally responsive pedagogy is] using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frame of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (p. 106).

Ladson-Billings (1995) claims that there are three propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy, which include both social constructivist views and critical pedagogical views (p. 160):

1. Students must experience academic success
2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence
3. Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they can challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Although Ladson-Billings and Gay have many elements in common in their approaches, Gay’s (2000) approach focuses more on how to approach and conduct culturally responsive pedagogy more systematically. Gay believes that in order to help teachers to act now on culturally responsive pedagogy “teachers should be trained in knowledge and skills of culturally responsive pedagogy for ethnic diversity, systematically supported in
their praxis efforts and held accountable for quality performance within the context of
cultural diversity” (p. 212). Gay (2000) identifies five fundamental objectives of
culturally responsive teaching:

1. Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity
2. Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum
3. Demonstrating caring and building a learning community
4. Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction
5. Providing cultural congruity in classroom instruction

Instead of examining all the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy, I
discuss some of its characteristics related to caring, which is, I believe, support teachers’
fundamental motivation for culturally responsive pedagogy and an excellent teaching tool
for all children from diverse backgrounds.

**Caring as a fundamental element of culturally responsive pedagogy.** Many
educators and teachers would say that they care about all the students that they teach and
that they want all of their students to achieve academic and social success in their
schools. The question then arises, what is different between the word caring which we
may use rather casually in our daily lives, and the culturally responsive caring of
educators who understand culturally responsive pedagogy theoretically and make an
effort to use it in their everyday practice of teaching, especially for students of culturally,
ethnically, economically, linguistically and racially diverse backgrounds?

It is important to theorize and articulate what caring means in the theory and practice
of culturally responsive pedagogy and to distinguish it from unspecified caring in daily
conversation, since caring is a fundamental and necessary component of culturally
responsive pedagogy. Gay (2000) uses rather strong words to claim that there are too many students of color who have met with uncaring teachers in everyday schooling. With regards to caring in the culturally responsive pedagogical context, Gay (2002) warns:

This is very different from conception of caring than the often-cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern”, which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way and move at their own pace (p. 109).

Gay claims that there are too many students who have met with uncaring teachers. In this section I especially focus on a discussion of caring in culturally responsive teaching with three themes: culturally responsive caring as spiritual guidance and motivation, culturally responsive caring in the construction of mutual partnerships, and culturally responsive caring for empowerment.

**Culturally responsive caring as spiritual guidance and motivation in practice.**

Caring in culturally responsive pedagogy requires that teachers have a willingness to work seriously for ethnically/racially and culturally diverse students and a true interest in these students and their achievement of excellence. Inspired by Dillard’s concept of spirituality, I used the term spiritual in this study to indicate 心, kokoro, or, soul and spirit which connect our mind and body to become a holistic self as well as holistic with all in the world, and guide us to work following inner or spiritual motivation to make the world better place for all (Dillard, 2006). In other words, culturally responsive caring is a spiritual motivation and a vehicle for culturally responsive pedagogy (Howard, 2001; 2003). Regarding her graduate classes at a university, which have been led with a deep
commitment to conducting culturally and spiritually responsive pedagogy, Dillard (2006) claims that she heard from her students’ open dialogue journals again and again, “the necessity of love as a guiding principle for teaching, learning and research” (p. 38).

Gay analyzes caring very closely in the context of culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2000, 2002) claims that culturally responsiveness and sensitive caring are necessary ingredients for culturally responsive pedagogy in order to make it holistic. Therefore, caring is like a spiritual bond for teachers in order to bridge all the elements of teaching for students from diverse backgrounds, such as their cultural knowledge, pedagogical techniques, and culturally responsive curricula.

**Caring as action.** Caring in culturally responsive pedagogy is not just a feeling but should really be an action that can be recognized by and shared with students (Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 2001). In other words, caring in culturally responsive pedagogy is based on and driven by respect, as well as high expectations of students’ academic and social success. Howard (2001) emphasizes that students are able to recognize if their teachers’ actions or behavior are based on love and trust and that this recognition can make a significant difference in these students’ learning as well as to their academic and social success in school. This kind of caring leads teachers’ to recognize and use students’ multiple identities and experiences to facilitate caring as action (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Culturally responsive caring in the construction of mutual partnerships.** Culturally responsive caring can also lead to community building among teachers and students as partners with integrity, and a deeper level of belief in and respect for one another (Gay, 2002; Howard 2001). Witherell and Noddings (1991) describe caring as being at the core
of building mutual human relationships, which also requires a true open dialogue
between individuals. Although there have been some studies about mutual partnerships
between teachers, students and their caregivers, these partnerships have not been
discussed and studied in a wide enough range of students and communities (Li, 2006). Li
claims that there are studies about classroom practices, school structures, and practices in
children’s homes and wider communities but that we also need studies on “the
interactions and relationships between the school and home/community” (p. 7). We need
to develop further studies about the kind of role that culturally responsive caring can play
in such interactions and relationships.

**Culturally responsive caring for empowerment.** Caring in culturally responsive
pedagogy requires, first, historical and cultural respect for the dignity of other people,
which helps students develop a strong sense of bi/multi-cultural competence. Secondly,
such caring requires breaking down the wall between self and other to work for one
another not only in schooling but also in society. For Gay (2002), the group functions
somewhat like a ‘mutual aid society’ in which all members are responsible for helping
each other perform and ensuring that everyone contributes to the collective task.
Therefore, the goal of culturally relevant pedagogy should not only be individual
students’ empowerment and success but also collective empowerment and success
(Ladson-Billings, 1995). This approach is the practical result of seeing society from a
macro perspective. An environment with caring mutual relationships is required to make
such empowerment possible.

Caring for empowerment may sometimes require “tough love” to push students to
fulfill their responsibilities and to develop their critical consciousness to see society
culturally, historically and politically. However, as Howard (2001) shows, using her study with African American students’ perspectives about learning environments, including their teachers, students are able to recognize if such tough approaches are based on love and caring or not. Howard used an example of the interaction between a teacher and her fourth grade students to illustrate this distinction. One student had not done a good job for an assignment and the teacher used rather harsh and strict words to show her dissatisfaction with the student’s work. This kind of teacher behavior is only possible because the student knew that the teacher really cares about her. The teacher shows the student love and care in clear and recognizable ways on a regular basis. For example, the teacher gave the student a hug and said some words in private after the incident. This story concluded with a letter from the student to the teacher the following morning, saying “Thank you for being a terrific teacher. Thank you for your toughness. It is [the toughness] that really got me back on track.” (p. 139). This kind of teacher’s approach not only had a positive influence on the specific student but it also influences the other students in her class because the teacher consistently shows what is expected of all of her students and uses her pedagogy that combines high expectations with tough love. Thus, this kind of caring has the potential to empower not only individual students but also all students as members of a collective community.

**New Directions and Needs in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

**Demographic changes in a global era.** As I have demonstrated in the Asian section, the numbers of first, second and third generation immigrant children have been increasing and will continue to do so. According to García (2005), 46.3% of schools have bilingual students, or students whose home language is not English and this number
has been steadily increasing. For example, for the academic year of 2000-2001, the total number of Bilingual students enrolled in U.S. schools increased by 32.2% from prior years (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Survey of the States’ limited English proficient students; 2001 Survey report cited by García, 2005). Approximately 11% of the population of the United States in 2000 was foreign-born (Minami & Ovando, 2004), and about 50% of teachers are expected to have a chance to teach bilingual students (García, 2005). The majority of immigrant students are either Latino/a or come from Asian backgrounds.

This dramatic trend of demographic change requires us, educators and scholars, to examine how to educate these new populations of children. There are several things that require discussion and research in terms of new directions to take and the modifications that need to take place in culturally responsive pedagogy.

For instance, there are new emerging needs when we think about these new student populations in the United States. Firstly, the cultures of the newer immigrant populations, such as Latina/o, Asian, and some African backgrounds, are not yet discussed enough in studies about multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, the majority of “American residents” are not necessarily familiar with the dynamics of Latino/a, Asian and African culture in sufficient depth yet. Second, although language is important, not only because of fundamental cultural elements but also as an important vehicle of cognitive and social intellectual development, cultural responsive pedagogy has not been discussed enough with regards to students whose English is limited or not as functional as that of other American students. Although there are some studies in this area, they usually only focus on the ESL disciplinary area. This
is mainly because students’ “language proficiency” has traditionally been seen as ESL teachers’ responsibility and most teachers are not really even trained to teach language to minority students in their teacher certificate programs. Third, culturally responsive pedagogy has not been discussed enough in relation to mixture or hybrid features of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, poverty, language, gender, or nationality/nationalities.

In this section, I examine some studies that were conducted with a special focus on these new demographic changes. In order to be more specific, I use examples of culturally responsive pedagogy mainly relating to the Asian population in the United States, which is most relevant to my research.

**Culturally responsive pedagogy for new generations.** As I stated previously, in this period of drastic demographic change, it is important to discuss how to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students in school (e.g. Howard, 2003; Li, 2006; García, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Although theories of culturally responsive pedagogy have great potential to create better learning environments for these students, there have been far fewer studies and less research carried out on Latina/o and Asian descent students and their families. The consequent lack of knowledge could lead teachers to apply a reductive understanding of these students’ cultural characteristics. In this section, I discuss some of the significant issues that we need to examine in order to determine future directions of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches for Asian descent students.

**“Forgotten” cultures and culturally responsive pedagogy.** There are some scholars who support concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy but at the same time point out that there are possible difficulties in applying culturally responsive pedagogies
to Latina/o or Asian descent students in real schools at present (Minami & Ovando, 2004; Li, 2006; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006).

For example, Guofang Li (2006) conducted an ethnographic study about Chinese immigrant children’s bicultural literacy practices and socialization in a middle class community in a small Canadian city. Her study analyzed the conflicts between mainstream teachers and the Chinese immigrant parents’ perspectives in literacy practices. In her book, *Culturally Contested Pedagogy*, Li (2006) examined culturally responsive pedagogy using Au’s “culturally responsive pedagogy” (1993) for Native Hawaiian children and Ladson-Billing’s “culturally relevant pedagogy” (1990, 1994) for African American children. Throughout the course of her research she found that the models for these culturally responsive pedagogies were problematic when applied to her research site for three main reasons. Firstly, Li (2006) points out that these models assumed classroom teachers are familiar with minority students’ cultures and their communication, linguistic and cognitive styles. She worked with students of first or 1.5 generation immigrant students and their families. The complexity of the cognitive, social, and academic development of immigrant students who are simultaneously living in two cultural and linguistic contexts, are not yet being discussed enough in studies of culturally responsive pedagogy. Immigrant students may take five to ten years to achieve grade level English abilities. Therefore, longitudinal culturally responsible pedagogy studies of immigrant students that take these complications into consideration are needed.

Secondly, Li (2006) points out that there is a lack of studies about middle class minority students in culturally responsive pedagogy. In part, this is due to the fact that Asian populations have traditionally been seen as academic achievers, so they are
frequently absent from such studies. Moreover, Li’s research participants came from middle class households, which one might assume have fewer problems. However, as I stated in the Asian descent section in this chapter, there are many students who are socially and mentally at risk in such households.

Thirdly, Li states that “these models are teacher centered; they neglect the autonomy of students and their families regarding what they can contribute to instruction and curriculum” (p. 6). Howard (2001) shares this view emphasizing, “Unfortunately, little of research on culturally responsive teaching practices has examined students’ perceptions and interpretations of these pedagogical practices” (p. 131). These questions are helpful in re-examining culturally responsive pedagogy not only for students of Asian descent but also for other students from diverse backgrounds in order to add more authentic voices, experiences and perspectives from students and the communities from which they originate.

**Bilingualism and Education for Immigrant Students**

Goodwin (2002) conducted a thorough examination of the literature in the field of Education in the last two decades and found that only a “handful of articles included mentions of immigrant children and the importance of responding to their educational needs” between 1980 and 2002 (p. 160). It is only recently that more scholars have started to pay more attention to immigrant children and their educational needs in general education and content education. In such a climate, language acquisition and education related to language acquisition, such as English proficiency, ESL programs and bilingual education, have been at the center of discussions about immigrant children’s education in the United States. As a result, immigrant students with limited language proficiency have
been attached labels, such as ESL (English as a second language) children, ELL children (English language learner), or LEP children (Limited English proficiency), which also indicates that language policies and politics have had a great impact in determining immigrant children’s position and their education in schooling (English, 2009).

However, “language acquisition” and “becoming bilingual” are much more complicated and long-term goals than many people realize. For instance, in California, Hakuta, Butler, & Witt (2000) found that “English oral proficiency takes three to four years to develop, while academic English proficiency can take four to seven years.” Thomas and Collier conducted a similar study with Hakuta, Butler, & Witt in 1997 and found that for some students, especially those who had moved to U.S. before 8 years old and had lost their first language, it took as many as 7 to 10 years to develop an academic level of English proficiency. Thomas and Collier (1997) point out that many studies and debates about immigrant children’s education are relying on short-term studies to determine “Which program (for English learners) is better during the first 1-2 years?” They warn that the recommendations made by short-term studies have often been associated with the failure of long-term success of academic achievement of language learners; therefore, it is important to study and examine immigrant students’ academic long-term instead of short-term success. Suárez-Orozco and her colleagues (2008) examined five years of immigrant children’s grade averages, also warned:

A large scale national study of high-school achievement found that while immigrants on the whole demonstrated greater engagement in school, the longer they attended American Schools the worse they did academically. Longitudinally, (our data support such results): on aggregate, the longer the newcomer immigrant students were
in school, the worse they did academically as measured by grade point averages, or
GPAs” (p. 33).
This is not only true for immigrant students but also for all students, but the tendency is
more precipitous among minority students (Suárez-Orozco and et al., 2008). For
immigrant student cases, it is important to recognize that “improvement” of English
language and cultural competence, which has been evaluated in short term studies, was
not helping the students’ academic growth.

The concept of bilingualism has been discussed for a long time but it does not yet
have a coherent definition among scholars (Butler and Hakuta, 2005). Although many
people believe that bilingualism means being able to use two languages at a competent
level, becoming bilingual in two languages at a native level is extremely difficult and
such a definition of bilingualism, balanced bilingualism, is very limited (Suárez-Orozco
& Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Butler & Hakuta, 2004). In addition, immigrant students who
learn English as second language in U.S. could lose their first language and their culture
much more easily than people may expect (Wong, 1991; Olsen, 1997). Therefore,
scholars have recently started to move away from simplistic definitions of bilingualism
that focus only on “proficiency” to focus instead on understanding the more dynamic
phenomena of human development of bilingualism in social contexts taking into
consideration linguistic, cognitive, psychocultural and socio-cultural aspects (Minami &
“Each bilingual individual will develop a unique linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural
profile that is distinct from that of monolingual individual” (p. 135).
In this study, I used the broader definition of bilingualism by Butler and Hakuta (2004):
The present authors define bilinguals as individuals or groups of people who obtain communicative skills, with various degrees of proficiency, in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society (p. 115).

I chose this definition because it focuses on the complexity of bilingualism, especially as a means of interaction in social contexts, and because it accounts for many different “proficiency levels” in bilingual individuals.

How people construct narrative and interact with each other are varied in each culture and society and such different styles between each culture/society can influence on students’, who come from different culture/society, social, academic, and holistic “success” in schools, which usually construct mainly only by one specific cultural/social communication style. For instance, scholars working in critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy have shown that different communication styles and social norms affect cultural/ethnic and racial minority students’ academic success, especially when instructions and assessments have been constructed based on mainstream American culture (Au, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Gee, 2008;). There are only a few of these studies and their implications for teaching immigrant children, who come wide variety of social, cultural, economical, national, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, have not been explored enough.

For instance, some scholars have explored the significant differences in narrative styles between Japanese and upper-middle class English in U.S., England or Australia (Suzuki, 1975; Minami, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2008; Fuji, 2007, 2008). Fujii (2007), for instance, conducted research to see how the style by which “one achieves the goal of
telling story” was different for Australians speaking in English and Japanese speaking in Japanese. He summarizes his results as follows:

In recipient-initiated stories, Australian speakers begin a story in concert with the recipient’s topic presentation, but Japanese speakers build momentum through the building of rapport and trust. In speaker-initiated stories, Australian speakers use a conversational story preface to claim the conversational floor, but Japanese speakers insinuate a story in subtle ways (p. 183).

Fujii’s analysis has a lot in common with Suzuki and Minami’s analysis of Japanese people’s narrative style and how they construct social relationships with one another. Both Suzuki (1975) and Minami (2001) explain how Japanese people communicate and interact with other people and draw the conclusion that they tend to 为自己規定, define who you are by how other people see you (Suzuki, 1975) or act in a way that appears codependent (Minami, 2002) in comparison to Euro-American culture and narrative styles. Minami (2002) also added that individual segments of conversations by Japanese people tend to be much shorter and that Japanese speakers tend to add frequent confirming sounds such as “un” and “so, so,” compared to Euro-American speakers. These different kinds of communication or narrative styles can have a great impact on people’s lives, especially if they are newcomers or minorities in the society. Explaining their experiences as immigrant children, Yoshino (2006) and Yamada (1997) held that it would have been extremely helpful if somebody had taught them the new “rules” and “styles” of communication in their “new” home, the U.S., when they were children. Recognition of different cultural/social styles in communication and explicit support to
bridge these gaps are crucial for linguistically and culturally minority students’ social and academic success (Delpit, 1995) so that more studies about the experiences of immigrant families and children are much needed in the field of education.

The other important issue to consider regarding the language policies applied to immigrant children is that language is always a political matter. As Suarez-Orozco (2001) claims, a discussion of immigrant children would not be complete without reference to the ever-controversial subject of bilingualism and bilingual education (p. 135), which is liable to induce emotional and political responses. Suarez-Orozco (2001) does on to say, “No topic related immigration is as emotional and subject to political passion and manipulation that this issue” (p. 135).

As various scholars have pointed out, some people feel that bilingual education presents a threat against “American unity and culture” (e.g. Minami & Ovando, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The political atmosphere attached to language and immigration also influences the hierarchical relationship between ESL programs and general classrooms and their teachers (English, 2009). Many scholars claim that this kind of political climate and program structure in schooling as well as in teacher education programs leads general or content classroom teachers to feel not necessarily negatively about the education of immigrant children but certainly less responsible and less prepared for it (Byrnes and Kiger, 1997; Youngs & Youngs, 2001; Reeves, 2006; English, 2009).

**Transnationalism and Immigrants**

In the long history of migration, many people still take for granted that migrants “renounce their membership in their home countries in exchange for full social and political membership in the United States” (Levitt, 2001, p.4). However, many
contemporary immigrants, including second and sometimes third generation, retain a social, political, and/or economical relationship and membership with their “old” home in various ways. In order to better understand and analyze such complex activities on the part of contemporary migrants, and especially in order to recognize their dual/multiple memberships with both “old” and “new” countries, scholars in the fields of social science started to apply the concept of transnationalism. Transnational theories embrace the duality of people’s lives and experiences as well as their connections to both “old and new” societies and shed light on both the benefits and challenges of living in separate worlds and realities as well as the continuous creation of fluid spaces by people who lead such lives (Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2001; Espiritu, 2003; Simal, 2004).

*Transnationalism* remains a relatively new and still somewhat fragmented concept. For instance, the majority of academic articles related to *transnationalism* in the social sciences have been published after 1998 (Vertovec, 2009). However, studies about *transnationalism* have started to become more common among scholars in disciplines such as cultural studies, gender studies, ethnic racial studies, religious studies, (im)migrant studies, sociology, anthropology, international studies, economics, political science (Lavitt, 2001; Vertovec, 2009).

Until recently, scholars of migration studies merely focused on migrants’ process of assimilation/adaptation in “new” lands (e.g. Poters, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2001; Kivisto, 2001). However, scholars have started to note that such approaches only provide limited understanding of (im)migrant experiences and activities. They often leave out issues such as identity re-construction and cross-cultural and nation negotiation processes, and furthermore conceive of the (im)migrant
only from the perspective of American society or the “new” land for immigrant, rather than also taking into account their relationship with “old” lands (Poters, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2001; Kivisto, 2001). Scholarship of transnationalism, on the other hand, helps us “uncover” the reality of immigrants and their children, not only from the receiving countries’ perspectives but also from the perspective of migrants’ dual or multiple memberships as social, cultural, racial, ethnic, political, national, and historical beings in this global era (Yeoh, Lai, Charney, and Kiong, 2003). In sociology, more scholars are currently conducting anthropological studies about migrant population in the U.S. using transnational theory and such studies provide more insightful and detailed understandings of contemporary migrant practices and experiences. Transnationalism has thus become one of the most significant lenses and concepts to help elucidate the complexity of contemporary immigrant experiences and practices with the full range of social sciences (Levitt and Schiller, 2007; Vertovec, 2009).

Transnationalism can also help us to re-examine the life and experiences of contemporary migrants in terms of their sense of identity and agency from a much wider perspective, which was previously not discussed much, except within the realm of negotiation and assimilation to their new county. Levitt (2001) summarizes one of the reasons why contemporary migrants in the U.S. keep their close ties with their homeland as follows:

Migrants remain active in their homelands because they are unable to achieve full social membership in the United States. Because increasing numbers of contemporary migrants are people of color, they often experience blocked
mobility, racism, and discrimination. They are not allowed to become completely “American” even if they want to . . . Transnational practice also enables migrants to recoup their sense of purpose and self-worth. Though they may feel isolated and unwelcome as immigrants, they are still treated as respected and valued members of their sending countries, a fact that also encourages their continued membership (p. 19-20).

Some scholars also emphasize that technological advances and easier transportation have re-shaped transnational migrants’ relationship with their home land. For instance, many affordable communication tools, such as email, the internet, internet message services such as skype, and phone calls help migrants communicate with families and friends in their home country regularly at a relatively low cost compared to previous generations of migrants (Vertovec, 2009). Such technological improvements, which facilitate immigrants’ access to information from their home land, influence how second generation immigrant children find spaces to shape their agencies and their sense of identity (Vertovec, 2009).

Transnational theory has not yet become popular among educators and scholars in the field of education. Immigrant and immigrant children’s construction, negotiation, practice, and reproduction of their identity are more fluid, hybrid or integrated creative act of human practice between two or more their dual memberships (Yon, 1999; Vertovec, 2001; Levitt, 2001). Therefore, it is important to understand how immigrant children and their families live with dual socio-cultural/economic/political and emotional relationships with both “old” and “new” homes and how they negotiate and develop their hybrid identities. Some scholars in the education field have started to focus on the duality
of immigrant children’s experiences in order to consider possible improvements in the educational environments of immigrant children. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco made one of the most significant initial contributions in their work, *Children of immigration* (2001), in which they used transnational theory to understand and re-conceptualize immigrant and immigrant children in the field of education. Their work helps us to re-conceptualize immigrant children’s life experiences from dual or multiple cultural/social centers instead of merely focusing on how they adapt U.S. schools and society through mono-cultural/social perspectives (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Such perspectives have helped educators and scholars to understand immigrant children’s experiences, identities and agencies in a more dual. They also allow scholars and educators to think about immigrant children’s memberships to both of their “old” and “new” homes not from a deficit perspective, but with a more positive attitude.
Chapter 3

Epistemology and Methodology

“When we love we can let our heart speak”

– *all about love* (2001, p. xi), bell hooks

In this study my purpose was to explore the voices of teachers of Japanese descent within the complex cultural, social, and political contexts of education. I decided to design this study as a qualitative research because I believe that qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry, can best help us learn about and understand peoples' lived realities and the social settings of peoples’ lives.

In this study, I use three questions to guide my research:

1. What narratives of life and experience do these three Japanese descent teachers perceive as influencing their lives as teachers?

2. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to interpret the needs of immigrant children and their families and, in particular, those of children of Japanese descent?

3. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to create supportive education for immigrant children and their families and, in particular, children of Japanese descent?
These research questions are pursued through a qualitative approach defined by two prominent epistemological positions: narrative ways of knowing and feminist perspectives, in particular Asian-descent feminist perspectives. In the first part of this chapter, I begin by discussing these epistemologies as they inform my position as a researcher. In the second part of this chapter, I review the details of my research design, including data analysis and writing.

**Epistemological Commitments**

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative epistemologies situate the nature of knowing and identity-making as storied in nature (Bruner, 1986, 1996). Bruner’s theory of modes of thought has been used to discuss narrative inquiry as a research methodology and has contributed greatly to the use of personal narrative as *legitimate* data. According to Bruner (1986), human modes of thought have two distinguishable shapes: “paradigmatic” and “narrative”. He argues that historically only “paradigmatic” thought has been researched among the *traditional research community*, and treated as logical, scientific, and therefore legitimate, thought. However, “narrative” is the other important mode of human thought, which works instead “by a search for the meaning of historical and personal events in their full comprehensive richness” (Jensen & Kolb, 2000, p. 281).


… [I view] ‘narrative’ as both a mode of thought and an expression of a culture’s world view. It is through our own narratives that we principally construct a
version of ourselves in the world, and it is though its narrative that culture
provides models of identity and agency to its members (p. xiv).

Making sense of one’s self through narrative involves high cognitive activity, including
interpretation, reflection, and theorization of events, and an examination of life events
within/without their cultural context. I was interested in learning about my research
participants’ complex understandings of their own experiences and identities through
narrative.

This study includes an intergenerational narrative study about two Japanese descent
teachers: a mother and her daughter. I thought that analyzing how their narratives
“meshed” (Bruner, 1986), did not mesh, or sometimes conflicted with each other would
help me to understand their lived experiences, identities, and perspectives in a deeper and
more insightful way.

What I particularly wanted to pay attention to was understanding my research
participants’ (including myself) multiple identities, such as cultural, social, or racial, and
how these multiple identities influenced their understanding of self, their students and the
way they teach. In order to not only capture their identity in a culture but also “theorize”
the complexity and dynamics of cross-cultural living, using all languages, English,
Japanese and “Japan-(E)nglish” simultaneously, was crucial for this study.

Waterhouse (2006) emphasizes:

Stories are how we make sense of the world and our experiences. Part of what it
means to be human is to be connected to a social and cultural reality. Language
and stories are how we connect to that social and cultural reality. In these ways
we develop a sense of self (p. 3).
I also chose narrative inquiry in order to “[tap] into issues of identity – how one views oneself and relates to the world around one…” (Kanno, 2003, p. 11). The research participants’ narratives helped me to understand not only their lived experiences but also how they use their understanding of their multiple identities, such as bicultural, bilingual, biracial (Kei), and “bi-national”, for example, to understand their students’ identity developments better and to teach them and build relationships with them more effectively.

I positioned myself within the study as a research participant as well as a researcher. Conle (2000) explains how it is inevitable and almost natural for researchers to put their own narrative, ‘autobiography’ (Bruner, 1987), in their study even as they focus on studying that of another. In my case, I planned to place myself as a participant in the study from the very beginning. Using Connelly & Clandinin’s concept of ‘I’ in research (1990), Conle (2000) explains the multiple roles of a researcher in narrative study, “the ‘I’ of the narrator may frequently move from a researcher-I, to a teacher, woman, commentator, critic, or theory-builder” (p. 53). It was important for me to be aware of my dual role and not hesitate to show my role as a researcher as well as a participant who has multiple identities, just like the other participants. This study’s interviews lasted a year. Cultivating participants’ openness throughout the course of study helped all of us to share each of our experiences and make sense of these stories in terms of our identities, experiences and teaching. Such a relationship among the participants became the rich foundation of this narrative study.

Narrative inquiry is not just a form of qualitative research but also an epistemological philosophy for the researcher: what the researcher believes to be the ways of knowing,
and what is considered legitimate knowledge by a researcher. Narrative epistemologies were critical in this study as I wanted to seek to understand the richness, complexity, and multi-dimensionality of Asian descent teachers within the social, cultural and political contexts they inhabit. I was interested in listening, learning and “uncovering” information from lived experiences through authentic stories, which, I believe, are best suited to illustrating the depth of human experiences holistically. In other words, I was interested in learning how the study participants understand, interpret, and theorize the world through narrative and use their knowledge to construct new knowledge about their past, present and future (Bruner, 1987). Because of this, I chose narrative inquiry as my research methodology as well as my epistemological foundation as a researcher.

**Feminist Epistemologies**

I am especially inspired by feminist scholars’ *life history* approaches and narrative inquiry. Feminist inquiry pushes us to deconstruct historical “truths” from multiple perspectives and enables us to learn from listening to the stories of people who have been historically marginalized, oppressed or silenced.

*Women’s Ways of Knowing* by Belenky et al. (1986) was the first feminist research book I read during my Master’s program. This book inspired me tremendously. Before this book, I was not sure if I really wanted to do research, because I only knew about quantitative research in general. This book gave me hope and, although I did not know anything about qualitative research at the time, it allowed me to discover that it was possible to do research for/with/ the people whose voices I believed were important in order to know *the truth* in the world and offer legitimate knowledge to be shared with a community of women. *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986) has inspired not only me but
also many others, especially feminist scholars and researchers in the field of education. I used a feminist approach of narrative inquiry not just as a research methodology but as the transformative methodology with which the research participants and the researcher, who are under-represented in society, could articulate, conceptualize and theorize society, culture, teaching and the world using their own words, which are outside of dominant knowledge (Belenky and et al., 1986; Helle, 1991; Dillard, 2006).

Feminist scholars have started to treat women’s personal narratives as “essential primary documents for feminist research” (Personal Narrative Group, 1989 p. 4 cited by Chase). Feminist researchers have been using the narratives of women and individuals of other non-dominant groups in order to challenge and deconstruct historical, social and cultural knowledge, which has historically been constructed by Upper-Middle class Caucasian males (Belenky et al., 1986; The Personal Narrative Group, 1989; Chase, 2005).

Feminist approaches are not only useful for women, but also for any socially, culturally, economically, sexually, and historically marginalized groups of people. The Personal Narrative Group (1989) explains:

Personal narratives of nondominant social groups (women in general, racially or ethnically oppressed people, low-class people, lesbians) often offer particularly effective sources of counter-hegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particular rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of life that defies or contradicts the rules (p. 7).

Historically, marginalized groups have not been the subjects of research but rather their objects, as in, for instance, the anthropological research paradigm. This kind of research
was directed towards satisfying the interests of upper middle class dominant society, rather than being carried out for the marginalized groups of people it studied. However, feminist approaches to narrative study are able to not only give us access to authentic narratives as knowledge but they also do so with/by/for each marginalized group.

**Asian feminist epistemology.** As a female researcher of Asian descent in the United States, it was important for me to be aware of the historical, political and social position of people of Asian descent in the United States. For example, many scholars have identified how the stereotype of the model minority has defined Asian Americans as an ethnic group of people who have no real problems in American society. Such an image has silenced and apoliticized Asian American people. The “forever foreigner” stereotype also apoliticizes the Asian descent population. Therefore, many individuals of Asian descent in the field of education not only lack opportunities to engage in discussions with each other and to make sense of who they are, but they also don’t get to read about, or see role models about their people.


African American women’s “theory” has not been broadly utilized in mainstream educational research, even as it has been continually and constantly constructed and utilized within African American communities and contexts to give sense and meaning to one’s life (p. 5).

Therefore, I believe that the process of narrative inquiry gives us an interactive learning space in which to “theorize” our lived experience as Asian descent women and
teachers in the United States. My research participants and I had some fundamental similarities in our backgrounds, such as being women of Asian descent and having transnational experiences between the United States and Japan. Using narrative inquiry combined with feminist theory allowed the research participants and I to experience a number of moments of clarity and sudden understanding related to our common cultural and life experiences. Such kinds of collective “aha!” moments have been missing among groups of oppressed people whose voices have not yet been heard. Narrative inquiry combined with feminist theory has been providing such kinds of spaces in research, breaking the isolation of individuals and allowing for the theorizing of cultural, social, political and historical realities collectively.

Feminist theory applied to Asian descent experiences, voices and perspectives is still at an early stage of study, so there are not many such studies yet. Asian women have been seen stereotypically as passive and exotic, or as victims of a patriarchal ‘traditional’ Asian culture (Espiritu, 1997; Kawahara, 2007). In order to deconstruct or counteract the submissive and silenced Asian female stereotypes while empowering Asian descent women, some Asian feminist scholars have used strong and aggressive images as symbols to represent women of Asian descent. For example, Shah and her colleagues (1997) use the image of Dragon ladies in Chinese folklore as a symbol for Asian feminists. Eng (1999) uses the word “Warrior” for the same reason. Chin (2007), a Chinese American scholar in Psychology, also uses the famous historical female heroic figures, the Women Warriors, to deconstruct stereotypes about submissive Asian women while empowering real Asian women. Emerging Asian American feminist scholars recognize that one of the essential challenges facing the contemporary Asian American
woman is to break the stereotypes attached to women of Asian descent in order to allow others, and even themselves, to understand Asian descent women not from the perspective of Western assumptions and outdated understandings of Asian culture, but from legitimate multiple realities (Chin, 2007). Such kinds of efforts seek to empower women of Asian descent and allow them to develop their voices and agencies in varied social settings. Meanwhile, Chin (2007) claims the importance of being aware of and honoring culturally relevant styles of communication and uses this knowledge and these styles to encourage Asian women to speak up. She states:

A comparative strategy to urge Asian American women to be more like their Western sisters is neither culturally competent nor feminist. Assertiveness training, commonly used as a strategy for teaching women to speak up and establish their voices, may not be appropriate for Asian American women if it fails to take into consideration the cultural strength and differential ways of demonstrating assertiveness (p. 16).

Thus, it is important for me as a researcher to pay attention to and honor research participants’ and my own ‘natural’ or cultural ways of communicating in the process of conducting research in order to bring each of our voices out. Conducting narrative inquiry with awareness of Asian feminist epistemology was important for me in developing the tools and in creating a space in which to share, interpret and theorize stories together in order to produce legitimate knowledge in transformative ways. In addition, given the limited opportunities for women of Asian descent to be present in social spaces, it is important for me to explore what it means to live with an awareness of my own position as a woman of Asian descent.
Conclusion

A narrative approach with feminist commitments was especially well-suited for this inquiry. My research is about/with first and 1.5 generation Japanese descent female teachers, who are dedicated to teaching ESL students in the United States. Maki-san married a Caucasian-man, and Kei, her daughter, is bi-racial. They live in the complexity and richness of cross/bi racial, cultural, linguistic, and “national” contexts everyday. I decided to use narrative inquiry because it enabled me to conduct research while fully respecting the participants and their lived stories and allowed me to truly appreciate their willingness to share their stories with me. I also decided on this approach because it would allow me to interpret and represent their wisdom and knowledge without objectifying them and their stories; instead, I would be working with them. I feel that Dillard’s (2006) explanation describes best why I chose narrative inquiry as my research approach in a culturally diverse research setting:

It seems to me that the more stories we "uncover", from multiple cultural spaces that we live within and through, the more able we might be to foster a balance of the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development of ourselves and others in today's culturally diverse research settings (p. 82).

Research Methodology

A caring relation also requires dialogue. The material of dialogue is usually words, but touch, smiles, affectionate sounds and silences, and glances may also be part of it.


Participants and Setting
Two teacher participants were solicited for this study and I was the third subject in the study (I outline my role as both researcher and subject below). I worked with two teachers of Japanese descent: one is a Japanese woman, Maki-san, who moved to the United States when she was twenty and has been teaching in the United States for years, and the other is her daughter, Kei, who just finished her first year teaching as an ESL teacher. Because of the paucity of Asian descent teachers in the education program, I have chosen to examine the perspectives of teachers at various stages, from a new teacher to an experienced teacher, in order to understand the strength and complexity of the historical, cultural and intellectual norms of traditions of these Asian descent teachers and the ways in which Asian descent female teachers understand and create contexts of success within the teacher profession. Moreover, the uniqueness of their relationship as a mother and her daughter give this research deeper perspective. I also was a participant in this study. I am a female graduate student of Japanese descent enrolled in the doctoral program in a research-oriented program. The foci of my studies were multicultural education, literacy, and teacher education. I was Kei’s university supervisor during her teacher preparation program and got to know Izumi-san through that relationship. I intentionally chose to do this research with Japanese descent female teachers, with whom I could fully, or at least partly, share bi/cross-cultural, bi-national, transnational, gender, teaching, and language contexts.

I describe each of the participant’s lives and work in greater detail in Chapter 4. Here I introduce the basic demographics of where they lived and worked, and the children that they worked with at the time of the study. I also describe ‘hoshuko’ which is a Japanese Saturday School designed to ensure that Japanese descent children maintain
or acquire Japanese language, culture, and academic knowledge. Each of these teachers either attended or taught in a hoshuko at one time or another. Many of the stories they tell about their work with children are caught up in and influenced by this particular setting.

惠, Kei. Kei’s initial teaching license was in early childhood. However, she took a job on a temporary license as an ESL teacher and got her ESL endorsement while she was teaching. During the time of this study, Kei was an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. The school district where Kei teaches is located in a suburb of the state capital. Because of the school’s location close to the state capital, the school population has much diversity in terms of language, ethnicity, and economic status. According to the state’s Department of Education (2007-2008), 58 percent of students are white and the rest are 13 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 9 percent multiracial, and 8 percent Black. The diversity of this particular school’s population is much higher than the state average. 36 percent of students from the school come from economically disadvantaged households. Before teaching in this setting, Kei had also taught in an international preschool in Tokyo, Japan, for a year.

真樹さん, Maki-san. Maki-san’s first teaching degree was in elementary education and she received her degree in Japan. She has taught in many different settings, including after-school, college, Japanese Saturday school, and high-school ESL. Throughout the duration of this study she was teaching ESL in a high-school in a small town which is about a one hour drive from the state capital and the other large city in the state. According to the 2000 census, the population of another large city is around 22,000
and around 91 percent of population is white. Because some Japanese car companies and other companies are located in the area, there is a substantial Japanese population in the school district. Maki-san commutes there from her home, which is in a small town known for being very liberal and which houses a small, liberal-arts college.

ぐみ子, Gumiko (myself). I received my degree in elementary education from a prestigious university in Japan. My first teaching job was teaching children aged two to six. The school was a private school and a sister school of the well-known Dalton School in New York City. This school had a very progressive, child-centered curriculum. I also taught in other early childhood settings and at a Japanese Saturday School. I also tutored many Japanese children while I was a graduate student.

補習校, Hoshuko (Japanese Saturday School). Japanese Saturday Schools or Hoshukos played an important role in this study, since each of the participants of the study and many of our students have had some kind of contact with a hoshuko. Kei attended a hoshuko between first and ninth grade. Both Maki-san and I taught as 6th grade classroom teachers in different hoshukos. In addition, most of Maki-san, Kei’s and my own Japanese descent students attend hoshukos every Saturday. Due to the expected unfamiliarity of readers of this study with Japanese supplemental Saturday schools, I will explain the basic idea of the hoshuko and offer a little more detail about the particular hoshukos where the research participants worked.

Hoshuko is a supplemental school for Japanese children and children of Japanese descent outside of Japan. The first group of children served there is those whose parents may be working for a short time in the United States (between three to eight years) and
who will eventually go back to Japan. The second group is Japanese-American children
whose families wish them to acquire a sense of Japanese culture and a degree of fluency
in the language. Finally, there are a number of bi-racial children who have one parent
who is Japanese. Hoshukos are located all over the world, including the United States.
An alternative name for hoshuko is Japanese Saturday School. Since the school’s agenda
is not teaching Japanese language but to re-create Japanese society and community as a
teaching and learning environment, I chose to use the term hoshuko throughout this study.
According to the Ministry of Education and Science and Technology of Japan (2009),
there are 204 hoshukos, supplemental afternoon and/or weekend schools, in 56 different
countries in addition to 88 Japanese international full-time schools, in 54 countries.

Hoshukos are basically private schools. Their existence is only possible because of
parents’ support and volunteer work, especially since teachers are only hired to teach on
weekends. Funding comes from various sources, including donations from Japanese
industries in the area as well as tuition. Such a financial situation has an influence on the
politics, administration, and educational aims of hoshukos. However, the main
educational goal of hoshuko is to prepare students for their return to Japan when their
parents are relocated back to Japan. Many hoshukos are accredited by the Ministry of
Education and Science and Technology of Japan, and use Japanese national standards and
curricula. The Ministry of Education and Science and Technology of Japan provides
textbooks to all students in hoshukos for free. When a school reaches a certain
enrollment, the Japanese Ministry of Education and Science and Technology also sends a
principal and vice-principal to that hoshuko. Hoshukos are located in various countries
all over the world. They help to create transnational educational spaces for children of
Japanese descent in different countries. Hoshukos, no matter where they are located, are embedded in the cultural, social, linguistic, historical, economic and political realities, and agendas of the places in which they are located. Usually, students learn Japanese language arts, mathematics, and sometimes social studies.

There are two hoshukos close to the areas where Maki-san, Kei, and I live. One is located in the neighborhood of a suburb of the state capital. Since the company facilities of a well-known Japanese car company and related industries are located there, there are many Japanese families living in the area. This hoshuko is one of the ten largest in the world and has around five-hundred k-12th grade students. I taught in this hoshuko and some of Kei’s students from the elementary school where she teaches are students there. The other hoshuko is the one Kei attended and where Maki-san taught, which is located in the school district where Maki-san teaches on weekdays. This hoshuko has students from 1-12th grade and the student population averages around one hundred and fifty. This area also has Japanese companies and their facilities located nearby.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected from March 2007 to September 2008 and included multiple forms. Given that narrative was both an epistemological position and a methodological tool for this study, the primary method of collecting data and the primary form of data was in storied form. There were multiple ways in which I collected stories about the life experiences, learning experiences, and teaching experiences of each of the teachers.
**Individual and intergenerational interviews/conversations.** All oral interviews were recorded by a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed. Although initial intergenerational conversation topics were chosen based on the data analysis of individual interviews, in order to capture the nature of the intergenerational dialogue and communication, subsequent intergenerational conversations were not guided by the researcher but rather co-constructed by the three of us. For our first intergenerational conversation, I invited Maki-san and Kei to my home. They came to my apartment in the afternoon after attending an ESL conference in town. The time was around Maki-san’s birthday, so we celebrated by eating Japanese food. Smelling Japanese food cooking, Maki-san and Kei’s first words when they came into my apartment was 「日本人の人のうちの匂いがする！」 “It smells like a Japanese person’s house!” After the first ‘official’ conversation, Maki-san invited me to their family gatherings many times, including Thanksgiving and a post-Christmas celebration in their house and at a restaurant, where we had an intergenerational conversation.

Besides “formal” interviews, informal conversations face-to-face, by email and telephone were used as interview data. Informal conversations and telephone conversations were recorded in researcher’s field notes in written form with the research participants’ permission. Although initial data collection was finished by February 2008, our conversations and meetings continued after that date, and I used these occasions as member checks as well as opportunities for me to understand their stories better or gain a different perspective on them.
I particularly paid attention to three points during the course of our interviews and conversations in order to create a comfortable and welcoming space where each of the participants could talk about their life experiences, thoughts and emotions as well as take the time to interpret, reflect and theorize them. Firstly, I wanted to create a space in which participants would willingly open up. The Asian descent population has long been silenced in public discourse. Although multicultural discourse provides one the most inviting opportunities for talking about diverse identities, many people of Asian descent in the United States have not yet been able to do so. As Belenky et al. claim (1986), “Language is a tool for representing experience, and tools contribute to create endeavors only when used. Language—even literacy—alone does not lead automatically to reflect, abstract thought” (p. 25-26). Using Freire’s words, Marino (1997) also talks about the importance of allowing the oppressed people or the researched people having an active role in expressing themselves in order to transform “colonized images” to decolonized ones. A historical example of this is the association of the Asian population with the colonized image of Orientalism in the Western World. I thought this was key consideration for this study.

Maxine Greene (1995) emphasizes that imagination is key for transformation, openings, and possibilities in education and our society. I initially planned to use creative journals written by each participant as one of the tools to create such a space. However, I immediately perceived participants’ hesitation to write creative journals or journals, firstly, because it would require a significant time commitment for them to write journals on their own, and secondly, because they seemed skeptical about the idea of including creative expression in these journals. Although I told them that it was really
their choice to use any form of creative expression they preferred, including just writing, if that was what they were comfortable with, I decided not to continue the attempt. Instead, I decided to organize interactive activities such as cooking, eating and drinking tea together, which allowed us to co-create and enjoy cultural, personal and creative spaces.

Secondly, one of the initial dilemmas for me as a researcher while designing this research was the exclusive use of qualitative research methods, which have been mostly developed by Euro-/American academics. Thus, I was careful about conducting interviews in ways that were culturally sensitive to the participants’ communicative and relational preferences. Narrative inquiry provided a research space and methodology that allowed me to take up culturally relevant patterns of interviewing and sharing stories. For example, the concept and image of mutual dialogue has historically been one of the most significant communication and learning methods in Philosophy in the West-European world. People from Euro-American cultural backgrounds grow up in a context where people encourage talking with each other in great detail and where mutual dialogue and discussion are encouraged as part of the meaning making process. However, in Japan, for example, the Euro-American definition of mutual dialogue has not traditionally been cultivated as a way of learning and communicating. More specifically, in Japan, we have long tradition of valuing quiet time to reflect by ourselves through various practices, such as 書道, Shodo-calligraphy, 座禅, Zazen-Zen meditation, 生け花, Ikebana – Japanese flower arrangement, writing 俳句, haiku or, 詩吟, Shigin – writing Japanese poems, 茶道, Sado-tea ceremonies among others. Minami (2002)
discusses culturally specific language styles and argues that Japanese people construct conversations through the accumulation and exchange of much shorter sentences, including more frequent use of reactive or affirming gestures. Given this difference in oral narrative communication styles, I chose not to use a “common interview style” in which participants would be expected to answer the questions with great detail at once. Instead, I chose to use a culturally relevant conversational style during our interviews and conversations.

Finally, I used previous interviews to facilitate our subsequent interviews/conversations, especially in order to reflect back to important conversation themes so that we could listen to each other’s lived experiences and teaching experiences. As Belenky et al. claim (1986):

In order for reflection occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write --- sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other’s experiences (p. 26).

I used telephone (with Maki-san) and email (with Kei) communications for this purpose as well.

**Researcher journal.** A researcher journal, which included visual texts, was written daily throughout the process of this study and used for multiple purposes such as constructing theoretical or conceptual frameworks, taking observational notes, as well as recording pre and post interview reflections by the researcher.

**Document collection.** Various documents were collected from or shared by the research participants, including lesson plans, photographs, Maki-san’s life storybook, and Kei’s autobiography paper.
Insider and Outsider: My Role as a Researcher and a Learner

In this study, I used my subjectivity in multiple ways. In this section, I explain how I used my subjectivity as a researcher inside and outside of the research context.

**Outsider: Researcher as Storyteller.** Speaking about methodology, Schwantdt (2000) argues that defining the meaning of understanding is one of the most crucial issues in qualitative research, and that the issue should be examined both in relation to the methodology of the research and the relationship between the researcher and the participants. It is crucially important for qualitative researchers to have relationships with the participants not as subject and objects, as is typical in positivist research, but as respected and trusted co-researchers (Christians, 2000).

Therefore, developing a strong and trusting community with the participants and developing a good dialogue with them may appear to be simple goals, but they were extremely important to my methodology as a researcher. I learned from Ladson-Billings’ work, the Dreamkeeper (1994), how to determine my role as a researcher and a learner within this research. For example, Ladson-Billings considers “the authenticity and reality of the teachers’ experiences” (146) as the first priority and sees her role as that of retelling the teachers’ stories through a trusting relationship with them. In order to do this, it was crucial for Ladson-Billings to examine how to understand what is true from the research participants’ perspectives and realities. She explains, “my intention really was simply to have a good conversation with each (teacher and research participant)” (149), and this is the most important attitude and methodology for her positionality as a researcher. Ladson-Billings positions herself as a storyteller, as well as a researcher, in honoring each of the research participants’ real voices. Listening to one’s life story and
understand depth and wisdom of such stories are not easy task and comes with a lot of responsibilities. Therefore, I used Ladson-Billings’ sincere attitude as a researcher when I listened to my research participants’ stories and learned from the depth and wisdom of such stories in this study.

**Insider: The Importance of the Researcher’s Subjectivity.** How one perceives one’s own subjectivity as a researcher is one of the most crucial differences between positivist and post-positivist research. Under the positivist paradigm, the researcher’s subjectivity has been treated as a negative bias that the researcher needs to erase or minimize as much as possible because it is viewed as an obstacle to the validity of the research results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In qualitative paradigms, on the other hand, the researcher recognizes that subjectivity is always there from the beginning to the end of the research, and often even after the research is completed. Therefore, the qualitative researcher seeks to discover, “how subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and how subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to research” (Glesne, 1999, p. 103). Under this paradigm, therefore, the feelings and emotions of the researcher are no longer viewed as an obstacle for the qualitative researcher but they are instead at the heart of the research. This gives the researcher a strong motivation to conduct and engage in the research, and to shape new questions with the research participants. The researcher’s personal autobiography, experience, background, history, and multiple identities, in terms of class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture, influence her or his positionality; in qualitative research, this is not a bias but an important part of the researcher’s subjectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ladson-Billings’ research, for example, is driven
strongly by her subjectivity and her passion for the African American community. Her attitude of continuous self-critique and reflection on her own subjectivity, especially regarding her relationships with the participants, is one of the most unique and strong aspects of the methodology in her research.

Throughout this research, I included myself as one of participants as well. For example, in the very first session of our in-depth interview with Maki-san, we both discovered various similarities in terms of our relationships with each of our fathers. It was a very crucial moment for both of us to share our stories openly, especially since these stories included some painful memories. It was an emotional experience for both of us. At some moments, Maki-san was the one who was there to listen to my story with a caring attitude, instead of me. A reversal of our roles as participant and researcher occurred several times, and each time it happened made us closer. Sharing experiences in such an authentic way helped us to build trusting relationships and was important to the methodology of this narrative research as well as to my attitude as a researcher.

Data Analysis

My approach to data analysis was inductive and emergent, so that as a researcher I explored concepts and themes as they emerged rather than applying a particular interpretive framework from the onset. This approach involves a recursive exploration of the data to identify and further define categories and understandings (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Patton, 2002; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Using such an approach it is common for the researcher to be simultaneously analyzing data while also collecting data. Below I describe the process I used in exploring the data and creating codes and categories.
**Initial analysis in an ongoing process.** As a researcher who uses narrative methodology and epistemology, it was important for me to get to know my data well first (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Therefore, I listened to each recorded interview after the event, and after that I voice recorded and/or wrote down my first impressions and reflections in field notes, memos, or researcher’ journal entries. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) calls such daily reflections an “Impressionistic Record,” which she defines as follows:

“Impressionistic Record”—a ruminative, thoughtful piece that identifies emerging hypotheses, suggests interpretations, describes shifts in perspectives, points to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical) that need attention, and develops a plan of action for the next visit (p. 188).

These reflections helped me to shape the structure and system of data collection and initial data analysis as well as to leave room to reshape the direction of my data collection accordingly. For example, since my study focused on how these teachers’ varied life experiences relate to their identity and pedagogy as teachers, I wanted to hear their voices from different angles: as mothers or daughters, students, sisters, friends, and teachers. I especially wanted to see how each of these positionalities were woven into their relationships in each role; it was important for me to understand the data from multiple interpretive and analytical perspectives in order to be well-prepared for subsequent interviews.

Secondly, I transcribed interviews and intergenerational conversations. In my transcriptions, I made three different margins in order to record time counters, emerging codes, and analytical memos. In order to understand data from different angles, I both
read and listened to the interviews repeatedly while writing down initial and continuous interpretive and analytic notes on the margins of transcripts, memos, and researchers’ journal entries. I performed the same kind of analysis with the participants’ journals and other artifacts they shared.

One of challenges for the qualitative researcher is understanding data not on the basis of one’s own assumptions but from those of the participant. Especially because the topic of my research is related to something I have been highly committed to and passionate about as a researcher, I needed to be aware that my personal investment could be a possible weakness as well as a strength for the study, so I often focused on this particular point in my daily reflections and journal entries.

**Constructing analytical maps and creating categories.** In order to understand the data from multiple perspectives, and not be limited by my perceptions or assumptions, it was important to construct a creative yet “disciplined and systematic approach” in the process of data analysis (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). I continuously listened to and re-read interviews, used color pens to identify emergent themes and patterns using the right side of the transcribing paper and organized them into coherent categories. After that, I chose significant codes and sub-codes, and recorded data on index cards so that I could move these cards around to “identify patterns and connections within and between categories” (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003, p. 5). Additionally I created large charts to examine the relationships that existed among and within different categories or themes. Since I was looking for the complexities of the participants’ life experiences and teaching, many significant data were connected directly, indirectly or sometimes in a hidden way. Therefore, it was important for me to analyze what each data was telling me
through multiple processes. The index cards provided me with a way to look at the data flexibly, which allowed me to explore the multiple and complex relationships in and between participants. This process helped me to play with my data from multiple perspectives and to eventually construct an analytical/interpretive map. Early themes or categories included culturally responsive pedagogy, immigrant student education, gender issues, teachers’ identities and so on. Eventually, I sought connections between the emerging themes and further fleshed out important characteristics of each of them. For instance, within culturally responsive pedagogies I identified important characteristics which included the development of interpersonal relationships and unique patterns of cultural mediation.

I also used cultural metaphors and symbols in order to identify emergent themes. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) claims, “metaphors – spare like poetry – embrace and express a large arc of human experience” (p. 198). Using metaphors was one way in which I tried to ensure a culturally responsive and respectful analytic process. For instance, Japanese people use metaphors or indirect and abstract forms of communication frequently in daily conversation in Japan. For example, in the interview process, Maki-san, Kei, and I all used metaphors in order to describe, conceptualize, and theorize while talking. While I understand the demands and expectations of conducting research and analyzing data in the Euro-American tradition of academia in the United States, at the same time, it is my responsibility as a transnational researcher to be sensitive about participants’ as well as my own discourse and cultural background, especially when demonstrating significant findings in the research.
Writing about the data. It was a great honor and responsibility to write Maki-san and Kei’s stories as well as about all of their students as well as my own from each of our perspectives. It is also a much honored responsibility to write about their family members, friends, and personal lives. As bell hooks (1999) stated, I believe that “When we love we can let our heart speak”(xi). Maki-san and Kei shared their time and stories with me and interacted with me with openness, trust and love. It was a very natural desire for me as a friend as well as an important ethical decision for me as a researcher to write this research with love and respect for them as well as for future readers.

Therefore, as bell hooks wrote, I wanted to write my dissertation by letting my heart speak based on the love and trust that Maki-san and Kei shared with me and the love that Maki-san, Kei and I have towards our students, friends, and families.

Issues of Credibility, Validity, and Ethics

Internal validity and trustworthiness. Qualitative research does not attempt to address issues of validity, reliability or generalizability; instead, commitments to trustworthiness and credibility are attended to. The qualitative, narrative researcher is more interested in creating stories that convey particularity and that capture the individual within particular historical, political, gendered, and local contexts (Waterhouse, 2006). Still, internal validity and trustworthiness are important matters in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Glesne, 1999). For this study, I use triangulation, member checks, clarification of researcher subjectivity, and peer review/debriefing in order to conduct a trustworthy study.

Triangulation. Triangulation is one of the most important tools for the trustworthiness/validity of data in a qualitative study (Glesne, 1999). For this study,
multiple data collection methods, such as interviews, intergenerational conversations, document analysis, and researchers’ journals were used for triangulation.

**Member Checks.** Belenky et al. (1986) analyzed how silenced women felt “deaf and dumb” (p. 24) because of their disconnection from others. Such women often do not have the tools and language to respect themselves. Freire (1970) supports the idea that when we do not have a sense of “we-ness”, no power to name ourselves, and no right to ask questions (no inquiry), we are powerless and isolated from the past, the future, and others. He argues that since dialogue is the collective reflection and action of naming the world using the words of /by the dialoguers, it is key for the transformation and humanization of the oppressed. For this study, creating trustful and caring spaces in which to dialogue with the participants and understand them was my goal. Since all of us became very close with each other and the participants willingly shared many fascinating stories related to their lives, I was particularly cautious about which stories I could use as data and which I should not from an ethical and trustworthy point of view. For example, I did not include stories, which were too personal to share for either of them. In addition, in order to create trusting relationships within this study, I willingly talked about my own experiences/struggles/joys as a female teacher from Japan rather than just listening to their stories as a researcher. I also valued their opinions when I performed the data analysis. Therefore, all the data and my interpretations of the data were constantly being examined by the participants in the process of the study as well. For me, this research was conducted not by me alone but by the three of us as a community. At the same time, I was always aware that I am ultimately responsible for the conduct of this research so
that I needed to always be sensitive about participants’ feelings and emotions that may have been brought up by this study.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Ikiru (The Things that Give Life Meaning)

The things that give life meaning are
To have a family
To have friends and a best friend
To be able to feel
(To live is) Class 6-1(itself)
To love
To be able to achieve your goals
To know and understand the word trust
To try your best
To have a life
To be able to “move”
To think seriously
To do something you like
To have fun with your friends
To love
To see the morning sun rise and the evening sun set
These are the things that give life meaning for us, members of Class 6-1

[When I was a 6th grade teacher at a hoshuko, my students gave me a book containing their writings and the above collaborative poem, March, 2005.]
This study explored the life narratives of Japanese descent teachers and the ways in which these narratives informed their understanding of children’s needs and their teaching. The particular questions that guided the study were:

1. What narratives of life and experience do these three Japanese descent teachers perceive as influencing their lives as teachers?
2. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to interpret the needs of immigrant children and their families and, in particular, those of children of Japanese descent?
3. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to create supportive education for immigrant children and their families and, in particular, children of Japanese descent?

As in much qualitative work, these questions were used as an initial analytical lens through which to explore the data. These questions helped me to consistently focus on how the three teachers’ life experiences and their identity/pedagogical approaches were intertwined. In this chapter, I first explore the lives of the three teachers in the study, Maki-san, Kei and I, and how each one of us became a teacher within the section called Biographical Stories. I then address the ways in which we use our lives and experiences in interpreting our students’ needs and in our efforts to create supportive education in the three sections that follow. These sections demonstrate how each teacher develops interpersonal relationships in school in order to have a meaningful life and also show how each of us acts as a cross-cultural mediator for our students, their families and other teachers using our knowledge and experience as bicultural, bilingual and transnational
beings. Finally, I demonstrate how each of us creates spaces and ways to nurture our students’ inner growth without them having to repudiate parts of themselves in each culture and beyond. All interviews and analyses originated from the three initial questions but were also guided by the other significant questions and analytical lenses that emerged as the three of us gained a deeper understanding of each other’s experiences and as we were able to express ourselves in our own voices.

**Biographical Stories**

In this section, I introduce the research participants’ biographical stories for the purposes of this research. Our lives and work as teachers are tied to our stories as women of Japanese descent and bicultural, bilingual, biracial (Kei) and translational beings. Each of the participants’ motivations to become teachers are rooted in many memories as well as in our personal and family histories. These stories were woven through decades, from the post-war era in Japan to the new idea of the United States as a “dream land” or land for new adventures. I believe we are all cultural beings as well as personal/individual beings. Therefore, it is important for me to demonstrate both the cultural and personal aspects of these three women’s lives in this section.

I divided each participant’s biographical stories into three parts: *Childhood Background Stories, Stories about Emergent Agencies, and Stories as Teachers and Adults*. Therefore, the first two parts are more related to their lives before they became teachers, which I use to show how their lived experiences and emergent agencies influenced the kind of teachers they intend to become. In order to effectively demonstrate some important similarities between Maki-san’s and my own childhood stories in Japan, I begin with our biographical stories and continue with Kei’s afterwards.
I draw upon this biographical information throughout chapter four to explore the ways in which each of us build pedagogies from the content of our lives and experiences, and more particularly, the ways in which we use our own bi-cultural/racial and bilingual experiences to support our students’ identity work.

Maki-san’s, 真樹さん, Story and My Story

I begin this biography section by discussing each of our stories, focusing on both similarities and differences in order to help readers understand our experiences from own voices as well as the cultural, gender, educational, historical and political backgrounds of Japan. Then, I explore the development of each of our identity foundations in Japan and the US. After these two sections, I describe our experiences as transnational beings and teachers separately.

Living in Post World War II Japan

Both Maki-san and I were the first child in each of our families, were raised by parents who belonged to the post-World War II generation in Japan, and had similar educational backgrounds.

真樹さん, Maki-san, was born in 広島, Hiroshima, Japan in 1954, which was still in the midst of Japan’s recovery from World War II. Growing up as a young child in post-war Japan, this kind of social environment had an influence on people’s lives, including Maki-san and her family. Maki-san explained that it was a time when all Japanese people were working harder because of the economic situation. As a result, children needed to take care of themselves and had many more responsibilities in society. Therefore, like all other grown-ups in her community and everywhere in Japan, Maki-
San’s parents were extremely busy. They worked at a local electric store, which they owned, all the time. Maki-san said that she and her brother needed to survive/live on their own. She said that she would wake up by herself to go to elementary school, and usually went without eating breakfast. When her younger brother started to go to elementary school, Maki-san was in the third grade and started to cook something for the two of them for breakfast.

真樹さん, Maki-san also explained that her community and school were still not well organized after the war, so that children had more freedom but also more important responsibilities. Although it was a tough time in Japan, Maki-san also said that these freedoms and responsibilities helped children, including her, to learn more through everyday life in comparison to children today.

I was born in 1966 as the first of my parents’ children in Gumi-zawa, which my parents named me after. Gumi-Zawa is located at the bottom of the Fuji Mountain. I was born during a period of the rapid economical growth after World War II which has come to be known as the Japanese post-war economic miracle. Japanese infrastructure was mostly recovered in order to increase productivity. Many Japanese people worked long hours, like Maki-san’s parents’ generation, so that the Japanese economy grew dramatically. At the same time, Japan was starting to be called an economic animal by Western countries.

My father worked for the Self Defense Army, 自衛隊, so that our house was always located in military housing and we moved to different parts of Japan every one or two years. I will explain our lifestyle in greater detail later in this section.
Visible fathers and silenced mothers. In Maki-san’s memory, her father was very strict and a traditional patriarchal authority figure in her family. Men like her father were rather common in Japan back then, and my father was also like this. She described her father and his relationship with the family members as follows:

I thought that he was a very lucky guy. Other people always had to accommodate him. Everyone always did everything to accommodate him. It was like a dictatorship. In this way, ‘the system’ was well organized (around his desires and orders). (Interview 3/31/2007)

While I was listening to Maki-san’s childhood stories, many of the things she talked about were related to her father, but she did not talk much about her mother. In this respect, our family memories are similar. When I talked about my childhood, I mostly talked about my father and the influence he had on my family and my life. However, it was difficult for me to talk about my mother except as a victim of my father. My mother was always a stay-at-home mother. She came from the rural area of south Japan, where traditional social values persisted. She said when she got married her mother told her, “Treat your husband like a god.” Following her mother’s advice, my mother became an excellent wife from in the perspective of anyone in the community. She accepted and followed whatever her husband said without arguing even though he treated her badly. Maki-san expressed something similar about the relationship between her father and mother:

The way he treated my mother…he was a man in a particular time period in Japan.

So, he did not treat my mother well… (Interview, 5/28/2007)
Both Maki-san and I had very strong and very visible paternal influences. On the other hand, both of us had a difficult time talking about our mothers’ voices in any depth. These strong binary gender role models in our lives, which were accepted by social norms at that particular time in Japan, influenced both of our childhoods and our ways of seeking and defining our identities as adults in later years.

**Fathers’ wounds in their hearts and souls.** Both Maki-san’s and my story show that family and home were not necessarily safe and nurturing places for us when we were young. This situation was not only caused by the domestic environment but also by the historically and culturally confusing period that people were living in at the time. Both of our fathers felt that their dreams and hopes had been destroyed because of the harsh economic and social environment after World War II. As a result, both pressured us, their daughters, to fulfill these dreams.

Maki-san explained that although her father came from a wealthy and well-educated family, the war destroyed his (youth) life and dreams. When his family suffered an economic collapse, he had to give up his dream of becoming a medical doctor in a remote island where no other doctors wanted to go. Maki-san said that it made her father always feel about himself and his life: “This is a shadow of myself, not the real me!” (Interview March 31, 2007).

This statement by Maki-san’s father illustrates exactly what I thought my father felt, because my father ‘lost’ his parents, became extremely poor, and lost his dream. When my father was very young, he lived in 满州, Manshu, 中国, China, which had been occupied by Japan during World War II. After Japan lost World War II, the Japanese returned home. However, my father’s parents got divorced leaving him behind with his
grandmother from his mother’s side. My father used to tell us how poor he and his grandma, to whom he was ‘not really related’, were. He said that he remembered debt collectors coming to knock on their door so that he needed to be quiet and pretend he was not in the house.

Raised in such a harsh reality, he was proud to be always at the top of his class academically. Consequently, he was able to go to the best junior and high schools in the region and was among the top students there. The schools were run by the government and connected to nationally-owned universities in each prefecture in Japan. Since they were nationally-owned public schools, tuition itself was not expensive. However, traditionally, most of the students who go to this kind of school come from wealthy families. Most of my father’s friends talked about their dreams and bright futures as realistic possibilities for them. However, after high school, my father could not even afford to take entrance exams for any universities except for a military college, which provided students with the money to take a trip to the school to take the exams as well as a stipend during college. I heard him talk many times about how he felt he was much better than his friends and I felt his anger at the fact that he needed to give up his dream to become a lawyer while watching his friends go to prestigious universities and become successful doctors and lawyers. The stories of Maki-san’s father and my father illustrate the historical and social wounds of their generation.

**Living to fulfill parents’ lost dreams.** Both Maki-san’s father and my father attempted to pass their dreams on to their oldest children, who were Maki-san and I.

**My story.** As a young child, I felt that my father was a dictator in our family, and such a childhood was not easy for me. Because my father was forced to give up his
dream, he wanted to pass that dream unto his son. Unfortunately he did not have a son but had only three daughters. As the eldest daughter, I could say that I was raised almost as a son figure for him, someone to whom he could pass on his dream, following the Confucian traditional family norm in Japan. Becoming a lawyer always hung over me as the choice for my future decided by my father, and all other dreams were discouraged. For instance, I still remember when I shared my desire to be a teacher with my mother and father when I was a high school student. My father was extremely skeptical. He said I must be joking, that I could hardly take care of my own sisters and that I never was and never would be good at taking care of children. My father frowned as he said this to me and I felt that he was telling me that I was not a good daughter or family member. This episode made it clear to me that he was never going to proud of me if I became a teacher. My mother said nothing and sat next to my father also frowning; her silence just reaffirmed to me that she supported what he was saying.

Having been raised, to all practical effects, as a son, I was always expected to study since I was a little girl. However, even though I did well in school, my father never truly praised me for my achievements. On the contrary, I was always afraid of being yelled at by him. I was not good at reading the family rule: just do whatever your father says. Therefore, my attitude and resistance always enraged my father. Of course, even though I was being raised as a son, I was really a daughter. Being raised as a son and a daughter in a country with fairly rigid gender roles and expectations was confusing. It was difficult for me to understand my role in the family.

真樹さん, Maki-san’s story. Just like my father, Maki-san’s father always expected her to be one of the best students in her school. Maki-san said that her father passed his
dream onto her instead of her younger brother because her academic performance in school was better than her brother’s. She explained:

My father always said “if you were a boy.” Always. Women were still discriminated against as lower status citizens in Japan (March 31, 2007).

Maki-san’s father had a poster in their kitchen on which he wrote a list of jobs that Maki-san and her younger brother could have in the future. He put the list there so that his children could see it every day. Trying to recall the jobs that were on the paper, Maki-san said:

On the paper, he wrote jobs such as doctor, teacher, and probably civil servant. He told us every day that we needed to become one of them!!

She continued:

If I think about each job now, all the jobs had something to do with helping other people. My father used to tell me, “if you become a doctor, become a doctor in a remote island for the people there” (Interview March 31, 2007).

All three jobs were very respectable jobs in Japanese society, especially back then, supported by the spirit of 處私奉公, which literally means to sacrifice your own desire for the benefit of society or other people (Interview, June 28, 2007). This social message was even stronger during the war, but it still remained strong as a morally aesthetic way of living in Japanese society. Maki-san’s father’s dream was to perform one of these jobs so that he would be able to work for other people and society.

At first, Maki-san intended to become a medical doctor, but she eventually changed her major to education. Although Maki-san’s career choice was influenced by her
father’s intentions, it was also influenced by her adolescent life. I will elaborate on this point further later on in this section.

Hidden mothers’ voices: growing up between binary gender expectations.

真樹さん, Maki-san’s story. As the oldest child with very busy parents, Maki-san took care of her younger brother, acting like a mother and a teacher until her aunt started to be their “mother” figure and take care of them when she was in fourth grade. She did not talk about her mother much in the beginning of the interviews. It seems that her mother had “failed” as a caregiver from her perspective. When Maki-san started fourth grade, her mother’s older sister started to come to their house to take care of Maki-san and her brother. Although she had her own family and children, she came to Maki-san’s place every day until Maki-san left for the United States. Maki-san said that her aunt felt more like a real mother to her than her actual mother. She said,

I think that my mother got really sick after working so hard every day. She needed to work in a shop with my father every day and even after they finished working at the store, she still needed to serve my father…I think that she lost her hearing in one of her ears because she worked too hard (Interview June 28, 2007).

Growing up in this kind of environment, childhood and youth were not easy periods for Maki-san. Surrounded by binary gender roles, such as her father’s definite authority over her and her mother’s lack of voice, Maki-san developed her own independence and sense of the kind of adult she wanted to become. Growing up seeing her parents’ example, she said she had determined the following:

I had learned and decided that I was not going to marry a man like my father (Interview 3/31/07).
This decision was not the result of seeing herself as a victim in the family. Rather, she stated several times that the situation she grew in actually helped her become stronger.

He was living in a world where, “If I say no, it is NO!” I just accepted this as the way it was. But, if I think about the fact that I developed the strength to resist his authority, it makes sense that I became stronger. (Interview, March 31, 2007)

This toughness influenced her as a teacher later, too.

*My story.* Since I was a child, I was always conscious of the unfairness of my parents’ gender roles. However, it took years for me to fully articulate this awareness, and it took even longer for me to become conscious of my embedded gender standards, which had been controlling my behavior and instigating feelings of guilt whenever I went outside that standard. In part, this was true of many Japanese women, though it was compounded for me because I grew up observing the extreme power differences between my mother and father.

For me, my mother was always an *innocent victim* and weak while my father was the one who was able to enforce his will. I remember seeing her crying in our small kitchen, which was probably the only space in the house she could consider her own, when my father was angry. It made me sad to see her crying and I became angry at my father. Looking back, however, I was probably angry at my mother, too. I could not understand why she would never defend herself or talk back to my father. When I was in sixth grade, I said to my mother, “I don’t want to be like you, mom.” I do not remember if I said this next part or not but I meant that I wanted to have a career and did not want to just work for a husband and children like she did. I still remember my mother’s sad face.
when I said that to her and I still remember the pain I felt and how I wished I could take back what I had said to her. The kind of injustice that I witnessed in my family gave me the motivation to tell myself that I needed to be stronger and helped me to develop the perspective to see injustice in other parts of society, too.

**Searching for 居場所, Ibasho, a Space to Belong**

Since both Maki-san’s and my family environments were not necessarily nurturing places, each of us sought for an alternative 居場所, Ibasho, a space in which or people with whom we felt love and caring, or something we could engage in to find meaning in our lives. Throughout my dissertation, I use the term 居場所, Ibasho, to represent such kinds of places/people, which Maki-san, Kei and I all consider a very important in our pedagogies.

In this second biography section for Maki-san and myself, I demonstrate how and where Maki-san and I sought for such kinds of places and people. In addition, I also show the kinds experiences of border crossing between gender roles, cultures, languages, and communities we had in the process of seeking 居場所, Ibasho.

真樹さん, Maki-san’s story. Recalling her childhood, Maki-san referred to two different Ibashos where she found people who gave her love and caring. These loving spaces and people helped her to construct こけない土台 (kokenai-dodai), her core, which instilled in her the belief that she would not fail or feel lost in her life. She also refers to this concept later in relation to what she believes is important in teaching (Interview, July 5, 2007).
Nurturing spaces. One of the most important persons in Maki-san’s life is her mother’s older sister, who Maki-san said felt more like “a real mother” than her actual mother. After her mother got sick once, her aunt started going to their house every day to do all the housework for them, including cooking. Maki-san’s parents usually did not have time to spend at home due to their demanding business. Maki-san said that the dishes her aunt cooked were the best and had a ‘mother’s’ taste for her. As soon as she came back from school, her aunt was there each day to ask her, 「今日学校どうだった？」, “How was your day today at school?” (Interview, July 5, 2007). Her aunt would listen to whatever Maki-san wanted to talk about regarding her day at school. Maki-san explained that these experiences with her aunt helped her to grow the roots of her self.

The other important people for Maki-san were her neighbors. Her family lived in トレ点街, a local market where many local small shops like bookstores, butchers, fish markets, fruit and vegetable shops, and electric shops were gathered next to each other. This kind of area is very common in Japanese towns. Maki-san said that everyone there knew her and talked to her and were friendly to her, calling her “Maki-chan, Maki-chan”. She said that the people in the community loved her and took care of her. Maki-san claimed that the power of community in Japan was so strong that even if your parents were not ‘good’, the people in the community could take care of a child, just like in her case (Interview, March 31, 2007).

Crossing cultural borders to find 居場所, Ibasho. Maki-san also sought 居場所, Ibasho, a community where she could belong. She started to go to a Christian church close to her house when she was still an elementary school student.
I liked the moral education class best among all the subjects in school. When I went to the church, they had a sermon every time. I liked hearing it very much. I also liked the cards they gave me every Sunday, just like some churches do here. Each card had a phrase from the Bible. I wanted to get a card very badly. So, I rode my bicycle even on rainy days or snowy days to go there every week.

(Interview March 31, 2007)

Maki-san’s family was Buddhist. Therefore, the fact that Maki-san had started to go to a Christian church created another serious conflict between her and her father. However, Maki-san was determined and she kept on going to church even after her friends stopped going with her. The Christian church had many meanings for her. Firstly it provided a space for her to stay and heal. Secondly, going to church gave her many opportunities for rich cross-cultural and cross-language experiences. For instance, she started to learn English through bible studies. Third, she eventually started to teach a Sunday school class and also started to translate Japanese to English and English to Japanese to help the people in the church community from the United States. This responsibility became an important motivation and a chance for her to learn English in a real interactive context.

This was when I started to learn English seriously. In the church, some Japanese people had married Americans. And some people who worked for the church came from the United States, too [ . . . ] I had read the Bible in Japanese a few times. But I thought it would be different in meaning in Japanese and in English so, I decided to read it in English. And the Bible study I had attended in the church was held in English, too (Interview July 5, 2007).
Maki-san’s aunt and neighbors created a nurturing space where Maki-san felt accepted, loved and cared for. But the church community she belonged to had additional meaning for Maki-san. The church community was a place where she participated as an important member who could contribute to the community. In other words, the church community was not only a nurturing space for her, but also a space where she was able to practice her agency with appropriate support, which I discuss further in the next section about Maki-san.

My story. In contrast to Maki-san’s life, which was rooted in the local community, my family situation was always much more isolated. Because of my father’s job as a lieutenant in the Self-Defense Army, we moved every two years or more often, mainly between somewhere in central Japan, and somewhere in northern Japan, where many army bases were located during the Cold War. By the time I turned eighteen, we had lived in thirteen different regions and sixteen different houses. Each region we lived in had different cultures, dialects, communication styles, school politics, and local rules. Japan may be a small country for people in the United States, but there is a lot of diversity and many different cultures in Japan. Because of this constant moving, it is always difficult for me to answer the question, “Where are you from?” Although Japan is a much smaller country than the United States, it is a big, complex and diverse country in many ways. We rarely got to see relatives on my mother’s side and my grandparents because they lived in the southern part of Japan, which was too far and too expensive for us to visit often.
In addition, because of the politically controversial position of the 自衛隊, Self-Defense Army, in Japan, people associated with Self-Defense were somewhat isolated from the rest of the community. The existence of the Self-Defense Army was very controversial after World War II because the Japanese Constitution states that we will not have an army. However, when the Korean War started 自衛隊, the Self-Defense Army was created in order to support the United States army. In school, especially in social studies, I often felt some sort of guilt because my father was working for the Self-Defense Army. Its existence was always a topic of controversy in schools and the community. It made me feel isolated from the rest of the community and conscious about politics even when I was small.

*Always an outsider.* Growing up in such conditions, I was always an outsider in each school. I was often teased and sometimes bullied by classmates since I was small. Thinking back, it was probably because I was an outsider in the community and attended a new school around every two years. This background always made me feel closer to other students who were also seen as outsiders in the classroom. These experiences also influenced me to want to work closely with students who felt like outsiders in a community later in my life.

When I became a teenager, it became even more difficult to be accepted in new school communities. When I moved to a new place, I felt that I had little choice in how others would perceive me. I felt that many things in each new school would be decided on the first day on the basis of small things, such as what my new classmates thought about the way I talked, dressed and moved or where I was told to sit in the classroom.
On the first day at each new school, I had to stand in front of everyone to introduce myself. Usually, the teacher wrote my name on the blackboard first, Monobe Gumiko. Because my first name and last name are both extremely rare in many places in Japan, it was common for students to make jokes about my name while the teacher was writing it down on the blackboard. Then, I would be asked to introduce myself. I was usually very nervous each time, so I do not remember well the kind of things I said. However, I always felt that the other classmates were more interested in how different I was from them than in what I was saying. I felt this way, for example, when I moved from a city in the Tokyo region to a very small, cold, rural village in the economically depressed area of Hokaido. Most families in the area were linked to either farming or the Self-Defense Army. The place was close to Siberia, in the former Soviet Union. The culture and dialects there were very different from the ones in the city near Tokyo that I was coming from. My mother chose dresses for my sister and I to wear on the first day of class. I think that she thought it was important for us to wear more formal clothes on the first day of class. However, all students there wore sportswear as a semi-uniform every day, so it was a big mistake.

One of the huge impacts that this kind of childhood had on me, is that I started to feel lost about my identity. I had to develop my own strategies to survive in new school contexts and to act without disturbing the new cultural context. I started to develop a feeling that I was always wearing a mask to ‘fit in’ in each new cultural context. At the same time, I felt important parts of me were disappearing and dying inside of me. I wrote about this experience when I was fourteen and the piece I wrote got an award and was printed in a local newspaper. However, that only seemed to make it even more painful.
The space that is always in the center of my heart. Although my childhood was not necessarily easy, I had some very important moments and encounters in the period between kindergarten and sixth grade. Kindergarten and elementary school were secure places for me and encounters with some teachers became very important for me, since they made me feel important and cared for. There was one particular space that was very important in my life and that occurred thanks to an encounter with a teacher and the students in her class. In the middle of 6th grade, I moved to Yokosuka, Japan, from Bekkai-cho. The school was located in a small sea-side village, but the school had a very unique mixture of students. There was a fishing village, housing for Self-Defense Army College faculty and staff, and a big US Navy and their residency area were close by, too. The people in the area came from a wide variety of economical, educational and social backgrounds, including some single-parent families. The school was very small so that each grade had only one class. Due to the environment, the school had always had new students come and other students leave. The teachers and students there were used to being in such an environment. The cultural environment there made me feel like I was an insider of the community as soon as I started to attend the school. And although I attended the school for only half a year, the space helped to create an important foundation for me.

The teacher, Ms. Endo, was probably around twenty-two. The astonishing thing about her was that she really treated all of us equally and we all knew it. Ms. Endo was not a ‘sweet’ type of teacher. She was very tough, treated students seriously and had high expectations for them academically, morally and socially. All students exchanged journals with her regularly. The journal was not for the purpose of improving writing.
Instead, it was a tool for each student and Ms. Endo to get to know each other and talk and share their thoughts about life.

Ms. Endo not only treated me the same way she treated other students, but she also made many efforts to give me, and other two students who had also moved around the same time as me, opportunities to become members of the class. For example, all three of us moved to the area during summer, which was in the middle of the school year in Japan. In order to help us become members of the school community as soon as possible, Ms. Endo started to invite us to join school activities during the summer break. Another example was the year-book. I had not expected to see any pictures of myself in it, but when I opened it I found that there were many pictures of me. Endo-sensei asked the photographer to take more pictures of new students, including me, so that we would have memories with other students. When I was still in Japan, I attended many class reunions and Ms. Endo even attended my wedding. This encounter with Ms. Endo was the beginning of my thinking about becoming a teacher in the future.

**Education as something that protects us.** As I demonstrated previously, both Maki-san’s father and my father passed their dreams on to their oldest children, who were Maki-san and I. Part of the result of this, is that both of us went to rather prestigious public high schools and colleges after studying very seriously for years throughout adolescence. The regions each of us lived in were rural areas so that if we wanted to go to good colleges in the future, we needed to go to high schools outside of where each of us lived. Both Maki-san and I spent a total of three hours commuting every day in order to attend high schools in big cities. Maki-san said in a joking tone, “I was an elite in my town,” and she added that she later realized that it was not a special thing for many
students in the big city to go to high school. My situation was very similar to Maki-san’s. This high school experience was a socio-economic as well as socio-cultural border crossing experience for both of us. Maki-san said:

I now realize that being academically successful had been protecting me. It was like… I had something that protected me (Interview March 31, 2007).

I felt the same way about ‘academic success.’ For example, I felt that I had gained freedom from my father thanks to entering the high school I attended. Having a higher education allowed both Maki-san and I to have more choices in our lives. Education during our adolescence helped us to build potential stronger voices and a sense of agency in our cores and helped us to cross the borders of countries, languages, and gender role expectations later. This experience helped both of us to be aware of the importance of talking about life, education and career choices to our students and using ourselves as examples (Interview, 10/27/2007).

Maki-san’s Story of Becoming a Transnational Being

As I demonstrated in the previous section, Maki-san’s cross-cultural and linguistic experiences started when she was a junior high school student. Maki-san’s attendance at the church community and Bible study were motivated by her desire to find 居場所, Ibasho, a space where she could belong and experience full-membership and やりがい, yarigai, opportunities to practice her agency in the community. Meanwhile, the space provided some great support for her to grow to have more responsibilities in the community. Firstly, the priest and other members of church there consistently showed a caring attitude towards her. Secondly, they were not only caring but also gave Maki-san
concrete short-term and long-term goals with high expectations and opportunities to practice what she learned and what she wanted to try. The more Maki-san learned English there, the more they trusted in her ability to use English. Eventually, she took the role of translator between English and Japanese in the community. This was a very important role in the community, and it gave Maki-san joy to participate in the community in such a meaningful way. Thirdly, the people in the church community respected her and trusted her very much. For instance, the church offered her to attend a high school in the United States with full payment of tuition when she was ready to start high school. At the time, Maki-san declined their offer, but she stated that that was the moment that laid the foundation for her desire to go to the United States in the future (Interview: 6/28/2009).

**Becoming a newcomer in the United States.** When Maki-san decided to leave Japan, it was very rare for a young Japanese woman to move to the United States alone. Because of that, Maki-san explained that it was very difficult to get a Visa from the U.S. Embassy. There were multiple factors that encouraged Maki-san to go through the process of moving to the US, such as falling in love with her future husband, Jim, and continuous support from her church. In addition, feeling imprisoned in Japan, especially due to the conflict with her father, made Maki-san even more determined to move to a different country and start a new life (Interview, March 31, 2007).

When Maki-san was nineteen, she met her future husband, Jim. He was staying in a U.S. military base in Japan. Both Maki-san and Jim were working as a team to do community service in Hiroshima through her church. At the time, she was a college student in the Education department, but they agreed that it was the most important thing
that they get married instead of being separated when he returned to the United States. Maki-san’s church offered her a job as a translator in Hawaii. She decided to leave Japan when she was twenty in order to eventually marry Jim (Interview: 6/28/2007).

Her experience living in the United States gave Maki-san opportunities not only to learn about a new culture and way of living but also to learn how to live an adult life. When Maki-san moved to the United States, everything was new to her. She learned to drive a car instead of riding a bicycle, how to use American bathrooms, which are very different from Japanese ones, and while she was in Hawaii, how to live with a roommate. After she got married, she also needed to do housework, which Maki-san said that she did not know anything about (3/31/2007). Maki-san learned how to do things like cooking and folding laundry from her husband, her mother-in-law, and sometimes herself. Maki-san said that it was not difficult for her to do things differently from the way they are done in Japan. She explained that her father rejected many traditional things in Japan when she was young. This was because, after World War II, her father felt that he could not trust Japanese traditions. As a result, her family did not practice many traditional cultural customs. Looking back, Maki-san thinks that the attitude she inherited from her father as a child helped her to adapt easily into the new cultural context (6/28/2007).

Maki-san learned different social values and ways of communicating in the US. (People in the U.S.) express what they think or feel orally. (This is very different from how people communicate in Japan). One day, I was cooking with my mother-in-law. She was very quiet that day. She did not say anything except about cooking so I started to wonder what had happened to her. If these things happen between Japanese people, the person in my situation would start to, 勧ぐ
あるいは，begin to wonder if I had done something wrong to her. But my mother-in-law was not quiet for any such reason. She simply told me, “I’m sorry but I am not in the mood to talk today (because of such and such). She told me that not because she had started to realize that I might have been wondering if I had said something wrong, but simply because it was true. I was astonished to see such a huge difference between the ways of communicating in the United States and Japan. (12/20/2007)

Maki-san’s example explains how Japanese people communicate with each other in daily life. In addition, if you are talking with someone who is older than you or someone who is of a “higher social status” than you in that context, you are supposed to be the one who makes the effort to talk and behave according to what the other person might really want to do or say. Thus, in Maki-san’s situation, she was supposed to be the person to figure out the hidden message which her mother-in-law might have really wanted to tell Maki-san. Maki-san was astonished because her mother-in-law was so honest in sharing her situation and feelings with her on that day.

When you are surrounded by people like my mother-in-law, I mean, people who have no hesitation to share and express what they feel, you can become honest and gentle, too (Interview, 10/20/2007).

At the same time, Maki-san is very careful not to understand this only as a cultural difference. She acknowledges that such kinds of exchanges of honest feelings were especially lacking in her family when she was a child. The particular event between Maki-san and her mother-in-law surprised Maki-san not only due to cultural differences
but also because of her family background. Maki-san said that it was not until she moved to United States and started looking at life and culture in Japan from the outside that she started to learn how her understanding of “Japanese culture” was heavily limited and shaped by her experience in her family.

Maki-san stated:

I started to meet more people both in Japan and in the U.S. and I learned that there are families and siblings who have good relationships with each other, even if they come from a Japanese background. So I realized that I used to believe that there were not many families who had good relationships in Japan, but it was only because my perspective was still too narrow. People have a tendency to (simply) say ‘the U.S. is...’ or ‘Japan is...’ but I learned that I should not just trust comments and opinions like that (Interview, 10/20/2007)

Making a decision as a parent: living biculturally and bilingually. Besides the dream that Maki-san’s father instilled in her since she was little, she also had her own dream of having a loving family and becoming a great mother and wife (Interview, 6/28/2007). Maki-san said that she needed to have a loving family for her own healing as well. She is now really happy and feels successful having such a great family (Interview, 3/31/2007)

The lifestyles of biracial and/or international couples can be very different depending on, for example, their familiarity with and tolerance of each other’s culture and language. Choices like, which language to speak and which culture, society, or country to live in, which take place for them on a daily basis, make their family life very different. Maki-san and her husband, Jim, chose to live sharing both cultural and language backgrounds
in their lives. Her husband, Jim, can use Japanese very well including reading and writing, and he appreciates Japanese culture. The fact that his father lived in the United States base in Japan during the Korean War also made Jim more familiar with Japanese culture, compared to other American people. Both Maki-san and Jim have been committed to and have enjoyed living a transnational life. Maki-San talks about the way in which her family – her husband and her daughters – grounded her life both as a Japanese person and as an American. She calls Jim her soul mate:

It is all thanks to Jim that our daughters have kept their Japanese cultural heritage.

He likes Japanese culture very much (Field note, 3/31/2007)

Living in both the United States and Japan as a bi-cultural and bilingual being became the most natural cultural context for Maki-san. However, the terms bi-cultural and bilingual actually oversimplify her own and her family’s everyday natural cultural context. Instead, it is more like simultaneously living in both cultures, or a mixture of them, or somewhere in-between, depending on the situation. For example, when Maki-san, her husband, and their daughters speak, they use Japanese, English and/or a mixture of both languages. Dinner table conversation in the family represents how two or more cultures, cultural knowledges and languages are present as natural environments in their daily lives. For instance, at the Thanksgiving dinner to which I was invited during my data collection, the people present were Maki-san, Jim, Kei and her boyfriend, now husband (who is Caucasian), Maki-san’s other daughter and her boyfriend (who is of African French background) and me. Only Maki-san, Kei, her sister and I were of Japanese descent at that table, but all other people there could speak Japanese very fluently and had experience living in Japan. During the dinner, we used both Japanese and English
simultaneously and topics of conversation were cross-cultural and across nations. For example, we discussed how the meaning and way of eating together were different in the U.S. and Japanese cultural contexts. We all started to speak of our own experiences on the topic, comparing both cultural contexts. Maki-san and Kei told me that this was representative of their typical family dinner table conversations (Researcher’s journal, 11/23/2007).

Although by now Maki-san has lived much longer in the United States than in Japan, she calls herself not American or Japanese American but Japanese. She said that she considers that it is her childhood experiences that determine who she is in terms of her ethnicity and nationality. Therefore, she still does not choose to apply for American citizenship. Getting citizenship in the United States would mean having to give up her legal nationality and passport as a Japanese national; it has been her choice not to do so yet (Interview, 3/31/07).

**Maki-san’s Story: Becoming a Teacher as a Cross-Cultural Being**

When she was twenty, Maki-san left her university in order to go to Hawaii as a translator for her church and eventually marry her husband in the United States. When Maki-san left Japan, her father declared that she was not his daughter anymore. He said to her, “Hawaii? Are you crazy? Over my dead body! If you go, I will disown you!” (e.g. Interview, March 31, 2007; ‘Changes for Maki’ the story written by one of her daughters, May 1999). Maki-san has told her daughters the story about how she met her husband, went to Hawaii, and had a family, many times. One of Maki-san’s daughters wrote a picture book about this part of Maki-san’s life, which tells exactly the same story that I heard from Kei. In this story, Maki-san was a not a sad victim but
rather a strong hero who truly enjoyed her new adventures in Hawaii. Reflecting on her experience of moving from Japan to the U.S., Maki-san wrote in her journal: “It was like changing from a Japanese car to an American car” (Maki-san’s journal, 11/17/2007). Maki-san said that she started to heal herself from her childhood and to make a joyful effort to make her own family with her husband and daughters with a lot of love and laughter, which she feels she could not have done when she was in Japan.

Maki-san’s family went back to Japan for a few years when Kei was three years old because they wanted their daughter to experience living in Japan. While Maki-san was happy with her decision to leave college and marry young, she said that she also developed a sense of guilt, feeling like a loser for quitting university after studying so much and not having a professional job. Maki-san said that she also needed to face the fact that that would be how her father and society would always see her as an adult (Interview, 6/28/2007). Maki-san decided to go back to the university that she had left and finished her degree in the education department.

Teaching one’s own daughter as a mother and a teacher. Maki-san knew that she wanted to preserve her children’s Japanese language and cultural identity from the day she became a mother. Her daughters became a significant reason why she felt that she needed to become a teacher. When Kei, Maki-san and I were talking about playing school as children, I asked Maki-san why she played school with Kei so diligently. Maki-san said:

When Kei was as small as two, Kei and I always played school. I thought it would be the best way to teach Kei Japanese. I put a lot of stuffed animals around her
Maki-san also showed me a big bookshelf, which was full of wonderful Japanese picture books. She said that whenever she went back to Japan, she bought these books and put them in her suitcase to bring them back to the U.S. to teach her daughters Japanese and Japanese culture.

**Becoming a teacher in school.** Since Maki-san taught in a Sunday school as an adolescent, she was always a teacher. For instance, when Maki-san returned to Japan with Kei and her husband, she taught some local children, inviting them to her house to do their schoolwork while she was raising Kei and attending the university. Maki-san also has experience teaching Japanese for three years in a college in the United States. Among these teaching experiences, her teaching at a hoshuko and a local school were most significant in terms of duration and meaning (Interview, 3/31/2007).

**Teaching in 補習校, hoshuko.** After Maki-san and her husband, Jim, decided to return to the United States for their daughters’ education, Kei started to attend both a local school and a Saturday Japanese school, or hoshuko. Kei attended the school from first to ninth grade, and Maki-san taught there during that time. Maki-san said that she wanted to give Kei and her sister motivation to go to the school, so she decided to teach there. The hoshuko was an important place for Maki-san to have her first experience as a classroom teacher. Like most new teachers, Maki-san experienced both much joy and many challenges, all of which helped her grow as a teacher (Interview, 6/28/2007).
Maki-san said that she especially focused on teaching her students the things they might be missing out on learning as children of Japanese descent in the United States. For example, Maki-san taught her students Japanese songs and old poems. Since hoshuko was held only once a week, Maki-san said that she wanted to make sure that she gave her students important cultural knowledge so that this knowledge could become a part of them. As a student of Maki-san’s, Kei remembers songs and poems she learned in the class (Intergenerational conversation, 11/17/2007).

Teaching in a hoshuko had another special meaning for Maki-san. Although she eventually graduated, Maki-san said that she still felt pressure from her father. Maki-san graduated from an acclaimed national university, so her father used to say to her, “You used other people’s money and taxes, which came as the result of their hard work, to get your degree. You need to return the favor!” Maki-san could now say to herself, “Now I could return favors, finally” (Interview, 6/28/2007).

**Teaching in a local high school.** Thinking back to when she started teaching, Maki-san said how hard it was for her to appropriately support her students because she could not understand the cultural contexts and rules of American schooling.

I was very passionate about supporting my students when I started to teach. But I learned that passion was not good enough to help my students effectively. I did not know anything about schooling in the U.S. and how to study there…So I didn’t know what was most important (supporting effectively supporting and teaching students) in the US school context. It was like I was trying to help someone lost in the darkness, but I could not see anything either, so I would get lost, too, and I could not help the person find the right road (Interview, 6/28/2007).
Maki-san has been teaching at this high school for over sixteen years now as a full-time teacher. It was her first full-time job. After talking with her husband, Jim, they decided that Maki-san would work full-time while Jim stayed at home with the children for three years, since their children were still small. Maki-san said that having a full-time job as a teacher had a huge impact on her life and how she felt about herself. She used the phrase, “I became free” after she got a full-time job. She put it as follows:

Through teaching, I started to learn who I am. And learning who I am is equivalent to ‘becoming free’ for me. Why did I become free by becoming a teacher…? I think it was because I was able to have experiences outside of the house. Becoming a teacher came with having responsibility and doing something important for others. Those experiences helped me grow. And I learned that teaching is my thing (Interview, 7/5/2007).

All of these experiences helped shape Maki-san’s pedagogy, and she always shares her life stories with her students (e.g. Interview, 7/5/2007). When Maki-san talks about teaching, she says “Teaching does not feel like a job or a burden to me, I look forward to it like I would look forward to my favorite hobby or pastime” (Interview, 7/5/2007). Therefore, for Maki-san, teaching is a really important part of her life as well as of her identity.

**My Story: Becoming a Teacher**

As I mentioned in the previous section, my encounter with Ms. Endo contributed to my desire to become a teacher. In addition, there were a few of other teachers who influenced me and made me think about education as a possible career.
**School education after elementary education.** All of the schools I have attended throughout my life, from kindergarten through college, have been public. I met some great teachers throughout my elementary education. However, during middle school, high school and college, I felt that I was not learning as much in school. Back then, in Japan, education after elementary education was heavily focused on entrance exams for admission to high schools and colleges. This system made it easy for children, their families, and teachers to see education not as a meaningful experience, but as a tool for children to reach better educational institutions, which could decide their future job possibilities. What made me feel uncomfortable was that I felt that I was being forced to keep my consciousness dormant; the fewer questions you asked, it seemed, the more successful you were.

Even in such a situation, I still met a few teachers by whom I was inspired. When I was in high school, I especially liked a Japanese history teacher, who was passionate about the subject matter he was teaching and possessed a rich knowledge that went beyond textbooks. In addition, I felt that he really enjoyed teaching us. I learned that a teacher’s sincere interest in teaching made a huge difference on me as a student, and it became an important thing for me to remember after I became a teacher.

There is one more teacher that I remember from high school. I met that teacher when I was seventeen years old. I lived alone in Sapporo, Hokkaido, because my family had moved back to Tokyo for my father’s job. Actually, I had never taken this teacher’s class. He always wore a lab coat, like a scientist. I thought he was an English teacher but he was also working as a career counselor in the high school. One day, I went to a college information resource room, where he usually helped students in the role of career
counselor. At the time, I was wondering which path I should pursue in my future. Before talking to the teacher, I felt that I “wanted to” or needed to go to law school. Due to my father’s ambitions for me, becoming a teacher was discouraged by my family as a career path. I was told by my father that I was not good at or capable of taking care of other people, especially children. That was a good enough reason not to apply to the department of education at that time.

I do not remember what I talked about with the teacher; all I remember is that he was there to listen to me with his full attention and that at the end of the conversation he told me that I would be able to become a great teacher. Although I only had one encounter with him, this meant a lot to me. The teacher’s words gave me encouragement to eventually choose what I truly wanted to do for my future occupation. My encounter with this teacher also helped me to realize that the role of a teacher is not only limited to academic matters, but also being able to help students think about their future possibilities.

There is not much to say about my university education in terms of what I learned about teaching and learning. The university I attended was a research institution and the majority of the faculty members in the Education department there had never taught in classrooms. Practice in the classroom and theory at the university were completely separate at that time. It became one of my motivations later on to come to the United States to study more about education from different points of view (Statement of intent, March, 2003).

Learning from teaching. After I graduated from university with an elementary teaching certificate, I worked in a number of different schools. The first school I worked
at was Tokyo Dalton School, which was a sister school of the Dalton School in New York City. I worked there for about seven years as a kindergarten classroom teacher. The experiences I had in that school helped me to construct my foundation as a teacher. Kindergarten starts at age three in Japan and the concept of kindergarten is probably similar to something between kindergartens and preschools in the United States. I still remember the first time I visited the school when I was considering applying for a teaching position there. I was guided to see a class where children were doing “free play”. Each corner was designed to create a different playing (learning) environment, to appeal to students’ interests in different activities. One of the things that I remember most was a crafting/drawing table where there were many different colored papers and different materials like small pieces of paper, beans and buttons, for making collages. Children could choose any materials they wanted for their collages and each student was enjoying making their collage very differently. Although this is not new in the U.S. cultural context, I was stunned by the fact that children were making and enjoying making choices, and making choices with such a great sense of freedom. I was very excited at that moment and decided to apply for a teaching position in the school.

*Learning new concepts of education.* Tokyo Dalton School was a private school. Since kindergarten in Japan is not mandatory, many kindergarten schools are private institutions. Therefore, each kindergarten has much more freedom in terms of educational goals, curriculum, and teaching philosophy compared to other education age levels in Japan. Since the school I worked at was a sister school of the New York Dalton School, we used a lot of pedagogical approaches and curricula from the school and the Tokyo school principal was formerly employed at the New York school.
The pedagogical approaches and curriculum we used were child-centered and progressive. The Dalton School calls itself a university for children. Everything I learned in the school related to education was very attractive to me as a novice teacher, and continues to be so today. The school also provided me with learning opportunities to see individual children as well as adults differently in different cultural contexts. For example, respecting individual children’s interests, needs, and personalities was not articulated in traditional education in the Japanese cultural context. Helping individual students to learn to develop their own voices and confidence was also not well articulated. Teaching at the Dalton School also gave me the opportunity to learn about education with new concepts and pedagogical approaches. The school had a solid teacher training system, in which every novice teacher could work with an experienced mentor teacher for at least two years and gradually gain responsibility as a teacher. But even though the school provided a lot of support, it also offered teachers freedom. I loved the way that I could cherish individual student potential and interests through teaching. This was only possible because the school gave each teacher a lot of freedom and responsibility in designing curriculums, the classroom environment, and pedagogical approaches. Working in such an environment helped me to develop a lot of confidence, joy, and pride working as a teacher.

As a teacher, I learned how crucial it is to understand each child deeply and from different perspectives. I also learned about the importance of actively observing each child. I wrote observation notes for every child every day, as did all the other teachers in the school. Thinking back, it was probably a skill very similar to that of an ethnographer. We used these notes to make lesson plans for the class and individual students. The notes
were essential to working in collaboration with other teachers by putting children at the center of the curriculum, lesson plans and pedagogy. They were also crucial to working closely with each child’s parents.

Through this teaching experience, I learned that that caring, respecting, trusting, and believing in each child are the most fundamental elements of successful teaching.

**Crossing borders in Education.** Teaching in the bicultural context of the Tokyo Dalton School led me to regain my strong interest in studying about education in the United States and motivated me to learn English. Teachers from the NY Dalton School came to the school every other year to give a variety of workshops in English. It was an amazing and inspiring experience for me to learn about Education in such a creative, intellectual, and liberating way.

**Teaching in diversity.** The educational environment at the Dalton School in Tokyo was liberal and welcomed diversity; there were students and families who chose the school because they were looking for a more comfortable and accepting atmosphere. In addition, working at this school gave me one of my first bi-cultural experiences. Besides working with a global-minded pedagogy and curriculum, I was able to interact with students from diverse backgrounds, some of whom had lived in other countries. Some of them started going to international schools after graduating from the kindergarten. After I started working there, these bi-cultural and cross-national contexts became more and more natural for me.

Since our school welcomed students from diverse backgrounds, it helped some families who could not find a welcoming educational environment for their children because they were different from other Japanese people. For example, there were students
who had autism, ADHA, and other learning disabilities. It was then and still is not easy for students with special needs to find an inclusive educational environment in Japan. There were also students who had lived in other countries or whose parents came from other countries. Since I grew up always feeling like an outsider, this kind of educational environment was especially appealing to me. In other words, I found my 居場所, Ibasho, a space where I belonged and 土台, dodai, a true foundation of self, by teaching in the Tokyo Dalton School. It became very important for me to create these kinds of spaces and foundations for each of my students later on as a teacher.

The Story of How I Became a Transnational Being

The first time I lived in the United States was when I was thirty. I was still married and my husband’s company had sent him to Purdue University as a visiting scholar for a year. Although I loved working at Dalton school, I also wanted to seek more learning opportunities related to education.

My English ability was very limited. For example, if I turned on the television, I used to feel that it was not in English but in some kind of language from another planet. However, I was very determined to take courses in the Education department at Purdue University, and I wanted to visit as many preschools and elementary schools as possible. In spite of my limited English ability, I had more experiences than I had hoped for thanks to the wonderful people that I met there. For instance, I contacted a professor who I found on a school website because I was interested in her research. I did not know anything about how I could even start to take courses in the University. However, the professor made time for me, and talked to me about my plans for that year. She was very
giving and helped me to connect with some wonderful people. My experience at Purdue University opened my eyes and gave me a sense of liberation as a learner as well as an individual. Oddly, I also discovered that this was the context that I wanted to belong to and in which I felt comfortable and accepted in, even though Japan was my country of origin.

**Becoming a newcomer in the U.S.** Since I had a clear reason for coming to the United States, it was easy for me to feel motivated, excited and comfortable about my daily experiences as a newcomer in the U.S. In addition, because of my childhood background as a newcomer and a minority in many communities, I did not feel isolated in the new cultural context of the U.S. most of the time. Many of the people I became close with after coming here were border crossers or had border-crossing experiences in terms of culture, language, gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, and socio-economic class in their childhood or adulthood. Being with those people, I felt that I had finally found a place to belong, a place where diversity was *natural* in the community.

Communication technologies such as the telephone and the internet also being available inexpensively made it much easier to live away from my home country.

**Facing linguistic, social and cultural challenges.** Although I have mostly been enjoying my experiences as a newcomer in this country, I have also experienced daily challenges due to linguistic, social and cultural differences. In this section, I focus on some of these experiences.

Although using English opened many doors for interacting with people from different backgrounds and with new ideas, English was (and still is) one of the most challenging parts of my everyday life. There are many cultural contexts in which I get lost because of
different aspects of my language limitations. For example, because I do not know many slang or conversational terms in English, it is sometimes difficult for me to participate in smaller conversations in between meetings, at parties and so on. Especially during my first few years in the United States, I did not know many context-specific words, such as the language related to filing annual taxes, ordering food in restaurants, and doing laundry. It took me a while to understand that it was not necessarily only one’s English level but also lacking knowledge of social and cultural rules in different contexts that could make communication more challenging in a new country. Japanese language was my strongest subject when I lived in Japan. I love reading and writing in Japanese as well as teaching it. My limited language abilities in my new cultural context made me face not only practical difficulties but also emotional and psychological difficulties, since the situation shook my confidence as an adult. The accumulation of situations that can make one feel like a “child” or a “childlike learner” because one does not know the things that adults are supposed to know in this society, can be extremely emotionally and psychologically challenging. As a person who chose to live in this situation, it has been important for me to remind myself to find joy out of such circumstances.

This situation has also been socially challenging for me. For example, I need to ask many questions in my daily life while I am living in the US. Realizing that I come from a different country, most people understand. However, I also need to be aware that the many questions I have may give some people a wrong impression of me, and I may come across as a less competent and confident person than I am. In addition, the culturally and socially learned behaviors and discourse patterns that I use as a Japanese person may easily give people in the United States the wrong impression that I am submissive,
passive or lacking in confidence. Thus, it has been important for me to learn new ways of showing confidence and acting like other adults in the US cultural and social context. This cultural learning was possible only because I had wonderful friends who were caring and honest enough to raise discuss such questions with me and who helped me practice more culturally appropriate social and cultural body language and manners.

The other challenge for me has been having limited social and cultural collective memories and knowledge, which I don’t have in the new cultural and social context in this country. For example, my friends talk a lot about movies, movie stars, and songs that they grew up with. However, I am typically not able to share such kinds of collective memories and feelings with them. These are the kinds of moments that make me feel that I will always be an outsider in this country. This is important for me to acknowledge as a teacher because it is a serious issue for ESL and immigrant children. Not having common topics and collective memories can be very challenging for newcomers seeking to interact with people from different cultural contexts.

All of these experiences have presented challenges for me. At the same time, these experiences have also helped me understand my students and their families’ experiences in an authentic way and helped me in coming up with culturally-relevant pedagogical approaches for each student and family more sensitively and efficiently.

**Becoming a teacher as a cross-cultural/transnational being.** One thing that has made me feel comfortable and has given me a feeling of belonging in the United States is that I came here with great motivation and with something I could contribute. I developed a sense of commitment as well as yarigai, finding great joy and satisfaction in my work.
Teaching in ห่อชู, hoshuko. I taught in a hosuko as a sixth grade classroom teacher for about four years. Since the six grade Japanese language arts curriculum provided some flexibility and used a project approach, in teaching, I especially focused on students’ life experiences, interests and communities in Japan and the United States. Some students in my class were more familiar with Japanese language and culture and some students were more familiar with English and U.S. culture. Either way, many of my students came to my class having some degree of difficulties in practicing their identities and experiencing a sense of full membership in either their local school or in the hoshuko context. As a result of my own experience as a student with limited English fluency and cultural background in the college classroom, I knew that it would be hard for my students to show their real selves with limited language ability and social and cultural knowledge. Thus, one of my most important goals as a classroom teacher was to create a space for my students where they could practice and demonstrate their agency and their active intelligence, and where they could develop their sense of core, their confidence and their voices. I did this because I recognized that many of my students would not be able to practice these important aspects of their selves in their local schools due to language, cultural and social barriers. In addition I also acknowledged that some students were going to have serious difficulties re-adjusting to Japanese community when they returned to Japan. Many students might experience feeling rejected in part or in whole because of their bi-cultural, bilingual, and transnational identities and experiences when they go back. Thus, it is important for me as a teacher to help my students to develop a strong sense of self and confidence about who they are before they return to Japan.
I also tutored some students of Japanese background. Most of the families of the students I taught were planning to go back to Japan, and most of them did. Many students I taught faced academic, social and/or emotional challenges in the local schools they attended. Individual students’ cases varied widely depending on, for instance, how long they had stayed in the U.S., at what age they had come, how much the student’s parents got involved in their education in their local school, how supportive the classroom teacher or ESL teachers in the local school were, how emotionally supportive the student’s parents were, whether the student had close friends in the local school, whether the student’s Japanese was well-developed and so on.

Tutoring gave me opportunities to work with each student and his/her family very closely outside of the school context. The subjects I taught varied, as did my students’ usage of Japanese and English. For example, some students had been in survival mode for so long in their local schools that they did not know what they had learned there. In some instances, students got used to being in a dormant condition while learning. In such cases, I would help the student articulate what they learned in the local school and help him/her connect that to what they know from experience using both languages. Other students had not heard their own voices for so long in the context of learning that they had lost confidence talking in either Japanese or English in the learning context. Faced with this problem, I believe that it is very important for students to hear their own voices either in writing or orally.

Teaching at a university. I worked as a university supervisor in early elementary education for five years and I also taught several courses, including *Introduction to children's literature*, for two years. These experiences gave me tremendous
opportunities to learn about students from diverse backgrounds, teachers, schools and teacher education in authentic American cultural contexts. These experiences also helped me to re-examine my role as a teacher and educator through my multiple identities and life experiences.

As a university supervisor, I had opportunities to work with students in the Master’s program. I intentionally situated myself to work with students from diverse backgrounds, including African American, Latino, and Chinese. The other valuable experience I had through supervising was that I was able to work closely with mentor teachers and other school staff in a variety of schools. Those experiences helped me not only to understand new cultural and social school contexts in the United States, but also laid a foundation for me live a meaningful life as a teacher and educator.

I also taught some courses at the university level. Working as a university supervisor helped me prepare myself in order to examine how I wanted to apply my experience and my multiple identities in teaching. One thing I especially wanted to focus on was providing students in my courses with the opportunity to have cross-cultural experiences and feel comfortable interacting with people from other countries by having me as an instructor. Many students in our teacher education program came from so-called ‘mono-cultural and mono-lingual’ contexts, so many of them had hardly any experience interacting with people from different cultures and countries. However, these students are going to become teachers in the future and are going to teach students from different cultural backgrounds, including immigrant children. I therefore thought that as a teacher educator it was important for me to provide such cultural opportunities while I taught.
I expressed these intentions to my students on the first day of class and tried to create a respectful and comfortable environment to discuss and perform activities around cultural and cross-cultural issues. After living in the U.S. for some time, I realized that the pressure to be politically correct in public can sometimes make people hesitate to ask questions about or to interact with people from other cultures or other cultural backgrounds openly. One of the pedagogical approaches I used in order to break down such walls between the students and I, was telling them about my experiences in teaching and daily life as a transnational being in the U.S. Showing students who I am in an honest way helped all of us engage in authentic discussions about their own cultural/cross-cultural experiences as well as about their future students from different backgrounds.

The other pedagogical approach I used was sharing the linguistic aspects of my culture, Japanese, with my students and sharing what the life of an ESL or bilingual person is like, using myself as an example. Most of my students in college courses are likely to have ESL students in their classrooms in the future. However, without experience living in another country with a different language background, it is just too hard for these students to understand the difficulties ESL students go through. Besides teaching specific pedagogical techniques that they could use in their future classes to help ESL students, I wanted my students to understand that making language mistakes does not speak to my intelligence as an instructor or as an individual. This was challenging for me, too. Working with ESL students and their families for a while, I learned that one of the emotional difficulties that they need to face in their everyday lives is that they feel that they are not recognized as interesting and intelligent beings – as who they really are
by school communities and American society in general. This can really hurt their dignity. I told my students that English is a linguistic communication tool for me, and that my English is “one of many international versions of English.” I was comfortable showing my English mistakes to my students, which, together with an explanation of the language structure differences between English and Japanese, provided them, I think, with an important experience. All of these pedagogical approaches were related to my bi-cultural, bi-lingual and transnational identities. The experiences that I had with ESL and immigrant students and their families helped me to become committed to developing a clearer pedagogical approach to teach future teachers to be better teachers for students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds.

**On Becoming a Whole Self and a Teacher: 恵, Kei**

恵, Kei, is the daughter of Maki-san, a woman from Hiroshima, Japan, and a Caucasian man, who met Maki-san when he was working in a military base in 広島, Hiroshima (further details in Maki-san’s section). I met Kei as her field experience supervisor while she was enrolled in a Master’s program to pursue her early childhood teacher certificate in a mid-west state university.

恵, Kei, was born in the United States but moved to Japan when she was four years old and attended an international preschool in Hiroshima. Hiroshima is a unique place in Japan that also has a unique relationship to the United States. As a city, Hiroshima became a symbol of peace after World War II because of the atomic bomb attack it suffered. This has caused many people to visit Hiroshima not only from Japan but also from all over the world. Kei once told me that, as a biracial being, her experiences
visiting Hawaii and Hiroshima made her inevitably think about World War II. Although she said she feels closer to people’s experiences in Hiroshima, her biracial and bicultural identity always put her in a unique position to see and understand the world.

Whenever we talked to each other, there was always laughter, even though we sometimes talked about her struggles as a biracial/bicultural adolescent in the past or more recently as a novice teacher. She always talked with me thoughtfully, openly, and honestly, which I admired and appreciated greatly. Kei said that people tend to see her as a quiet and calm person, but that she is also a passionate, adventurous, and joyful person who has many things to offer.

In this section, I explore Kei’s life as a bi-racial and bicultural woman of Japanese descent. The following aspects of her life are intimately tied to who she is as a person and who she is as a teacher.

**Life as a new immigrant and a Japanese-American bi-racial self.** Knowing that Kei would be seen as biracial in both Japan and the United States, her parents had always thought very seriously about which school they should choose for Kei and her sister. When Kei started to attend preschool in Hiroshima, Japan, her parents decided to send her to an international school, which Kei still recalls as a great school with people from many different backgrounds. Although the school was very expensive, they found a scholarship for Kei. The school was very far. Every morning, Kei and her father walked approximately thirty minutes to get to the train station, and Kei had to take a train with friends to commute to the school and sometimes even had to take a local bus by herself to get back home. Kei explained her parents’ decision as follows:
I know my parents put me in an international school because they thought that a Japanese school would kill my spirit (Interview, March 7, 2007).

It was the result of her parents’ careful consideration that although they both liked Japan very much, they also knew that Japanese society was probably not ready to accept biracial children in local schools and communities. It was this realization that eventually made them decide to go back to the United States when Kei was old enough to start elementary school.

Although the United States was probably much more open to racial and cultural differences, life was not easy there either. Kei was aware of that even though she was a little girl. The first school Kei attended was a local elementary school, where her father grew up and which, according to Maki-san, was in a typical conservative mid-west small town, where most people were local Caucasian people. As soon as Kei started to attend elementary school there, she hated it. Kei said that when she was as young as six years old, she decided not to go to sleep at night so that she would be too tired to go to school the following day. However, she told me with a smile, she always failed and eventually fell asleep. After Kei’s determined effort, her parents decided to relocate to another area, a small college town famous for a very liberal society and where everyone knew each other.

For bi-racial/ethnic immigrant children like Kei, parents’ conscious and unconscious decisions and choices in lifestyle and how to raise their children regarding their ethnic, language, cultural and racial identity have a great influence on their children. In raising their children, Kei’s parents made a constant effort for their children to be able to preserve both heritages, Japanese and American. For example, when Kei was a little girl,
they decided to live in Japan for a few years. Even after moving back to the United States, her parents made it a routine to make their children to visit Japan every summer with Maki-san while their father worked in the United States in addition to making them attend a Japanese Saturday School every week for nine years.

Keeping two languages at a native level can be challenging. It requires a lot of determination and a constant effort on the part of both the parents and the children. Since Kei’s family lived in the United States most of the time, her mother, Maki-san, and her father made constant efforts to introduce their children’s Japanese heritage in their everyday lives. Kei said that it was not her intentional choice but her “mother’s pride” which kept her learning Japanese. Many bilingual children may know two languages, but not be fully competent in one of them. Kei said that Maki-san felt that she needed to prove to her father that she was raising her children with competence in Japanese culture and language. Indeed, Kei said that she was not allowed to watch American television programs until she became a college student and lived alone. She explained that it was because in her house “Japanese was educational and English was not.” In other words, Kei said that she was more Japanese than American while she was in High School.

Although it was not always easy for Kei to maintain her Japanese competency in the United States, it later helped her to be able to access the Japanese identity inside of her and the Japanese community in the United States.

**Named By Others.** In this section, I present Kei’s biographical stories and I describe the three metaphors that she used to describe her identities as well as to guide her narrative. These metaphors were Moon, Chameleon, and Cake, each of which aptly describes Kei’s complex cultural, racial, national, and linguistic identities. I also
demonstrate how her life experience and the shifts in her understanding of her own identities helped shape how she views the world as well as her attitude as a teacher.

“I am like the moon”. In spite of the careful and considerate effort on her parents’ part, as a bi-racial and bi-cultural being, as a child, Kei often felt that she was not completely comfortable or accepted in any community to which she belonged. Kei described that the atmosphere of the local school she attended and the surrounding liberal small town community was that “Being different is cool!” Therefore, she was recognized as cool, there. On the other hand, she was accepted not as the same but as different from others. When Kei, 恵, grew up, the way other people saw her or interacted with her made her feel as though she was never completely an insider but rather an outsider in those communities. Kei stated that she was always treated like “a Japanese girl” in the local school and like “an American girl” in the Japanese Saturday School or Japanese community, although she was really a local in each community (Interview March 28, 2007). Unconsciously, this made her feel unsettled:

The way I look (to other people) makes me feel different. In a room full of Caucasian people, I look Asian. In a room full of Asian people, I look Caucasian. I have never sat in a room or walked down a street where everyone else was of my own race (Term paper for Multicultural Education class, 8/26/2005).

Having these life experiences in daily life, Kei developed a clear sense of what constituted her identity. Kei stated, “[My sense of identity] is not necessarily determined by how I feel about [who I am] but more by how other people feel about [who I am].” (Interview, 3/7/2007). When I asked her to choose three metaphors to explain who she is,
she said that she would use three words: moon, chameleon and cake. She explained it as follows:

I am like the moon because the moon is always there… but we only see a part of it.

We cannot see the entire moon at any given time. This is similar to how other people see me (Interview March 7, 2007)

As her moon metaphor describes, Kei had often felt that even though she was always there completely, some people from some communities could only see some parts of her and other people from other communities could only see other parts of her. It was not just about image, however, because this perception directly influenced how other people interacted with her as a member of the community. Kei told me about one of her experiences in Japanese Saturday School as an example. In the school, all students had to take a quiz on 漢字, Kanji, character spelling every day. Kanji is very complicated and many students hate Kanji tests. Once, when she was the only student in her class who got the perfect score, the classroom teacher told everyone that "even Kei" had been able to get a perfect score. The teacher’s intention was probably to praise her, but Kei felt that it showed that teachers and students in the Japanese school community did not hold high expectations on her Japanese-ness and recognized her American-ness as her identity. In other words, she was always being named by others regardless of her own sense of who she really was. She also did not have many opportunities to talk about this with people around her, which is an important process for any adolescent.

Kei’s narratives clearly explain how important it was for her to feel accepted in a community. What she was longing for was a feeling of being fully accepted and true belonging; she wanted a feeling of sameness or of being “normal” in relation to other
students in both/either her Japanese-based or United States-based community. These experiences helped her become very empathetic and sensitive towards ESL, immigrant and other non-mainstream students’ needs to feel fully accepted in school.

“I am like a chameleon.” Kei also described herself as a chameleon: “I am like a chameleon, because I feel like I change in different surroundings” (Interview March 7, 2007). Kei then talked about something that one of her favorite professors had said about the necessity of becoming a chameleon in different cultural and social contexts. The professor always told her that if you have multiple cultural backgrounds, what you do when you are alone is what really represents who you are. Kei provided an example of how she changes her behavior when she is alone in the United States and in Japan:

In the United States, it is ok to kick the door to shut it. But in Japan, [you really should not use your foot to shut a door] [Kei and I laughed out loud together at this moment]. I always think about what the professor said, because even though I don't change on the outside, my identity does change depending on where I am and who I am with (Interview March 7, 2007).

As a border crosser, or someone who knows the rules of multiple cultural, racial, linguistic and national contexts, Kei could negotiate her identity and her behavior to fit each context, but this also meant that the context she was in and the people within it were the ones that defined her identity. For instance, Kei said that she was always treated as “a Japanese girl” in the local school in the United States and as “an American girl” in the Japanese language school (Interview March 28, 2007). In other words, depending on which community she was in at a particular moment, people expected her to be a different cultural being. However, the image of “who she is” as a Japanese or an
American are not necessarily equal to who she really was, but rather a constructed image of “who other people believe she should be.” If identity is defined by relationships with others, Kei’s identity was necessarily changeable and unstable depending on whom she was with. In other words, the gap between who she believes she is and who other people believe she is has always existed, and the way other people accepted her was not the way she wanted to be accepted (as an insider) but always as someone who was slightly on the outside.

As the chameleon metaphor indicates, Kei knew how other people’s expectations changed depending on cultural contexts. However, the cultural context is not only about culture; racial aspects had a lot of influence on how other people expected her to behave in each cultural context, too. When I asked Kei if her appearance mattered to other people or not, she immediately replied with a smile, saying, “oh, yeah!”, and continued telling me about how her sister looked more Japanese and she looked more Caucasian. She added that her sister is a favorite of their grandmother in Japan while Kei is a favorite of their grandmother in the United States.

One of the issues that made it difficult for her to confront her identity matters was that there was no word/category/discourse to describe who she is in the United States. She could talk about Japanese culture and American culture separately, but she felt that there was no cultural category in which she really belonged.

In Japan, there is a word, ハーフ, Half, which indicates that you have parents from two different racial groups; in the United States, people usually use the word mixed or biracial to describe her situation. She stated that the fact that there was a Japanese word,
Half, to describe her identity made her happy. There is *Half culture* in Japan but there is no such thing in the U.S.

(In the U.S., people just say,) “You are mixed.” “I am mixed.” It is not the same with Japanese usage of *Half*. I like *Half* better than mixed. Because for me *Half* is about culture, but multi-racial is about race (Interview, March 7, 2007).

*I am like a cake with many ingredients:* becoming the author of her own life. In feeling like a moon and a chameleon, Kei often described her identity as influenced by the gaze of others. These first two metaphors her consciousness about how other people interpreted her, and how she modified her behavior according to how other people saw her or depending on the cultural context. This consciousness intensified her longing to construct her identity in a more holistic way. As she grew older, she began to develop a confidence that allowed her to move toward self-definition and toward what she often described as, wholeness – a good mix of the many locations that created her. This is what the metaphor of the cake helps to describe.

I am a cake because all the ingredients that make me are already inside of me and are mixed. So, I cannot take any ingredients out. (Interview, March 28, 2007)

Having friends, traveling, and exploring the world outside of her family and immediate community helped Kei begin to construct a more integrated identity. Friendships were critical in her life and she had friends who were Japanese and friends who were Caucasian and belonged to two worlds.

In addition, she also experienced moments when her friendships brought her two worlds together in important and powerful ways. As a half, bi-racial person of Caucasian and Japanese descent, Kei always attended Japanese Language School from 1st to 9th
grade every Saturday. Although her Japanese language skills and her understanding of Japanese culture were very competent, she still had a difficult time feeling completely safe and like a member of the community. When she was in 6th grade, she started to think about quitting the Japanese Language School. She agreed to stay one more year only because her mother said she had to. But the situation changed in 7th grade when she started to make great friends there, who she still visits and communicates with. She also developed a great friendship in Japan. All of her close friends traveled between American and Japanese culture and back and forth between countries together. A very important moment was when her friends from the United States visited her while she was studying abroad in Japan. It was at this moment that she experienced a bringing together of these formerly divided worlds and shifting identities. As she said:

When my friends came from the United States to visit Japan, they really connected both the American and Japanese elements inside of me (March 7, 2007).

Although Kei could not find a complete sense of belonging initially in neither the local schools nor communities in the United States or Japan, Kei found a different sense of wholeness in other places during her travels, specifically in a place where her identity did not have to straddle two distinct and separate worlds – Hawaii.

I didn’t know what that felt like until I went to Hawaii for a week-long vacation. I was talking to a hula dancer after watching her show, and she asked if I was a “local”. It was the first time in my life that someone had assumed that I was from the area. It was a feeling of acceptance that I had never felt before. The way that I looked had made someone assume I belonged.

(Kei’s term paper for Multicultural Education class, 2005. p. 4)
As Kei’s confidence as a biracial person grew, she found that she was being able to create more and more opportunities to be surrounded by people who also straddled different worlds and who spoke two languages.

I had been feeling nervous/uncomfortable because English and Japanese had been separated in my daily life. Now, I can (find) places and people with whom I can use both Japanese and English and I feel normal (Interview, January 12, 2008).

As Kei explains, when she felt complete acceptance from a community or people, it helped her to become more confident in other communities as well. She recognized the different ingredients of her identity and the way to explain who she was to herself as well as to other people. This shows a sense of identity and confidence that came from a sense of belonging and a feeling of acceptance in “her own community,” which in her case included Hawaii, international schools, ESL classes and communities in which she could use both Japanese and English.

The number of people who speak both Japanese and English has been increasing around me. I think it was what I have always been looking for. I guess I have probably been looking for someone like myself. I feel like being able to spend time with people like me gives me the strength to spend time with people who are different from me as well. After all, I feel uncomfortable and nervous if I cannot have both Japanese and English. (Interview: 1/12/2008)

**Becoming a teacher with all her life experiences and a sense of who she is.** Kei’s life strongly influenced both her decision to become a teacher and her decisions about who she would be as a teacher. In this section I explore these two aspects of her teaching
identity to provide details regarding her early family socialization and her own
developing agency as she decided the kind of teacher she would become.

“*I Come from a Family of Teachers.*” Just like many parents influence their
children’s occupation choices directly or indirectly, Kei’s parents had an influence on
her choice of occupation. In the very first interview, Kei told me, “My family was
always the *teacher family*”. She states that she had not recognized this until one day she
had dinner with her boyfriend’s (now her husband) family. His family was more
interested in chemical or scientific issues, compared to her family, who always discussed
topics such as education, culture and society. Kei’s father was once an English teacher in
Japan and her mother, Maki-san, has been a teacher for a long time.

When I met Kei’s mother, Maki-san, for the first time, she immediately started to talk
to me about Kei’s *first teaching experience*, “Kei always played school with her younger
sister. She always wanted to become a teacher.” According to Kei, the story was a bit
different; it was her mother who always played school with Kei and it was only
eventually that Kei started to take the role as teacher and her younger sister became her
student. But eventually, Kei had to stop playing school with her sister. Kei remembers a
shocking moment, “One day, she [my sister] told me, ‘I don’t want to play school
anymore!’” When I was invited by Maki-san and Kei’s family for Thanksgiving dinner, I
asked about this and all the family members started to talk about the family memory.
First Kei’s father said, with a little joking and sympathetic smile for Kei’s sister,
“(Playing school) was from morning to night!” And her sister said, “I was never allowed
to play the teacher!” It was a sweet family memory from both Kei and her sister’s
childhood.
That same day, we played a new game together. Kei was happily playing the role of the teacher here, too. When she started to explain a word from the game, other guests and family members immediately started questioning the definition of the word, and then I realized that both her father and mother had brought their own dictionaries and started to discuss the definition of the word. Having become a teacher, Kei was smiling and told me, “See, if you grow up in this environment, you have to become a teacher!”

**Validating and respecting her students’ and her own life experiences.** Although becoming a teacher could be considered the most *natural* thing for Kei to do, the kind of teacher she wanted to become was a longer and different story. While I was conducting this inquiry, she was in her first and second years of teaching ESL classes. Although Kei got a certificate to teach K-3 classrooms, she chose to become an ESL classroom teacher because of job availability and her passion for the kind of students she wanted to teach. As soon as she became an ESL teacher, she went back to university for a year to get her ESL teacher endorsement. She chose a particular area to teach in because there were relatively more children of Japanese descent there compared to other areas, and she enjoyed having not only Japanese children but children from a variety of races, ethnicities, languages and socioeconomic backgrounds in her classroom.

A strong influence on Kei’s decision to become an ESL teacher and work in a community where there were children from diverse backgrounds was an awareness of the experiences, understanding, and skills that she brought into her work from her life as a child who grew up moving back and forth between two worlds. She believed that the difficulties, challenges and joys that she faced as a border crosser provided her with a special insight into the experiences of linguistically and ethnically diverse children and
their families. Meanwhile, the experience of teaching children from diverse backgrounds made her feel more whole than ever.

For instance, when Kei was in Tokyo, Japan, as a college exchange student for two years, she taught in an international preschool, where she said she felt that her experiences as a bicultural and biracial person were being validated for the first time in her life. There, she met many children who were Half, just like her. Kei said,

The children I taught were two or three years old. But their mothers said that when their children were with me, they seemed to feel very comfortable. I think we both felt an instinctive connection as Half (Interview March 7, 2007).

Kei also had very important experiences talking with her students’ parents, although she usually had more opportunities to talk with students’ mothers. According to Kei, most of the mothers were Japanese and the fathers came from varied countries, such as the United States, Korea, and Thailand. Kei said that she had a lot of opportunities to talk with mothers, for example, about raising the children of Half background. Kei’s background as a biracial and bilingual individual allowed her to talk with these mothers using her own life experiences and also helped her validate and respect her own life experiences helping children and parents in the community holistically. These mothers were full of questions: How do I raise bilingual children? What might be possible future problems? How will having two cultures and languages influence my children in the future? What kind of possible discrimination and prejudice might my children have to face? How can I support my children in such difficult situations? However, there were hardly any teachers who could talk about raising Half children from firsthand experience, so being
able to help these parents was a very significant experience for Kei. At the very end of her autobiography paper for one of her Master’s degree courses, she wrote:

I want my students’ life experiences to be validated and respected. I need to validate and respect my own experiences. The more honest I can be about who I am, the more honest I can be with my students (Kei’s Autobiography paper, 2005, p. 8).

This kind of validation and respect in a community was what she had always been looking for but which she had never really felt she had. Thus, the experience of teaching in this international school gave her an opportunity to realize the kind of teacher that she wanted to become.

One of the episodes Kei talked repeatedly was about was her experience receiving a minority scholarship for college. This episode is evidence of the kinds of un-named or non-validated situations that Kei experienced as a biracial person in American society. Kei expressed that she had experienced some difficulties showing her biracial identity as an Asian and a Caucasian in the United States. In several interviews as well as in her autobiography paper, Kei talked about how she felt guilty when she received a minority scholarship for college. She shared her feelings about hearing other people say things like, “She should not have gotten the scholarship.” In the autobiography paper, she explains why her Caucasian and Asian identities were problematic on such occasions in American society:

I have been made to feel guilty for receiving a minority scholarship. I heard comments saying that I was only half minority for being biracial and implications that “Asian” isn’t a struggling minority (Autobiography paper 2005, p. 5)
This data shows the political implications of her biracial identity in the United States. It also demonstrates that although both her Caucasian and Asian identities are very important parts of her, Kei has not encountered many spaces where people have accepted and validated her biracial identity in a respectful way. That is why her experiences in Hawaii and her international school, where she was accepted as who she is, were so powerful for her.

Feeling accepted is a very powerful feeling, and I would like to continue to explore what is takes to stay true to myself and accept myself for just being me.

(Autobiography paper 2005, p. 5)

These kinds of experiences made her more committed to discovering what it means to accept oneself as an individual and a teacher.

Her experiences searching for acceptance also help her remain committed to being open to really getting to know people from all backgrounds. In interviews, Kei expressed several times that being raised in a small college town had prevented her from knowing the people and communities from the so-called mainstream culture in the United States. She recognized that her experience as a part of American and white culture was limited and this realization gave her the motivation to explore this part of her identity further when she became a college student.

People from [name of the town where she is from] were known to be very open-minded, and a friend from school and I had a conversation about our community – that maybe we were open-minded, but we were somewhat close-minded about people who were not open-minded. And that bothers me. If I am really going to open-minded, and there are people who are close-minded, I should still be open-
minded towards them. So I decided to come to University of X. It has been challenging for me because there were people…you know … more like people from mainstream culture in the university. And it was the first time for me seeing people like that, and so it was always challenging [interacting with them] but…I think it was good (Interview, 3/28/2007).

Kei’s family had a nick-name for mainstream American people in Japanese, パンピー, panpi, which literary means “mainstream people” in Japanese. Kei received both undergraduate and graduate degrees from that university and is now teaching in the area for a while. She summarized her journey living in different communities in the United States and getting to know more mainstream American people in one sentence:

What I learned at [University Name] was that パンピー, panpi, [mainstream American people] were actually not bad [but nice] (Interview, 11/07/2007).

Now Kei has been working with teachers who come from a mainstream cultural background and her experiences in the university have helped her to understand and communicate better with these teachers as colleagues in a respectful and friendly way. This experience has also helped Kei to understand both the abilities and the limitations of mainstream United States teachers in understanding and supporting ESL and/or immigrant children, which, in turn, has allowed her to support these teachers more effectively in teaching.

As I have described, Kei has been voluntarily and courageously traveling between countries and communities, going to Japan to teach, to college to meet mainstream American people who she did not know, to Hawaii to re-discover who she is, and so on.
This is the process of discovery and re-discovery which has allowed her to name herself rather than allowing herself to be named by other people. Kei also used this kind of traveling as an opportunity to understand people from different communities. Her multiple identities and experiences as a bicultural, biracial, bilingual and transnational being further enriched her experiences in multiple ways. Kei’s position as both an insider and an outside in both Japanese and U.S. communities placed her in a unique position from which she could be useful and which provided her with a new insight into the special, powerful aspects of her identity as a bi-racial, bilingual, bicultural person.

After teaching as an ESL teacher for a few years, the school she was working in asked her to become a 2nd grade classroom teacher, which she now continues to be. She explained how her new experience as a general classroom teacher gave her opportunities to understand other general classroom teachers’ perspectives and struggles regarding teaching ESL students more effectively and what makes it difficult for them to seek help from ESL teachers. She has been spending a lot of time in school, even on weekends, to work on teacher teaching, and she demonstrates great enthusiasm about her teaching experiences and the students in her class.

**Interpersonal Connections: Connecting with Children, Teachers, and Parents**

**To Facilitate 生きる, Living a Meaningful Life**

When educators discuss ESL or immigrant students’ success in schools, they tend to focus on academic success and English acquisition first. Moreover, some teachers, educators and parents believe that without acquiring English first, nothing can else can start. However, Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that human relationships can be
extremely important for students in pursuing a meaningful life in school (socially as well as academically) and in their families and in society in general.

One of the unique situations that we encountered was that our Japanese descent or other immigrant students were often numerically few in general classrooms. For example, in the case of Japanese descent students, while the students were together and among many Japanese peers in the hoshuko, within their public school settings there could be as few as one or two of them in a classroom. This is not different from many ESL contexts. Thus, the foreignness of these students’ language, culture, lifestyle, behavior and even looks, make it difficult for other community members in local schools, such as teachers and students, to accept these immigrant students in an authentic manner. Such students, who are isolated due to the various factors mentioned above, are desperately seeking to connect socially and find acceptance in a school environment in order to pursue to live a meaningful life.

In regards to understanding the importance of nurturing interpersonal connections, three characteristics emerged that define how these three teachers supported ESL and immigrant students to build interpersonal connections inside and outside of school, including with their families. They are: 1) connecting with teachers, 2) connecting with friends, and 3) connecting with parents and/or caregivers.

**Interpersonal Connections: Connecting With Teachers**

Kei, Maki-san, and I understand how important it is for ESL students to have good relationships with classroom teachers, since this relationship has a strong influence on students and may determine if their lives at school can be meaningful and happy or not. We also attempt to create strong and supportive relationships with each of our students,
understanding that this relationship may be their primary student-teacher relationship. In this section I explore the ways in which the three of us attempt to build positive and important connections between classroom teachers and their ESL students and describe the ways in which we, as ESL teachers, also nurture loving and supportive relationships with our students.

**Mediating interpersonal connections between ESL/immigrant students and teachers in schools.** When teachers are unaware of their ESL students’ struggles to connect in the classroom, they may not notice their students’ struggles and their pain. They also might misinterpret their silence as reticence. An example from my own life tutoring ESL students demonstrates this. 二, Koji, who was in 2nd grade in his local school, was one of my students. I was familiar with Koji at home. He was a very energetic and playful boy who had come to the United States about three years since with his family. In an incident that I noted in my journal he was behaving like a completely different child and the teacher was largely unaware of his plight.

Koji (anonymity), looked like a totally different person from the one I met in his house. At home, he was a very funny, mischievous and childlike boy. But I also knew that when we talked about studying and English, his body started to become stiffer. In the classroom, Koji seemed to almost try to erase his appearance and his face looked numb. He looked like he was focusing on something else when the teacher was reading something to the class. When he needed to work on an individual task related a field trip the students took to a whistle factory, he did not understand what he supposed to do. He knew he needed to observe a whistle, which they had gotten from their field trip, but it took him a very long time to
finally ask a girl who was sitting in front of him, “Can I take a look at this?” in a low, whispery voice. He did not have any friends in the class. It was painful to observe him and I needed to hide my tears when I talked with him later (Journal, March 14 2007).

Koji’s teacher, perhaps like many others, expressed her concern about his academic work, but seemed unaware of his struggle to gain a place for himself in the classroom. He needed the assistance of an adult who could help him do this.

Koji is one of many students from other countries who are scattered among local schools and experience hopelessness and loneliness. Many students like him often feel painfully lonely and separated from the rest of the world. Many teachers are actually willing to help them but they often have a difficult time understanding these students’ situations and finding effective pedagogical tools and approaches for them. It is rare to hear a discussion on how ESL students can feel isolated and disconnected in many ways, from classmates, friends, teachers, dominant culture, and even from their home culture. Because teachers are focused on language acquisition and academics, they often miss the more important foundation for success in the classroom – becoming a member of the community. Adding to this challenging situation is the fact that schools tend to separate ESL students into different classrooms, believing that if the students are immersed in an English-only environment they will learn English faster. Connecting with other students who speak the same language is thus sometimes seen as an obstacle to learning English.

Kei, Maki-san, and I understand the isolated situation of these students, and are therefore aware of our role in building stronger relationships between classroom teachers and ESL students. We work actively with teachers to help them achieve more effective
active observations and a better understanding of these students, including their strengths, which are often hidden by language differences and cultural conflicts.

Another example from my own experience as a teacher is when I visited Akira, one of my Hoshuko 6th grade students, in his local school classroom. The classroom teacher and I had a conversation in order to help each other see the student in a different light.

Akira’s teacher quietly came to talk to me. She asked me,

Is Akira always quiet like this in your class, too? I have never heard his voice in class (May 23, 2005).

This was precisely what I had anticipated based on my conversation with his mother. Akira had been in the United States for about two years at this point and I imagine it must have been very frustrating for a brilliant student like him not to be able to show his real self because of the English language barrier. That is one of the reasons why I decided to go to his classroom – I thought it was very important to tell his teacher who Akira really was. I told her about Akira’s behavior in my classroom:

He is one of the most talkative students in my class. Indeed, I need to stop him from talking many times! He is a really brilliant student and he brings great ideas to my class always (May 23 2005).

I really appreciated that the teacher was willing to talk about Akira with me as soon as I visited her classroom. The classroom teacher was, just like Maki-san, and Kei, really motivated to help Akira.

As the data above shows, Maki-san, Kei, and I recognize how difficult it can be for many American teachers, who only have mono-cultural and linguistic experiences, to understand language and cultural minority students, in spite of their desire to help them
and give them a better education. Therefore, we are conscious that taking initiative to
work as a bridges between students and their classroom teachers or other subject teachers
and helping these teachers understand their students better is one of the most important
roles we can take. Maki-san said, smiling proudly, that there are no other teachers who
have interacted with as many other teachers as she has in her entire school building.
Maki-san said that she attends many parents’ conferences in order to help teachers and
parents communicate more effectively and to help their students have a better educational
environment. Maki-san also communicates with her students’ tutors as well.

Maki-san, Kei and I are aware that there is often a political atmosphere around ESL
programs and students in local schools, and that the relationship between classroom
teachers and ESL teachers is rather hierarchical. Kei mentioned that she is always the
person to take initiative in communicating with her students’ classroom teachers. She
expressed her frustration about talking with some classroom teachers because they often
change their meeting schedules. She acknowledged that this is partly because ESL is a
supportive program.

Although schools can sometimes present a rather political and “unfair” atmosphere,
neither Maki-san, Kei or I talk about ESL students, the program or ourselves in a
victimized tone. Rather, we find joy as teachers in being able to act as bridges between
students or their families and classroom teachers. Maki-san also uses her knowledge
about teachers in her building to consider which students will be good match with which
teachers. She explains:

When you choose classroom teachers for ESL students, it is important to choose
someone who is willing to support their students in any kind of situations and
issues, LIKE I DO. If the ESL teacher just sees his/her role as teaching English, it will be a very unfortunate and painful situation for his/her students (Interview July 5, 2007).

Maki-san steps into the process of deciding which teacher’s class she assigns her ESL students to, especially when the students are facing difficulties in the school. Because of ESL students’ isolated situation in the school community, it is important to make sure that such students are sent to more supportive environments. This kind of decision is crucial in supporting students who are at a potential risk academically, socially, or emotionally in the school. Maki-san has built trustful relationships with some teachers who are passionate about supporting ESL students. When Maki-san notices that a student is having difficulties, she takes initiative to communicate with other teachers to create a better and more caring environment for ESL students.

**Building interpersonal connections between ESL students and ESL teachers.**

Kei, Maki-san and I understand that one of our most important roles as teachers who work with ESL students is to create a safe, trustful, loving and encouraging environment for students, especially since ESL students can be isolated and do not necessarily receive appropriate support from their classroom teachers. As a bilingual ESL teacher, Maki-san understands that her role is not merely teaching English but also something more.

As an ESL teacher, Maki-san sees her role as building strong connections with her students in order to create a fundamental social and learning environment for them. Maki-san describes the joy she finds in her way of teaching as follows:
Well…you know the moment when you feel a connection with your students?

How can I explain...I mean, a feeling of connection with my students…that’s what I like very much (Interview July 5, 2007).

Although it would be ideal for classroom teachers to be able to have personal conversations with ESL students about things such as their family, friends, and interests, we are also aware that this is not likely to happen. Therefore, all three teachers in this study believe that it is very important to create a space where ESL students can talk about these things with someone who is sincerely interested in hearing their stories.

For example, Kei and I were talking about how difficult it can be for ESL students to have such regular conversations in their general classrooms. In her ESL classroom, Kei has been trying to make a space where students can talk about these personal stories with her and with other classmates.

Did you know there is a Muslim Holiday called Eld ul-Fitr? One of my students talked to me about the holiday a lot. So I asked her if she told the story to her classroom teacher, and she said no. Children can feel what adults around them are thinking about them even if they don’t say anything. That is why I think just having this kind of conversation is very important. I hope that my students understand that I am interested in them (Interview, January 12, 2008).

Kei made a connection with her student in which the student could feel safe, important, and respected in the school.

Maki-san, Kei and I believe that the “classroom” is not the only place where we can build relationships with our students. Instead, it is outside of the “classroom” that there are sometimes more possibilities to build relationships with students. For example, Kei
explained a number of times how much she enjoys eating lunch with her students. She
told me about how she has conversations with some of her Japanese students about their
Japanese lunch boxes. In elementary schools in Japan, teachers eat lunch with their
students every day. When I was teaching in a hoshuko, lunchtime there was considered a
very important and meaningful time to build closer connections with students as well as
get to know them better. I could talk to them about topics not related to academics while
eating. Students loved to share food with me, and Kei has had similar experiences.
Lunchtime can be one of the most enjoyable times in school. On the other hand, if you
don’t have any friends yet, it can be the most painful time, too. Unstructured daily
conversation in English can be very difficult for new ESL students to join in. Even
though they may sit with other students, they may still feel a deep level of loneliness –
like I still feel sometimes, too. As I mentioned earlier, ESL students can be just one or
two in a classroom, so there is a great possibility of feeling very isolated. Maki-san, Kei
and I use lunchtime effectively to build close and comfortable relationships with our
students, and to help these students to make friends at school.

Classroom teachers also know that they can look to Maki-san, Kei, and I for help
when something happens or when they need an opinion about their ESL students. Maki-
san told me about a dream she had when she had invited me to a family gathering to
celebrate the holiday season (Third Intergenerational Conversation, December 29, 2007).
Maki-san’s story about the dream demonstrates clearly what she believes and does as a
teacher for ESL students, including constantly communicating between students, their
parents and classroom teachers, and bridging two cultures and languages. Maki-san
called the dream *Collage of Memories*. Following is an excerpt about Maki-san’s dream from my field notes journal:

Maki-san had a dream last night. The day she had the dream, she had gone to a mall to walk with her husband and had bumped into the principal from her school. Maki-san said that it was her encounter with the principal that triggered her to have that dream that night. Maki-san said, “What happened in the dream was really similar to what happens in everyday school life, especially when something has happened.” I asked, “Something happened to one of your students?” Maki-san answered, “Yes, so …the dream was not really happy, but rather a negative one.” Then, she started to explain the dream further, and the dream was really about what she does in her everyday life as a teacher in the school.

Maki-san said that the dream was in her classroom. She was with her students and she got a phone call from a classroom teacher. Something had happened to one of her students, who was in a general classroom at that moment. So she needed to leave her high school students in her ESL classroom saying, “Be good and stay here. Ok?!”

I asked, “What had happened to the student?”

Maki-san answered, “I don’t remember. But this kind of thing always happens in school. My students may get sick or get in trouble and not be able to say anything and start to cry, or he or she may have some trouble with his/her parents… I might be able to deal with the situation just by phone, but if not, I need to go to their classroom wherever they need me […]”

(Field notes journal, December 29, 2007)
Once, Maki-san and I talked about our roles as teachers being like ninjas, who can change forms in many different ways in order to face different situations and tasks. Maki-san said that she feels that classroom teachers seem to expect her to use magic to fix any situation related to ESL students. It shows again how hard it can be for classroom teachers to understand what is going on with ESL students and how best to approach them. It also shows that teachers trust Maki-san to work with them to communicate with ESL students and create a better environment for them. The significant point is that Maki-san does not believe that she is the only person who is responsible for ESL students’ education. On the contrary, she believes that it is extremely important to work with classroom teachers. Therefore, Maki-san as well as Kei and I are all aware that while we build close relationships with our students, we also try to teach classroom teachers how to communicate more effectively with ESL students.

**Interpersonal Connections With Friends and Peers**

One day, one of my students wrote, “Friendship is like air. Without it, we cannot live.” In terms of ESL students’ issues, we tend to focus on mastering English and catching up on the grade level as the first and almost only priority in their education. ESL students are now required to take standardized tests, and this change may have caused this kind of attitude towards ESL to proliferate and become even stronger.

However, without this “air”, how can students live? They cannot wait until they can use English functionally to make friends, since that could take years. How can students develop the motivation to study without having friends or being happy at school? Maki-san, Kei and I understand that the most important priority for ESL students is making friends first, just like for any other student. Before they are able to learn, it is essential for
them to find friends in their new school context or in the community they inhabit. In this section, I first explain 1) the cultural awareness and interpersonal sensitivity which Maki-san, Kei and I display regarding ESL students’ need for friends and the challenges that we face in this endeavor, 2) how each of us help students make connections with other students in American classrooms, and finally, 3) how we help students who are from a language and/or cultural minority make friends with other Japanese and ESL students.

“We need friends”: Building interpersonal connections with friends.

It was the first day of class at my new local school (after I moved from Japan to the U.S.). I was a second grader. I was walking in a hallway. And at that moment, I learned how painful it can be to be alone and how awful it is to feel lonely. I was just walking in the hallway, but I felt that my heart was almost broken because of the pain of loneliness.

(From a book of 6th grade Class 1, 2005 presented to me by one of my students)

We, adults, may have a tendency to believe that children have a natural ability to make friends in spite of cultural and language differences. But in reality, it is not that easy. Maki-san, Kei, and I have observed that there are many new ESL students who cannot find anyone who they can really call a friend until a year or even years after starting at their local schools, with the exception of friends who share the same language and culture with them.

As I demonstrated in the biographical story section, On Becoming a Teacher, as a Half, a bi-racial person of Caucasian and Japanese descent with experience living in both American and Japanese contexts, Kei expressed several times her feeling of not being
seen as normal in either space until recently, and she recognized the importance of friendships in her own experience.

This is not unique to Kei. I observed something similar working with biracial and bilingual students as a 6th grade classroom teacher in a hoshuko. I had numerous students who came to my class looking uncertain and nervous at the beginning of the school year. They were the students who were second generation Japanese in the United States (Japanese American) or who came to the United States a long time ago and felt more comfortable using English than Japanese. Their nervous or withdrawn expressions looked familiar to me because I had seen them on the faces of ESL students in local schools. These students usually did not have many or any close friends in the classroom and were not doing well academically in the Saturday Japanese school, even though many of them were doing well in their local schools. I felt it was so ironic that even though the community members of the hoshuko had witnessed many Japanese students’ struggles in local schools, they were not able to recognize some students’ similar kinds of difficulties in Saturday Japanese elementary school.

One example of this lack of recognition became evident in my teaching experience. One year, I had two 6th grade students who started the school year determined to quit hoshuko, just like Kei. However, both of their parents wanted them to attend the school at least until they graduated from elementary school. One of the students name was Mari. Her father was Caucasian and her mother was Japanese. She had no friends and her Japanese was not “grade level”. Her mother explained to me why she wanted her daughter to keep on attending Hoshuko. I still remember her very worried tone. She said:
Mari may look like an American girl. But deep down, she actually likes Japanese more than her younger sister. Mari likes Japanese アニメ, animation and Japanese food very much, and her way of thinking is closer to Japanese. But she does not know how to talk to Japanese friends.

Her mother recognized that it was very important for her daughter to have a positive and enjoyable experience in the hoshuko for her identity development. Mari spoke Japanese very well, but as children get older, making friends can start to become more difficult: youth discourse patterns, peer culture, peer pressure, youth sub-cultures and continuously updated popular topics make it more complicated to make friends during teenage years.

One of the greatest supports I had in trying to figure out how to make Mari more comfortable in my class and to possibly help her find friends was her 5th grade teacher, Fumiko. Fumiko was concerned about Mari’s struggle and loneliness when she was in her class so she decided to send her to my class; she knew each teacher’s strengths and which student would benefit from being paired with which teacher. We worked very closely together with Mari and her mother.

Instead of seeking “help” for her directly, I tried to bring up her strengths and interests in the classroom, and tried many group projects taking into consideration which students would be likely to become friends with her. At the end of the school year, she wrote a comment on the class memorial book:

I was a member of Class 1 in 6th grade and I had a lot of fun this year! I was very happy that I made a lot of friends! (From Class 1’s memorial book, 2005)
Mari also became more motivated to study and participate in the classroom and her grades improved as well. This is a great example of how friends really are like “air” for students, and how students cannot have a meaningful school life with them.

In Mari’s case, since she could speak Japanese, the situation was a little different from that of students who cannot speak the language spoken in the school fluently, like many ESL students. A possible problem here is that some classroom teachers do not recognize that ESL students often don’t have any American friends until very late in the process, and sometimes never. Another example from my work is when I was tutoring Toshio, a 4th grade student. Toshio had moved to the U.S. about two years before. After one year, I started to see that Toshio had started to develop more anger inside of him. He felt he had no one he could relate to in the classroom, and thought some of the students were even calling him names even though he did not really understand what they were saying. I decided to attend a parents’ conference and asked him if there was anything he wanted me to talk to his teachers about. He said:

Please ask my teacher to let me play with my friend from a different class on rainy days (Journal, 15, 2008).

Although the school Toshio attends is one of the schools where there are more Japanese students in the area, he was still the only Japanese boy in his class, as is the case for many other Japanese students. In many schools, Japanese students are scattered into different classes in order to help them improve their English faster. He explained that on rainy days the students were only allowed to play with friends in the same class, but that he did not have any friends in his class. When I found out about this it was almost the end of the
school year. I asked him, “What do you usually do on rainy days?” He said that he just played alone.

In the conference, I talked about Toshio’s situation with his two classroom teachers. The teachers did not realize that Toshio did not have any friends. Rather, they said that they thought he was doing all right in the class and that he was quiet but had friends. After talking with the teachers, they promised me to let him play with his friends in the other class.

Maki-san, Kei, and I recognize that the problem is not that classroom teachers do not care about ESL students, but that the system of schooling makes it is very difficult for them to realize the difficulties that ESL students encounter. For example, in Toshio’s case, there were morning and afternoon classroom teachers, and Toshio had to leave his classroom at least once a day for one hour to go to ESL class. Also, classroom teachers are not responsible for lunchtime and lunch recess, which are great opportunities to observe social relationships between students in the school. In addition, classroom teachers are not usually considered “responsible” for talking with ESL students’ parents/caregivers. Usually, ESL teachers or language aid teachers are considered “responsible” for these tasks. Furthermore, the stereotypical image of model minority attached to Asian students may encourage these teachers to believe, without careful observation, that these students are doing just fine. A student who is silent or quiet seems to fit into the expectations of the model minority. Therefore, some teachers may misunderstand or not see beyond the surface enough to realize that these quiet students are crying or angry on the inside because they feel so alone. For all of these reasons, Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that it can be difficult for classroom teachers to know
how these ESL students are being suffocated by not having any friends. Therefore, we know that we need to take initiative to solve these situations for our students.

Eventually, Toshio started to show physical signs of his struggle. After I talked with his mother about it, she communicated with his school and requested to put him in the same class with at least one of his Japanese friends. I still remember Toshio’s big smile at the beginning of the new school year. His anger and physical indications of stress had diminished. Two months into the new academic year, the situation was getting even better. Once, while we were talking about topic of journal writing, which usually caused him to hesitate a lot, he said to me, in a happy tone, “アメリカ人の友達が出来た！I found an American friend, today!” and he wrote about the occasion enthusiastically.

Toshio’s case demonstrates that having friends can give ESL students not only a reason to go to school and live a meaningful life but also give them self-confidence and a sense of self-validation as well.

**Extending friendships: connecting ESL students to other U.S. students.**

Although, ideally, one would like to help students make friends in their classrooms, Maki-san, Kei, and I also recognize that it is sometimes very difficult to encourage, especially when we are not the general classroom teachers. Also, it sometimes simply takes time to make friends in the classroom because of the language barrier. However, all three of us know that we cannot afford to wait that long while our students are socially and emotionally isolated in the classroom.

Although there is a difference between having friends and being accepted by classmates and peers, we, three teachers know that forming friendships can be one of the first steps we need to work on in order to help students feel validated in their classrooms.
Therefore, it is important to work with classroom teachers to create environments where students can feel comfortable, welcomed and validated.

For many ESL students, feeling accepted by their peers means feeling accepted in the community and in the United States, and this is something that the majority of language and cultural minority students are desperately seeking. Kei’s biographic stories demonstrate the importance of feeling accepted in the community. As I wrote in the previous section, when Kei’s family moved to the United States, Kei tried not to go to sleep each night for a week so that she would be too tired to be forced to go to school. Although she was only in first grade, she knew that she would lack the essential “air” of friendship if she went to school. In her case, the family decided to move to a town where “difference is cool” (Kei), but many language and culture minority students don’t have that choice. Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that some students are really suffering in school by not being able to make friends.

In another biographical story, Kei said that she was always perceived as a Japanese girl for students in the local school and an American for students in the hoshuko. What she was longing for was a feeling of being fully accepted, a feeling of belonging and sameness with other students in either school.

Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that when there is a lack of appropriate support and not enough time to make friends, many language/cultural minority students need to figure out their own ways of being accepted by or surviving in the communities in their local school and the U.S. Since this is something that their parents/caregivers or teachers have never experienced in the school context themselves, it is usually difficult for these students to
find adults to talk to about their situation. Furthermore, these difficulties can cause them
to develop a degree of denial towards certain parts of their language/cultural background.

Although the discourse of multicultural education encourages acceptance of
differences in the school community, Maki-san, Kei, and I also recognize that the
differences in immigrant students will only really be accepted by other American
classmates when they find something that they have in common. For instance, Kei and
her sister enjoyed singing Japanese songs in Karaoke and watched Japanese television
programs when they were adolescents. Those were important experiences for developing
common peer cultural knowledge and generating topics that they could share with their
Japanese friends.

When children from different backgrounds feel so foreign to each other that they
cannot find many common interests or values, it is difficult for them to accept each other
and become friends. Therefore, when the number of culturally minority students is so low
in a classroom or school, they learn on their own that it is important not to be too
different from the majority of the students, because their culture and language are not
viewed as normal and could be disadvantage to making friends.

Maki-san, Kei, and I worked with students, their parents, and their teachers according
to each student’s situation. Since some students are really alone or only a few among the
dominant group of students in the classroom, we need to generate creative strategies and
pedagogical approaches that really focus on each student’s case.

Reflecting on her teaching experiences, Maki-san shared how she changes her
approach depending on each student’s particular case. She explained:
When I was a newer teacher I used to tell my students, “You need to talk to American students.” Or “Go and ask them to let you eat lunch with them.” Basically, I was pushing students to try to fit in more actively. However, I learned later that there are some students who cannot really do it. If I won’t eat lunch with them, they are going to eat lunch alone. So, I started to be more flexible or … softer depending on the student (Interview July 5, 2007).

Like all children, there are some ESL children who are better at making social networks or making friends and there are some who are not as good at this. If they are good at or enjoy sports, band, drawing or anything other than studying, they are more likely to be able to make friends and find a space where they can enjoy a feeling of belonging. However, there are some students who do not feel comfortable joining these clubs. Maki-san’s deep level of understanding of her students makes her very flexible as she interacts with different students, adapting her approach to their individual needs.

**Connecting with friends who can share life experiences and interests.** Because many people believe that the priority for ESL students is to improve their English competence, there are caregivers, teachers, and even ESL students themselves who believe that it is not good for them to use their first language or to always be with friends who speak their same language. In other words, many people still see ESL students using their first language as an obstacle to developing a *successful* school and social life in the United States. However, in reality, as I explained in the previous section, it is very difficult for ESL or even bilingual/bicultural students to make real friends with whom they can laugh, feel comfortable and have a feeling of mutual understanding. However,
if it is difficult for many students to make friends in the general classroom, where can they find friends?

As I discussed before, because language is often treated as the first priority, many teachers still discourage students from using their own language in school. This has created a tendency to put Japanese students in different classes. For instance, one of my students attended an elementary school that had more Japanese students than other schools. However, from the student’s perspective, they were either alone or one of only two Japanese students among many other American students in their classrooms. In this kind of political school atmosphere, it was not rare for me to hear a classroom teacher from a local school say, “I am sorry for Japanese students, because they need to study at the Japanese School every Saturday” or “In Saturday Japanese school, do teachers encourage students to study Japanese rather than English? I have been seeing that Japanese students are not working hard enough for local schools compared to other Asian students.” However, Maki-san, Kei and I know how important attending a hoshuko can be for many Japanese students in the United States. Some students are barely surviving in this totally new country simply because they can go and see their friends at hoshuko, every week. Maki-san explained:

Well…hoshukos are places to heal for many Japanese students. Although the school is open only once a week, the students can be very open (they can relax and be themselves). So Saturday Japanese elementary school is the place where they can put out their souls (sprits) openly, and they can heal their souls (sprits) (Interview, 8/7/2007).
Some people and teachers in the U.S. may think that this is just “escaping.” In reality, however, having friends or a place of healing helps many students have the hope and motivation necessary to make a greater effort in their local schools.

One example from another experience of my teaching is about Koji, who I mentioned before. Koji used to say that he hated local schools. He said that he did not like studying there and basically hated everything about local schools and the United States. When I went to visit his classroom, I found that not only did he not have any friends but that he also didn’t have anyone he could speak to comfortably. He was seriously behind in his grade level as well. Before the new academic year started, we requested that he remain in the same grade. We also requested to change his classroom teacher to provide him a fresh start and to have his Japanese friend in the same class as him. I also asked his parents to rearrange his daily schedule, which had been fully loaded every day, to reduce the load and make sure they allowed him to have time to play with his friends after school. When the new academic year started, we found that he did not have friends in his class, but that there was a Japanese boy who he knew from a hoshuko in the same class. After the first day of the new school year, I asked to him, “Did you find your Japanese friend in your class?” Koji said:

Yes….I mean no, but I recognized a Japanese boy from the hoshuko in my class.

He is not my friend yet. But I think I would be able to ask him questions. I feel we would be able support and help each other. (Journal, September 8, 2007)

I was extremely happy that he had started to show signs of hope and that he might possibly be happy about going to the local school. At the end of school year, his family went back to Japan for good. Before he left, I asked Koji how he felt about going back.
The same student who had always wanted to go back to Japan said to me that he wanted to stay. He even said that now going to the local school was much more fun than going to hoshuko. He blossomed academically, too. A year ago, when I met him, he could only write a few sentences with great difficulty. Now he was enjoying writing stories. The very first story we wrote together (I only helped him start) was amazing. It was about his adventures going to the era of dinosaurs with his friends and I. Many of his friends’ names were in the story. After he finished writing it, we read the story aloud again and again to each other with a lot of enjoyment. His face was glowing with joy. He said, “Wow, the story is just as good as the real books in the book store!” I said, “Yes, you are a real author, Koji”. We invited his mother and younger brother to listen to the story. Koji said with a big smile, “Mom, if I become a famous writer, I will buy a big diamond ring for you!” After that, he started to write even more stories by himself with great pleasure and confidence.

This is an example that shows that having friends who share the same language is not really an obstacle, like many teachers may think. On the contrary, it can be quite the opposite. Although we also worked closely to improve his reading and writing all year, I believe that it was the fact that he had friends that made him find joy and meaning in his everyday life. And I believe that helped him to blossom academically well. Maki-san and Kei are also aware of the significant relationship between their students’ academic success and having friends. In addition, the way the school heard his voice when he needed friends also helped him to develop trust for his teachers and the school.

Maki-san, Kei, and I also know that students who speak the same language are not the only possibility when developing friendships. For example, many of our ESL students
became friends with students who came from Taiwan, China or South Korea. I had the same experience among graduate students in the university, especially just after I came to the United States. It was much easier for me to understand and communicate with someone from an East Asian background because we shared similar lifestyles and value systems. Many of us also shared the fact that we could use Chinese characters, Kanji in Japanese, as a communicating tool in writing, too.

The other reason this happens is that ESL students or newer immigrant students can share their experiences with each other and understand the kinds of difficulties they encounter, especially until they are comfortable using English so that they can feel more comfortable in their local schools. For example, there was a student, Satoshi, who initially said with an uncomfortable laugh, “There are many Indian families in my neighborhood and they smell bad!” It was his first encounter with someone who came from a different cultural background, just like himself. However, a year later, Satoshi told me:

Satoshi: A new student came from Iran. I felt like I was looking at myself.

Gumiko: Why?

Satoshi: Because he cannot speak English yet, and I could not speak English when I first arrived, either (Journal October 10, 2007).

Identifying with the new student’s experience, Satoshi found sympathy and a sense of closeness toward him. Satoshi continued talking with relief about how the student could not say anything but “yes” and “no,” like him before, and how some American students had helped him. Knowing how difficult it is to be alone without knowing English, Satoshi felt happy for the student because someone had helped him. Maki-san, Kei, and I
recognize that these experiences help our students understand and recognize the other ESL or newer immigrant students’ situations and help them develop an awareness of diversity in an authentic way.

For example, Maki-san noticed that sometimes, it can be easier for some Japanese ESL students to develop friendships with students from other countries rather than from their own. She said that since the population of the Japanese community is very small, there are students who do not get along well with the other children in their particular community. It is not rare for this to happen. With this knowledge, she asked some students from India to talk to a Japanese girl on their way back home one day. Maki-san explained that the student was lonely and did not have any friends yet. She said:

How can I put it…they are simply very kind and good kids. So I told them about Yoko saying, “Yoko refused to come to school. If you go to her house to ask her to come to school together, I think she will come to school.” These students said, “Really? Does Yoko feel lonely?” “She wants to be friends with us?” They are from India and they are really good and kind students so they could understand Yoko’s loneliness. But they don’t make things too complicated (in terms of friendship) like Japanese people do sometimes. It worked very well. They helped Yoko start to come to school again. After the talk, these students started to go to visit Yoko’s house on the way to school to pick her up and they became good friends.

(Interview: July 5, 2007)

The closeness within groups of people from the same ethnic background in very small communities can also make things even more complicated, especially in terms of human relationships, not only between students, but also between students and their families.
This was something that Maki-san was very aware of. This instance demonstrates, again, how Maki-san, Kei, and I work with individual students closely and adapt our approach depending on the particular situation of ESL or newer immigrant students in local schools.

In this section, I did not mean to suggest that it is not important to have *American* friends in the classroom. On the contrary, most language/cultural minority students are really eager to be accepted by peers and teachers in their local schools. They really want to feel that they belong and having friends is one of the most significant symbols of this acceptance for them. However, in reality, they cannot wait for years without having any friends in their local schools. The prolonged loneliness and struggle can sometimes turn into *hate* and *anger* toward local schools, themselves, or their families, and in the long term, this kind of mental distress may seriously disturb their mental development, too. Therefore, Maki-san, Kei, and I take this issue very seriously and do not consider it a choice to let any of our students become isolated in school. We strongly believe that having friends is the beginning of a meaningful life.

**Interpersonal Connections: Building Bridges with Parents**

Maki-san, Kei, and I acknowledge the unique difficulties that parents/caregivers of immigrant children often face in the process of child rearing and their children’s education. Our students’ families and parents are socially disconnected not only from mainstream American society but also from their own home culture. In addition, since many of them do not have much or any experience with local schools in the U.S. or U.S. youth culture, they are at a serious risk of being disconnected from their own children as well.
More specifically, Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that since cultural norms, lifestyles and social values between host and hosted cultures are not only very different but also often conflicting, it is not easy for our students’ parents, especially for those who are newly immigrated to the United States, to effectively communicate with classroom teachers and the school community as well as their own children, who have been receiving education in the United States. Therefore, Kei, Maki-san and I understand that one of our most significant roles as teachers who work with children of immigrants (especially, first and second generation), is to sometimes help them to build bridges between the parents and the classroom teachers, the school, the host school culture and even sometimes their own children, depending on the case. In this section, I demonstrate how we understand and help establish caring and effective relationships/communication between 1) parents and teachers, and 2) students and their parents.

**Building bridges between teachers and their students’ parents.** As I demonstrated previously, Maki-san, Kei, and I consistently communicate with classroom teachers and our students’ parents/caregivers. Many classroom teachers and parents sometimes do not know who is supposed to take the initiative to communicate about students-related matters. Therefore, teachers sometimes *assume* that ESL teachers/aids are the bridge between them to help them communicate with each other. As a result, there are many cases where the voices of the parents cannot reach the classroom teacher unless ESL teachers/aids or teachers who work specifically with the ESL population connect each side, and these three teachers are very aware of this.

**Establishing trustful relationships with parents.** Maki-san, Kei, and I do not see this just as a responsibility that comes with being a teacher who works with ESL children, but
rather find great joy in communicating with our students’ parents. For example, Kei shared how much she really enjoys parents’ conferences and conversations with them in general because she is truly interested in getting to know her students’ parents and their home life as well as their cultural background.

The three of us recognize that although it is very important for teachers to understand the details of students’ cultural, linguistic, social and family backgrounds and apply this knowledge in teaching, it is not easy to do so, especially when their students are not from the same cultural/linguistic background as them. Teachers need to take active roles in order to get to know their students better. For example, during interviews with Kei, she often talked about her Latino/a students. Kei had many ESL students from Mexican or Latino backgrounds. She said that many parents were very hard-working and yet not wealthy like many of the other students’ parents in her school district. When one of her students mentioned that her parents worked at a restaurant, Kei and the other ESL teachers decided to visit the restaurant. She said that probably not many classroom teachers in her school knew where ESL students’ parents worked and probably would not have visited the restaurant even if they did know, and she could not understand why. Kei said that she always liked teachers who were willing to break the boundaries of the classroom walls. After thinking a while she said, “Oh, that’s the same as my mother’s style!” Having observed Maki-san as a mother and as a teacher to other students as well as herself, Kei has been learning and constructing her own beliefs as a teacher on how to communicate with her students’ parents. She shared how important it is for her to get to know students’ families as a teacher. This conversation about her relationship with students’ parents is evidence of her active observation as well as her conscious and
continuing reflections geared towards attaining a better understand her students from multiple perspectives, such as their cultural, family, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Maki-san also shared her stories about driving her students back to their homes after school many times (she cannot do it anymore because her school now has a stricter policy that prohibits it). She said that she drove many ESL students, from countries such as India, Vietnam, and China, back to their houses, in some cases, every day. She explained that sometimes her students stayed longer at school to study or do other activities, but since some of their parents did not have driver’s licenses yet, the children could not find rides home. Knowing that they were left alone in the school building, she could not leave them. She explained that these home visits became great opportunities for students’ families and her to get to know each other and build trustful relationships. While she was talking about these experiences she said many times with a smile, “すごく喜んでくれて（The students’ family members and students looked really happy when I visited their home”). These visits helped her to understand what kind of family life her students had and what kinds of neighborhoods they lived in. She said:

One time, when I drove one of my students back to her house, something interesting happened. Many Indian people lived close to each other. When I went to the neighborhood, one of my students found me and said, “Oh! Maki! Do you want to come to visit my house?” so I said, “Sure!” And when I went to her house, there was an older sister lying in a living room. She was disabled so that she lay there most of the day. I thought that I now understood my student and her family life better. I talked with her parents. They were very happy to have me
there. They had never had the experience of a teacher coming to visit their home since teachers usually don’t that in the United States. So, I decided to visit many of my students’ homes….

In another example, she continued:

So I visited many of my students’ houses…. my students and their families gave me a variety of things when I visited their places. I thought 本当にアジアの人って、のりが日本人と同じだよね (which means: Maki-san found many similarities between people from other Asian backgrounds and people from Japan regarding how to communicate, interact, show joy and appreciation. It provided a sense of familiarity and a comfortable feeling.) For example, when my students’ family had me in their house, they had a tendency to want to give me something. One day, when I drove a student from China back to his house, his grandpa was there. He said to me, “Here! Come and sit!” “Drink this!”, “Eat this!”, and gave me several things to try. When I visited other Chinese students, their families were very happy, too (Interview October 20, 2007).

She explained how her visits helped her to understand her students from different perspectives and to build a more open and trustful relationship with them as well as with their family members.

Maki-san, Kei and I acknowledge that translating language and culture, and becoming a resource for classroom teachers/school community members and our students’ parents are some of the roles that are most expected of us as teachers who work with children of immigrants. The findings show that all three of us emphasize that our role is not just to provide resources but also to provide psychological and emotional
support for our students’ parents/caregivers. In the many cases, we can offer the mentoring and mental support that is not readily accessible to them, since many of these parents or caregivers live socially disconnected from the rest of U.S. society. For instance, many of our Japanese students come to the U.S. because of their fathers’ jobs. Most of their fathers work for the same Japanese companies in the United States and therefore do not necessarily need to communicate with many American people outside of their companies. Their mothers are usually stay-at-home mothers since, because of their visa status, they are usually not allowed to work in the U.S. Therefore, many of them don’t have much or any contact with people in the U.S. other than the other Japanese mothers they meet at school. I recall having a conversation with the mother of one of my tutoring students. She said that, nothing has changed in comparison to when she was in Japan. She said that she only needed to use English when she went to the grocery store.

In this kind of situation, it is important for the mothers to have someone who understands both languages and cultures, especially the school culture in the U.S., and with whom they can have a caring and trustful relationship with.

For example, it is amazing to hear stories about Maki-san’s conversations and interactions with her students’ parents, mostly mothers. Whenever Maki-san starts to talk about her students, she almost always starts to talk about her communications with their parents, too. Maki-san has an incredibly trusting relationship with her students’ parents. She said:

When something happens to their children, the parents know and feel that they can come to talk to me so that I will be able to help them (Interview, 8/7/2007).
Again, one of the reasons why each of us three teachers have earned our students’ parents’ trust is that we do not take this role as an obligation. Instead, we really enjoy communicating with these parents. Our sincere interest encourages these parents to willingly communicate with us, whether it be in fortunate or unfortunate occasions.

*Scaffolding communication between parents and classroom teachers.* Maki-san, Kei and I recognize how difficult it can be for our students’ parents to remain confident in a different country because of the language barrier and unknown cultural differences. It is also difficult for many immigrant parents to know what is really going on in the school because they don’t have school experiences as children in the United States. After Kei became a classroom teacher and she developed better communication with other classroom teachers, she explained that teachers’ behavior is not necessarily due to prejudice but simply due to the fact that they don’t know what to do with ESL students.

In addition, the political climate around ESL students has changed since the introduction of standardized exams, which had formerly been excused from being recorded for four years for ESL students, and are now required to be recorded as official scores in each school community. This change has put more pressure on teachers and they have started to attach deficit models to ESL students in parent conferences, using a discourse that adds to the parents’ lack of confidence. In this kind of climate, it is not easy for parents to maintain their confidence. In addition, especially in the case of many Japanese ESL students, mothers are almost uniquely responsible for taking care of their children. In conferences, I often heard my students’ mothers say things like “I am almost like a single mother. My husband is not home until very late.”
Maki-san, Kei, and I believe that it is important to communicate with each parent, mostly mothers, closely, and to inform them about how their students are doing and to help them feel more comfortable in their new environment. Just as for any other student, it is important for parents to hear about the growth of their children from their teachers. For example, Kei said that it is a true pleasure for her to let her students’ parents know what kind of achievements her students are accomplishing. One day, her student from a Mexican background raised her hand to ask a question, which Kei had not seen her do before. Kei was really happy to see her student’s growth in self-confidence and to see her participate in class activities comfortably, so she talked to her student’s parents about it. This kind of communication is especially important for ESL students’ parents. Kei’s enthusiasm shows parents not only their children’s progress, but also that they have a teacher who is really interested in their children’s growth and who cares for and loves them. This helps establish trustful relationships between parents and teachers, but also gives the parents confidence and a feeling of being cared for.

In the unfamiliar school culture of the U.S., there are many occasions in which immigrant parents could easily feel uncomfortable due to their lack of knowledge about the school context. The three of us acknowledge the existence of such cases and have observed some of them. Therefore, we try to help parents understand the situation better in the cultural context while also explaining to classroom teachers how ESL students’ parents could misunderstand situations or act “inappropriately” because of their lack of knowledge about U.S. society.

For example, the way of conducting discipline and the role of the principal within it is very different in schools in the U.S. and Japan. In the U.S., principals take on a
significant role in terms of disciplining students. Students are sent to the principal’s office to talk about matters of discipline and for other situations. However, if you are sent to the principal’s office in Asian countries, it is most likely a very serious occasion. For many parents, it is not an acceptable thing to happen. One example I recall from my own teaching experience is when a 6th grade student was sent to the principal’s office because he had thrown wet papers at the mirror in the school bathroom with a friend. He was a very bright, cheerful and well-behaved student in my class. He always studied very hard, and he had a lot of friends. When the incident occurred, it was about two weeks before our class field trip before graduation at Hoshuko and his parents decided not to let him join the trip. I explained to the parents that the role of the principal is different in the U.S. and Japan but, unfortunately, I could not change his parents’ decision. Many Japanese parents think that going to the principal’s office is ひじり (Haji, meaning shameful) for not only the child but also the entire family.

Suspension from school happens much less in Japan, too. Maki-san gave another example:

When you cannot understand English but know that other students are calling your name, it is hard. But when you start to understand, it is even harder. One time, in a school bus, my student was called a “Jap” and he could understand what the other student was calling him. I am not sure how the principal was informed but the student who called him a “Jap” was suspended from the school for a while. My student’s mother was very surprised and worried when she found out about this. She said that she had never thought the incident would cause such a serious punishment. Now she was worried about the other student looking for revenge.
against her son. (Field note journal from third Intergenerational conversation, December 29, 2007).

The mother’s fear was compounded by her lack of knowledge about the school system and culture, as well as the language barrier and a feeling powerlessness in regards to her son and herself. There are many cases like this. Therefore, it is important for Maki-san, Kei, and I to take act as bridges between teachers/schools and parents and help the immigrant parents feel more comfortable knowing that they are not alone and that there is someone who is there to support them.

At the same time, it is important for the parents to feel comfortable and confident communicating with their children’s classroom teachers. Therefore, Maki-san and I believe that scaffolding this process and helping them gain agency is one of our roles as teachers who work with immigrant populations. Although most Japanese people have at least six years of English language education, many Japanese parents feel uncomfortable speaking in English. This is partly because they did not learn and practice using English as a communication tool as part of their education in Japan. I have observed this in my own experience as a teacher. For this reason, I communicate with my students and their family members as well as future classroom teachers in the University and share my own experiences with them, telling how little I could use and understand English when I first came to the U.S. and giving them specific examples. I also use my knowledge of language communication to show them how people can communicate with each other effectively without relying uniquely on speaking the language.

Positive enforcement is not only important for individual children of immigrants but also for their parents, especially those who are greatly disconnected from local
communities in the United States. Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that many immigrant parents believe that they are not capable of supporting their children academically and in other school issues. For example, many documents from local schools can make immigrant parents feel intimidated. Encountering unknown aspects of the school system and new words related to school may make them feel less capable. This kind of everyday experience gradually makes many parents feel unwelcome. For example, some parents try not to visit their own children’s classroom due to fear of disturbing the teacher or the other students through their visit. I was able to observe this myself though my tutoring experience. There was a mother of two children, one who was in second grade and the other in kindergarten, who had moved to the U.S. about four years since. I started to tutor them just before Christmas in 2006 and realized that their mother had never visited her daughters’ classrooms. She said that it was difficult for her to find someone to look after her younger daughter, but that she was also afraid to go. Knowing that the classroom teacher was looking for a volunteer to help children make a Christmas gingerbread house, I encouraged her to volunteer. I explained the system and the atmosphere of volunteering in local schools, and how the teacher would enjoy and appreciate her help. I also told her that her daughter would enjoy having her there to help her and the other students. It must have been a big adventure for the mother, but in the end she had a very successful experience there and her daughter brought the Christmas gingerbread house back to their home with big smile.

Another example arose when I was tutoring ESL students. There were two mothers whose sons had been having a difficult time psychologically, emotionally, socially, and academically at school. I tutored these students at different times in different schools, but
their situations had a lot in common. While contacting their classroom teachers as a tutor, I took the opportunity to let them know how wonderful their children were and gave them specific examples. As a result, the children started to show their enjoyment of learning during our tutoring sessions. This helped the mothers and I build a trustful relationship. At the end of the school year, I communicated with both mothers to discuss how to help their children have a better environment in their local schools. Amazingly, eventually both of them stood up for their sons, and told their schools and classroom teachers what they believed to be the best for their sons and the kinds of help they needed from school. Each mother requested that the school place her child in a class where he would be able to have a friend or other Japanese male student. One mother even requested to let her son to stay in the same grade after we had discussed the possibility at great length. It was wonderful to see that each school really took the time to have meetings about these students to create a better environment for them in the coming academic year. Each student had a much better experience the following school year, and one of them even said, “My mother is my hero!” I am sure that that is the best thing one could hear from one’s own child. It is important for children to know that they can rely on their own parents/caregivers; therefore, Maki-san, Kei, and I believe that helping students’ parents to develop confidence as parents and adults in this country is also a significant role for us as teachers.

Supporting communication between children and their parents/caregivers. Maki-san, Kei and I emphasize that since many children of immigrants are isolated from the dominant culture in schools, it is even more important for these students to have positive and strong relationships with their parents. However, in reality, many of these students
start having to act adults’ roles after moving to the United States, translating, answering
phone calls, or talking to visitors. At the same time, their roles as children or young
adults of Asian descent in their family may sometimes conflict with the values they are
learning from U.S. local schools. In other words, children receive conflicting messages
from two societies and are then expected to adjust to them perfectly without role models
to guide them. This kind of unique situation makes the relationship between the students
and their parents complicated. Some families develop stronger relationships after they
move to the United States than when they were in Japan but other families struggle to
find a new definition of relationships among family members. Maki-san believes that
such struggles among families are related to whether parents feel confident about
parenting and living in another country or not. She explains:

The other difficulties have to do with how to support communication between
students and their parents. In these cases, children eventually start to be able to
speak or use English better than their parents, so the parents need to get help from
their children in everyday life. When the parents are confident and have a great
relationship with their children, everything is fine. The children can get help and
support from their parents to develop their confidence, self-respect and self-
esteeem. But that is not the only case. When students don’t have a good
relationship with their parents, it becomes harder (Interview, 7/5/2007).

She continued to illustrate this with an example about a student who did not have a strong
relationship with his parents and who eventually started to hate his identity as a Japanese
person. This was one of the students that she felt that she could not help in spite of her
efforts when he was a high school student. However, after communicating with his
mother, she found out that he is now in a better situation and that he has been admitted to
the university he wanted to go to after a brief period of struggle. Maki-san’s story
demonstrates that she does not see the limits of education within the classroom walls and
this teaching philosophy that she, Kei and I have in common.

The three of us use positive discourse about their students with their parents in front
of them but also without them. Japanese parents have a tendency not to provide much
positive enforcement to their children. The internet website, *You Tube*, offers many
examples showing how Asian/Asian American parents communicate with their children,
especially in matters related to schoolwork, from children’s or young adults’ points of
view. It is amazing how similar they are to each other even though the countries that
appear are as varied as Thailand, Taiwan, China, South Korea, and Japan. However, since
new ESL students are especially vulnerable in school, they need to have positive
relationships with their parents. Therefore, the example of Maki-san’s communication
with her students’ parents demonstrates her strong belief in the importance of helping
parents know the strengths of their children and encouraging them to communicate with
their children while acknowledging their strengths. For students, knowing that teachers
have positive things to say about them can also help increase their confidence.

As I demonstrated, Maki-san, Kei, and I see our role as that of a mediator between
students, parents, and school members. This role is especially important because the
individuals in these three positions (students, parents, and school members) are at risk of
becoming disconnected and isolated from each other due to the unique situations that
immigrant children and families have to face.
Cross-Cultural Mediation

Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that one of the most significant reasons for the problems that immigrant children face is that what is *normal* for them is not only ‘not normal’ but also sometimes conflicts with some expected social values and behaviors in the United States. When such clashes occur, Maki-san, Kei, and I believe that it is important to perform explicit cultural interpretation for each side as cultural facilitators.

Maki-san, Kei, and I also acknowledge that some of the difficulties that new immigrant students encounter are caused by the fact that the adults around them lack authentic cultural references as well as cross-cultural experiences, so that they don’t know how to effectively help their children. Therefore, these new immigrant students are in many cases on their own, to some degrees.

In this section, I examine the findings that emerged as important in Maki-san, Kei’s and my efforts as cross-cultural and transnational interpreters and mediators between U.S. and Japanese cultures. They are:

1. Mediating Between Culturally Conflicting Social Values
2. Mediating Between Culturally Conflicting Communications
3. Mediating Between Culturally Conflicting Meanings of Teaching and Learning

Mediating Between Culturally Conflicting Social Values

Maki-san, Kei and I understand that common sense and social values and expectations between the U.S. and Japanese cultures are often very different and sometimes conflicting, and that these conflicts cause difficulties for our students to survive in their schools without feeling rejected or rejecting the host culture and people.
In this section, I demonstrate our understanding of common sense in the two cultures and how we use this knowledge to support our students, their parents, and their teachers.

**Feeling lost in different communities: not knowing which is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’**. As Asian American immigrants, Maki-san, Kei, and I understand the feeling of uncertainty in ‘not knowing what is considered normal and right’ in society in the U.S. or Japan. During the first intergenerational conversational interview (November 17, 2007) with Mai-san and Kei, Maki-san expressed her fear and helplessness of ‘not knowing what is normal and right’ in the U.S. or a foreign country. She explained this using a metaphor of the cultural coordinate grid. She said:

> When you live in a foreign country, it is difficult to see where you are located on the grid. On the X axis and Y axis… Where are we located (in the society)? It is very difficult to find it out. When something happens, you also don’t know where the incident should be located on the grid. Does it happen to everyone? Or does it happen more often to someone like me? Or does it happen accidentally because I am Japanese? If something happens in your own country, you can find out where than incident falls on the grid. I have a strong fear of not being able to see the grid here (Intergenerational Interview: November 17, 2007).

When Maki-san said this, Kei and I expressed our profound agreement with what she said. In Japanese, we say, 右も左もわからない (can’t even recognize right from left) when we feel totally lost, not knowing what we should do. Living in a foreign country or community is like 右も左もわからない, (can’t even recognize right from left), so that your common sense or knowledge and experience of social values not only does not work...
but can also cause conflicts, make you feel totally lost in a new place, and make you feel helpless and powerless.

Kei experienced a similar sense of helplessness and powerlessness as a child. In a brief autobiography she wrote for an M.Ed. course, she wrote:

I am a second generation Asian American. I consider this to be separate from being bicultural; it is about being the daughter of a Japanese immigrant, and living in the United States. My mother did not always know what the norms of “American” life were. When I entered the public school system in the United States, it was a learning experience for her as well. My mother’s Japanese culture influenced my everyday life in American culture. Feeling ignorant about cultural norms made me feel different because I felt as though everyone else knew what to do but me (Kei’s Autobiography paper p.4).

Although Kei grew up with a Caucasian father and a Japanese mother mostly in the United States, she had experiences that were very similar to those of many immigrant students at school. Kei expressed several times in her autobiography as well as in interviews that she did not know what was expected in the classroom when she started to attend an elementary school in the United States because she could not learn *what was natural and expected* from her parents. The quotation from her paper explains the complexity of the different experiences between adults and children of immigrant populations. Since the adult population of immigrants does not necessarily have experience living as a child in the United States, they may not know what kind of cultural experience and knowledge is lacking from their children’s daily lives in comparison to their peers in school. At the same time, when the children grow up, they also do not
know much about how to appropriately behave outside of their student-identity outside of their own cultural context yet.

In addition, the three of us recognize is that cross-cultural experience is not as simple as cross-cultures between Japan and the United States, but actually more complex. One additional complication is the cross-cultural experience between urban and rural areas. For example, the school where Maki-san works is located in a rural area. Maki-san said in an intergenerational interview:

What I say to Japanese people (parents and students) in my school is “Although there are cultural shocks in the United States after you come from Japan, please don’t forget you are coming from a city to a rural area.” Many Japanese people have a tendency to assume that any difficulties or problems they experience are caused by (their cross-cultural experiences of) the United States, the United States, and again, the United States. But it is not only reason. We have small cities everywhere in Japan. There are many people crowded together and there are many stores…most Japanese people are coming from such kinds of places (to my school). However, the community where my school is located is in a really rural area. So, these Japanese people in my school may have cross-cultural shock because of that, too. That is why I tell my students’ parents to please consider such kind of urban vs. rural cross-cultural differences. Otherwise, they blame the (cultural differences of) the United States (November 17, 2007).

Maki-san recognizes that her students and their families experience multiple cross-cultural experiences, including cross-cultural experiences between rural and urban cultures, and she regularly helps her students and their families to understand this. This
kind of confusion, caused by a combination of multiple cross-cultural experiences and unfamiliarity with new cultures makes it even more difficult for newcomers in the community to find out what is causing each problem and could lead them to draw wrong conclusions. Maki-san’s quote also suggests that such oversimplified false assumptions might trigger and accumulate misjudgments between people from different cultures.

Kei also shared her experience between rural and urban cultures referring back to her experiences as a college student in Tokyo, Japan. In an intergenerational interview, Kei described a specific situation in which she felt there was something wrong with her Japanese. She recounted the following incident:

I went to a flower shop in a department store to buy a bouquet to bring for my friend’s piano concert in Tokyo. When I bought it, I asked a clerk whether they had any ribbons for the bouquet. Then the clerk said (imitating Kei’s voice so that it sounded like she was making fun of Kei), “We don’t have any ribbons.” I asked, “Really? You don’t have any?” But she did not say anything like, “You can find them on the third floor.” If I go to a flower shop in Hiroshima, a clerk would typically be more friendly…The clerk in the flower shop in Tokyo probably did not even apologize…It was kind of shocking for me (International Conversation, November 17, 2007).

When she was in Tokyo, Kei lost her confidence in her ability to communicate in Japanese. However, later she found out it was not because of her Japanese but because of the cultural differences between Tokyo, which is the biggest city in Japan, and Hiroshima. Responding to what Kei had said, I added:
After I came to the United States, I experienced that even a small thing made me feel really bad and shocked. It is like… I may not have felt like that if I was in Japan, but here, I felt bad or felt that I must have done something wrong (International Conversation, November 17, 2007).

When Kei and I faced difficulties in new or less familiar cultural contexts, our confidences were easily shaken in that context and we imagined that we must have done something wrong. That is why we both insist on the importance of helping our students to increase their confidence. In an intergenerational interview, we all agreed on this point, saying things like: “After all, helping students to have confidence is so important,” “We, teachers, need to make an effort to help students have confidence” and “students grow when they are praised as a result of increasing their confidence” (November 17, 2007).

Another cross-cultural experience arises from differences in socio-economic class. Maki-san’s family moved to a liberal college town for her daughters’ education. Maki-san and her husband were from a more working class family and she recognized the cultural differences between two. For instance, Maki-san explained:

People in my community don’t know what it means not to have money. They always had money and will continue to have money, so they cannot understand the pain that you feel when you don’t really have money. They are the people who can afford to buy cars but choose not to and ride bicycles instead. They look down on people who want to buy cars, but there are people who cannot afford cars. They save money very hard to buy a car, and when they buy a car, they feel very happy. But I don’t think people in my community can understand this kind of happiness and share that happiness with them (Interview, November 17, 2007).
All three of us are uniquely positioned because we are insiders and outsiders in the community we live in and because our background makes us bicultural between Japan and the United States (Interview November 17, 2007). Also most of the teachers who we work with in schools belong to the dominant U.S. culture. Therefore, we are different from the people in our community in schools. Kei explained:

I was in a cohort with another thirty students in the M.Ed. program in university of X. Thanks to that, I had an opportunity to become friends with people with whom I usually don’t hang out with. I mean, there were more パン ピー (people from the dominant culture) in the program (smile). I had never taken initiative to become friends with people in a dominant culture before, so I almost thought I wanted to quit. But after a year, I became good friends with everyone. It was such a great experience for me. The majority of teachers in the school I work for are from a dominant cultural background. In the beginning it was difficult to communicate well with them, but thanks to my experience in the M.Ed. program, I knew I would be fine.

So, the experience in the M.Ed. really helped me (Interview, November 17, 2007). Kei took initiative and made an effort to get to know people from another culture with whom she was not familiar because she knew the importance of this as a teacher from a minority cultural background as well as a teacher who wanted to become a bridge between teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Scaffolding cross-cultural understanding and bicultural competence.** As a result of these multidimensional cross-cultural experiences, Maki-san, Kei, and I know that helping students understand these very different cultural and social expectations is a significant role for us as teachers who work with ESL students or students whose cultural
values or backgrounds conflict with mainstream culture and society. Furthermore, we recognize that it is important not only help students to understand these different cultural and social expectations but also to help them use this knowledge as a tool to join and live in the often unfamiliar host society. Maki-san articulated the conflict of cultural values between the U.S. and Japan as follows:

Well, first of all, students who come to ESL (class) are not in the mainstream in this society. That is why their starting point in this society is, from the beginning, not only outside of the mainstream but also lacking the tools to get into mainstream society (Interview 6/28/07).

This applies not only to the students, but also to the people around them, including their parents and teachers, who are often in the same situation. While students of Japanese descent have much strength, they often lack the tools necessary to live and thrive within this society. Much of what people might assume to be common sense is actually in conflict with their background. These students often don’t have the tools, resources, or role models to survive here, but neither do their parents, in many cases.

I wrote about a conversation with one of my students’ mothers in my journal:

One of my student’s mothers shared with me her frustration and sensation of feeling lost when she needed to make sandwiches for her son’s baseball teammates in his local school. Although she had done it a couple of times in the past years, she said she still didn’t know what the correct or appropriate sandwiches would be in this context. She said that she bought ham and bread and even made some sandwiches a day before to try and asked her son if they were good. She said, “I asked my son if two slices of ham were enough. Are there any
vegetables I should add? Is this kind of meat ok? How big should I cut these slices of bread?” Eventually, she had to go back to the grocery store the next day to buy more turkey ham instead of pork ham as well as some other ingredients following her son’s advice and she re-made the sandwiches. As a person from another country, I understand completely how she feels (Journal November 1, 2007).

This example shows how small things can become a big issue and create uncertainty in everyday life for immigrant families and cause them to feel 。

In her autobiography paper, Kei wrote about the importance of providing explicit guidelines for immigrant students connecting between her experience as a child and what she believes to be important as a teacher who teaches students from different cultural backgrounds. She wrote:

I see the importance of having clear guidelines that all children can understand, so that no one feels like the only one different one in a group. I believe this helps create a collective space for everyone. (Autobiography paper p.5)

Kei’s lived experience and what she learned from it show how complicated it can be to anticipate new social expectations and values if you come from a very different or conflicting cultural value system. Her example also shows how necessary it is for immigrant students as well as adults to have clearer and more detailed guidelines from someone who is aware of the cultural and social gaps that they are facing. This kind of support allows immigrant children and their families to participate in new cultural contexts not only more comfortably but also more functionally.
As illustrated by Kei’s example, Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that students as well as parents/caregivers and teachers in their schools need explicit explanations and clear dialogue in order to build a solid foundation to live successfully in a new cultural context. We also recognize how difficult it can be for teachers who are raised in mono-cultural and monolingual backgrounds to understand the experiences of immigrant students and believe it is important not to judge them. Instead, it is best to use creative means to communicate these difficulties to other teachers. Maki-san and I discussed this in an intergenerational conversational interview:

**Maki-san:** What we are doing in ESL classes as teachers is the exact same as what we are doing between two cultures in our daily lives. If you are raised in a bilingual and bicultural background, it is not that big of a deal but considered natural. We talk about these kinds of cross-cultural matters at the dinner table all the time. It is a bit weird for us to hear what these teachers, who are from mono-cultural background, cannot understand ESL students’ experiences. If people are raised in one culture with one language, they cannot imagine ESL students’ experiences. So, we need to explain it to them (as ESL teachers) in ways that they can understand.

**Gumiko:** You mean you do something like cultural translation.

**Maki-san:** Yes. For example, if I think something is too complicated for a teacher to understand, I 水で薄めて, add some water to dilute the meaning, which is like a scaffolding strategy to help these teachers understand step by step.
Gumiko: …And use these teachers’ familiar cultural experiences to explain ESL students’ experiences

Maki-san: Right. I change how I explain and how much I explain depending on each teacher’s familiarity and ability to understand other cultures.

Kei: それもやっぱりscaffolding. It is, consequently, scaffolding.

[All of us laughed together.] (Intergenerational Conversation, 11/17/2007)

In order to help teachers from ‘mono-cultural’ or ‘mono-lingual’ cultural backgrounds understand immigrant students and their family members’ cross cultural experiences better, Maki-san, Kei, and I recognize the importance of observing each of these teachers closely so that we can have a better understandings of what they understand and what they don’t regarding such cross-cultural experiences. These kinds of observations help us find the best possible approach to use with each teacher, using flexible and creative ways such as 水で薄めて, adding some water to dilute the meaning, to help them understand their students and their students’ family members better.

Conflicting values: collective and individual orientations. One of the most serious social value conflicts between Japan and United States may possibly arise from the collective and individual orientations of each community. Independency is valued more in Euro-American communities and cultures whereas collectiveness and cooperativeness are more valued in East Asian communities and cultures. While we recognize that there are subtleties and complexities and individual variations as to how these expectations play out in individual lives, Maki-san, Kei, and I have also observed that this difference sends strong conflicting messages to children and families from both communities.
For example, the active attitude in the United States, where people are confident and take responsibility for pursuing their own needs, can be seen as a very negative thing in Japan and other East Asian countries. Here, people negotiate things by talking and discussing. However, in East Asian countries, people negotiate things and understand each other in a way that is more indirect, from the perspective of American people.

Maki-san explained this difference in attitudes as follows:

… Japanese students or students from Asian backgrounds don’t have the ‘active attitude’ required to live (functionally) in society in the United States… ‘An active attitude’ such as…doing something for your own benefit or following your desire. Or making an appeal for yourself (in terms of your ideas and thoughts) to others (before thinking about what other people want to do). Most Asian students feel ashamed to do such kinds of things. (We call) this kind of “active attitude” 団太さ, Zubutosa (shamelessness). We, as Asian background people, have learned that these kinds of attitudes are negative; therefore, it is impossible to change so suddenly. However, Asian students need to learn how to behave with such ‘active attitude’ to live and survive here in this (U.S.) society. Many teachers here always say, “Come to talk to me if you don’t understand or have any questions,” and it is a basic thing to be expected to do in the U.S. However, it can be a very difficult thing to do for many students from Asian backgrounds because it is opposed to what they have learned throughout their lives as their social norms and values. I explain this to other teachers so often that I almost start to feel fed up with having to explain this (to them)…. (Interview, July 5 2007)
調和 (choowa) is one of the most important concepts and social rules that people respect in Japanese society. 和 (wa) means peace, harmony, and circle. The image is something like lack of conflict, quiet and calm. 調 (cho) means adjusting to each other. Therefore, 調和 (choowa) means a calm lack of conflict, and peaceful harmony that is created by everyone who participates in the community. As Maki-san stated above, children and adults in Japan are taught that expressing themselves or acting on the basis of their own desires is considered a selfish attitude because detracts from 調和 (choowa). Therefore it is very hard for students to do things like taking initiative to ask teachers questions.

Another example comes from my own teaching experience in a hoshuko. Every Saturday morning, the Saturday Japanese School starts with an assembly of over three hundred students from kindergarten to 6th grade. Each class makes a straight line and exercises together. After that, all the students and teachers listen to the principal’s speech. It is common to hear the principal say something like, 皆のために行動する, “do things for other people or the community,” 人の迷惑にならない様にする, “think carefully about not disturbing other people,” and, 相手の立場から物事を考える, “think from other people’s perspectives.” In other words, in Japanese culture, children learn how to negotiate their own thoughts and desires before they express or communicate them. This is part of a hidden cultural curriculum that Japanese society has been passing from one generation to the next as important social values and rules to develop in order to be good Japanese citizens.

On the other hand, students in the United States learn to express their own opinions and desires and to negotiate them through conversation and discussion. Maki-san, Kei
and I recognize that these kinds of social value differences often make students of Asian background appear to fit the stereotypical image of being passive and quiet. As Maki-san states, this is not about which is better or which is worse, but rather about understanding that when these social values and rules become the first priority in a society like they do in Japan and East Asian countries, their cultural/social values and expectations can be very different from those in the United States (Interview, 7/5/2007).

Maki-san explained that what is *natural* for her as a Japanese person is significantly different from what she finds here in the United States. She said:

My cultural background is what is the norm and natural for me. For example, my priority is not myself but other people. I don’t think that way intentionally, but it is natural for me. So I instantly act and think like that. Japan(ese) culture is like that. That is why when Japanese people act, their first thoughts are not about ‘what is convenient for me’ but ‘what is convenient for other people’ and other people take priority. In Japanese culture, we are encouraged to think about other people’s convenience as a priority and to act accordingly. Hence, even ‘your way of thinking’ is dependent on ‘other people’s way of thinking’ first. That is why most people have never chosen what they really want. That is because what you want to do is what other people want to do….this kind of thinking is really natural and has become the norm for us. But this way of thinking does not exist here. People tell each other what they want to do. While they tell each other, and then they decide how to act…

(Interview, August 11, 2007)
As Maki-san explains, the active attitude in the U.S., where people are confident and take responsibility for pursuing their own needs, can be seen as a very negative thing in Japan and other East Asian countries. For example, in Japanese there are many words to condemn “active” attitudes in Japanese society, such as 髪をつぶす (to put mud on other people’s face in public) and 礼儀を知らない (someone who does not know how to act with courtesy; impolite), and all of them are related in meaning to selfishness and are therefore considered negative behaviors. In the mainstream culture of the United States, people negotiate things by talking and discussing more openly. However, in East Asian countries, people negotiate things and understand each other more indirectly.

Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that it is very important to explain these social value differences as explicitly as possible to our students and their parents using concrete examples. Maki-san explains:

I tell (all new students and their families) that when they come here, they should try not to think, “Is it ok to do this? Or is it inappropriate to do this?” but just do it. It is not only OK but often even better to do something here that you feel “could be Zu-zushii (disturbing other people) if you did it in Japan.” So, I tell them to abandon these hesitations and please try to do things without thinking about Zuzushii. I say this to every new student and their family as part of Life in America 101 (Interview, June 28, 2007).

Maki-san, Kei and I also communicate with other teachers to let them know about these social value differences and ask the teachers to help their students to communicate with them and other students.
For example, one of my student-teachers, who was a second generation Taiwanese American, had a difficult time building a smooth and trusting relationship with her mentor teacher in her preschool placement. I wrote:

The mentor teacher thought the student was lazy because she did not ask questions or initiate communications with her. However, these were very difficult and uncomfortable things for the student to do because they went against what she learned from her parents. I communicated with the mentor teacher to explain that cultural differences made the student have a difficult time communicating in the way the mentor teacher expected. Meanwhile, I also talked with the student teacher about different ways of communicating expectations to students using concrete examples, and we worked together to produce a list of the kinds of questions that would be ok to ask and practiced how to initiate communication with the mentor teacher by acting out both roles (Journal, 10/26/2007).

Here it is important for me to point out that I am not saying that Japanese or East Asian people are not active thinkers or have no independent attitude. Rather, I am claiming that the meanings of active and independent are different in each society. For example, having the ability to think about other people as well as yourself in a harmonious way is active and independent – you need to have a strong agency to do so. However, when these fundamental differences and social values interact with each other, they may lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, in order to be successful in local school settings and relationships with new friends here in the United States, it is important for students of East Asian descent to learn this new way of communication without disrespecting their own cultural values. Therefore, Maki-san, Kei and I find that it is important for us to
teach our students and their parents these differences as a tool to live successfully in U.S.
society.

This kind of value, like 調和 (choowa), causes Japanese people to behave according
to certain kinds of subtle rules. For example, as Maki-san stated:

Although there are kind people in Japan, I think that the “kindness” of Japanese
people is also in the social behavior, values and rules required in order to live and
survive in Japanese society. Many people behave like that in Japan because they
need to do so (from social pressure). Therefore, we don’t have a real sense of
freedom in Japan. That is why it is almost impossible for most Japanese people to
understand that “you can say what you want to” or “you can do what you want to
do” unless they come to a place where it is really ok to do so.

(Interview, August 11, 2007)

I encountered an example of this when I had just started to work as a teacher in Japan
after graduating from university. One of the senior teachers in the school was carrying a
lot of chairs, so I offered her help but she said she was fine. I still insisted to help her two
more times, but she continued to say no, so I finally left. However, a few years later, the
senior teacher told me that I should have offered to her help once more. She was irritated
by my ‘impolite and immature behavior’ as a Japanese adult woman in that social context.
In other words, the teacher saw my past behavior as an inappropriate way of
communicating as an adult in Japanese society. She had acted 遠慮 (enryo, a polite
posturing typical of Japanese culture, in which a person modestly rejects another’s help,
even if it is wanted, out of consideration for the other person) and she thought that as a
Japanese woman I should have known that it was my duty to offer again so that she would no longer need to act 遠慮 (enryo).

Maki-san, Kei, and I recognize that people and children who grow up in this kind of Japanese cultural context have a very difficult time expressing their needs or thoughts in the U.S. Therefore, we communicate with the students, their parents and teachers to explain these cultural differences.

For instance, 遠慮 (enryo) causes communications between Japanese people to be indirect, and this aspect of Japanese culture creates very unique ways of communicating with each other that may seem strange from the perspective of American. In several interviews, Maki-san and Kei explained to me how they play ‘Japanese’, 人々ごっこ, like a dramatic play for fun among their family in their daily lives. For example, they may pretend that one person is visiting the other person’s house as a guest. Maki-san and Kei use not only Japanese language but also facial and physical expressions to imitate a textbook example of how Japanese people interact with each other.

Visitor: 御邪魔します。 ((Giving a gift, usually a box of sweets) つまらないもので すけど。

Host: そんな気を使っていただかなくてもいいのに。

Visitor: ええええ、たいしたものではありませんから。

Host: (In the living room) 粗茶ですが。

Visitor: Sorry for disturbing you. This is not a good gift.

Host: You don’t need to bother doing this kind of thing

Visitor: Please, don’t worry. This is really not a good gift.
Host: (In the living room bringing a cup of tea) This is not a good tea, but…

If I translate this conversation to the United States context, it might be something like this:

Visitor: Hi! Thank you very much for inviting me. This is for you.

Host: Oh, you didn’t need to. Thank you. Come in. Would you like to have a cup of tea or coffee?

Visitor: Tea, please. Thank you.

These are literal translations. Of course, these words are now used more out of custom than anything else. However, the idea is that you do not say directly what you want to say and act modestly in order to pay respect to the other person. It is also typical to express an apology about the possible “distraction” you might have created by visiting the person. Therefore, bringing a gift is important, too. Maki-san and Kei said that they play Japanese in the house with other family members, too. This kind of play was the way for Kei and all her family members not only to practice Japanese social communication rules but also to provide an opportunity to discuss cultural/social differences between the two countries. As a mother, Maki-san constructed a playful learning environment for her daughters to learn and practice Japanese language and culture since her children were as young as two (ex. interview 10/20/07). For example, Maki-san played Japanese school with Kei by placing a lot of stuffed animals around her as the other students. This playful pedagogical space allowed her and her daughters to freely compare and contrast different ways of communicating in the U.S. and Japan.
Acting 遠慮 (enryo) means you don’t take any action which might disturb other people in any way. For instance, this 遠慮 (enryo) makes Japanese students and their parents avoid asking questions to teachers or classmates because they don’t want to bother them with their “selfish” needs.

These differences also influence how students initiate conversations with classmates. One of my 9th grade students, Chika, shared with me that she did not know how to talk to “American classmates” in her school. Chika explained to me that in Japan, people usually don’t bother to talk to other students who they don’t already know. However, since Chika was the only Japanese student in many of her high school classes, she felt the urgent need to talk to her classmates. Chika was a very shy student, but her English and her confidence improved a lot in the last three years after her arrival in the United States. I was hoping that Chika would use her courage to talk to her classmates in English, so I explained to her that in the United States it is much more accepted to talk to someone you do not already know. In order to give her concrete examples, I told her some of my stories about how I would talk to people who I didn’t know in coffee shops or in college classrooms sometimes and would enjoy such kinds of conversations. We also went to coffee shops and bookstores together, and I talked to some people to show Chika examples. After the conversation with Chika, I also used the drama method to act as if we were classmates sitting next to each other in her classroom in order to practice how to start conversations and to help Chika feel more comfortable and well prepared so that it would be easier for her to try starting a conversation in her school next time.
One of the most common difficulties for parents from Japan is initiating communication with schools and teachers. In most cases, in Maki-san, Kei’s and my own experience, mothers of students are the ones in charge of communicating with teachers and schools. However, immigrant parents do not have many opportunities to learn the communication differences between the two cultures in their daily lives because their opportunities of interacting with people who are not Japanese are very limited. While Maki-san, Kei and I often explain that “it is not only ok but actually welcome for them to initiate communications with the school or classroom teachers,” we also understand how difficult it can be for adults to suddenly change their way of communicating, especially when there are language barriers.

**Mediating Between Culturally Conflicting Communications**

Constructing conversations and communications is a very complicated social activity. Maki-san, Kei, and I understand that the way people communicate and interact with each other in the U.S. and Japanese cultural/social contexts hold complex differences as well. Unless these differences are understood on each side, they may cause misunderstandings and sometimes even enforce stereotypes about each other. Knowing these differences can help linguistic and cultural minority students to join conversations and be able to have a more successful experience. At the same time, teachers can be able to understand these students’ situations and help them to communicate better. In this section, I describe Maki-san, Kei’s, and my own understanding of the different and sometimes conflicting modes of communication in each cultural and social context and how we use this knowledge to support our students, their parents, and their teachers to have more successful communications without enforcing stereotypes of each other.
Differences in culturally preferred communication styles. Maki-san, Kei, and I understand how difficult communicating with American people can sometimes be, not only because of the language barrier and a lack of certain cultural knowledge, but also because of the culturally/socially preferred roles and behaviors of speakers and listeners in each culture troubling each other. We have been experiencing this trouble in our own daily lives.

Although Kei is of second generation Japanese descent and her father is Euro-American, she often told me that she had sometimes experienced difficulties or had a feeling of not knowing how to join in conversations with other American people. At the beginning of the 2008 academic year, she started to work as a second grade classroom teacher and therefore had more opportunities to talk with colleagues. In spite of this, she expressed that she often did not know how to join conversations with her colleagues very well because of the different interaction and participation patterns of conversation between American and Japanese culture.

For instance, in Japan, people consider it rude to say something while other people are talking. Therefore, people usually wait for each other to finish talking before they begin to say something. In other words, the speed and timing of switching speakers and topics is different in American and Japanese cultural/social contexts. Also, the choices of conversation topics can be quite different. People in East Asian societies tend, somewhat subconsciously, to co-construct the flow of the conversation.

Therefore, children in Japanese schools learn how to respect what other people say by listening. It is considered an important lesson to teach children how to become good listeners as a part of their education both at school and at home with their families. The
importance of expressing your own ideas in public places has also started to be focused on more in education in recent years because of the influence of Euro-American culture.

These kinds of differences can create tremendous difficulties in communication for each cultural background, and may also cause misunderstandings between them. I experienced some of these difficulties myself when I took a year-long seminar while I was writing my dissertation. It was a small group seminar and I was the only Asian student in it. I thought I was participating in the seminar actively joining in conversations. However, after the seminar ended, my advisor told me that the other people in the seminar might have felt that they did not know who I really was, even after a year-long seminar, because I was quiet. This was shocking for me, because I did not see myself as quiet in the seminar. On the other hand, I have also heard the opposite perspective from Asian international students in the same university. Some of my friends from Asian background complained to me about American students in classes, saying that they were selfish because they were only interested in talking about themselves and did not seem to think about what other people felt or wanted to say.

Maki-san, Kei and I also recognize that there are a number of other factors that could exacerbate these difficulties as well. One important distinction is the fact that the differences in age, gender, or social status of each participant in the conversation/communication can contribute greatly to how a conversation is constructed in Asian culture. Also, culturally acceptable tones and attitudes of talking can vary significantly between the two cultures. Therefore, although you might mean to say exactly the same thing, it would be expressed in very different ways depending on whom you are talking to/with.
I wrote about an example that illustrates these culturally different modes of communication in a journal entry when I last went back to Japan in 2007. I was waiting in line to buy a ticket to go to Tokyo from Narita Airport by train. Since it was an international airport, there were many people from many different countries waiting in line. There was a female attendant who was helping people buy train tickets. She came to talk to me in Japanese with a very polite and kind attitude. She was smiling, her voice pitch was relatively high, and she used a very soft and very feminine tone. Her gender and social identity had an impact in deciding how to talk to a Japanese female costumer. As soon as she finished helping me, she started to talk to a group of Caucasian men with business suits. I was stunned by how she changed her tone of voice, body language and way of talking. Now she was not smiling but she looked very confident. Her tone of voice was much lower and her way of talking sounded much more straightforward than when she talked with me (from Journal 12/5/2007).

Although her purpose in talking with people there was exactly the same, the attendant changed her way of being and talking, from an outsider’s point of view, completely. In other words, she code switched “her being” by reading what kinds of self as a ground attendant would be more culturally/socially acceptable, appropriate or preferred by the other person in the communication.

Maki-san, Kei’s, and my students have been learning to perform this code-switching in their daily lives. We have observed that some students can understand how to do this better while some students find it more difficult. One of my students, Nami, who I have known for four years, recently started to confidently enjoy this code switching when she is talking in Japanese and in English. Nami speaks in a very sweet, girlish tone when she
speaks in Japanese. She is always very kind to everyone and everyone likes her very much. Her Japanese classmates think of her as a “small, very cute girl”. Her way of talking is always humble and it may seem that she is trying to hide her intelligence. On the other hand, when she speaks in English, she is very different. She looks and talks more confidently.

When Nami was talking in Japanese, she acted the role of a good girl in Japanese culture. In Japanese, there is a proverb: “the nail that sticks out gets hit down,” which means that if you do something to disrupt harmony or become too noticeable in the community by sticking out, you will be punished. In other words, this proverb reminds people that it is important to make an effort to maintain harmony (和) in the community. On the other hand, when Nami spoke in English, she demonstrated that she knew how important it is to talk and act confidently in U.S. society. Therefore, she acted the role. Her ability to negotiate this kind of biculturalism made her feel more comfortable in diverse settings. As Maki-san articulated, the three of us recognize that these are crucial communication skills for bi-cultural students to learn and they encourage students to practice these skills both in and out of the classroom.

However, there have been students who are never quite able to master these two different ways of communicating. Maki-san talked about one of her students’ cases as an example:

There are students who have a very painful time in the United States. There are students who say they cannot make any friends and want to go back to Japan as soon as possible. And some of them actually do go back earlier than planned. These students are often people who are very quiet and serious. It could be
difficult to understand their real personality unless you got to know them really well with a lot of patience. But in reality, there is no one in local schools who has the kind of patience necessary to understand these quiet students who don’t speak the same language well, so there is usually no chance for these students to make friends at school. There was a female student who decided to go back to Japan. Her tutor, who was an American woman, always said, “Really? Is she really going back? Such a big loss.” She also said, “I cannot understand why nobody becomes friends with such a good girl. Why did nobody understand how wonderful a person she was!” This woman is a great tutor. She is …like a grandma (age-wise). So, perhaps, it might be difficult to understand the student’s great personality unless the person is like a “grandma” who is full of warm kindness and willing to understand other people. In Japan, younger people may have this kind of attitude as well, but here, it was hard to find someone who wants to be friends with someone with this quiet demeanor. She is a really good student. The more you get to know her, the more you understand that she is a great person… (Interview, 7/5/2007).

Maki-san told this story with regret and great sadness in her voice. As bi-lingual/cultural beings, Maki-san, Kei, and I recognize how this kind of communication code switch can be difficult to understand and master but we also believe that it is crucial to being accepted by each community. Therefore, it is important for us to act as cultural mediators and help each side to culturally interpret different communications through these code-switches. We also make an effort to help teachers understand students of Asian descent better and scaffold their students’ communication development. If
teachers only see students from other cultural backgrounds with mono-cultural lenses, they may easily misunderstand these students and see them as lacking in confidence and quiet, falling into stereotypes about the Asian population. However, as I demonstrated earlier, even the ways of showing competence are very different between different cultures/societies. In other words, people from different cultural/social communication styles may have a difficult time understanding each other because they will only recognize the foreignness and the differences but may not be able to see the similarities that are hidden by the foreignness and the differences.

**Direct or indirect means of communication.** Collective-based communities like those found in East Asia or Japan, and individual-based communities like the United States have different ways of expressing their own needs, thoughts, and feelings through communication. The East Asian community probably has a more indirect way of communicating than the American community. Moreover, according to East Asian society’s standards, expressing your own needs, thoughts, ideas, or feelings, could be considered as going against the moral standard, by taking a self-centered attitude or not thinking about other people first. On the other hand, in the United States, learning to directly and explicitly express your own needs and opinions in school and society is an important social skill.

Therefore, although what you want to express is the same, the way of communicating it could be very different or even conflicting in these two communities. Maki-san, Kei, and I have learned these differences through our experiences, such as the one I presented in Maki-san’s biography story about her communication with her mother-in-law. We have also learned by observing our students how these different communication styles
can cause misunderstandings and communication difficulties. Thus, we acknowledge that it is important for us as teachers to explain and teach our students and their families about new communication styles using specific examples in order to help them live “successfully” in U.S. schools and other cultural and social contexts.

In one of the interviews, Maki-san and I had a conversation about why Japanese people communicate indirectly in comparison to people in Western Europe or the U.S. We discussed that Japanese people learn to put the other person first in communications or conversations, which makes communications more indirect. For example, once, I introduced a friend of mine who was an English teacher to my student’s mother and her friend because they wanted to learn conversational English. The very first time they met, I was there to help translate languages to each other and to set up the basic schedule for future communications. When they started to talk about schedules, my friend, Cathy, told the Japanese women directly which days were available for her to meet. The two Japanese women, on the other hand, never said which days and times were convenient for them. Instead, they asked Cathy many times what times would be best for her.

This example indicates clearly that people use very different ways of engaging in conversation in the US and Japanese/Asian communities. We, Japanese people, build conversations and relationships by なるがる (hakari-nagara). This means that people try to understand each other not necessarily by saying things to each other verbally or directly but rather by observing the other person’s body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and context. In other words, people expect you to understand what the other person really means not necessarily by listening to them but by reading the context. This
is very different from U.S. society, where people are expected to express their own thoughts and feelings more directly.

Therefore, in the case of my friend, Cathy, and the two Japanese women, the conversation and negotiation did not function well, because neither of the two Japanese women said what they wanted, and Cathy could not read the context of the conversation or what and how they wanted her to ask them.

Maki-san articulated these social value differences as follows:

I sometimes hear Japanese people say that American people are not caring or that they are not considerate and that they are too simple. However, from the perspective of American people, Japanese people may appear to be co-dependent or have a tendency to constantly rely on others. So, American people think Japanese people are too dependent so that they want to say, “Why don’t you do it by yourself!” But, again, Japanese people want American people to understand them and their feelings very much, even when they are not explicitly expressing them (Interview, October 20, 2007).

In other words, the picture of a “socially competent adult” in the U.S. and in Japan or in other East Asian countries would not only be different, but may even be conflicting. As a result, people on both sides may not only have difficulties communicating and understanding each other but may also end up enforcing stereotypes attached to each side independently and collectively, like Maki-san explained above.

Maki-san also provided an explanation regarding the differences in communication from the perspective of mainstream people in the United States:
In the United States, if you show you care about another person based on conjecturing, it means you are treating that person like a child. For Japanese people, the more you grow up, the more you are supposed to 察する (sassuru), to try to understand the other person’s situation and feelings without directly talking. On the other hand, for American people, if you cannot express what you think and feel, it is because you are still a child. When you become an adult, you are supposed to be able to articulate what you want to do. Therefore, American people say that if you show you care based on 察する (sassuru), it is impolite because you are treating the other person like a child. That is the way I feel while I am here (Interview, October 20, 2007).

As teachers who work with cultural minority students and their families, Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that one of our most important roles is to become cultural facilitators/mediators to help each side understand the other better by explaining these different ways of communication without passing judgment.

As I demonstrated previously, Maki-san, Kei and I believe that one of the most common communication problems that arises between teachers and parents from Japan is about who should take the initiative in their communications. Japanese people have a tendency to think that talking to teachers, who are figures of authority, is impolite and an interruption of their jobs; therefore, they don’t often initiate communication. Parents may also be waiting to be 察する (sassuru-ed) by teachers. On the other hand, teachers in the U.S. tend to think that they have already let parents know that if they need anything, they
can communicate with them, and consider that the most respectful way of establishing communications.

I had the opportunity to observe another instance of this kind of miscommunication when I was visiting Kei in her elementary school. Kei brought me to the entrance hall of the elementary school when it was time for students to go home. There were some Japanese mothers that had come to pick up their children. They all stayed closely together at the end of the hall, apart from the rest of the crowd. They were far from where the teachers were standing, so that unless teachers took the initiative to go to them, there would be no conversation or communication started between teachers and parents. Kei wanted to show me this because she understood what both sides might be thinking.

In this kind of situation, for example, Maki-san and I keep explaining to parents as well as teachers that there are different styles of communication between teachers and parents in the U.S. and in Japan, and recommend that they take initiative and help them to do so. At the same time, we take initiative to communicate with our students’ parents very closely employing 察する (sassuru), a more Japanese or East Asian way of communication, too.

Kei knew that teachers talked about how odd it seemed to see Japanese mothers always gathered so closely together at the edge of the hall. At the same time, she understood why these Japanese mothers stayed there like that. They probably did not want to be the ones to disturb the context, especially because they saw themselves as outsiders in the school community, so they stayed in a hidden spot. For them, it is supposed to be not them but the teachers who have the right or responsibility to initiate conversation. Even if she did not yet have all the answers, Kei honestly shared her
perspective on the two cultures as a bi-cultural /racial teacher and as someone who could understand the subtleties and complexities on each side. The kinds of communication questions and situations the three of us face as teachers are endless. Large amounts of data from our interviews were related to how we constantly move back and forth between contexts, interpreting the cultural communication gaps that we face in our everyday lives as individuals and as teachers, and how we subsequently use these reflections as examples to help other students. The tone of our voices and our attitudes during these interviews as we talked about these situations also showed that we are interested in and in fact enjoy understanding these culturally different communication styles rather than seeing one side as less important or better than the other. Our daily reflections as bi-cultural teachers help us to more effectively mediate between students, their parents and teachers.

Love, care, and respect in different cultures. One of the most important conclusions emerging from the interviews was that each culture has very different and sometimes even conflicting ways of showing or giving and receiving their care and love for each other.

In my last official interview with Kei, she and I went to a coffee shop close to her house. We always enjoyed tea or coffee together. Sometimes we had coffee at Kei’s home, sometimes we had tea at our favorite Japanese Tea Salon, and sometimes we went to this place. At the end of the conversation, I asked her if the way she interacted with her grandparents from her mother’s side in Hiroshima, Japan, and from her father’s side in Kentucky, in the United States, were different and if their interactions with her were different as well. She answered, “Oh, yes!” and she continued (in Japanese, originally):
Yes, it is very different. Whenever I am leaving my grandma on my father’s side, she gives me a big hug and says, “I love you”. But, you know, my grandma on my mother’s side is very different. When I leave her place, she always makes a Japanese lunch box for me to eat on the train. We don’t give each other hugs, but I can see her eyes starting to fill with tears and I start to cry, too. While I am leaving, I look back at grandma many times and she is always still there. She waves until she cannot see me any more (Field note, January 12, 2008).

After the interview, I wrote in my journal:

When I was listening to Kei’s story about her grandmother in Hiroshima, Japan, I felt that I was listening to a story about my own mother or grandmother in Japan. These ways of expressing caring and love could be difficult to recognize as care or love cross-culturally (Journal, January 12, 2008).

Kei’s grandmother loves Kei as much as her grandmother in the United States. However, their ways of showing love and care are completely different. When I talk about this with friends who are not of Asian descent or not familiar with Asian cultures, they are usually surprised when I tell them that my parents have never told me “I love you” or that we don’t hug each other. Here again, the way of showing care and love in East Asia/Japan is not as direct as in the United States. Even fundamental human emotions like love and care are culturally and socially constructed and shown and practiced very differently.

At the same time, Maki-san, Kei, and I also emphasize that love and care have the potential to reach beyond cultural and social differences, too. Each of our personal and social experiences involve having received and given love and care from people of both or multiple cultures. Many of our stories show that our students are eager to be loved and
accepted by teachers, friends, and their school communities, regardless of whether they show their desire well or not. Sometimes, this is painful to behold, because the desire only goes one way. One example of this one-directional desire arose in my own experience with one of my tutoring students, Yoshiya. Yoshiya had a very difficult academic year in his local school. He had no friends with whom he could comfortably talk and he felt completely alone in the classroom. In order to change the situation, I communicated with the teacher and ESL teacher in his school often. Unfortunately, Yoshiya’s classroom teacher did not recognize his pain but focused instead on his academic “failing.” It was probably necessary for her to do so because ESL students’ academic records had started to become more and more important in that district. When the new school year started, Yoshiya started to have a much better time. Having a Japanese friend in his class was one of the most important reasons for this improvement. One day, thinking back to the previous school year, Yoshiya said something like, “I liked Ms. X. She was kind to me.” When I heard what he said, I almost wanted to cry, knowing that he liked his teacher and wanted to be liked by her, too. However, I wondered whether she felt the same way.

At the same time, all three of us have met several excellent teachers in local schools. Some teachers have really opened their minds to try to reach their students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds in a loving and caring way. As Maki-san explains:

アメィカのいい先生って言ったなら本当にね、とことんのめり込んで、あの口先だけじゃないで、「今度帰ってきたら家に泊めてあげるから」って本気なのね。

There are some wonderful teachers in the U.S…They are really wonderful. They really make an effort to do something for these students. They don’t just say it.
They really act for the students. If they say, “when you come back to the U.S. next time, come and stay in my house” they really mean it (Interview, 7/05/2005).

Both Maki-san and I found that the kinds of loving and caring that Maki-san was talking about were common experiences for both of us in the United States. I shared with Maki-san that I had also met truly caring and loving people in the United States. For example, I had also met professors in my program who cook for us students regularly or who have let me stay at their home for a while. The fact that these teachers and professors in Maki-san’s and my experiences were caring struck both Maki-san and I. Maki-san said:

I really think that this is the kind of things that is really great about the United States and some people in the United States. I really want all my students to have a chance to experience such a great aspects of the people and life in the United (Interview, 7/5/2007).

One pedagogical approach that the three of us use as teachers is sharing our stories about our loving, caring or joyful relationships with people on the other side of the cultural community with our students, their parents, and other teachers as living and real examples. This way, students, parents, and other teachers may begin to understand the other side of the community better and hopefully feel more comfortable seeking for connections and relationships across cultural borders.

An example that illustrates this pedagogical approach comes from my teaching experience. One day, I invited one of my best friends, a Caucasian male in my program as at the university, to my 6th grade classroom. I explained to my students that we were very good friends. Laughing, I shared the kinds of arguments my friend and I had because of communication style differences and the kinds of innocent and simple
questions we asked each other in order to understand each other’s countries. For example, he once asked me something like, “You don’t have any cows in Japan and eat sushi everyday, right?” My students loved to hear these stories and they helped them to talk to their friends in local schools, too. I also asked my friend to teach my classroom for an hour. He was a 6th grade teacher, too. What I wanted to show my students was a real example of a good friendship that derives joy from cultural differences and to offer them examples of how my friend and I negotiated communication differences in order to maintain our friendship.

Regardless of others people’s definitions, Maki-san, Kei and I feel that we already belong to both cultures and communities, even though the degree to which we belong to them may vary. Each of us has friends and people who are important to us in both sides of the community. As Kei said, having friends who can share both sides of culture is extremely important, and this is true for Maki-san and I as well. As teachers, Maki-san, Kei and I know that our students also belong to both communities and cultures, regardless of whether other people think so or not. We therefore work hard so that all of our students will have opportunities to find such loving and caring relationships in the U.S., too.

**Mediating Culturally Conflicting Values in Teaching and Learning**

Schools, home, and other communities are important places for students to learn how to become competent members of society when they grow up. There are many cultural and social values and norms embedded in the unspoken agendas of such informal education. However, if students come from different cultural and social backgrounds, this hidden curriculum is not easy for them to access and learn. Different expectations in
teaching and learning and different definitions of good students and teachers in each community are examples of such hidden knowledge.

Maki-san, Kei and I understand that the meaning and social expectations of teaching and learning in the United States and Japanese cultures are also different and sometimes conflicting. In other words, the meaning of a good student or a good teacher is not necessarily the same in the U.S. and in East Asia or Japan. In this section, I demonstrate how Maki-san, Kei and I understand the different meanings and styles of teaching and learning in each cultural context. I also demonstrate how, as teachers, we use our bicultural knowledge to support our students, their parents, and other teachers who are placed in between these different understandings of the norms of teaching and learning.

Culturally/socially different expectations of students. What is important in U.S. dominant school culture and East Asian culture is not necessarily the same. In fact, there are many differences. For students, it is very important if your teacher thinks you are a good student or not. How a teacher sees a student can actually transform the way other students see that student, too. If the teacher sees the student as a troubled child, the students in the class are more likely to see him/her that way as well. If the teacher has low expectations of a student and treats him or her as an “outsider or visitor”, other students in the class may see the student in the same way.

Kei’s bi-cultural experience and consciousness helps her to actively observe how her students understand differences in adults’ expectations between their home culture context and the U.S. school context and how they need to follow such expectations in order to act “appropriately” in each cultural context. Following is an example of how
her students modify their behavior according to the different expectations in each school context:

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Kei: One Korean first grade student was writing something... And I think that she knew she was supposed not to use a pen to write. But I guess she wanted to try and made mistake while she was writing. She started to look very worried wondering what she should do, but then the other first grader who is also from Korea, they may have gotten in trouble. (Laughter).

Gumiko: Wow! That's right! If the students were in a school in Japan or South Korea, they may have gotten in trouble. (Laughter).

Kei: Yes. (Laughter) The teacher would probably have said in an angry voice, 'I told you that you were supposed to use a pencil to write.' And I understand why they think like that. It was funny to see how they were talking about it. They are great! Even though they are very young, they distinguish between their home culture and U.S. culture because now they are (living cross-cultural school lives) in the United States (Interview, June 24, 2007).

This example clearly demonstrates how Kei's students have been trying to construct and negotiate new understandings of different teachers' expectations, comparing their home culture to their U.S. school culture. Many students from an East Asian cultural background learn how important it is to listen, respect and obey what their parents or teachers tell them to do. This is a socially-constructed disciplinary behavior that is valued in many East Asian communities. Students are expected to learn this kind of respectful attitude through education in many different contexts. As a result, students...
from East Asian culture learn how important it is not to make mistakes. In other words, the learning behavior that Kei’s students were talking about is required in order to become a good student in the context of East Asian culture; on the other hand, students’ behavior or attitudes during learning are not as strongly valued or emphasized in American classrooms. Kei’s bi-cultural experiences in school have helped her to be sensitive enough to understand these students’ concerns and the possible difficulties they may encounter in attempting to act like “good students” in the U.S.

Maki-san, Kei and I also recognize that having “choices” means something different in each cultural context. In the U.S., having and giving choices is an important aspect of daily life and education. On the other hand, Maki-san and I have both how difficult and sometimes even agonizing it can be for students of Asian descent when they are offered choices. By making choices, students are practicing showing their own desire and agency, which is expected from “good” students in the U.S. Many teachers think that having choices, such as allowing students to choose their own projects, paper color, and so on, is fun for students. This means that most children in the U.S. have been practicing expressing their own desires and opinions in many different ways through their daily lives as well as school experiences because they are constantly given choices by adults. On the other hand, many children from an East Asian cultural background have been learning how important it is to respect and listen to adults. Therefore, making choices, even about little things, can be difficult for some students from East Asian cultural contexts.

Another example from my teaching is about one of my students’ younger brother, Akio. His mother asked me for help with his assignment. Akio was then a first grader
and had moved to the U.S. with his family when he was four years old. He went to a preschool in the U.S. and he was considered to be doing well in his school. Akio was a very active boy and loved to talk and play. However, when I saw him this time, he looked very sad, confused and hopeless. It was writing assignment. His classroom teacher had given all of her students about twenty choices as writing activities. The students were supposed to choose one activity from among them each week. There were many fun writing activities to choose from. Akio’s mother explained to me that he had been having a difficult time doing this kind of assignment for a long time. She said, “Akio seems to have difficulties doing assignments which have free choices.” I understood that it might be difficult for him because of the cultural differences that I discussed above. Therefore, I explained to Akio’s mother the purpose of the assignment from the classroom teacher’s perspective and how it could be difficult for many Japanese children to make choices because it is not practiced much in the Japanese cultural and school context. I also talked with Akio about how his teachers were not expecting him to find a “correct” or “right answer” for each choice. Instead, his teacher had given him choices because she wanted him to enjoy choosing an assignment and to have fun writing each week. Akio was very skeptical about it at first, so we “practiced” how to enjoy choosing assignments.

Another example of how to approach this kind of difficulty can be found in my teaching experience. One of the first assignments I gave my 6th grade students in hoshuko was a free-writing assignment. I gave them this assignment every week from the beginning of the school year. My students had choices of in terms of the color of the papers they could use, how to use the paper as well as styles of writing and themes.
When I gave them this assignment, my students were very skeptical about it at first. They asked questions like, “Do you really mean it?” or “Is it really ok to write what I want to write?”

This was evidence that they were not used to being given choices or asked to take initiative to show their desires or opinions in their own ways, which students are encouraged to do in the United States. In fact, my students must have experienced many choices of this kind in the U.S. school context. However, without an explicit explanation of these cultural differences, many of them seemed not to understand the meaning of having choices. Therefore, some of them may have been making choices passively in order to survive in U.S. schools. I believe that this is something that is very important to discuss clearly and explicitly with my students. Therefore, it was important for me to build trustful relationships with them. I wrote extensive comments responding to each of their assignments. My intention was not “correct” what they wrote, but to help them build confidence and enjoy expressing their voices through the writing or drawing. I also shared what they had written with the class, with their permission, so that they could enjoy hearing the work of others and feel more comfortable expressing and sharing their voices with the classroom community.

As these cases demonstrate, bi-cultural understandings of teaching and learning help Maki-san, Kei, and I to understand our students’ situations better but also allow us to conduct culturally sensitive pedagogy and scaffolding to help our students access different types of teaching and learning in the US school context.

**Culturally/socially different expectations for teachers.** Teachers’ roles in Japan and the U.S. can be very different, and Maki-san, Kei and I understand the different roles
that teachers are expected to play in each cultural context. In the U.S., the teacher’s role focuses more on academic responsibilities. In Japan, on the other hand, elementary school teachers’ responsibilities are more holistic and span a wider range of responsibilities, including recess, lunchtime, and cleaning time. In other words, the teacher is involved in students’ holistic development, including their social interactions, social responsibilities, health, moral development (goodness as a human being), discipline, and life. This kind of approach to education is called 全人教育 (Zenjin Kyoiku, which means Whole Person Education) in Japanese. Here, my intention is not to generalize about teachers in either country or to make a statement about which is better equipped to teach holistically. Rather, my intention is to demonstrate how cultural and social expectations about teaching and education are generally different in the two cultural contexts and how these differences have influenced Maki-san, Kei’s, and my own teaching philosophy. In order to help readers understand these differences, I first discuss the different cultural perspectives on the meaning of education. After that, I show how these differences may have influenced Maki-san, Kei and I using data.

The way students spend their time at school is very different in the two cultural contexts. For example, in Japan students are responsible for cleaning the whole school every day, including their classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and even the schoolyard, because cleaning is seen as a part of their education as a members of the school community. Therefore, teachers are responsible for teaching and supervising their students in these tasks. Lunchtime in Japanese schools is also a very different concept from that of U.S. public schools. Generally, elementary school students eat lunch, which is cooked in the school kitchen every day, together in their classrooms. Students take
turns serving dishes for their classmates. Usually, some students go to the kitchen to get plates, silverware, and dishes such as soup, bread, rice, milk, cooked vegetables, and fruits, fish or meat and they serve these dishes to other students in their classroom just like in a cafeteria. Teachers are responsible for being with their students throughout the entire lunchtime. Students also usually have time dedicated to democratic education. They create their own government under the teachers’ supervision and they talk about school and class issues and make recreational plans. Art, music and physical education are also considered parts of 全人教育, so they are given great importance. Classroom teachers are responsible for these subjects in many public schools, too.

This is consistent with how Maki-san, Kei, and I see the teachers’ role. This is a reflection of the different concept and focus of education in Japan. Besides personal teaching philosophies, this is the reason why the three of us see our roles as teachers not only academically, but rather more holistically, paying attention to students’ development as human beings in their relationships with friends, social skills, and life. Thus, Maki-san, Kei and I believe teaching and learning is a holistic part of our students’ development as social beings.

*The “Sweet” good teacher and the “strict” good teacher.* Throughout the course of the interviews, Maki-san, Kei, and I emphasized that there are many wonderful teachers who can effectively work with students who come from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, we also recognize that culturally different definitions of what it means to be a good teacher could be an obstacle to building a trustful relationship between teachers and students or their parents.
What follows is an example from one of my 6th grade students, Yoshio, and his experience of a good teacher in a different cultural context. Yoshio came to the U.S. when he was very young, so he got most of his education in the United States. He had been learning to play the Cello for years hoping to become a professional cellist. Comparing cello teachers, one who was of Japanese descent and the other, who was Euro-American, he said that teachers in the U.S. praise him when he plays and that he liked it very much. At the same time he said that because of this praise he was sometimes not sure if he was really getting better and doing things right or not. He said he liked his Japanese teacher, too. She is very strict and tells him what he needs to work on very clearly.

Hearing his story, it was obvious that both teachers were great teachers for him, regardless of their different approaches, and that he was learning greatly and developing his love for playing the cello from both of them. However, being praised while learning instead of being told what he should work on, are very different teaching styles from his two cultural backgrounds that reflect cultural differences in child-rearing styles in general. Therefore, his experiences made him wonder about the two styles. Although many of my students from Japan and their parents enjoy and appreciate this new style of learning and relationship with teachers in the U.S., some question it and are skeptical about this quality in teachers in U.S. I have heard this skepticism from many parents and students, including Asian graduate students I met during my Masters and Ph.D. programs.

Without culturally relevant explanations, these complex and sometimes problematic differences related to teaching and learning in each cultural norm can cause numerous difficulties in building trustful relationships between teachers and students or their
parents. Therefore, Maki-san and I have been working with the two sides to talk about these differences on a case-by-case basis. As I explained in our biographical stories, we both recognize the strengths of each teaching and learning style. As Maki-san emphasized many times, both sides have strengths and weaknesses. This kind of un-judgmental approach has helped both sides understand each other better and helped them to focus not on the differences but rather on the similarities and good intentions behind these differences. Teachers want to be better teachers for their students and students want to be recognized as good and active learners by their teachers.

**Parents’ expectations matter.** In this section I expand further on the different/conflicting ideas about teaching and learning, especially from the perspective of students’ parents. Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that parents from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations towards teachers, schools and education. However, these different expectations are usually not discussed enough. This is mostly due to the fact that teachers are often unfamiliar with the cultural values of immigrant parents and that there is often a language barrier between them.

Maki-san, Kei and I believe that our students’ parents are great *knowers* of their culture, life, and, of course, their children. Therefore, we believe that it is important to communicate with them to understand their educational stances and expectations, instead of just letting them know the school’s expectations. For example, Kei continuously expressed how important it was for her to truly understand her students’ parents’ expectations regarding school. Having mostly attended schools in the U.S. and having been raised in a more Japanese cultural context, Kei is conscious of the different educational expectations in both cultural contexts. This consciousness has helped her to
be sensitive about the educational expectations of parents from different cultural backgrounds.

For example, Kei analyzed how she subconsciously modified her attitude as a teacher when she taught the same student in Japanese and in English. She added that it was not the language she was using but rather the cultural context in which she was teaching that made a difference:

Kei: Usually, Yumi and I don’t care how we sit (Kei demonstrated how she might sit) But, when we practiced, 漢字, kanji in Japanese, I would say something like, “You need to sit still and sit upright” or “Put your hand here.” But when we are studying English, I don’t care. And Yumi is like that, too (Laughing).
Gumiko: That’s funny. Is it like putting a long yardstick on your back?
Kei: Yes, yes, yes! I think I sit with better posture when I am writing in Japanese, too.
Gumiko: That’s funny. So, it is impossible to teach in the same way…
Kei: Exactly! When I teach Kanji to Yumi, her mother would sit close to us too. So, I would tell Yumi, “You made a mistake. You need to be careful about the orders of the strokes.” Or “You can write better if you pay attention to the order of the strokes.” However, when I am teaching in English, (even though Yumi might make some mistakes in her writing) I would say, “Oh, Yumi. That’s great!”

(Interview, June 28, 2007)

This story of Kei’s is consistent with other Japanese parents and their children’s stories and social experiences too. For example, one of my students’ mothers talked about her frustration with her daughter’s education, wondering if she was really learning in her
local school or not. She said, 「アメリカの先生は間違いをしてもよくやったね。すごいって言うだけだから」 (All teachers here in the U.S. just say to children, “You did wonderful” or “Great” even though the children make mistakes.)

Understanding the different ideas about education, and parents’ as well as cultural/social expectations in both the U.S. and Japanese social contexts, Kei emphasized how important it is for her students to learn both approaches. At the same time, she explains that this balancing act can also cause her to struggle to define her own teaching style as a new teacher:

I think that it is not because of language, but because of culture. I feel sorry for Yumi (to reprimand her strictly about the order of her strokes). But if she does that in Hoshuko, it would not be good for her…. I really need to think seriously…(Interview, June 28, 2007).

Kei believes that it is important for her students, who are from bi- or multi-cultural backgrounds, to learn both approaches in order to be able to live in both cultural/social contexts independently and confidently. Kei has also been making an effort to “choose” her style of teaching depending on the student and the context in her local school classroom. Maki-san, Kei and I believe that helping our students to have two functional cultural centers is one of the most important roles for us as teachers. This prioritization is reflected in our students’ parents’ expectations as well.
Maki-san, Kei’s, and my understanding of parents’ educational expectations also means that we value these parents’ points of view and experiences. Especially in the case of first generation immigrants, the parents’ agency as adults can be put into question or reduced in unfamiliar cultural and language contexts. Therefore, it is extremely important for teachers to help these parents feel free to communicate with them and let them know that their voices and expectations are important, to be listened to and respected just like any other parents’ in the same school community. Taking cultural mediator roles, Maki-san, Kei and I make efforts to make these voices audible to classroom teachers and the entire school community.

**Nurturing Space beyond Two Cultures**

Although schools make many efforts to include multiple cultures, most of the students of the teachers in this study are living in communities, such local school classrooms and Japanese homes, that are designed from a “mono-culture” perspective and tend to divide cultures in a dichotomous way. Meanwhile, each of our students has been developing their sense of identity not only in each culture but also across or between and beyond both cultures. Maki-san, Kei and I acknowledge that it can be challenging for our students to develop their positive and holistic inner-selves, including a sense of their relationship to each worlds, self-worth, and agency, while living in this kind of dichotomized environment. The three of us acted on the basis of our commitment and belief that it is important to create spaces and ways to nurture our students’ inner growth not as fragments but as whole beings in each culture and beyond.
In this section, I examine the findings that demonstrate how we three teachers understand our students’ inner struggles in the process of developing a sense of who they are and how we nurture our students’ wholeness and rooted-ness in U.S. and Japanese cultural contexts as well as beyond each cultural context.

In this section, I used Kei’s metaphors of the Moon, the Chameleon, and the Cake to demonstrate students’ development of a sense of identity. Also, since our life experiences had a significant influence in determining why we believe this is a very important part of teaching, I refer back to our personal experiences and biographical stories.

**Nurturing students’ agency and wholeness in U.S. mainstream culture**

The three teachers in this study recognize that many students tend to be more accepting of differences in others when those differences exist in the context of similarities between the two students. When students feel so foreign from each other that they cannot find many common interests or values, it can be difficult for them to accept each other and become friends. As a result, the three of us observed some of our students start to deny or attempt to erase their Japanese identity in an effort to join American friends as *same as Americans* or deny the aspects of their identity that they developed in the U.S. in order to show their Japanese friends that they are *normal Japanese*. This is an extreme case, but it is the same concept that Kei illustrated with her *Chameleon* metaphor. We acknowledge this kind of extreme negotiation process can have a serious negative impact on students’ identity development procedures and their sense of who they are.
For example, Maki-san shared the story of one of her high school students, who refused support from her. He had decided not to use Japanese in school and had decided only to spend time with *American* friends to demonstrate his loyalty. Maki-san said:

Maki-san: There was a student who did not want to accept my help.

Gumiko: Why? He was embarrassed to speak in Japanese in front of other people in the school?

Maki-san: Yes, he did not want to have any connection with Japanese. He could not accept his Japanese identity. He wanted to be with “American” students and behave like them.

Gumiko: So, his English was good?

Maki-san: No, his English still needed to be improved, so he started to fail classes, but he did not accept my help using Japanese. And he did not have a good relationship with his parents, either.

Gumiko: How did he communicate with his friends?

Maki-san: He was with other “American” students ...probably… in the edge of the group, listening and hoping to join the conversation…

Gumiko: It is very easy for me to picture the situation. I experience that kind of ‘standing in the edge of a group hoping to join conversation’ here myself. It is not an easy thing to do...

Maki-san: It must have been hard for him. When he saw himself, he did not look like them. But eventually things went well. He managed to graduate. It took him longer to pass the graduation exam than other students, but now he is in the University he wanted to go to.
Maki-san, Kei and I recognize our students’ desire to find a place of acceptance and belonging is very strong and that it can influence how they shape their identities or how they reject certain parts of their identities. Since the situations that these individual students find themselves in are often quite complex, we have sometimes felt that we failed to help some students regardless of our efforts, and we do not forget about these students.

“Non-existence” of Asian descent discourse in mainstream U.S. culture. One of the things that we three teachers had a difficult time articulating or discussing with confidence was when we talked about our racial experiences in the mainstream context in the U.S. I present these data to illustrate how discussions of the experiences of people of Asian descent have been socially discouraged from entering legitimate discourse in U.S. society, which is often based on demonstrated levels of oppression or hardship. Thus it can be even harder for other teachers to recognize and understand the experiences, difficulties, and needs of students of Asian descent while they teach.

Maki-san, Kei, and I all struggled to conceive of our voices and experiences as important contributions to American mainstream society and the field of multicultural discourse in the United States. One of the reasons was that all three of us saw our Asian descent experiences as belonging to the “model minority” discourse so that, even though we have many important things to talk about, we each lost confidence when we imagined our contributions being incorporated into mainstream U.S. discourse. For instance, in the beginning stage of the research Maki-san said:

I am not sure if my story is important. I am not a Japanese American who has experienced World War II in the U.S. (Interview, 3/3/2007).
Initially, Maki-san could not recognize her own life experience and stories as a teacher as important enough to be heard by others in U.S. society. Maki-san even offered to introduce me to other Japanese descent people who had experienced World War II, which Maki-san believed would constitute a legitimate Asian descent story in the U.S.

Maki-san also said about her daughter, Kei:

Kei is not a really minority. Her father is Caucasian American. So she really did not experience as many difficulties as other minority people (Interview, 3/3/2007).

For Maki-san, her stories and her daughter’s stories were not “painful” enough to talk about, or did not feel like stories which would be recognized as legitimate by mainstream U.S. society. This had been my hesitation as a researcher conducting this research as well.

The following is an excerpt from a journal,

I know that my advisor and other people say that my research is important and interesting. I know that all the stories I have been hearing from Kei and Maki-san are fascinating and important. But I am wondering who is really going to read this and show interest. When I went to conferences to see sessions about people of Asian descent, there were always only few people listening and they were all people of Asian descent. I know it is important to talk amongst ourselves, too. But it is difficult to feel confident about this research being something important to conduct in U.S. society… (Journal, 3/28/2008)

Thinking back to the time when I wrote this journal entry, I think I was afraid that academics in the mainstream discourse of the field of education in the U.S., might not be interested or see the significance of my research, which I thought could determine my future in the job search. During the process of the study, Maki-san and I had so many
things to talk about with passion and confidence, yet we could not imagine that other
people would think our stories were important enough.

As a bi-racial person with an Asian mother and a Caucasian father, Kei’s situation
seemed even more difficult and complicated. Below is what Kei wrote about her
experience as a person of Asian descent:

The stereotypes of Asian Americans include that of being a “model minority”.
Although it can be seen as a positive stereotype, it is still a stereotype of a group
of people that is untrue. I do not understand what it feels like to be a minority that
is attached to more negative stereotypes…. Being a minority that is attached to a
lot of negative stereotypes is something that I have not experienced. Yet in
history, Japanese Americans have experiences of extreme discrimination.
Knowing that time was the only reason why I did not experience discrimination
shows how discrimination is something that is created by society. While I cannot
say that I understand how it feels to be attached to negative stereotypes, I know
that under different circumstances it could just as easily have been someone else
that was being labeled (8/26/2005).

Kei was comfortable discussing minority groups to whom negative stereotypes are
attached, but she could not say much about her own experience as a person of Asian
descent due to the fact that the “model minority” image is regarded as positive. In
addition, Kei, like Maki-san, used historical facts to discuss Japanese American
experience but was not be able to articulate her own racial experience as much.

The words of Maki-san, Kei, and I show that we feel that “historically proven
struggles” and victim stories are legitimate discourses to join the discussion of
multicultural, social justice and equity in the U.S. Therefore, it is not easy for us, as people of Asian descent, to join the conversation of “multicultural education” or race in this country. As Kei explained, Asian Americans have been traditionally seen as a “model minority” which is a so-called “positive” stereotype. Because images of orientalness and model minority are not necessarily “negative,” the way these images may influence the development of the identities of children of Asian descent has not been examined carefully, which possibly continues to silence students of Asian descent further. When I asked Kei if the image of model minority had an influence on her, she said immediately with very clear voice, “Oh, Yeah!” Yet, in her auto-biographical writing, Kei stated three times, “I cannot say that I understand how it feels to be attached to negative stereotypes”, like the African American population is, and could not identify in the impact of being labeled as a model minority throughout this study. These are examples of people of Asian descent who do not feel comfortable or confident enough to talk about themselves because society has assumed that they have no problems in U.S. society.

Helping teachers break down stereotypes to see the wholeness of each student.

Although the three of us have struggled to develop the confidence to discuss our own racial/ethnic experiences in mainstream and multicultural discourse in the U.S., we acknowledged the possible difficulties that our Asian descent students could have in their classrooms as they struggle with model minority myths and the invisibility and silencing that accompanies these myths. One of the most harmful results of attaching stereotypes to any group of students in schools is that these stereotypes disturb and limit teachers’ and other students’ imaginative ability to really understand individual students.
holistically by observing or interacting with them. When there are language and cultural barriers, the situation becomes even harder. In addition, such stereotypes influence students’ identity development and cause them to have difficult time accepting who they are as whole beings as well. For instance, Kei’s metaphor of the moon illustrates how this kind of social expectation, and the stereotypes attached to a certain group of people greatly influence children’s identity developments. Kei’s image of “who she was” would change depending on which culture she was in at the moment and she always felt that people only knew a part of her. These images were not necessarily equal to Kei’s sense of who she really was as a whole being; rather, they were constructed images of “who other people believed she should be” in each culture. As Kei’s Chameleon metaphor shows, students in minority groups may start to learn how to act culturally/socially “expected” roles, moon, as chameleons and use their identity negotiating as strategies in order to survive and live in US cultural context.

In the case of Asian descent students, Maki-san, Kei, and I consider that one of the most harmful influences on Asian descent students is being seen only partially, as in Kei’s moon metaphor, and the model minority and forever foreigner stereotypes. Such kinds of stereotypes may have the effect of making students of Asian descent adapt to or at least try not to disturb the image of the model minority identity from mainstream American people’s point of view. They may also cause teachers to see Japanese descent students as a quiet and nice, without really getting know who they really are.

The following excerpt is from one of my journal entries about my discussion with another Japanese descent teacher about Japanese descent students’ identity negotiation in their local school classrooms:
I was talking with my friend Yoshiko, who in the same Ph.D. program as me and who has also been a teacher at the hoshuko for about 8 years, about Japanese descent students in local schools. Yoshiko said that her students always needed to act as “Japanese kids” there. We discussed how many teachers in local schools treat Japanese students more like just visitors instead of real students. Their differences from local students are more apparent than their similarities to them compared to other students in local schools. The differences are tricky, too, because teachers and students in local schools expect specific forms of Japanese-ness that have been constructed by people here in the U.S. and such expectations of ‘the Japanese-ness’, such as the image of the ‘quiet and nice’ Japanese student, are probably designed not to disturb the dominant population of American people. But their expectations as peers or community members in classroom have an impact on these Japanese students (Journal September 05, 2008).

Recognizing the difficulties that Asian descent students may face, Maki-san, Kei and I believe that it is important to complicate the images of students of Asian descent so that other teachers will be able to see individual students from a more holistic perspective rather than through limited stereotype images.

For instance, hoping to change this situation as much as possible, I voluntarily made arrangements for student teachers to meet with Japanese students not in a local classroom context but in a Japanese cultural context, such as in Japanese student’s house or my house. My intention was to help student teachers to see the multiple and often very different sides of these students’ and students’ parents’ realities. For instance, there was a student teacher who had one of my Japanese students, Yohei, for tutoring in her 3rd
grade placement. The student teacher described Yohei as a very quiet, nice, but an academically lagging student. In other words, she was not really recognizing who he was yet. It is common for teachers to talk about ESL students from Japan as being quiet and nice, because the description falls within Japanese students’ stereotypical image, and because these words are probably safe and politically correct to use. Since she chose him as a case study student, I brought her to his home and spent some time with them together. It was amazing to see her surprised face as she realized how Yohei was actually a playful, fun, energetic, talkative, and intelligent boy. The student teacher finally recognized that Yohei’s quiet frustration, fear and anger were being hidden under the image of the quiet and nice Japanese student before. This student teacher’s visit helped him to feel safer in the classroom because now he knew that there was a teacher who knew the real him in his classroom now.

The other difficulty arises when students do not fall into a stereotype in a negative way. We three teachers recognize that in such cases many teachers tend to lose their tolerance more easily than with other students. For instance, Maki-san once had a male student, Tsutomu, from Japan in her high school, who “many teachers hated . . . because he was lazy”. ‘Hate’ is a strong word, but it was the result of his inability to fit into the typical Japanese student image for teachers in the school. Tsutomu skipped classes sometimes and did not do school work so that many teachers recognized him as lazy. But in reality, Maki-san knew that he was having a very difficult time with his family and as an adolescent in adapting to his new cultural context. Maki-san also explained, “Tsutomu was actually a very good boy on the inside but he could not handle the situation well.” Maki-san said that she explained his situation many times to other
teachers, and asked them to give him another chance whenever they were about to give up on him. Maki-san said:

There are smart children or students who are not serious about studying among Japanese students just like other students in the U.S. classroom. Many teachers in my school have a tendency to see Japanese boys are lazier in general. For example, some teachers say that Japanese boys try to pretend they cannot understand English in order to avoid studying. But this is half true and half not true. I mean….there are one or two students who do such things. But this does not apply to many other students. [A lack of familiarity with minority groups of students] can make teachers rely on only limited images and take away their desire to understand individual students (Interview, July 5, 2007).

In Tsutomu’s case, it became a visible situation. But Maki-san and I discussed how often Japanese descent students’ struggles are not even recognized because of the stereotypical images attached to them. For instance, the three of us discussed how often (especially male) students stop talking in their local schools. Many teachers think that as long as these students are quiet and not causing any trouble, they are ‘quiet and nice’ students. However, like Yohei, many of these students just negotiate their identity in order not to be in trouble; but hold anger, quiet resistance, despair, loneliness, and fear inside of them. Since situations around immigrant students are often subtle and complicated and many students are not mature enough to articulate what is going on inside of them by themselves, these three teachers believe that it is very important to make an effort to understand each student holistically.
While asking teachers to give Tsutomu another chance, Maki-san said that she talked with him many times, sometimes crying and sometimes yelling at each other, making her best effort to help him and show him that she would never give up on him. One of the many things that Maki-san, Kei and I have in common is that we are very patient in these kinds of situations. We know from own experiences how hard it can be to really understand some students from different cultures and countries and that unconsciously denying or repressing certain parts of them really distort their identities. Giving up on a student in difficulties was hardly considered a choice for any of us three.

Maki-san has also been making an effort to explain the various aspects of each student’s background and situation to other teachers. For instance, Maki-san explained the different socio-cultural backgrounds of her students to other teachers. She said:

Before, there used to be only upper-middle class, ‘well-educated’ families from Japan coming to the U.S. However, now there are more and more families who come from a variety of (socio-economic and educational) backgrounds coming here. There are even students from really rural parts of Japan, too. For them, the differences here are not only because of language but also due to the differences between rural and urban culture. So, I explain to teachers that just as American students come from a variety of backgrounds, Japanese students also come from different backgrounds. Just like bell curves (Interview, October 20, 2007).

Maki-san said that her explanations to American teachers, making connections to their own experiences and American demographics has been helping them to understand better.
Nurturing students’ agency and wholeness to prepare them to return to Japan.

Both local schools and hoshukos, Japanese Saturday schools, are based on hidden cultural curricula from their dominant cultures, and the teachers and people who populate and have power in them belong to their community. Many of our students from Japan were/are sojourners and went/will go back to Japan depending on their parents’ jobs (although some of them may choose to go to college in the United States later). Therefore, the main mission of hoshukos in our three teachers’ areas is to educate students to become Japanese citizens and to preserve their Japanese-ness. Thus, the tendency to maintain mainstream cultural norms through the curriculum could be even stronger in hoshukos than in local schools.

Japanese descent students who go back to Japan are called 帰国子女, Kikokushijo (children who come back to the country). Although the situation for sojourners like them in Japan has been getting better compared to how it used to be, Maki-san, Kei and I acknowledge that many sojourner students may be put in vulnerable situations when they return. Some of the cultural behaviors, ways of communication or social values, which they acquired in U.S., are so incompatible to those in Japan that they may be seen as different from other mainstream Japanese people. The three of us know many stories about children who have had a difficult time after returning to Japan because they had adopted a new culture, social values, and communication styles in the U.S. so that they could not longer pass as pure Japanese any more in Japanese society. For instance, their pronunciation of English could be marked as “snobby” sometimes. And their more direct communication style may be perceived as “selfish”.

Maki-san explained:
The problem (after immigrant students from Japan adjust to culture and society in the U.S.) is when children take what they have learned as the truth. The younger they are, the more they just believe that what they have learned is the only truth, and they are going to get in trouble when they go back to Japan (Interview July 5, 2007).

Political, social, cultural, and historical tension attached to the relationship between “English and U.S. culture” and “Japanese and Japanese culture” make the sojourners’ situation even more complicated in Japanese society. This fact is one of the reasons why many parents who are planning to go back to Japan want Japanese Saturday School as the place to teach “authentic Japanese-ness” to their children as much as possible. Maki-san explained:

Students’ parents know what kinds of cross-cultural difficulties their children may encounter when they go back to Japan (Interview July 5, 2007).

Maki-san, Kei and I all shared how our experiences here in the United States changed our relationships with other people in Japan after we moved to the U.S. For instance, I usually didn’t share my experiences in the United States with many friends in Japan. I learned that talking about experiences in the United States made some people feel uncomfortable or think that I was a snob or judgmental about Japan. Maki-san agreed that she had the same experience and shared that she only spent time with friends who love to hear about and share Maki-san’s bi-cultural experiences in Japan and in the United States when she returns to Japan.
When students are *half*, bi-racial, like Kei, the situation becomes even more complicated and difficult. For example, Kei talked about the ‘positive’ stereotype attached to *half*, who are considered beautiful and can speak English and Japanese well. Kei said that sometimes people wanted to become friends with her because they wanted to learn English from her. Although this kind of image sounds ‘positive,’ it means that people decided how they viewed Kei even before they got to know her. Kei said that she sometimes decided to pretend she could not speak Japanese so that such kinds of people would not approach her. In other words, she needed to hide a part of her identity because of a stereotypical image that she needed to deal with when in Japan.

Having a strong understanding about this kind of situation in Japan and especially because students are on their own once they get to Japan, these three teachers stressed how important it is for these students to be well prepared when they go back to Japan, not by hiding or rejecting the experiences and identities that they developed in the U.S., but having a strong and flexible bi-cultural competence and use it as agency. For instance, Maki-san uses the metaphor of *gears* when she teaches her students who have more than one cultural center the importance of understanding and practicing active flexible changes in their ways of acting/behaving/communicating with bi-cultural awareness. I will discuss the metaphor of *gears* in the next section.

**Nurturing Students’ Inner Growth Beyond the Social Notions of Both Cultures**

As I demonstrated in the previous section, Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that our students constantly must try to find ways to become members of the two communities whose social and cultural values and ways of communication are not only different but also often conflicting with each other. As a result of this process, many students may
become confused about who they are as a whole, or try to hide or deny some parts of who they are. Recognizing that there are not many spaces where their students can experience and explore who they are as whole, these three teachers made efforts to create spaces where their students could explore, experience and practice their wholeness and agency. In this section, I demonstrate how Maki-san, Kei and I create or take a role as 居場所, Ibasho, to help our students explore, experience and practice their wholeness and agency.

**Looking for Wholeness.** For Maki-san, Kei, and I, an important purpose of education is not just to prepare students to become citizens of a specific country but to prepare them to become citizens of both of their home and host cultures/countries. For instance, Maki-san said:

できたら両方でいける人になって欲しいから

I hope that my students will be able to live (with confidence) in both cultures/countries (Interview July 5, 2007).

This statement encapsulates well the intentions and hopes in teaching of the three of us as teachers. As I demonstrated in the biography section in Chapter 4, this kind of teaching philosophy comes not only from our teaching experiences but also from our lived experiences. Each of our experiences and relationships with each culture/language/country are not exactly same. Regardless, one of the consensuses we have arrived at in terms of our relationships with both cultures/languages/countries is that both are important and essential for us, and that we have chosen to live a life that relates to both sides. The three of us have chosen and enjoy being related to both cultures and communities. As Kei put it:

両方ないと不安になる
I become anxious/nervous when I don’t have both (languages and cultures).

This is a very simple statement but it articulates clearly that all cultural/racial/linguistic/national and social elements are parts of her and it is important for her to be able to have all of them with her wherever she goes.

In order to help our students explore their own wholeness, we recognize that it is important for us to help our students to build a healthier and more functional relationship with both cultures/languages/societies, which many schools and family environments on each side may not necessarily help students to prepare for.

Maki-san explained,

どちらが良い悪いじゃなくて、違うって言う事

It is not about ‘this side is right and the other side is wrong’. It is about recognizing that the two are just different (Interview July 5, 2007).

This sounds very simple but we know that achieving this understanding is not that easy for students and adults who live in/between two very different cultural/social values that sometimes conflict with each other.

**Making sense of their selves through dialogue.** In order to help our students to explore their wholeness, Maki-san, Kei and I create spaces for dialogue about our students’ and their own experiences and lives in and outside of their classrooms. Such spaces help students talk about themselves as main characters with other students who can share their experiences, feelings and thoughts with empathy and interest, and help them to make sense of their experiences together with their own words. I can provide an example of this from my own experience as a Ph.D. student in the U.S. I once attended a year-long seminar about race and dialogue in which I was the only Asian descent
student. All other students and professors in the seminar were exceptionally loving and caring people. Regardless of this fact, I expressed how I had started to feel isolated and not important in the community. It was an eye-opening experience for me to understand the experiences of other Asian descent people in the United States. In the seminar, we had a lot of discussions about issues related to race, especially about the African American and Caucasian populations in the United States. For me it sounded like a binary world, and I thought there was no space to really talk about my experience as an Asian to someone who was really interested or understood. I started to become more quiet and felt some kind of resignation. On the other hand, when I shared my experience with another Japanese Ph.D. student the day following one of our seminar meetings, we felt strong empathy for each other. What follows is an excerpt from my research journal:

In this comfortable space, we both believe that what we are talking about is important to talk about and worth being heard. We trust the other person knowing that she listen to about the things I want to say with sincere interest. And spending long time discussing, we have been talking about all of our experiences ぐるぐると，guruguru, going back and forth repeatedly, and being allowed to talk guruguru helps us to “make sense” of things and see the bigger picture. Together, we started to discuss our memories and thoughts… so many things related to race, ethnicity, gender… And we often say “Sou sou sou!! (yes, yes, yes!!)” to show empathy while hearing each other’s stories. We laughed, cried, became excited and became serious while talking to each other and realized we had been longing for this kind of space where we can make sense of our experiences as Japanese
descent women and students in the U.S. and where we can feel truly valued, accepted, and understood (Journal, 1/8/2008).

An example of such kinds of spaces can be found in my own experience teaching. In my 6th grade classroom I regularly made time to have conversations with my students about their life experiences, including bi-cultural/lingual experiences. Students discussed their identities and feelings as Japanese, Japanese Americans, or Americans who live in the United States. Once, some of my students shared their concerns about bringing their Japanese lunch boxes to their local schools because of their significant difference from the “American” regular lunch box. One female student, Yoshimi, who had lived in the United States for more than 7 years said:

   I cannot understand why some Japanese people bring Japanese lunch boxes to the local school. It looks very weird there.

Another student, who was male and was born here in the U.S., agreed:

   That is right. My (American) friends said I was dirty, because I was eating an おにぎり, onigiri, a Japanese rice ball, with my hands.

Although some of these American students’ comments might have just been carelessly said, in this kind of situation, cultural minority students may interpret their difference from other American students not as something unique, but rather as something that will make them feel excluded, weird or rejected. Such comments not only hurt these students but also make them understand how they “should” modify their behavior in local schools in order to be accepted by other students and make friends in their local schools. The other female student, who came to the United States when she was in kindergarten, said:
I don’t want to think about or talk about my Japanese identity. We have been trying so hard to become Americans everyday.

As Kei expressed in her biographic story, using the metaphors of the chameleon and the moon, many students try to figure out by themselves how they should act depending on the cultural context they are in, in order to be accepted in each community. Although this student was resistant to joining the discussion at first, she eventually expressed many feelings of struggle and confusion in relation to her experiences. Talking about and listening to each others’ experiences, these students could start to explore their own definitions of who they are beyond the socially expected role, moon in each culture.

Another example of this can be found in Miyu’s (another student’s) two poems. Miyu wrote the poems after a few of us had discussed our bicultural/bilingual/bi-national experiences. Miyu shared these poems with us about a week after these discussions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mother Tongue</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is Japanese for me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is my mother tongue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precious and imbued with sorrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filled with memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The longer I stay [in the United States], the less skillful I have gradually become. But I cannot afford to forget it. For what would I do in the future if were to forget it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter how less skillful I have become, I cannot afford to forget it. Because it is part of me and it is my whole life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>English I Love</strong></th>
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Miyu moved to the United States when she was in 5th grade and went back to Japan in 9th grade. When I first met her as her 6th grade teacher, she looked fearful and very quiet. However, Miyu was a truly thoughtful student and started to enjoy discussing her own and other students’ experiences in the U.S. and Japan. It was a great joy to observe her growth and the growth of her confidence. When she went back to Japan, she was eventually able to define her relationship with both parts of her and both cultures using her own experiences and words and with love for both sides. Miyu’s poem demonstrates that not only the two languages but also all of her experiences both as a Japanese person and as a person of Japanese descent in the U.S are equally important parts of her so that she cannot talk about her wholeness without either of them. This is the same concept that Kei illustrated with her Cake metaphor.
**Practicing agency.** Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that ELL/immigrant students do not have many opportunities to practice their sense of agency and independence compared to other students due to their cultural, social and language barriers. We believe that developing a sense of agency and independence is crucial for our students to become who they are and develop their confidence in any setting. For instance, as an ESL classroom teacher for young children, Kei is committed to helping students function by themselves in their everyday lives so that they can develop confidence and independence even when she cannot be around them. She explained this in a conversation we had on the topic:

Kei: I think what I need to do is give them the skills so that they can function in the classroom.

Gumiko: Ok…help them to function…

Kei: Yeah… and then I think emotionally it’s a really a big part. So they feel confident, you know. So they can ask questions and ask for help.

Gumiko: That’s really important.

Kei: That’s really big (Interview, 8/14/2007).

*Expressing* oneself verbally and/or non-verbally is the start of connecting with others as well as the self. However, Kei had observed many times that ELL students became quiet in regular classrooms without being recognized by classroom teachers. Thus, she believed that it was crucial for her to help her students to learn how to express themselves verbally and/or non-verbally.

Maki-san, Kei and I recognize the importance of negotiating behaviors and identities flexibly in different cultural contexts not merely as a survival skill but also to provide
students with a sense of agency and ownership over their own lives, which we want our students to develop. We have observed our students and ourselves negotiate our behaviors or identities struggling to figure out how to deal with the certain parts of our selves or sometimes even denying some parts of our selves. For instance, Yoshimi denied her Japanese identity in order to become a member of the U.S. mainstream community. The other example is Kei, who expressed that when she was an adolescent, she felt that other people, rather than herself, were in charge of deciding who she was.

Instead, Maki-san, Kei and I want our students to know that they are the authors of their own lives and that they have the ability to control their own lives with confidence. For instance, as I demonstrated previously, Maki-san uses the word, gear, when she teaches her students who have more than one cultural center the importance of understanding and practicing flexible and conscious changes in their ways of acting/behaving/communicating. Her metaphor illustrates her students as drivers of cars and they can decide and control which gear they want to use depending on the situation so that they have the freedom to go wherever they want to go. Maki-san stated:

I tell my high school students to think of themselves as having many different gears. If they have only one kind of gear, they can live well in only one culture. I want my students to be able to live well in both cultural contexts. Therefore, it is important for people who live in two worlds to think of balancing between them as shifting gears. That is why I tell them “Please have many different gears.” My students are mature enough to understand what I mean. It is not like this gear is better and this gear is worse. It is the ability to consciously use many different gears depending on the situation that matters.
When students develop such kinds of conscious gear changing skills, they no longer need to deny parts of themselves in different social/cultural contexts and they can develop a sense of wholeness regardless of living between two worlds. The three of us shared how we encouraged these gear changes and how happy we were when we witnessed our students starting to develop the ability to become agents in both worlds. As Maki-san put it:

When I see students use different gears in their daily lives in different cultural contexts, I feel very happy (Interview July 5, 2007).

**Having successful experiences.** Feeling useful and being able to make an important contribution to the community is a very important experience for students to practice membership in the community. ELL/immigrant students especially have fewer opportunities to feel important at school. Without speaking fluent English or lacking cultural competency, many ELL/immigrant students tend to feel that they are always being helped. Maki-san, Kei and I believe that having this kind of experience for a long period of time could be very harmful to our students, allowing them to lose their self-esteem and dignity, and preventing them from experiencing success with other people in the community.

Kei, for example, found this feeling of usefulness when she started to teach at an international preschool in Tokyo. She became a very important member of the community and she contributed to the community and the children there because of who she was. Therefore, as a teacher she creates a pedagogical space and makes an effort to help students have such kinds of experiences. Another example can be found in Maki-san’s experience, when she became an important member of her local church. She taught
to younger children and even became a translator for the church. This experience helped her to boost her sense of agency and her joy of living.

What Kei did with her students to help them feel a sense of accomplishment and importance was to plan a fashion show together with her students. This experience became very successful and important for each student especially because they discussed and planned this fashion show by themselves. The fashion show was held as part of a multicultural festival in her school. Kei explained how all of her students were excited about planning the event. They brought clothes from their homes and walked the runway in front of all the other students in the school proudly. These kinds of experiences are not only important for her students but also important for other students to see different and positive aspects of students in the ESL classroom. Kei created an opportunity for such experiences outside the curriculum and outside the classroom walls and facilitated a very joyful and successful experience with her students.

**Beyond the notions of two cultures.** Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that focusing on students’ background, which tends to be at the center of discussions about teaching ELL/immigrant students more effectively, is very important. However, we also recognize that taking background into consideration is not everything. Maki-san explains that if teachers rely only on cultural aspects, they can lose the desire to really understand each student beyond culture. For example, expressing her confusion and frustration in finding her identity as an adolescent, Kei stated,

I was not sure if I was in confusion because of my bicultural and biracial background or if it was just because I was an adolescent.
It was probably a combination of both because both issues are complicatedly mixed together. However, we also recognize that if we only approach students from those perspectives, we will not be able to really understand or reach to our students’ cores.

In the very first interviews, Kei expressed her feeling of burden because everyone always expects her to act as a bridge between two cultures and countries. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, she does this with passion, but it is not all that she is. In an autobiographical paper she wrote for a graduate class, she initially used the categories of bi-racial, bi-cultural, and second generation Asian American in order to discuss who she is and what kind of experiences she had in her life. Then she added the categories of third culture kid, student, teacher, single, middle class, environmentalist, spiritual, and multicultural to explain who she is. Having been seen as a Japanese girl by American people and as an American girl by Japanese people throughout her childhood, Kei knows how important it is to get to know people beyond culture. She is aware of how much she and her students want other people know them not just by their culture but also through the many other aspects that make up their identities.

Maki-san, Kei and I believe that when teachers focus on each student’s interests and/or strengths, which are sometimes hidden, they can increase their students’ strengths as well as their inner and social confidence. The three of us are determined to discover and support individual student’s interests and strengths inside and out of academic areas in order to open our students’ hearts and potential.

Maki-san supports each of her students in many different areas. For example, one of her students was failing in most academic areas when he moved from Canada. The student had lived in English speaking countries for a while. He said that he did not get
enough support for his English so that he failed on all academic subjects. Maki-san started to help him in all subject areas using Japanese and as a result they discovered his love for science. Maki-san said:

   It was like I thought I picked up garbage and I found a mass of gold underneath it. He started to shine! It was such a joy to teach a student like him. (Laughing joyfully.) Thanks to teaching him, I had to restudy everything in English again in order to teach it to him. Physics, Chemistry, calculus… He was very good at everything (Interview, November 17, 2007).

Maki-san, Kei and I know that many other teachers are also interested in and pay attention to students’ interests and strengths. However, we believe that focusing uniquely on cultural and language differences could be an obstacle to finding what lies underneath those layers. Maki-san’s example shows how important it is to be able to see underneath them. We believe that when students gain confidence in one area, it can become a positive trigger so that they start to grow in many other areas, socially, emotionally and academically, and become much happier in their daily lives in school. As teachers, we believe that it is important to let our students know we recognize their growth, efforts and success and their growth and success are very important for us too in any areas.

   For instance, Maki-san, Kei and I go to many places to see our students outside of our classrooms, such as sports events, concerts, festivals, and their homes or invite our students to our own environments, such as our homes or schools (university). Following is an example that Maki-san provided:

   Recently, one student from China had a (music) concert after school. She asked me, “Teacher, Could you come to my concert? Could you come?” I was very
tired at the time and her concert started from something like 7 pm so in order to go I would need to stay at school late, so I thought, “What should I do?” But (with a big smile and a clear voice) I said, “Of course, I am coming!” I stayed at school late to go to see her concert. Finding me there, she looked very happy.

This example shows that Maki-san’s students know that she really cares about them, is interested in what they do, and that she enjoys their success just like her own success.

Maki-san continued:

When someone comes to see you for your important event, you never forget about the person. It is same for students….. Teachers sometimes act or talk very carelessly. Students may feel hurt or very happy depending on what we, teachers, do or say to them. I think it is always important to think from the students’ point of view more carefully to understand their feelings better.

Maki-san, Kei and I all believe that this kind of close personal relationship is essential to building a really open and trustful relationship with our students so that we can understand each of them better as individuals.

*Planting Seeds for the Future.*

The last thing I want to demonstrate is how we, the three teachers in the study, think about our students’ futures in our daily pedagogical practices. We recognize that students’ futures are not discussed much in school and we believe that it is very important to construct everyday teaching strategies aimed at ELL/immigrant students especially because they rarely have adult role models who live both cultural worlds.

For instance, Kei shared her different experiences as a child and as an adult in Japan. She said that she realized that she knew how to act as a child in Japan, but that she
sometimes did not know how to act/behave as an adult in Japan. This is something that many Japanese sojourner students need to face when they go back to Japan, because they did not have a chance to learn social expectations and rules for adults in Japan. These three teachers and many parents from Japan acknowledge that this is an issue. There are many hidden rules in adult social life in any cultural context and it is not easy for students to learn them if they grow up in a different cultural context.

Another example of this can be found in my experience as a university supervisor in an Early Childhood M.Ed. program. I had some students from minority cultural backgrounds, such as African descent, rural, lower socio economic and Asian descent, including first to third generation immigrant students. Most of them had a much more difficult time compared to the other students. There were different reasons for this, but one of them was that they did not know what was expected of them as adults in the school’s cultural context and they had a difficult time reading the hidden expectations from their mentor teachers. In addition, the students had their own ideas about what is expected from adults in their own society.

In order to help our students to be able to live meaningful lives not as partial but as whole beings and not only in the present but also for future, Maki-san, Kei and I are conscious about helping our students prepare for their future in both cultures as well as beyond both cultures, which requires students to find their own way of defining their relationships with both worlds. For instance, Maki-san recognizes that certain things may be forgotten to be taught to Japanese descent students in the U.S. and said that she spends time discussing things about life in general, such as marriage, jobs and human
relationships with her students often. She believes that discussing this kind of issues with her students is more important that learning only academic matters. She expressed:

人生のメンターみたいなことができるから今の仕事が好きなの

I love my job because I enjoy becoming a role model or mentor for them (Interview, 3/31/2007).

She also stated:

I believe that the most important thing in Education is what you are left with after you forget everything you have learned (Interview, 3/31/2007).

Maki-san consciously and happily shares her own life experiences with her students, saying that there are not so many opportunities for her students to hear such stories from other adults around them.

I also share my own stories with my students often. In addition, I have brought my students to my university and in order to help them expand their images of their possible futures. Maki-san and I both used seeds as a metaphor to express how we feel about teaching. For us, education is like planting seeds for the future. Teachers help students take care of the seeds so that when the time is right, the seeds start to grow. When we know that students have received, planted and started to grow these seeds, we feel very happy. Kei expressed that she want her students to be *citizens of the world* and this is something all three teachers are aiming for. We want to help our students to become not only competent citizens in two cultural contexts but also competent citizens of the world.
Chapter 5

Pedagogy Of しなやか, Shinayaka

This study explored the life narratives of Japanese descent teachers and the ways in which these narratives informed their understanding of children’s needs and their teaching. The particular questions that guided the study were:

1. What narratives of life and experience do these three Japanese descent teachers perceive as influencing their lives as teachers?
2. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to interpret the needs of immigrant children and their families and, in particular, those of children of Japanese descent?
3. How do these three teachers use their lives and experiences to create supportive education for immigrant children and their families and, in particular, children of Japanese descent?

These three questions articulated my focus in this study to understand the complicated relationship between teachers’ life experiences (question 1), teachers’ perspectives to understand students and their world (question 2), and teachers’ pedagogical approaches, practices, and decision-making (question 3). The questions were specifically addressed in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings that I presented in Chapter 4. In doing so, I attempt to go beyond summarizing the findings to discuss the important concepts that
emerged from the findings through a theoretical framework and literature review that builds on and extends the idea of culturally responsive teaching. I first focus on the concept of culturally relevant practices, which emerged from these three teachers’ narratives of teaching, which I call Pedagogy of しなやか, Shinayaka. Then, I demonstrate the four main components of Pedagogy of Shinayaka: Pedagogy of One, Pedagogy of Two Worlds, Pedagogy of Bilingual Space, and Pedagogy of 居場所, Ibasho, Agency and Transnational Identities. I then discuss the educational implications of the findings, and conclude my research report by identifying the limitations of my research.

Many scholars who support culturally relevant pedagogy discuss the importance of children’s holistic success and transformation. For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as not merely a pedagogy which leads diverse historically oppressed students to academic success but as a pedagogy that also “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to import knowledge, skills, and attitudes (p. 20).” However, in terms of both Asian descent students and ELL, immigrant students have not been recognized as a whole due to obstacles such as stereotypes, language policies, and cultural conflicts. Therefore, throughout this study, I wanted to know how these three teachers recognize and define their students’ holistic-ness, especially as transnational individuals, and also how they recognize and define students’ success and make efforts to help students to be successful in the present and the future.
Conceptualizing the Pedagogy of しなやか, Shinayaka

The three teachers in the study, Maki-san, Kei, and myself, have lived and taught in both Japan and The United States. We have important people in our lives, including families, friends, and students from both of these worlds and have great appreciation for both cultures. Through our lives, we have learned how to adjust to the social norms in different cultural contexts and have consequently developed our bicultural and bilingual competency through this transnational way of life.

The three of us have also created more fluid and integrated identities and belief systems so that we do not need to be divided in two. In other words, Maki-san, Kei and I have chosen to live our lives as transnational beings, having multiple homes in different countries.

Our ways of understanding and reflecting on our lives and teaching experiences have shaped our teaching philosophies. Maki-san, Kei and I have created culturally relevant practices of teaching by drawing from our own lived experiences. The three of us demonstrate しなやか, shinayaka, in this respect, since we are like bamboo trees, which move and bend without breaking or loosing their rooted-ness.

*Pedagogy of Shinayaka* reflects the culturally relevant teaching practices of Maki-san, Kei and I. I use the term, *Pedagogy of Shinayaka*, to theorize effective pedagogy for newer immigrant, especially Asian descent, children/youth using the data I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, which is constructed from the rich narratives of the three teachers in the study. しなやか, Shinayaka, is a metaphor grounded in the spirit and works in this research. Literally meaning しなやか, Shinayaka suggests the flexibility of
a bamboo tree. In Japan, bamboo trees have been used not only as a material to build houses, tools, and many other goods, but have existed as a cultural symbol or metaphor for thousands years. The bamboo tree has a sacred meaning, and people respect its association with spirituality. Bamboo trees have a very unique strength. If you try to bend one to the right side, it bends to the right. If you try to bend one to the left, it bends to the left. Their flexibility prevents them from breaking even if you bend them. And when you release your hand, the bamboo tree straightens up again toward they sky.

This image recalls the situations that newer immigrant children/youth often experience having to negotiate between their cultural background and the school/U.S. ‘dominant’ culture. Many Asian communities respect and try to maintain their traditional values and way of life after they move to the United States, and many parents and caregivers make an effort to pass on their cultural heritage to their children (e.g. Pang and et al. 2004; Zhou, 2000). At the same time, newer Asian immigrant children/youth learn different and sometimes conflicting cultural values from their family and at school. Dealing with these two strong and often conflicting cultural values, sometimes they are expected to bend to the right, and sometimes they are expected to bend to the left. In the process, some students may feel lost about which way they are facing and why. Some students may feel like they are losing the ability to “go back” to their own definition of who they are or to reach toward the sky.

The three teachers in this research have become thoroughly familiar with these students’ bi/cross-cultural contexts through their own lived experiences as bi/cross-cultural beings in the United States and they used many pedagogical approaches in order to be effective teachers for these students. しなやか,  Shinayaka represents their hope

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that their students will be able to live in both cultural contexts competently and
confidently, and eventually develop a flexible but strong bi/cross-cultural consciousness
using their rich life experiences in/between and beyond both cultures.

Based on the findings of my study, I define several components of Pedagogy of しなやか, Shinayaka that reflect how the three teachers in this study used their life
experiences and sense of identity, especially transnational identity, to employ culturally
relevant practices of teaching with their students. These components included the
following: (a) Pedagogy of One, (b) Pedagogy of Two Worlds, (c) Pedagogy of Bilingual
Space, and (d) Pedagogy of 居場所, Ibasho: Agency and Transnational Identities.

In the section of Pedagogy of One, I discuss and conceptualize how these three
teachers creatively sought to build connections around their students, many of whom
were at risk of becoming isolated in their school community due to language, cultural
barriers, and a limited quantity of students from their same cultural and linguistic
backgrounds (Poters & Rumbaut, 2007). Such situations of ELL/immigrant students
have been not recognized and discussed enough by scholars in educational field. In
addition, many of these students’ parents or caregivers were not able to truly understand
the kinds of life experiences and struggles their children were having since many of them
had no attended schools in the U.S. or had close relationships with people in the United
States. Maki-san, Kei and I have experienced isolation in our lives due to, for instance,
family issues, biracial/bilingual/bicultural identity, and moving across communities, and
we have come to understand how such kinds of situations can damage students severely.
Therefore, in this section, I discuss, using data and literature, the importance of teachers
having strong and loving relationships with each of their students to help them move past their isolation, and the importance of creating connections around students to construct better supportive educational networks around each student.

The three teachers in this study are all bilingual at an advanced level. We each have different stories about how we became high functional bilingual individuals, yet we shared a common theme in how we determined to continue to live with two or more languages. In the Pedagogy of Two Worlds section, I focused on how the three of us use our bicultural understandings in our teaching and how we help our students, our students’ parents, and other teachers to develop and deepen bicultural understandings to create a more effective and supportive educational environment for each of our students.

In the section on Pedagogy of Bilingual Space, I discuss and conceptualize how the three of us understand our choice to be bilingual and how our beliefs are reflected in our teaching, particularly in attempting to create more authentic bicultural/bilingual contexts for our students. In addition, I also discuss how Maki-san, Kei and I creatively create bilingual spaces with our students even in the context of the politics associated around language and ESL programs in schooling.

As a result of our life experiences, Maki-san, Kei and I also know that possessing bicultural knowledge and bilingual skills passively is not enough. We believe that it is important for our students to have a space in which to talk and in which to practice their active agencies, especially since ELL students have a tendency to act more passive than they really are due to language and cultural barriers. In the Pedagogy of Agency and Transnational Identities section, I discuss and conceptualize how the three of us used our transnational experiences, identities and agencies to create spaces for our
students in which they could move between and beyond the worlds of their home and hosted cultures, in order to try and practice their emerging identities and agencies. In this section, I also discuss how Maki-san, Kei and I see education in a more holistic sense, in terms of considering not only our students’ “academic performance” in the present but also helping them to be well-prepared for the future.

All components of the Pedagogy of Shinayaka are essential to and are interwoven into one another. Thus, the order of the organization of the components of the Pedagogy of Shinayaka in this study is not intended to create a hierarchy and is simply only one of many possible ways of organizing a logical pattern (Gay, 2000). Like Gay (2000), I believe that “the components of culturally responsive teaching are dynamic, dialectical, and interwoven” (p. xv).

**Pedagogy of One**

All three teachers in the study believe that creating social connections/networks around each student is one of the most crucial duties for them because many of our students were at risk of becoming isolated in their school context for a variety of reasons such as cultural, language, and social value differences and conflicts between students’ home background culture and U.S. “dominant” and/or school culture. Gay (2000) claims that interpersonal relations among students and teachers in classrooms and schools have a great impact on the quality of education for each student. However, few studies discuss the cases in which if the student is numerically alone or just one of a few in a classroom, without many other students from the same linguistic, social, religious, economic, and/or cultural background, a phenomenon that has started to become more and more common in U.S. classrooms (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The fact that many public schools in the U.S.
are not clear about “who is responsible for ELL/immigrant students’ education” and classroom teachers and content area teachers’ lack of clear sense of responsibility for ELL immigrant children enhance the danger for such students of becoming disconnected from other parts of the school community without appropriate support (e.g. Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; Reeves, 2006; English, 2009). For instance, Kei recounted how the principal in her school, which had a relatively high number of ELL/immigrant students, told her in her very first year of teaching, that since she did not know anything about ESL students’ education, Kei and the other ESL classroom teacher could make all the decisions regarding their education.

Most Asian immigrant students, except those in the East and West coasts, are scattered around the U.S. and often do not have many other students from similar backgrounds around them (Pang and et al., 2004; Porters & Rumbaut, 2007). Teachers have a tendency to recognize Asian descent children/youths as students who have no problem due to the model minority myth. However, Asian American children/youths in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods experience “traumatic, even suicidal, identity crises, in which they feel ashamed of who they are, try to become who they are not, and end up being neither” (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000, p. 19). In addition, the psychological and emotional stresses of growing up as newcomers and/or children of immigrant/parents are tremendous (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The combination of psychological and emotional stress of growing up as an Asian immigrant is unique and needs to be considered as different many other students’ situations, which numerous scholars have discussed in terms of culturally responsive pedagogy or multicultural education. The three teachers in this study witnessed many of their students at risk of
such isolation and are strongly committed to creating connections around their students to save them from such isolating situations. For instance, Maki-san proactively communicated with many teachers and even participated in the process of choosing classroom teachers for her ELL students who were in especially difficult situations. Another example is that I communicated with classroom teachers to build connections between Japanese ELL students with other U.S. classmates and well as with other Japanese students in different classrooms. Our own experiences of feeling isolated from other communities or from our own families as children, and the fact that we lived as Asian immigrants helped us to understand the pain of isolation and the importance of interpersonal connections as an essential element of our students’ lives.

Stereotypical images about Asians, such as that they are from a passive culture, or that they are quiet, could also discourage teachers from helping Asian descent students to build interpersonal connections in classrooms or from having high expectations about their active participation in classroom engagements (Pang and et al., 2004). This kind of normalized image attached to Asian descent students puts them at risk of isolation in the school community as well. For instance, I often heard teachers referring to Asian descent students as “quiet but nice.” Such kind of stereotypical images could prevent teachers from really getting to know their Asian descent students. In order to counteract such images, I sought opportunities for future teachers to see Japanese descent students in their “home” cultural territory such as in hoshuko, at my house, or in a Japanese student’s house.

Maki-san, Kei and I made conscious efforts to construct social connections around each of our students strategically and creatively because we recognized that these
connections are essential to the health of students’ life socially, emotionally, psychologically and academically. Isolation can damage a student’s sense of agency and worthiness. Freire (1970) articulates the idea that when we do not have a sense of “we-ness”, no power to name ourselves, and no right to ask questions (no inquiry), we are powerless and isolated from the past, the future, and others. Maki-san, Kei and I recognize how difficult it can be for many teachers who are from “mono-cultural and mono-lingual backgrounds to understand ELL/immigrant students’ experiences of isolation. Therefore, we do not accuse other teachers but feel a strong responsibility and commitment to help them understand ELL/immigrant students’ experiences and build cooperative relationships with them to create a better community for ELL/immigrant students. For instance, Kei stated that not only did many teachers fail to take initiative to seek opportunities to get to know their ELL/immigrant students but also they seemed to consider that planning for ELL/immigrant students was less of a priority compared to their other tasks in school. However, Kei and Maki-san were always patient and became advocates for other teachers to understand ELL/immigrant students’ experiences and needs. At the same time, they sought to make strong interpersonal connections with their students and establish a strong sense of community in the classroom so that their students would have a place to belong. Kei was very familiar with feelings of isolation and the feeling of having no place to belong. It was always one of the most essential struggles for her until she found a place in which she felt a true sense of belonging, such as an international preschool she worked for. All three of us could pull from specific examples from our own lives to understand the need to support students, their parents and their teachers in order to break this social isolation.
Due to the obstacles that ELL/immigrant students encounter, Maki-san, Kei and I emphasize that it is even more important for these students to have positive and strong relationships with their parents. However, in reality, many of their parents understand their children’s experiences from limited perspectives and experiences, which can make the situation more complicated. For example, most of the parents of the Japanese descent students of the three teachers’ in this study were planning to go back to Japan in the future. Therefore, many of them did not seek close communication with people in the new country. As one of my student’s mother said, *nothing had changed in comparison to when she was in Japan* in terms of her own daily life. In addition, many of these students start having to act in adult roles, translating, answering phone calls, or talking to visitors after they move to the United States. At the same time, their roles as children or young adults of Asian descent in their family may sometimes conflict with the values they are learning from U.S. local schools. In other words, children receive conflicting messages from two societies and are then expected to adjust to them perfectly without role models to guide them. This kind of unique situation makes the relationship between the students and their parents complicated. Some families start to establish stronger relationships after they move to the United States than when they were in Japan but some families struggle to find a new definition of relationships among family members so that some children start to be feeling isolated in their family as well as their original social/cultural settings. Another issue to consider is that generation gaps between first, second and third generations of immigrants are more marked and more complicated compared to non-immigrant populations. As a result, many scholars in sociology have started to pay more attention to the generational gaps and experiences of second and third

**Pedagogy of Two Worlds**

Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that our students have a right to live as transnational beings who belong to two or more cultural, social or “national” backgrounds regardless of the length of their stay in each country. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) show that new immigrants have a tendency to shuttle between “new (the United States)” and “old (home)” lands. In order for our students to become competent members of each society, the three of us recognize that it is essential for them to attain cultural/social tools in multiple cultural/social worlds.

Our lived experiences of going back and forth between two different cultural/ethnic/racial and political spaces within and outside of the United States have helped Maki-san, Kei and I develop bi/multi-social and cultural competences. In the Pedagogy of Two Worlds section, I discuss and conceptualize how these three of us used our bicultural knowledge, experiences, and narratives as transnational beings in teaching. More specifically, I examine how we help our students, our students’ family members and other teachers develop bicultural understandings and how we help our students develop cultural/social tools to become competent members of both cultural/social worlds.

Many scholars have discussed how the cultural mismatch between minority background students’ home culture and school culture can be obstacles for students’ social and academic success in schooling (e.g. Au & Jordan, 1981; Phillips, 1982; Ogbu,
1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). The greater the differences between the social and cultural values of the home culture and school culture are, the harder it is for students and their family members to feel accepted in the school community. As findings in this study show, there are serious cultural differences and social value conflicts between Japanese culture and mainstream American culture in many different aspects of everyday life, including styles of communication, body language, eating habits, and teaching and learning. Gay (2000) states, “Culture is the rule-governing system that defines forms, functions, and content of communication (p. 79)”. Such a definition likens culture to the vocabulary and grammar in a language. The three teachers in the study recognize that just like people need to learn basic *vocabulary and grammar* in order to master new languages, students, parents, and teachers, from different cultural backgrounds need to learn the cultural/social *vocabulary and grammar* of the new culture in order to communicate successfully (Mori, 1997; Yamada, 1997; Yoshino, 2004). I call the unique social/cultural system in each society the *cultural coordinate grid*, borrowing from an expression that Maki-san used in order to explain her difficulty as a new immigrant of not having any clues to know “what was right or wrong” when she moved to the United States. We rely on this cultural coordinate grid to figure out how to behave *appropriately* in each social, political and cultural context.

I want to emphasize that this does not mean essentializing culture or seeing culture through stereotypes. Rather, having bi/cross-cultural coordinate grids help students, parents, and teachers recognize different grammars to communicate and understand each other without misunderstandings so that they can begin to appreciate the similarities and differences between cultures beyond “foreignness”. For example, Kei explained the
different ways of showing love and care in the two cultures using her grandmothers in the United States and Japan as examples. Their ways of showing love are very different and “foreign” to each other, but knowing and understanding the “grammar” of love in each culture/society, we can understand the similarity in both grandmothers’ depth of love for Kei.

Maki-san, Kei and I emphasized the importance of providing explicit and clear guidelines to explain such cultural/social differences to our students. The cultural coordinate grid is not necessarily learned naturally simply by living in a given cultural context. For instance, Kei and another student teacher, who was second generation Taiwanese-American, knew how to be in the mainstream cultural context but they did not necessarily know how to function effectively and reach their own personal potential when they started to teach as student teachers. This happens to many immigrant students. They learn by observation and experience how to survive in the new cultural context, but they continue to have difficulties developing cultural competence and cultural agency without purposeful help and a social context in which to practice (Gay, 2000).

The three of us shared our life experiences and knowledge living in both cultural contexts by comparing both cultures to provide concrete examples for our students and their families. For instance, Maki-san explained how she explicitly explained cultural differences to her students and her students’ parents in what amounts to a “Life in America 101” lesson:

I tell (all new students and their families) that when they come here, they should try not to think, “Is it ok to do this? Or is it inappropriate to do this?” but just do it. It is not only OK but often even better to do something here that you feel
“could be Zu-zushii (disturbing other people) if you did it in Japan.” So, I tell them to abandon these hesitations and please try to do things without thinking about Zuzushii. I say this to every new student and their family as part of Life in America 101 (Interview, June 28, 2007).

Delpit (1995) explains the importance of explicitness in helping students understand different cultural rules or social language in order for them to gain access to mainstream society. Kei explained how such explicit scaffolding eventually helps students become more functional in their new cultural context and develop their confidence.

Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that it is important to scaffold cultural understanding not only for ELL/immigrant students and their families but also for other teachers, who come from mono-cultural/mono-lingual backgrounds. We understand how it could be difficult for many teachers to imagine the real experiences, struggles and strengths of ELL/immigrant students. The three of us concur that it is important to understand each teacher first so that we can arrive at a better understanding of how to help each teacher better understand ELL/immigrant students and their families’ experiences. For instance, Maki-san explained that when the situation of an ELL student was too complicated for a teacher to understand, she “added some water to dilute the meaning”, which is something like a scaffolding strategy to help teachers understand these complex situations step by step. Kei also explained that she modified her approach in talking to teachers depending on the teacher’s familiarity with and ability to understand the other culture.

One of the most significant difficulties that ELL/immigrant children are facing every day is that most of the adults around them only know one of the two cultures/societies well. In other words, there are not many adults around them who can understand their
experiences from both sides. Therefore, Maki-san, Kei and I recognize that our role is not only to help each side, students’ families and teachers, to learn new cultural/social coordinate grids to understand each other better, but also to observe our students closely and to share our knowledge about each student with each side. This kind of role for teachers has not been discussed much in the literature but it is crucial to facilitating the coming together of Two Worlds to create better emotional, social and learning environments for each ELL/immigrant students.

**Pedagogy of Bilingual Space**

Maki-san, Kei and I are all bilingual at an advanced level, which is often denominated balanced-bilingualism. We use our bilingual abilities, experiences, and identities as teachers with our students, our students’ families and with other teachers. The findings show that for the three of us as well as for many of our students who live transnational lives, both languages are essential parts of our selves. Kei summarized this when she said:

> I had been feeling nervous/uncomfortable because English and Japanese had been separated in my daily life. Now I can find places and people with whom I use both Japanese and English and I feel normal (Interview, January 12, 2008).

This quotation represents the experiences of the three teachers’ and their students’ as well, who feel that their identities inevitably include both Japanese and English languages. This is also apparent in the poem one of my students wrote about English and Japanese, which also talks about how both languages constitute important parts of her, including her memories, sense of identity, and emotions. Recent scholars have started to move from a relatively simplistic definition of bilingualism as mere “proficiency”
towards a more complex understanding of the dynamic phenomenon of bilingualism in its social context, taking into consideration linguistic, cognitive, psychocultural and socio-cultural aspects (Minami & Ovando, 2004; Butler & Hakuta, 2005). Therefore, it is important that Maki-san, Kei and I recognize the complexities of bilingualism and used our experiences, knowledge, and bilingual/bicultural abilities with our students, their families and other teachers.

It was not by coincidence that Maki-san, Kei and I became teachers for ELL and/or immigrant students. Kei, for instance, had been looking for her sense of self and teaching in an international preschool in Japan helped her to feel fully accepted and validated. Moreover, she felt that she was able to provide great help for students and their parents who came from a similar background to her. As many scholars have discussed, it is not easy for minority teachers to be able to become teachers while maintaining their sense of identity (e.g. Dillard, 1994; Sleets, 2001; Sheets & Chew, 2002). The three of us, however, found places where we could be teachers “as who we are” and help students and their families using our knowledge, experiences and identities as transnational bilingual beings. Maki-san expressed her joy of teaching in such contexts calling it a “win-win situation”.

Languages can be great assets in connecting people as well as one of the greatest obstacles that can prevent ELL students and/or immigrant students from having full membership in their school community as well as home community. For instance, it takes three to four years to develop English oral proficiency and four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Meanwhile, as one of my students expressed in her poem, the longer they stay in the United States, the more
likely they are to lose their proficiency in their home language. In addition, “language fluency” is also determined by mastering communication styles, body language, and discourse styles in the new culture. For example, both Maki-san and Kei repeated how different Japanese and English conversation interaction styles are and how they still feel comfortable and prefer the Japanese communication style when they communicate with other people.

Maki-san, Kei and I work creatively to create bilingual and bicultural spaces using flexible but strong agencies. In addition, our proactive attitudes in bridging teachers and ELL/immigrant students and their families are conducted with our bicultural/bilingual competency. Due to the complexity of mastering a competent level of communication skill in English, all the three of us expressed how few opportunities our students have to carry out conversations in English with other students or teachers in mainstream classrooms or content area classrooms. A lack of opportunities to participate in the classroom for such a long periods of time can cause serious harm for immigrant children not only academically but also cognitively, psychologically and emotionally (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) explain how immigrant students gradually develop vacant facial expressions and begin to harbor frustration, anger, and resentment. This description fits the cases of some of the students in this study. The fact that Maki-san, Kei and I created spaces in which multiple cultures, languages, and discourse styles could intersect was helpful in allowing students to develop bicultural and bilingual competency within a more comfortable environment. For instance, all three of us made efforts to create an environment in which students
could talk more comfortably, as Kei did in encouraging her students to talk about their families in her classroom.

It is important for all immigrant students to develop competent English proficiency. Meanwhile, it is crucial for them to keep up with content areas (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Our bilingual abilities helped our students expand their potential in different content areas. For instance, Maki-san stated that she taught herself all high school level content areas in English so that she could help her students learn these content areas using both English and Japanese. I also used both languages when I tutored students. Using both languages allowed me to help students use their knowledge and cognitive ability in Japanese and transform it to English or vice versa.

Maki-san, Kei and I also recognized the politics surrounding the issue of languages in schools. For instance, Kei and Maki-san repeatedly expressed the politically weak and unstable position of ESL programs as well as the “lower status” of ESL students and teachers in their schools. Olsen (1997) states that the use of children’s home languages in school education has become a politically charged idea. The fear that the assimilation of immigrants into mainstream culture could disrupt the unity of the United States culture threatens to cause a rift in society (e.g. Olsen, 1997; Minami & Ovando, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Butler & Hakuta, 2005). Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) claims that a discussion of immigrant children would not be complete without reference to the ever-controversial subject of bilingualism and bilingual education (p. 135), which tends to spark emotional and political debates.

Pedagogy of 居場所, Ibasho: Agency and Transnational Identities
Maki-san, Kei and I consistently made clear that we want our students to live competently and confidently in *both worlds*. We are aware that our students’ construction and reconstruction of identity take place in, between and beyond *two worlds* and want these students to be *successful* in both/between/beyond these two worlds, not only in the present but also in the future. At the same time the three of us recognize that such complex identity constructions are not necessarily supported in our students’ reality. The ideal educational environments that we work towards are rarely encountered in our students’ everyday lives in their local schools and homes. In the case of Japanese descent students, for example, the local schools’ main agenda is to educate students to become American citizens, and the goal of Hoshuko, Japanese Saturday School, is to educate students to remain or “become Japanese” (Yoshino, 2006). Yet, the students who we three teachers worked with are transnational in that they occupy at least two distinct ethnic cultural spaces simultaneously.

There are many definitions of identity but, in this study, I used the conventional definition that is commonly used by transnational theorists and sociologists in (im)migrant studies: human identities are constructed both by how other people see you and by how you define yourself (Levitt, 2001; Zhou and Lee, 2007). Transnational theorists argue that although many scholars have started to discard the notion of fixed identities and have incorporated the idea of multiple identities, there is still a dominating assumption that “individuals have a “master”, overarching identity that is fundamentally rooted in a single place (Levitt, 2001, p. 202). This idea of ‘master’ overarching identity or the need to be fundamentally one way or another is especially damaging for children who experience a sense of being torn between two worlds. Understanding identity as
‘fixed’ and locked in dichotomous choices forces immigrant children to always living on the margin of each culture; as a result, many of them feel that they are unable to completely belong to either (Levitt, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). What Kei experienced as an adolescent when she was always seen as a Japanese person when she was in local school, and as an American when she was in the Japanese community, was the result of such an assumption of single rooted-ness. Meanwhile, Kei felt as though she did not belong to anywhere.

Earlier in Chapter 4, I described the ways in which these three teachers came to experience a sense of 居場所, Ibasho. Ibasho is a metaphorical term I use to describe a space where people can feel a sense of belonging and acceptance and can also practice membership in the community by contributing to others while experiencing a sense of agency. Because immigrant children’s identities are still very much in formation their sense of identity is more vulnerable and dependent on the gaze of others; for them, whether and where they feel a sense of belonging usually depends to a greater degree on outside factors.

Findings in this research show that Maki-san, Kei, and I made a constant efforts to provide 居場所, Ibasho, a place where students can feel that they belong and explore their potential wholeness through their emotions/feelings, experiences and get a sense of who they are and what their dreams about the future are. Maki-san, Kei and I attempt to create spaces where our students can feel comfortable, whole, and normal, as that is what we sought as we ourselves encountered the need to construct an identity of wholeness. For instance, Kei described how she felt like an outsider and not normal or local in either
Japanese contexts or other contexts within the United States until she visited Hawaii when she was a college student. Within the multicultural context of Hawaii where so many different ethnicities merged, where so many people ‘looked’ like her, and where she no longer felt the ‘gaze’ or expectation to choose between identities she began to experience her identity in a more stable and integrated manner. There she experienced a different kind of belonging.

Our use of Pedagogy of 居場所, Ibasho, is based on our understandings of the challenges and needs of transnational identity work and transnational lives. Historically, much of the argument around immigrant experiences has been along the lines of assimilating or some form of resisting assimilation. Portes (2001) claims that the act of assimilation has been “conventionally described as the gradual learning and adoption of the language, culture, and behavioural patterns of the receiving society and corresponding of those of the countries of origin,” but the contemporary experience of immigrants does not match up with such a simplistic definition. Transnational theorists emphasize that assimilation theory provides only a limited understanding of immigrant experience and identity construction, negotiation, practice, and looks at the experience of (im)migrants only from the perspective of American society (Poters, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2001; Kibria, 2001). Instead, they argue that in order to understand the dynamic phenomenon of immigrant experience and identity, it is important to recognize some immigrants have a more transnational experience and that many transnational immigrants are “assimilating and remaining transnational at the same time” (Levitt, 2001, p.203). From our perspective, we would also argue that it is not enough to simply ‘resist’ assimilation or, even healthy, to attempt to ‘stay’ in one’s
identity of origin. Kei’s statement that she feels insecure unless she can have both U.S. and Japanese language and culture and Maki-san’s statement about wanting her students to be able to live successfully on both the U.S. and Japan, both reflect such transnational theory points of view.

Our definition of 居場所, *Ibasho*, is not defined by one cultural side, such as the American or Japanese side of the school curriculum and school culture. ELL/immigrant students simultaneously use two cultural lenses with numbers of different ways (Maki, interview 7 2009), which they have developed through their experiences, and that is *normal* for them. 居場所, *Ibasho*, is a hybrid space, which is a social, emotional, educational and pedagogical environment and is not defined by any single culture, language, curriculum or classroom. Rather, it is defined by all the important ‘ingredients’ such as bi/multiple cultures, relationships across culture, languages, and curriculum inside and out of the classroom walls.

The intentional hybrid spaces, 居場所, *Ibasho*, that Maki-san, Kei and I create have made it possible for our students to explore their transnational identity with “all their ingredients.” These spaces also put them at *the center*, instead of the *margin*, in the classroom community or pedagogical space and allow them to develop their consciousness and sense of identity not only from “other people’s gaze”, which they experience in their everyday life, but also from their own perspectives. The feeling of center-ness is important for students to feel worthy, as well as a sense of belonging and validation, which Kei stated she was longing for when she was child, and which all three
Many of Maki-san’s students and my own students were adolescents. Their experiences as transnational immigrants and Asian descent students had a complex influence in their daily experiences. Many American-born Asian Americans and Asian immigrant youth experience inner conflicts, such as negative self-image and vague self concept, that present a very serious issue (e.g. Lee, 1996; Pang, 1995a; Kiang, Pang, and Pak, 2004; Park, 2007). Transnational theorists shed light on the development of consciousness and agency of contemporary immigrant children through their daily experiences. Minority children, such as those of Asian descent, and Immigrant children have more opportunities to feel the gaze of other people, and to feel fearful of being seen as “strange” or “odd” from other people’s perspectives (Pollock & Reken, 1999; Miyachi, 1990). However, they lack the tools to make sense of their experience and develop their identity using their own words. Given their sense of being torn between two worlds, it can be hard for them to experience a sense of agency within the development of their own identity and within their own lives. Yet, this sense of being somewhat in control over who to be and how to perform identity is critical and children must be supported in their attempts to develop such agency. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) claim that:

While much of social science research on immigration has catalogued how structural opportunities and impediments shape the lives of immigrant children, their own agency is often neglected. Yet, the story of today’s immigrant children is not complete without reference to their own consciousness and agency (p. 118).
This need to construct herself as whole and to do so consciously was very important for Kei. For instance, Kei described her identity using the metaphors of the *Moon* and a *Chameleon*, which could be described using assimilation theory which considers “other people’s gaze.” However, it would not explain her development of consciousness and agency of wholeness, which is apparent in her *Cake* metaphor, in which Kei explained how she was made of up many ingredients as a bicultural, biracial, bilingual and transnational being. Immigrant and immigrant children’s construction, negotiation, practice, and reproduction of their identities are fluid, hybrid or integrated creative acts of human practice (Yon, 1999; Vertovec, 2001; Levitt, 2001). Kei’s metaphor of the *Cake* shows evidence of her construction of her identity from her own perspective. It is important that we three teachers create spaces in which our students are able to engage in dialogue to make sense of their experiences and to make sense of who they are using their own words.

In summary, the third space, 居場所, *Ibasho*, is not just important for our students’ academic success but even more so as a core element of their human development in all areas of their lives. Developing a sense of 居場所, *Ibasho*, was critical to the ways we three teachers took up a healthy transnational identity. We learned this from their own experiences as well as our experiences as students and teachers. Throughout the conversations and interviews, Maki-san, Kei, and I constantly argue for Pedagogy of 居場所, *Ibasho*, and the importance of having a space where students can develop/start to develop their self-esteem, agency, and sense of *who they are*. The commitment to create
such spaces comes from each of these three teachers’ life experiences and backgrounds as people who have traveled between and belong both to Japan and the United States.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Given that there are only three teachers in this study, it is not appropriate to generalize findings. However, lessons from our lives and our teaching offer important insights on how we might think about preparing teachers for ELL/immigrant students, particularly Asian descent students.

What is clear from our work is that our pedagogies arise from our experiences and from the understandings that have emerged from those experiences. For instance, our experiences as outsiders or newcomers have helped us understand the kind of complex isolation that many of our students experience with sensitivity, allowing us to take action to connect our students to other people, such as their teachers, peers, and parents. We also understand the possible social and cultural conflicts between two cultures because we have experienced these very same conflicts, and used this knowledge to mediate between the two communities in order to create a better environment for students.

While it is impossible to provide prospective teachers with the experiences that we have, it is, however, possible to provide them with a set of experiences and supportive mediation so that they will feel more confident and be better teachers for students from diverse communities. In this section I explore the education practices that offer potential for preparing teachers to work with children from diverse backgrounds, especially ELL/immigrant students, more effectively.

**Collaborative Course Work: Supporting English Language Learners In the School**

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As I discussed in this study, it is a very complicated matter to “master” another culture and understand ELL/immigrant students’ experiences holistically. Schools today include more culturally and linguistically diverse students and families than ever, so these recommendations are not based on prospective teachers acquiring mastery of a culture, but are rather about developing sensitivity to the needs, challenges, and strengths of immigrant and ELLs. In order to acquire sensitivity to these needs, it is necessary for all teachers to be provided with appropriate opportunities. On the one hand, most general education teachers will have new immigrant or ELLs in their classrooms for the majority of their day and, yet, they receive little instruction in second language learning or in modifying, adapting, or structuring the classroom environment to support ELLs. On the other hand, while ESL teachers receive preparation in second language learning and strategies for working with ELLs, they rarely are supported in learning to work closely with general education teachers or to learn about and gain a good understanding of the general education curriculum. Thus, my recommendation is to provide a course that would bring these two populations together and provide essential knowledge of English as a second language acquisition and bilingual education sessions for prospective teachers in the general education program and opportunities for collaboration and working with the general education curriculum for ESL teachers.

Learning from the practices of the three teachers in this study, one of the most significant things teachers can do to create better environment for diverse background students is to help them learn how to collaborate with other school community members effectively by sharing responsibilities. For instance, in the school community, it would
be very beneficial for ELL/immigrant students’ education if general education teachers and ESL classroom teachers could regularly and effectively collaborate with each other. Generally, teacher education programs for general education and TESOL programs have been separated almost completely so that prospective teachers from each program are not learning about the kinds of curriculums and pedagogical approaches that are used in the other program. This also means that teachers on each side have no opportunities to learn how to collaborate with each other. As I demonstrate in this study, collaboration between classroom teachers and ESL teachers has a great potential to improve ELL/immigrant students’ lives academically, socially and emotionally.

Therefore, the main goal of this course would be to provide prospective teachers in both general education and TESOL programs a space in which to learn about collaboration in a variety of settings such as general education classrooms, ESL classrooms, and with students’ family communities with an instructor who is familiar with at least two cultures and languages.

This course would offer two major experiences that would help prospective teachers from both programs experience collaboration to become more effective teachers for students from diverse backgrounds. This class would be held by an instructor/mediator familiar with two languages and communities. The ideal instructor would be someone who, like the three teachers in this study, is a participant in multiple cultural worlds. Thus the instructor would understand both cultural/social/linguistic perspectives and would be able to help prospective teachers understand ELL/immigrant students and their backgrounds better as well as to scaffold them to become better teachers for ELL/immigrant students more holistically. While the class would include readings and
different assignments, the two following major experiences would be the focal point of
the course.

**Guided Community Experience.** The purpose of a guided community experience is
to provide prospective teachers from both general education and TESOL programs with
in-community experiences to learn and experience how to collaborate together in getting
to know students, community members, and the community. This field experience is not
designed to enable teachers to “master” a community’s culture, but rather to provide
prospective teachers with first-hand experience as a cultural/linguistic minority, allowing
them to see from the student’s perspective. This would enable them to think about
helping students not to just survive in the classroom but to fully participate in the school
community.

Prospective teachers would not necessary go to many guided community experiences,
but they would go to places as a group and with an instructor as a “guide” to set up the
purpose of the experience with students and then debrief with them afterwards. The
mediator would need to carefully scaffold students’ experience, asking them key
questions to guide them to really get the most of the experience. Examples of questions
for this “guided” experience might include:

- What would it take to become a participant in this context?
- What are the challenges?
- When did you feel and what made feel accepted/rejected during the community
  experience?
- How could you be helped to participate more fully?

Prospective teachers in general education and TESOL programs have different
experiences and motivations to become teachers in their chosen areas. They could bring different perspectives, insights and experiences to the Guided Community Experience. They could learn different perspectives and strengthen the community experience together with the mediator.

There have always been difficulties in creating community experiences for prospective teachers because we don’t want to “use” communities or intrude, but if prospective teachers are really to become better teachers of children from diverse communities, these experiences are key. The mediator would also demonstrate how to build respectful and collaborative relationships with community members by sharing her or his experience and practice. This kind of attitude in the mediator would encourage students to be respectful to the community members providing the space for them to learn.

*Case Study.* This case study would be conducted with the careful guidance of a mediator as well. The goal of this case study is, firstly, to understand the social, emotional, cultural, linguistic and academic aspects of a student in multiple settings, including their home, ESL classroom, general education classroom, and community activities/events such as Japanese Saturday School. One ESL prospective teacher and one general education prospective teacher would team-up to observe and work with a implement the plan. After understanding the student better, the team of teachers would discuss what they consider the most important priority for the student in the short term and in the long term, create a support plan for each field experience classroom, and conduct teaching. While one teammate is teaching, the other prospect teacher would be observing. After both have taken turns teaching, they would have a meeting to reflect on
how their plan worked or did not work for the specific student, and adapt their plans accordingly. Throughout the case study, teachers would record their observations and create documentation using multiple mediums such as photographs, videos, and interviews. These documentations would be shared with other prospective teachers, who would be responsible for asking constructive and critical questions to help each team understand each student better and create more effective intervention experiences.

In conclusion, while there is much that teachers need to learn in order to work more effectively with diverse learners and while it often seems to be an overwhelming task in already crowded teacher education programs, these types of experiences would provide important steps toward that learning. As prospective teachers move into their teaching positions, one would hope that these kinds of experiences would continue as teachers seek out new experiences in their communities and work with other faculty and parents to better understand and serve children who are new immigrants and come from different linguistic backgrounds.

**Significance of the Study**

There are a number of ways in which this study makes significant contributions to our current understandings regarding teacher narrative and culturally responsive teaching. First, the findings reveal how Maki-san, Kei’s and my life experiences living in, between and beyond two cultures, languages, countries or races, have affected and shaped how each of us understands ELL/immigrant students and the people around them such as friends, schools, and families. The findings also show how each of us shapes our pedagogical approaches to create more meaningful learning and living environments for
our students allowing for more effective interactions with the people surrounding the
students, such as other teachers, other children and family members.

This study is also significant because it adds to the literature in the educational field,
the voices, knowledge, pedagogical approaches and perspectives of immigrant,
specifically Asian descent, teachers who have been notably absent in past scholarship.
This study also contributes to the literature of culturally relevant teaching for immigrant
students, specifically students of Asian descent, from an insider point of view. Studies
focusing on culturally relevant teaching for students of Asian descent have rarely been
conducted because of the stereotypes, such as model minority, that are attached to the
population. This study helps to break such stereotypes by offering rich examples of the
complex realities and educational needs of these students through the eyes of Asian
descent teachers.

This study also raises important questions for the future of teacher education in that it
asks that the field to consider how to provide preservice and practicing teachers with the
understanding and experiences that would better prepare them to help students from
diverse backgrounds, especially ELL/immigrant children, whose presence in U.S. schools
has been increasing dramatically in recent years.
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