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Learning from the Alternative Asian American Press:

A Close Look at Asian Americans & Pacific
Islanders in Education through *Gidra*

Jean J. Ryoo

Abstract

Through a careful analysis of the educational concerns and efforts described by Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) activists in *Gidra*—the first radical Asian American newspaper described as “the journalistic arm of the [Asian American] Movement” (Wei, 1993, 103)—this article explores ways that current educators, public policy writers, and researchers can learn from the stories of the past to improve the state of K–12 education today. Drawing from five years of monthly *Gidra* publications, this article illustrates parallels between past and current issues in AAPI K–12 education while offering suggestions for action and change.

Introduction

Many Americans—whether indigenous to the continent, related to European colonizers, children of global immigrants, or newcomers to this country—are often taught a history disconnected from their lived experiences or those of their parents. Yet, what if we could draw from our different family stories in order to learn from our elders’ decisions when they looked to the future and thought about us? How would understanding past generations’ struggles and successes help us to counter the challenges our children currently face?

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) belong to a powerful family tree of political activists who historically organized for access to equitable education. However, one rarely finds opportunities to learn about the work of earlier generations. In an effort to link such a shared but hidden history with current analyses of AAPI K–12 education, this article explores how AAPI activ-

ists attended to educational reform as a specific focus within the early Asian American movement.

Reflecting on Glenn Omatsu's question—"Are the ideas of the [late 1960s Asian American] movement alive today, or have they atrophied into relics—the curiosities of a bygone era of youthful and excessive idealism?" (1994, 21)—I turn to some Asian American Movement "relics" (the University of California, Los Angeles's [UCLA] *Gidra* publications) to try to answer the following: did past AAPIs struggle with similar forms of institutional racism and oppression within public schooling? Or are *Gidra*'s articles only "curiosities" of a lost time?

Background

A Brief History of *Gidra*

Recognizing that the mainstream press primarily spoke to and for a white majority while the Asian ethnic and native-language press typically did not welcome US-born, younger generation political activists' radical ideas, AAPI university students nationwide created their own newspapers during the 1960s. For example, after UCLA's administration denied a proposal from Dinora Gil, Laura Ho, Mike Murase, Tracy Okida, and Colin Watanabe to create an AAPI community journal, they gathered their meager resources to begin publishing *Gidra* in April 1969 (Wei, 1993).¹ Written for a popular audience, *Gidra* printed approximately four thousand copies each month read by 900 to 1,300 dedicated subscribers (Wei, 1993). Although staff members disagreed on *Gidra*'s ideological objectives, their newspaper reflected the importance of Asian American pride and identity, need to radically change political and economic structures, and power of collective community organizing (Wei, 1993). Over the years, *Gidra*'s staff included 247 volunteers, from ages eleven to fifty-one, with a core of primarily Japanese Americans heading the publication process that included two major editorial phases: (1) defining AAPI identity and consciousness and (2) focusing on the antiwar movement, counter-culture lifestyles, and radical politics (Wei, 1993). Eventually, *Gidra*'s "demise [in 1974] was due, in part, to its success" (Wei, 1993, 112) because it inspired other AAPI activists to create competing journals. Today, original copies of *Gidra* can be found in UCLA's libraries as well as in other university and community sites, serving as valuable primary source documentation of a historic movement.

The State of Public Education Leading Up to the Time of *Gidra*

Although by some measures, US public education seemed to be improving in the 1960s when *Gidra* was created—with a surge in student enrollment,² a highly educated teaching force,³ decreased student to teacher ratios in the classroom, and increased federal and state aid—the nation’s urban public schools were experiencing a major crisis. As noted by Tyack (1974), “‘crisis’ had emerged as one of the common words in the school lexicon during the decades from 1940 to 1970” (269). The 1940s educational crisis involved a shortage in school funds and a lack of teachers to educate the “baby boom” generation of World War II (Tyack, 1974). The 1950s crisis was marked by increasing educational class- and race-based inequality—despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that made segregated schooling illegal and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that denied federal funding to segregated school districts⁴—that was simultaneously complicated by the country’s obsession to compete with Russia’s math and science advancements during the cold war (Cuban, 1993; Tyack, 1974). These two decades set the stage for increasing isolation and pauperization for America’s cities into the 1960s and 1970s. The 1940s mechanization of southern farms and legally enforced segregation left African American workers without opportunities or jobs, compelling their mass migration into northern and midwestern cities in search of work and better schools (Anyon, 1997; Tyack, 1974). At the same time, the federal government subsidized the suburbanization of white families (often described as “White Flight”) and manufacturing businesses, and the 1956 National Defense Highway Act expedited this departure from the cities, thereby increasing race- and class-based segregation while significantly decreasing the number of urban jobs available (Anyon, 1997; Tyack, 1974).⁵ Such changes lay the foundation for government and private disinvestment in urban centers and their schools while allowing wealth and educational resources to spread to wealthier, white suburbs (Anyon, 1997; Tyack, 1974; Cuban, 1993).

Thus, the 1960s crisis was defined by new and increasing disillusionment with the established practices of public education, even as expectations increased that schools be the nation’s weapon in the “War on Poverty” (Tyack, 1974).⁶ Urban schools were also becoming more diverse as the 1965 Immigration and Nationality

Act abolished limitations on the number of non-Western Europeans entering the country, resulting in an upsurge of nonwhite students and families. Following the 1960s civil rights era, education faced severe conservative backlash. In the 1970s reformers turned toward “career education” that tracked poor students and students of color into vocational education—during a time when skilled labor was being devalued economically and socially (Shor, 1986).⁷ At the same time, the “Literacy Crisis” / “Back-to-Basics” movement gained momentum, which Shor (1986) describes as the Republican government’s “restoration” campaign to vilify the egalitarian surge of the 1960s and increase conservative authority over schools through “standards” and standardized testing with the purpose of decreasing students’ critical thinking skills. Following his landslide presidential election in 1968, Nixon then appointed extremely conservative Supreme Court members who chose not to pursue desegregation as the previous Warren Court had—as was evident in cases such as the 1973 *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* decision that denied federal aid to poorly funded, segregated schools populated by Mexican Americans, even though they were unequal to better-funded, segregated white schools nearby (Graham, 2005).

Conservatives shut down previous innovations in progressive schooling of the civil rights era just as America’s schools were becoming increasingly diverse (Tyack, 1974). Discussions about school began to focus on “deficit” views of nonwhite culture—reinforced by the 1966 *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report (also known as the “Coleman Report”)—arguing that students of color (with their nonstandard English home languages and practices) had a “deficit” of knowledge and lacked respect for education. About the same time, academic studies and popular media articles disseminated the “model minority myth” that Asian Americans—a racial group including more than thirty different ethnic subsets with varying immigration histories, class backgrounds, and educational trajectories—achieve uniformly high educational and economic success (Chun, 1995; Suzuki, 1995), thereby creating a racist wedge against other people of color (Chang and Au, 2007 / 2008). Thus, *Gidra* was published at a time when US demographics were rapidly changing in schools as well as in society and while conservatives had begun to overturn many of the advances produced by 1960s social activism.

Methodology: The Productive Tension between Vision Making and Historical Inquiry

While reading through *Gidra*, I was reminded of the Chinese revolution slogan noted by Glenn Omatsu in reference to the character of Asian American Movement rallies of the time: “The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history” (1994, 31). Although simple, this idea proved powerful when perusing forty-year-old AAPI radical newspapers in which poets, artists, and journalists recorded the “making of history” while actively shaping the new consciousness they described. *Gidra* activists “promot[ed] a new moral vision centered in democratic participation, cooperative work styles, and collective decision-making” (Omatsu, 1994, 28–9) and, through poignant language and imagery, *Gidra* contributors made meaning of their experiences and recorded their histories while inspiring new visions in which people united for the rights of their community elders, workers, and youth. *Gidra* writers actively crafted a vision for the future through the experiences of their present. In a similar way, this essay seeks to make new visions for the future but through an examination of earlier activists’ critical understandings of AAPI education as they align with current experiences in K–12 schools.

This research draws on well-established methods of historical inquiry that Rury (2008) describes as involving a dynamic process of induction that is a “craft” inevitably shaped by the lens of the historian “because frames of reference shift and new evidence arises, history is an ever-changing field of research, subject to considerable debate and controversy” (323). This work begins and ends with interpretation (Bloch, 1953), building upon both the biases of past AAPI writers and my own biases as a high school teacher and educational researcher. Yet what grounds historical inquiry amidst such seemingly fluid interpretation is the fact that historians identify meaning in the “connectedness of things” (Hughes, 1964, 6). Thus, I will attempt to illustrate how *Gidra’s* engagement with education connects to current teachers’, researchers’, community organizers’, and policy makers’ efforts to meet the needs of diverse AAPI students.

This study employed a careful content analysis approach involving continuous rereading of all monthly *Gidra* issues from 1969 to 1974. I began by copying any articles, announcements,

advertisements, and photographs that described K–12 education, focused on children, referenced public schools, or had been written by adolescents. I then coded newspaper artifacts by topic (e.g., Chinatown Youth Council, grades, drugs, or street gangs), reread and recoded the artifacts according to educational issues referenced (e.g., English language learners [ELL], racism, or tracking) and efforts made to address such issues (e.g., high school conferences, health services, or tutoring), then reread artifacts a fourth time to identify how the three types of codes (topics, educational issues, and activist efforts) overlapped into broader categories. Using these categories and codes, *Gidra* artifacts were read a final time to reveal parallels between past and current issues in AAPI K–12 education, as well as to illuminate patterns in what previous AAPI activists defined as effective ways to transform public schooling.

AAPI K–12 Education—A Look at Past Issues through *Gidra*

Gidra articles reveal that AAPI K–12 students and youth faced numerous educational barriers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including an unequal distribution of school resources based on race and class, segregation, tracking, challenges with English language learning, struggles with the model minority myth, a lack of culturally relevant curricula, and gang violence.

Racism and Class Oppression in Public Schools

In an article regarding segregated schooling, for example, Los Angeles High School student R. Wu (a.k.a. Mellow Yellow) wrote about how African American, Latino, and AAPI students were marginalized through differential access to resources based on race and class. Wu commented how the “forced integration” mandated in the Supreme Court’s ruling that “separate education is not equal” resulted in the depressing implication that “The reason why the inner-city schools are so bad is because there is no White middle-class group to pressure the school board to improve the schools” (1970b, 10). Refusing to embrace this deficit idea of communities of color, Wu explained that “We minority students are not of inferior intelligence compared to the White students. . . . But because the school board won’t better our schools, forced integration is the only other means of bettering education for the minorities” (1970b, 10), and he concluded by calling for increasing funding to his segregated school. In a later *Gidra* article intended to summon

support for a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) teacher strike, Wu described the specific differences between poor urban schools attended by AAPI students and wealthier schools, writing that his own school was:

poorly maintained and poorly equipped. Some classrooms have chalkboards twenty years old and paint jobs seventeen years old. Our classrooms, having an average of 35 students, are the most crowded in the U.S. Thousands of students don't even have textbooks. . . The cause of this deterioration, however, is mainly due to a lack of funding from our state. (1970a, 4)

Poor school resources negatively affected student graduation rates and educational outcomes as Wu explained that “students graduate and cannot even read or add and subtract. . .33% of our students drop out of school and 90% of our junior and senior high schools are infected with drug abuse” (1970a, 4). Wu also described a teacher shortage in public schools that “have scared away many qualified teachers. . .our schools (especially inner-city) have been forced to accept teachers who are not very qualified” (1970a, 4). Segregated schools attended by AAPI students lacked the basic resources necessary for academic success.

Unfortunately, the few teachers willing to work with AAPI populations typically did not share their race and class backgrounds, and often also held negative stereotypes about people of color. Mike Murase wrote:

The conditions of poverty, deprivation, and oppression in Chinatown and other urban ghettos throughout the country are as remote and unknown to middle and upper class children and adults alike. . .it is precisely those people who do not know anything about ghetto conditions who are afforded the opportunity to go to school and obtain their degrees and credentials, thus becoming classroom teachers and counselors in culturally and economically oppressed areas (1971, 7).

The learning barriers created by race/class cultural mismatch between teachers and students that Murase described were also expressed by May Chen—a Pasadena Unified School District teacher—who wrote: “I feel most teachers are ignorant of Asian cultures and therefore do not understand their Asian student as well as they should” (1974, 7). Teachers unfamiliar with AAPI students’ experiences often expected them to be “model minorities”

with uniform academic success and, when students did not fit this stereotype, such students suffered. AAPI teens at the Amerasian Youth Day held at Belmont High School—described in *Gidra's* June 1972 issue—discussed this same struggle in schools that expected them to behave according to stereotypes while ignoring their diverse experiences. Students talked about how schools used tracking and the model minority myth to “‘divide and conquer’ [them] on the basis of color and test scores” so that students could not work together against institutional racism (Matsumura, 1972, 10). Los Angeles High School AAPI students who contributed articles under the title “The Fighting Times” confirmed this sentiment, explaining that “High school is a place where the system tries to control your life and your mind” by using competition—the “basic element of capitalism”—to pit students against each other as “we literally have to fight with our brothers and sisters for a ‘better position’” (“The Fighting Times,” 1972, 11). Angered by the racist nature of education, these students explained that school:

is totally irrelevant to the actual happenings in our lives. . . . Divide-and-conquer is a tool the system uses to advance racism. . . . They divide us with stereotypes. Asians are stereotyped as quiet, hard working gardeners. . . laundrymen or Hop Sing cooks. . . stereotypes only serve to divide [us]. . . . As long as we are fighting each other we can never unite to fight the real enemy (“The Fighting Times,” 1972, 11).

Joining together in the Student Coalition for Progressive Change that included the United Asian Students, Black Students Union, and the Leadership Class of their school, these writers explained, “our enemy did not exist in each other and our racial differences, but instead, existed in the oppressive educational system, under which we were forced to function” (“The Fighting Times,” 1972, 12). In a later article, the United Asian Students organization of Los Angeles High School defined this “oppressive educational system” as including “poor curriculum, racist teachers, tracking system, police oppression, insensitive administration, irrelevant education” (“United Asian Students,” 1972, 14). *Gidra* youth writers clearly articulated how class oppression and racism worked against AAPI students in the schools.

Brad Fujikuni elaborated on the “divide and conquer” educational practices described by *Gidra's* student contributors by out-

lining how California public education tracked students according to a “White Anglo-Saxon”-controlled, capitalist economy. In October 1972, he wrote:

Schools serve the corporate economy in many ways. One way is to pre-select those that will have positions of authority and those who will man the machines. . . through the tracking system. The tracking system works by limiting the number of positions of responsibility there are to be filled (10).

According to Fujikuni, California’s 1960 Master Plan for Education established a tracking system that limited the number of working-class students who would be able to attend college and “reduced the spending on them” by developing a track for students considered “college-material” and another for students considered not “academically inclined” (1972, 10). Fujikuni noted that “educators are discouraging students from getting more education, and the economy is being kept up by those who can least afford it, the working class” (1972, 11). Thus, AAPI students faced severe structural racism in K–12 education.

Gidra’s January 1974 issue illustrated concretely how such racism in education affected California’s Chinese students, citing how school curricular materials overlooked Chinese American history, ELLs struggled due to a lack of bilingual education resources, and students’ experiences with poverty were often ignored by public schools (Woo, 1974, 7). A December 1973 article described how Los Angeles’ Chinatown population faced persistent problems regarding unemployment, education, housing, and health: Chinese Americans were *not* experiencing an “American Success Story,” because “Chinatown [was] suffering from the institutionalized racism that first infringed on the rights and resources of Chinese communities over 100 years ago” (“Chinatown Youth Council,” 1973, 13). Similarly, the Chinatown Education Project wrote that there were “deficiencies of the education system in this community: among them being inadequate child care facilities, inadequate recreation in Chinatown, inadequate coverage of many subjects in schools, and much insensitivity to the special problems of immigrant children” (“Chinatown Education Project,” 1973, 14).

Unfortunately, the picture was similarly grim for Pilipino and Samoan Americans. Amado David described not only how Pilipino American youth had no community centers where they

could safely avoid gang or drug violence after school, but that many also failed to learn about their families' histories, felt alienated in education, and struggled with identity formation (1974, 8). Samoans faced similar neglect in schools as another *Gidra* contributor wrote: "Public education has been unable to provide for the special needs of the Samoan minority. . . . Samoans have the lowest level of achievement in education of any ethnic group" ("Samoan Community," 1974, 9). Teachers would "treat them with contempt and poorly concealed distaste" with "disastrous" results including high dropout rates and low college-going rates ("Failures of Education," 1974, 10). These 1970s *Gidra* articles reveal how deeply engrained institutional racism and classist practices were in local schools and school districts.

English Language Learners

AAPI ELLs also lacked appropriate support and resources in K–12 education. *Gidra's* pages described a range of tutorial projects created to meet ELL needs independent of the school systems, including the Oriental American Tutorial Project ("Oriental American Tutorial Project," 1969), the Asian American Tutorial Project (Wong, 1973; Chan, 1970; "Asian American Tutorial Project," 1971), and the Chinatown Education Project (Chinn et al., 1973). *Gidra* contributors also fought for bilingual education programs as noted in an announcement to support the threatened Japanese Language Program at Dorsey High School ("Japanese Language Program at Dorsey Jeopardized," 1970) or in the testimonies of teachers and parents calling for bilingual classes for Chinese and Samoan ELL students (Chen, 1974; Magalei, 1974). The need was great as educator May Chen described: "Both Belmont High School and Nightingale Junior High school, with significant Chinese immigrant populations, do not offer bilingual ESL [English as a Second Language] classes for its Chinese students at this date. ESL classes are over-crowded—which leaves the Chinese student even further behind" (1974, 7). Angelina Yu, an immigrant mother of two public school students, also testified for the need to support ELLs, stating that "we really need a lot more Chinese bilingual teachers, more classrooms, more appropriate curriculum materials, and a university training center for Chinese bilingual and ESL teachers" (1974, 8). This same concern for bilingual education was voiced by a Samoan community social worker, Amani Magalei, who explained

that “because of the language barrier, much of the Samoan community cannot fill out the forms, answer all the questions, produce required documents, or respond to notices sent to them” in order to access valuable social services (1974, 9). Clearly, various AAPI communities were denied linguistic access and support within local public schools.

AAPI Gang Activity

Gidra interviews with AAPI ex-gang members also explored how AAPI gang activity was on the rise due to a lack of educational resources, social services, and opportunities. United by what one article described as “class consciousness” as well as a lack of afterschool options, many AAPIs resorted to joining local gangs (Furumura et al., 1973, 5). As noted by ex-gang member Victor: “I think some of it is, like, economic conditions, ‘cause we was a lot poorer, you know, and if you ain’t got too much money, the only thing to do was run around” (Furumura et al., 1973, 5). Another interviewee, Ats Sasaki, explained that his decision to join a gang came from living in poor conditions and feeling disconnected from school:

even when I was young, I thought the educational system was f**ked up. . . . I just couldn’t relate to the teachers. . . . I wouldn’t go to school. A truant officer would always drag me back to school. . . . On top of that, I always saw a lot of prejudices (Furumura et al., 1973, 5–6).

The relationships between educational marginalization and street-gang participation are particularly revealing in these and several other *Gidra* testimonies.

Seeking Solutions—*Gidra* Activists’ Reactions to K–12 Education

Although *Gidra* contributors clearly recognized that AAPI K–12 students faced multiple challenges due to racist and classist schooling policies and practices, they demonstrated a deep dedication to do more than simply expose these issues. Activists organized education programs, English language classes, AAPI history teach-ins, high school conferences, legal aid, job training, and community health services to address a full range of youth-community educational needs that most public schools had ignored.

Afterschool programs organized by *Gidra* contributors included the Asian American Tutorial Project (Chan, 1970; Asian Pride, 1973), the Oriental American Tutorial Project (“Oriental American Tutorial Project,” 1969), a University of Southern California Tutorial (“Tutorial at USC,” 1970), and the Japanese Creative Workshop (“Creative Workshop’s Brunch,” 1973). One program, for example, organized by students from California State University at Los Angeles called the Asian Pride program—in conjunction with a larger Asian, Black, and Chicano (ABC) Pride organization—explained that their organization was created to

counteract the insensitivity and racism present in the educational institutions. The identified problems to which we address ourselves are: 1) lack of positive self-image among minority children; 2) lack of cultural awareness or self-respect regarding their ethnic background; 3) stereotypes and myths perpetuated by textbooks and other media about minorities; 4) omission or distortion of minority contributions to the building of America; 5) lack of understanding and respect for people of other ethnic origins (Asian Pride, 1973, 12).

Similarly, the Asian American Tutorial Project was created “to supplement meager facilities” at Castelar Elementary School, where two-thirds of the students were Chinese and more than two hundred students spoke little to no English, but only three ESL teachers were present (Chan, 1970, 12). Creators of this project also asserted that “other areas of need must be met: including problems in housing, employment and health facing people living in a deprived area” (Chan, 1970, 13). Organizers of the Japanese Creative Workshop further critiqued the curricula in local schools that taught “basic survival characteristics to get by in our society: greed, selfishness, shrewdness, and the alienation necessary to sit through eight hours of work” and created a program to teach children “how to build things together; how important it is to be aware and sensitive of others around you; how well an activity goes when everyone helps each other along” (“Creative Workshop’s Brunch,” 1973, 23). Other youth programs, like the Yellow Brotherhood fitness program, “originally organized gang youth so that Asian brothers would stop fighting each other and unify their energies to deal with larger problems that affect them as Asians” (Uyematsu, 1973, 8). Noting that the three main problems affect-

ing “inner city youth” were “drug abuse, dropouts, and gangfighting,” the brotherhood created “an educational, social and political environment for junior high and high school people to relate to” while brotherhood students gave talks against street violence at local high schools (Uyematsu, 1973, 9).

Activists also organized teach-ins and conferences to provide AAPI youth with the political and cultural education that schools did not offer. The Asian Uni-Camp summer program “for underprivileged children” taught AAPI students “awareness and appreciation of nature as well as an awareness of Asian identity [and] their role in society” (Asian American Tutorial Project (AATP), 1970, 18). Similarly, the UCLA Community Day sought to “‘bring together’ the Asian-American community” as project coordinator Alan Nishio explained, “We feel a need for Asian students and the community to relate both culturally as well as politically. . .we are hoping to create dialogue and communication among the participants” (Funakoshi, 1970, 2). After attending a Council of Oriental Organizations high school conference, high school student Wu wrote:

Discussions provided a very good opportunity for the conferees to become more aware of their Oriental identity and to become more involved in the movement. It really gave me a good feeling to see so many young Asian Americans talking together, playing together, eating together, and living together (1969, 15).

Other students described how they valued things like the Berkeley High School AAPI conference (“Asian Awareness,” 1971, 20) and “the Young Spirits” that organized activities for diverse high school youth to “com[e] together to find out who they are, becom[e] strong and positive about themselves. . .unifying to make things better” while learning about their AAPI heritage and community issues (Hamano et al., 1974, 7). Uniting AAPI teenagers through cultural and political awareness was another way that activists promoted social change in AAPI communities.

Other activists associated with *Gidra* created legal and health aid to students. Recognizing that schools did not prepare students either to know or defend their rights, a local community organizer and lawyer from the Asian American Legal Services—Mr. Valparaiso—organized legal classes “for those who, because of their financial or cultural background, do not avail themselves to their

full rights guaranteed in the legal system” (“Legal Education,” 1970, 11). Communities needed to be taught about youth rights because those who entered the penal system were rarely rehabilitated: “In a sheltered environment like a prison he does not get the opportunity to learn. He is told when to get up, when to eat, etc.” (“Legal Education,” 1970, 11). The Chinatown Youth Council offered the “Teen Post” to serve “teens in various counseling, recreational, social, and employment capacities” while offering eye and tuberculosis clinics that were unavailable in schools (“Chinatown Youth Council,” 1973, 13). Similarly, a Chinatown Health Team coordinated with agencies throughout Los Angeles to offer bilingual health education and child-care services for mothers working full-time (Chung, 1973). The Asian American Tutorial Project offered health services with annual, free, dental hygiene examinations and free eye examinations (Wong, 1973). In Gardena, local groups like the South Bay Asian Involvement and Teen Post joined with the Mexican-American Civic Organization and city agencies to provide flu vaccinations, eye examinations, legal advice, and information on respiratory illness (“Gardena Pioneer Project,” 1973). AAPI activists recognized the value of connecting youth with community organizations that could offer what schools did not.

Finally, activists created the High Potential Program (Hi-Pot) and Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) for AAPI students struggling with transitions into college. The UCLA Asian American Hi-Pot was created for “Students of Asian ancestry with academic potential and motivation, but who lack the grades or financial resources needed to pursue a college education” (“High Potential Recruitment,” 1970, 2). Similarly, the EOP was created to “bring the benefits of higher education to segments of our society who have heretofore been neglected. . .to find students with the potential for college success who are overlooked in the traditional processes” (Uyeda, 1970, 9). Although both programs struggled tremendously due to a lack of funding and university backing, they reveal how *Gidra* activists fought for AAPI access to higher education.

Gidra—A Mirror of the Past Reflecting Images of the Present

Gidra articles regarding K–12 schooling illustrate that little has changed for AAPIs in urban public education over the past forty years. I do not wish to deny that positive social change has occurred since the Asian American Movement, particularly given

that children of marginalized Asian immigrants, like myself, have opportunities today to attend institutions of higher education. We are able to pursue research and writing as our work *because* of the hard labor, political action, and undying commitment of social activists, community organizers, and family members who selflessly placed our futures before all else.

Yet it is revealing that the educational issues described in *Gidra* mirror conditions in urban public schools for contemporary AAPI students. Schools are resegregating at an alarming rate with “double segregation by race/ethnicity and by poverty. These schools differ in teacher quality, course offerings, level of competition, stability of enrollment, reputations, graduation rates and many other dimensions” (Orfield and Lee, 2007, 18; UCLA IDEA, 2007). Since the period of *Gidra*’s publication run, diverse AAPI populations have increased significantly amidst this dynamic of school resegregation. The AAPI community has seen a fourfold increase from 1970 to 2000 (Ima and Rumbaut, 1989) and includes more diverse Asian ethnicities with 48 percent of all immigrants and refugees admitted in the 1980s coming from Asia—particularly from Southeast Asia—compared to fewer than 5 percent in any decade prior to the 1965 Immigration Act (Ima and Rumbaut, 1989). Nationally, the 1980 census reported just more than three hundred thousand Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians counted, whereas by 1989 a total of 657,000 refugees identified as Vietnamese, Khmer, Cambodian, Laotian, or Highlanders (Hsia and Hirano-Nakanishi, 1995). Many of these AAPI immigrants live in concentrations of urban poverty and increasingly segregated schools (Reardon et al., 2009; Le, 2004; Teranishi, 2004). Contemporary Southeast Asian Americans and other urban Asian refugee/immigrant groups have confronted comparable educational barriers to those described in *Gidra* that Samoan and Chinese ELL students experienced decades before. Racist and ill-equipped educational practitioners, for example, improperly mark Khmer, Lao, and Hmong students as having learning disabilities or behavioral problems simply because their home languages and cultural practices are a “problem” that many teachers do not know how to use as a resource in the classroom (Ima and Rumbaut, 1989). Within-school segregation through tracking based on race and class also persists (Oakes, 2005; 1990; Kao and Thompson, 2003; Braddock, 1990). Although dominant researchers and policy makers often

state that Asian American students are the “most integrated” and highest achieving students in the United States, such claims nearly always fail to disaggregate AAPI students according to their numerous ethnic groups—thereby failing to show how specifically disenfranchised AAPIs enroll in primarily African American and Latino segregated schools and are tracked into non-college-bound groupings (Escueta and O’Brien, 1991; Mau, 1990; Wong, 1990).

Sadly, in urban public school districts such as LAUSD, the high poverty level documented in *Gidra* in 1970 is mirrored four decades later in the current \$375 million budget deficit that threatens school resources and at least three thousand teachers’ jobs. Although families and teachers joined together against impending budget cuts in a large demonstration on January 29, 2009 (Blume and Song, 2009; CNN iReport, 2009), LAUSD schools continue to be among the first who lose funding during local, regional, and national economic crises. Despite a current surplus of credentialed teachers overall, there is a shortage of teachers willing to work in urban schools (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2005; Howard, 2003), thus perpetuating a continuing race/class cultural mismatch that produces daily conflicts between a primarily white, middle-class teaching force and urban, working-class students of color (Villegas and Lucas, 2002; Gay, 2002; 2000; Howard, 1999; Delpit, 1995).

AAPI students still struggle to find their place in a world that tells them they must conform to either white or black norms while disempowering them with model minority labels (Lee, 2008; Lew, 2008; 2006; He et al., 2008; Park et al., 2003; Nakanishi and Nishida, 1995; Pang, 1995). Although some educators strive to design and implement culturally relevant curricula beyond half-baked attempts at multicultural education programs employing “food, festival, folklore, and fashion” approach (Meyer and Rhoades, 2006; González, 1995; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 1994), too many others remain ignorant about students’ cultures, languages, and immigration histories as well as methods to provide responsive English learning support (Lee, 2008; Lee and Madyun, 2008; Ngo and Lee, 2007; Ima and Rumbaut, 1989). Contemporary No Child Left Behind Act policies and practices have forced many ELL students to take mandatory high-stakes tests in English, often to the academic and psychological discouragement of newcomer students (Wright and Li, 2008; 2006; Menken, 2008; 2006; Crawford,

2007; 2004; de Cohen et al., 2005; Rossell, 2005; Wiley, 2005). Given that dynamics of educational inequality have persisted during the past forty years, how can we learn from the efforts of past activists, as described in *Gidra*, to have far greater impact on current and future K–12 educational policy and practice?

Learning from *Gidra*—Reconnecting Schools and Communities

Contemporary organizers, educational practitioners, and public policy advocates can draw important lessons from *Gidra*. First of all, several programs described in *Gidra* continue to thrive today, suggesting that students and surrounding community members need programs such as the Asian American Tutorial Project (still active at Castelar Elementary School in Los Angeles’s Chinatown), UCLA Unicamp (a residential summer camp for children living below the federal poverty line), UCLA Academic Advancement Program (the new name of Hi-Pot), or UCLA EOP (still offering support to transitioning college students). These locally based education programs and organizations have counterparts in historic AAPI communities of other cities across the United States where the Asian American Movement also had roots—such as Seattle, Oakland, San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston—and their vital, continuing roles can be developed and adapted for diverse AAPI children and families in numerous other settings.

Furthermore, although many at UCLA still organize teach-ins like those described in *Gidra*—for example, in 2008 the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education led a teach-in regarding the experiences of undocumented immigrant students—more educational programming should reach beyond the university. The pages of *Gidra* reveal a consistent, principled commitment to the practice of university-community-school collaboration with foci on relevant issues, including health, immigration, racism, police brutality, and youth and family violence.

My research suggests, therefore, that the process of learning from *Gidra* can instruct and inspire contemporary activists to reengage with the core theme that defined the K–12 education focus of *Gidra*’s efforts: connecting schools to their surrounding communities by addressing the broad social and physical needs of diverse AAPI students. Based on models documented in *Gidra*, we can

initiate or revitalize youth programs to address the gaps between students' lived experiences and what they learn in school, along with health interventions and legal services that connect students and their working-class immigrant families to linguistically and culturally responsive resources. Unlike the relatively modest civic capacities that were fully institutionalized some forty years ago, our local public schools today are surrounded by, albeit too often separated from, dozens of nonprofit organizations, including community health centers, afterschool tutoring and youth mentoring programs, low-cost legal services, and neighborhood community development corporations. Many urban public school students and their families need access to these organizations but have no systematic, structured ways to find them. Likewise, many of these organizations were established with missions to serve local residents but may not successfully reach many segments of the population due to linguistic and cultural barriers or other factors. Given that public schools represent a unique institution where local families of various backgrounds converge in the interests of their children, however, school sites can—and in my view should—serve as a conduit for community knowledge and family support.

The idea is nothing new, as other scholar/activists have argued with perspectives ranging from those of marginalized, out-of-school Cambodian American youth (Tang, 2009) to broader social justice and education reform movements (Anyon, 2005). Even within mainstream, scholarly, national professional networks such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), there is a formally organized Special Interest Group (SIG) for “Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing” (SIG #172) that brings together researchers who are involved with organizing efforts for school improvement, educational equity, youth development, and social justice.⁸ Remarkably, however, the Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG was not formally proposed and established within AERA until 2007—nearly forty years after the insights from AAPI K–12 education activists appeared in the pages of *Gidra* in which activists described the power and potential to transform education by connecting students to community organizations. By learning from *Gidra* and our shared AAPI activist history, in which this very idea was deeply engaged and documented, we may gain greater clarity and capacity to support AAPI students currently.

Learning from *Gidra*—Documentation as a Dimension of Activism

Finally, although my study is grounded through a careful analysis of the archival published record of *Gidra*, I recognize that an alternative or complementary methodological approach to better understand how the early Asian American Movement viewed and engaged AAPI K–12 education issues might include oral history narratives with core members and contributors who wrote *Gidra's* education articles. Such an approach could help to clarify further the issues and contradictions of the time as well as to draw on participants' reflections about both their own personal trajectories of educational activism since then and their perspectives about parallels and divergences with contemporary AAPI educational concerns. Not surprisingly, some of the writers referred to in the preceding text continued to participate actively in Asian American community organizing and educational activism. Among her contributions, for example, May Chen went on to develop innovative educational programs for Chinese immigrant women garment workers and organizers in New York through the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and later the Workers United affiliate of the Service Employees Union International. Another *Gidra* education writer, Alan Nishio, helped to establish the EOP at California State University Long Beach in 1972 where he was eventually appointed as associate vice president for student services and served as a campus educational leader until his retirement in 2006. His long-term contributions to the campus were recognized through the permanent establishment of the Alan T. Nishio Educational Equity Excellence Scholarship Award, which supports outstanding students who connect community engagement with social justice visions of education.⁹

It is also worth noting that some thirty years after the publication of *Gidra*, a new cohort of Los Angeles–based Asian American student and youth activists relaunched *Gidra* in magazine format with much the same collective editorial process and priorities. Although only a few issues of *Gidra's* new incarnation were published in the early 2000s, this reengagement with its purpose and product by a new generation was significant, even if they were unable to sustain the effort financially for more than a couple of years. These more recent actions of organizing and publishing dur-

ing the past decade complement the lifelong activist contributions of early *Gidra* participants like May Chen, Alan Nishio, and many others too numerous to name here. They suggest—along with my own content analysis of K–12 education-focused articles from *Gidra*—that the value and meaning of *Gidra*'s articles go far beyond being curiosities of a lost time. Though contemporary AAPI movements for K–12 educational equity must, by necessity, be the motivating forces in making their own fresh histories, the multiple legacies of *Gidra*—from collective activist visions to lessons about how to address concrete educational issues in schools and communities—also remind us of the importance to document struggles and produce media for others to share, whether at the moment, in the movement, or eventually for the consideration of future generations.

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Notes

1. Named after the oversized-bug hero of a Japanese monster film.
2. In 1960 more than 46 million students were in school. This number included about 99.5% of children aged 7 to 13 years and 90.3% of youth aged 14 to 17 (Tyack, 1974).
3. In 1966, 93.4% of all public school teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher (Tyack, 1974).
4. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under Title VI denied funding to segregated school districts, many were unaffected and maintained segregated schools by using state and local government resources (Graham, 2005).
5. According to Tyack (1974), all central cities saw a net decrease of white families of 1.2% between 1960 and 1970, while some saw considerably greater cases of "White Flight" (New York, 9.3%; Chicago, 18.6%; Cleveland, 26.5%; St Louis, 31.6%) with a simultaneous increase of more than 50% of African American people in Boston, Newark, New York, and Los Angeles. In 1966–7, nonwhite students formed the majority of public schools in ten major cities (Tyack, 1974, 278).
6. The Johnson Administration's Great Society and War on Poverty efforts made impressive promises to improve education for all through legislation like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

of 1965 that assured federal money under Title I for “compensatory education” programs for children in low-income areas. However, the conservative Nixon Administration quickly undercut such efforts, arguing that the federal government should decrease its control of public institutions (Graham, 2005).

7. Pincus (1980) did extensive research on vocational education and found that it did not increase opportunities for students; half of community college vocational program graduates did not even work in their fields of training. Grubb and Lazerson (1975) similarly note how vocational education was simply a process of keeping working- and lower-class students in low-paying jobs, stating that “Career education is not directed at resolving social problems, developing avenues of upward mobility, or making school and work more satisfying experiences. It is aimed instead at reducing expectations, limiting aspirations, and increasing commitments to the existing social structure” (473).
8. For more information about Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG, see <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/AERA/about.html>. Other relevant SIGs in AERA include Family, School, Community Partnerships (SIG #43) and Research on the Education of Asian and Pacific Americans (SIG #94). For an overall listing of AERA SIGs, see http://www.aera.net/SIGs/SigDirectory.aspx?menu_id=26&id=4714 (accessed January 5, 2010).
9. See <http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/students/scholarships/search/display.php?sID=22> (accessed January 5, 2010).

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