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By Dr. Larry Kuehn

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Japanese Canadian internment in BC. In early 1942, more than 3,000 Japanese Canadian elementary students were ousted from their BC public school classrooms. They and their families were ordered to leave coastal BC from Vancouver to Prince Rupert and from all the Pacific Coast islands. They were interned in camps and "ghost towns" in the BC Interior during a shameful period in BC's history.

Public hysteria about the danger of Japanese Canadians potentially supporting an invasion from Japan was fomented by politicians and some competitors in occupations like fishing and garden farming. Anti-Asian racism had a long history in BC, and people of Asian ancestry were prohibited from voting and from many professional occupations, despite being Canadian citizens. Both military and RCMP reports saw no realistic danger, except for a small number who had already been identified and imprisoned.

Despite this, every Japanese Canadian was forced to abandon their home and work, and their possessions and businesses were sold for a fraction of their value. In early 1942, the animal stables at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) grounds became the home of thousands for several months. Later that year, everyone was removed to hastily constructed camps, buildings in nearly abandoned former mining communities in BC's Interior or to sugar beet farms in Alberta.

Some public school officials and the BCTF had resisted the expulsion of the students. The January 1942 editorial in the B.C. Teacher said the following:

"Is the pitiful plight of young Canadians of Japanese origin being practically recognized in your school and community? Are we rising to the challenge of a supreme opportunity to show that

the cause we represent deserves the love and gratitude and devotion of everyone within our borders, whatever his breed or social condition? If not, then in that regard, we are losing the war. Are we allowing public policies to be shaped by dangerous demagogues, indifferent to democracy and the basic principles of Christian ethics? If so, then in that regard we are losing the war. And, if you and I am passively acquiescing in policies of futile hatred, we are guilty of treasonable violation of vows that are none the less binding because unspoken. "

After backlash to this editorial, Dr. Norman Black, the editor of the B.C. Teacher, submitted his resignation—but the BCTF officers supported him and rejected the resignation. Black continued to advocate for the Japanese Canadians throughout the war and years after, until the prohibition on them returning to the coast of BC was finally lifted and voting rights were granted in 1949. This was long after America allowed its Japanese American citizens to return from its internment camps in 1944 and the end of the war in 1945.

What happened to the education of the 3,000 Canadian children once they were in these internment camps?

The BC government had the obligation to educate children who were citizens of the province and Canada. However, the BC Minister of Education, H.G.T. Perry, refused to pay to educate Japanese Canadian children and supported school districts that refused to admit them or who charged tuition. Early in 1943, Perry introduced an amendment to the Public Schools Act to prohibit Japanese children from the schools. It was withdrawn under pressure from the federal government, along with a promise that the feds would educate the "evacuated" children.

With this rejection of responsibility by the province, how were the children to be educated? The secondary students could take the BC correspondence courses, but the government charged $9 a course for them, in contrast to $1 a course for other students. This was well beyond the ability for most to pay. Eventually secondary school courses run by churches were set up at some of the camps and in the former mining communities.

For 3,000 interned elementary students, there was only Hideko Hyodo, the one teacher with a certificate and public education experience interned alongside them. Hyodo was the only Japanese Canadian teacher in a BC public school at that time. She taught Grade 1 in the Steveston area in the Richmond district beginning in 1926 and was a member of the BCTF. In 1937 Hyodo represented the BCTF at the congress of the World Federation of Education Associations (WFEA) in Tokyo. The WFEA was the first international organization of teacher unions and other education groups.

The BC Securities Commission, responsible for administration of the evacuees, had unsuccessfully attempted to find a white director of education for the camps. It then appointed Hideko Hyodo as director—responsible for overseeing the untrained and inexperienced principals and teachers. Most volunteer teachers were young women with, at most, high school graduation.

Hyodo visited each school spread around the BC Interior on at least a quarterly basis. She was responsible for dismissing or reassigning teachers, primarily for lack of classroom discipline. Teachers had been given a six-page article by Dr. Norman Black on classroom discipline, prepared for volunteer tutors when students were held in the PNE stables, as their initial training in classroom management. Faculty members from the schools that trained BC elementary teachers offered courses at the camps in the summer of 1943 and the following two years to provide some limited training for about 250 teachers who ran classes over the three years.

Teruko Hidaka was appointed as assistant to the director. As reported by Patricia Roy, she "had graduated from Maple Ridge and the Provincial Normal School. The Maple Ridge School Board hired her as a substitute teacher, but after some parents withdrew their children from her class, the school board decided not to hire any teacher who was ineligible to vote. Since Japanese Canadian citizens could not vote in British Columbia that ended Miss Hidaka's career as a public school teacher." Hideko Hyodo did teach in a public school in Richmond but had only Japanese students.

Hyodo was paid $75 a month, later increased to $100, and principals of the three largest schools received $60 a month. The teachers received stipends of $40 a month, about a quarter as much as the average for elementary teachers in the public schools.

In August of 1944, Japanese Canadians were told they must either relocate east of the Rocky Mountains or "repatriate" to Japan when the war ended. By 1945, Hyodo joined many of the families who moved east and the number of students in these schools declined. By the next year, children still living in the small towns were primarily integrated into the public schools in their communities with the federal government paying tuition to the school boards.

Patricia Roy reports that, "Between 1945 and 1948 nine different Japanese names appeared on the payroll of British Columbia's public schools." These were likely teachers in schools for those "evacuated" to the Interior. A number of the teachers who moved to Ontario and elsewhere in Canada earned formal teacher education and became successful teachers and administrators.

Hideko Hyodo Shimizu (her married name) was made a member of the Order of Canada in 1982. The citation said she played "a vital and voluntary role in ensuring that Japanese Canadian children in British Columbia received a proper education."

Sources

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- City of Richmond Archives, Hideko Hyodo Photograph #2014 6 5, Published with permission

Note: This paper has also been published as an article in the *Teacher* magazine, September/October, 2022.

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