Teaching Chinese as a Heritage Language in an English-Dominant Society

by

Bingxin Zhu
Bachelor of Arts, Jiangnan University, 2014

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

© Bingxin Zhu, 2016
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy, electronic or other means, without the permission of the author.
Supervisory Committee

Dr. Wolff-Michael Roth – Supervisor  
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Robert Anthony – 2nd reader  
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Abstract

With increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants arriving in Canada, the awareness of maintaining Chinese as an HL has grown among Chinese immigrants. Heritage language is regarded not only as an important resource for immigrant children, but it is also of great significance to this multicultural nation. Research indicates that there are many factors that contribute to students’ HL learning, including motivation, ethnic identity, parental support, and HL schools. Based on the theoretical framework of intrinsic-extrinsic and integrative-instrumental constructs, this study was designed to investigate the internal and external factors that impact HL development and was also done to provide suggestions for Chinese HL teaching in Canada. The findings reveal that students with internal motivation tend to achieve high proficiency in HL; the strong sense of ethnic identity contributes to the intrinsic motivation so that it positively influences HL development; parents’ positive attitudes toward HL and active engagement in HL teaching improve children’s HL acquisition; and HL schools play an important role in ethnic identity formation.

Keywords: heritage language, Chinese, ethnic identity, motivation
Introduction

Background

With an increasing migration of Chinese people to Canada, more and more immigrants consider Chinese as their heritage language (HL). According to Statistics Canada (2011), there are about one million Canadians speaking Chinese as their mother tongue. Following English and French, the Chinese language has become the third largest language group in Canada. And, after Europeans, the Chinese community has become the largest minority group in Canada, accounting for 3.7 percent of the population (Jiang, 2010). With increasing numbers of people in Canada speaking Chinese at home, a growing awareness of the importance of maintaining Chinese as an HL has developed among Chinese immigrants. The Chinese immigrant community regards Chinese HL as an advantage for their children’s future development, for the cultural roots that connect to ethnic identity, and for the cohesion with extended family (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Therefore, the majority of Chinese parents expect that their children’s HL will be maintained (Chen, 2013). Moreover, HL is not only a personal resource, but it is also of great significance for communication between countries. Due to globalization, people who are bilingual can promote cultural, political and economic exchanges between two countries. Chinese is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and, therefore, it has an even greater significance in the globalized world. Because Chinese HL development is beneficial to both individuals and nations, in recent years, more and more Chinese schools have been established in Canada in order to improve Chinese HL development going forward (Jiang, 2010).
It is not easy to maintain immigrant children’s HL in a western and English-dominated context like Canada. Most first-generation immigrants maintain their mother tongue, whereas their offspring, who are expected to assimilate into mainstream lifestyle, may lose it due to a lack of support (Fillmore, 2000). In Canada, in particular, due to the English language context, many children are not aware of the value of learning their HL. Therefore, to support the development of Chinese as an HL, it would be significant to know the factors that influence children’s HL development, and thus raise some ways of supporting families and children in their HL maintenance.

**Personal Ground**

There are personal reasons that have led me to investigate the topic of Chinese HL maintenance and there have been other experiences that have provided opportunities for me to notice different factors that influence children’s HL development.

First, I noticed the importance of motivation and ethnic identity. I have a cousin (Lily) who was born and grew up in English speaking Canada. Although her parents (my aunt and uncle) maintained Chinese as the first language for communication between the adults, they chose to communicate with the child mainly in English because the parents wanted my cousin to integrate into mainstream society as soon as possible. As a result, my cousin who is studying in high school can only understand a few simple words in Chinese; and, she cannot read or write. I still remember that a few years ago, when my cousin went back to China, she could not communicate with her Chinese relatives due to the language barriers. All the family members could only speak Chinese, but my cousin could not understand it. During her stay in China, my cousin refused to attend
activities with her Chinese relatives. It was at that point that her parents realized that alienation from the extended family would result if their child could not speak Chinese to her relatives. So they decided to send my cousin to a Chinese school in Richmond. Nonetheless, my cousin was not willing to learn Chinese, she was forced by her parents to attend Chinese school classes; thus, she did not do very well in them. I asked her why she resisted learning Chinese and she told me that it would take her extra effort and time after school, and it was unnecessary for her to learn it since she was living in Canada and did not have any intention of going back to China. When I told her that Chinese people have a duty to keep Chinese as their home language, she refused to believe it because she preferred to think of herself as Canadian rather than Chinese. She told me that she felt more assimilated with White people.

From my cousin’s story, I realized that there were two main factors that resulted in her negative Chinese HL development. Basically, she had no motivation to learn Chinese and she lacked a sense of Chinese ethnic identity. In other words, my cousin did not realize the potential usefulness of her HL, so she thought it was a waste of time to learn it. Also, she did not consider herself Chinese and did not want to learn about a foreign language and culture from China. In the review, the roles of motivation and ethnic identity will be discussed to explore how these factors influence children’s HL development.

My cousin’s story also provoked my thinking about parents’ role in their children’s HL development. Certainly, my cousin had negative attitudes toward learning Chinese due to her personal feelings. However, if her parents did not spoke to her in English but in Chinese since she was a child, would that change her situation?
I had another experience that indicates that HL maintenance is certainly possible. I met a boy in Richmond, who is a second-generation Chinese immigrant. Because his family could only speak Mandarin, he spoke Mandarin and English from an early age. He told me that he never went to Chinese school, but he was born into an environment where speaking Mandarin was “normal.” So, he acquired Mandarin as a child and then learned English after attending school. In other words, it was because his family kept using Mandarin at home that he could maintain it in an English language context. For this reason, I realized that the parents’ role should be considered a key factor that needs to be investigated.

Another experience that led me to explore the topic for this study arose from a visit to a Chinese HL school in Victoria, which helped me gain insight into the role of HL schools. I visited the Zhonghua (a pseudonym) Chinese School, which was a part-time business owned by a university professor—Dr. C. The school operated in his home and the students came from families with diverse backgrounds. Most of the students were from immigrant families with a Chinese background.

I observed three levels of classes and found that Dr. C designed the class to improve students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills comprehensively. For example, at the beginning of class, he required students to write Chinese characters when he was reading them slowly. These words were from what they had learned at their last class. He also encouraged students to read stories out loud in class. I was impressed by the students’ performances as they were much better than I expected. From my observations, I found that attending a heritage school is an effective way to acquire one’s heritage language. Dr. C told me that most parents had to work and they did not
feel confident teaching children themselves, so they relied on HL schools to help children maintain their HL. Attending an HL school provides children with an environment where they can practice the language with teachers and peers. Thus, HL school plays an important role as an external factor of HL development, which cannot be ignored.

From personal experiences, motivation, a sense of ethnic identity, parental support and HL schools all influence children’s HL development. In the literature review section, these factors will be discussed separately.

**Definition of Heritage Language and Heritage Language Learner**

Heritage language is the widely used term that refers to the language spoken by people with an immigrant background. According to He (2008, p. 1), heritage language to some extent has a similar meaning to “home language,” “mother tongue,” or “community language”. According to Fishman (2001), heritage language is an umbrella term that includes languages of “the indigenous, the colonial and the immigrant groups” (p. 81). In this study, heritage language refers to immigrant heritage language, which signifies a language maintained by immigrants and their offspring. As Cho, Cho and Tse (1997) stated, one of the features of a heritage language is the close relation to cultural background, some people take heritage language as the home language, whereas some may not speak it at home. And, it may be learned at home other than the dominant language. In this study, heritage language learners narrowly refer to language students who are enrolled in a formal program such as a heritage language school and have been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or only understand the heritage language, and who have some
proficiency in English and the heritage language are to some degree bilingual” (Valdés, 2001, pp. 39–40).

**Research Questions and Method**

The general research question of my study is “How do the factors of motivation, ethnic identity, parents and HL schools influence students’ HL development?” There are four sub-questions guiding the presentation of this study:

1. How does personal motivation influence students’ HL leaning?
2. What is the correlation between ethnic identity and HL development?
3. What are parents’ attitudes towards engagement, and how does parental support influence children’s HL development?
4. What role does HL school play in HL development?

Research articles were collected mainly through online search engines and school library websites, including Web of Science, Google Scholar, UVic Library, and UBC Library. First I used keywords and combinations such as “heritage language,” “home language,” “mother language,” and “heritage language education”, and there were hundreds of articles. To limit my search scale, I searched articles related to each section of my study. For example, when I reviewed motivation for HL learning, I combined the keywords “motivation” and “heritage language”. The same approach was also applied for ethnic identity, parents and HL schools parts. Through these ways, I got research articles more pertinent to my study.

Many research studies have been conducted to examine the factors that affect immigrants’ HL maintenance. However, few of them have covered all the factors mentioned above. This study
aims at filling the gap by exploring how these factors affect HL development, and the connection between these factors. Not much research has been done on teaching Chinese as an HL in Canada. In this study, ways in which to improve a Chinese HL program in an HL school in Richmond, BC, Canada will be discussed.

In the next section, I provide a general theoretical framework to support the literature review and then examine the literature related to different dimensions (motivation, ethnic identity, parents’ attitude and engagement, and HL schools) that influence students’ HL development. In the following section, I propose some ways to improve Chinese HL teaching in an HL school. And the paper ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.
Literature Review

Researchers have investigated many variables that affect HL development. Some studies focus on the motivation of HL learners (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Geisherik, 2004; Lu & Li, 2008; Wen, 1997; Yang, 2003). A few of them also look at the relation between ethnic identity and HL learning (Brown, 2009; Cho, 2000; You, 2005). Some research investigates aspects within the family context, such as parental attitudes and parents’ engagement in HL learning (Fillmore, 2000; Hu & Whiteman, 2014; Li, 1999; Luo & Wiseman, 2000), while others focus on the role of HL schools (Chinen and Tucker, 2005; Jiang, 2010; Pu, 2012; Shibata, 2000). However, in these research articles, factors are studied independently instead of connecting them to one another. Thus, in the discussion part, I investigate the relationship among these factors, and try to make coherent connections.

General Theoretical Framework for the Review

Psychological theories include internal and external factors to explain human behavior (Cole, Holtgrave & Ríos, 1992). Basically, internal factors refer to determinants from the within such as attitudes, beliefs and values; whereas, external factors are those from the outside, for example, social environment, policy and economy. One of the important aspects that determine human behavior is motivation. Motivation is the impetus, desire and force that leads a person to do something. Like other social psychological dimensions, there are internal and external determinants of motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) raised the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in self-determination theory. Intrinsic motivation appears as the internal dimension of motivation, which signifies the desire to achieve some goals based on personal interest, not for “a
reward contingency or control” (p. 34). On the contrary, extrinsic motivation represents the external aspect and reflects the desire to get a reward from outside and others, including rewards of money, prizes or a sense of competence (Comanaru & Noel, 2009). In this way of thinking, other people can change a person’s behavior by modifying their external conditions. For example, when educators are asked to “motivate students,” they are then asked to modify the motivation of the students from the outside, e.g., by some form of reward, or by making the lessons “interesting” or “fun.” Hence, motivation is one of the psychological dimensions that has internal and external aspects. Moreover, internal motivation comes in different forms, for example, as integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner, 1985). According to Gardener (1985), integrative orientation reflects affective reasons, such as an internal interest to learn about the culture, an intention to integrate into the community and the people, or even to become a member of that group. Whereas, the instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn the target language as a tool to achieve certain benefits for some pragmatic reasons, such as taking the language as an advantage to get a better job or achieve school requirements. In Gardner’s (1985) framework, integrative and instrumental motivations were separate and contrasting, however, in contemporary thinking, these two types of motivation are not discrete components under certain circumstances; instead, they partially overlap (Shenk, 2011). For example, as articulated in Shenk’s (2011) study, a participant expressed her reasons for learning English—communicating with people when traveling and getting a better job due to her communicative skills. In other words, the integrative motivation—using the language to travel and communicate is accompanied by instrumental motivation, which is benefitting from a better career. Thus, it seems more reasonable to interpret
integrative and instrumental motivation as simultaneous components, which have overlapping areas as aspects of intrinsic motivation. The combination of constructs developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), Gardner (1985), and Shenk (2011) provides a strong foundation of the research reviewed in this study.

In considering HL learning, it is not just the internal factors we have to consider but also the external factors. Previous research on HL development has indicated various factors that impact immigrant children’s HL learning, including both internal factors, e.g. sense of ethnic identity (Cho, 2000), and external factors such as parental attitudes (Lao, 2004) and HL school environment (Shibata, 2000). In this study, four aspects will be demonstrated to investigate the internal and external factors that influence HL development: (1) personal motivation, (2) ethnic identity, (3) parents’ attitude and engagement, (4) and HL schools.

Motivation for Heritage Language Learning

Introduction. Personal motivation has always been regarded as the most influential factor that to a great extent determines whether the learner can achieve high language proficiency (Geisherik, 2004). According to Gardner (1985), motivation of second language learning is “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (p. 10). With regard to HL learning, students express various motivational factors. Based on an investigation of HL students with various ethnic backgrounds in America, Carreira and Kagan (2011) reported that the main reasons students learn their HL are as follows: “(1) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (59.8%); (2) to communicate better with family and friends (57.5%); and (3) as a purely pragmatic goal, to fulfill
their language requirement (53.7%)” (p. 48). All these reasons pertain to intrinsic motivation, but (1) and (2) can be included in integrative aspects, while (3) belongs to instrumental motivation. From the statistics, students’ desire to get to know their heritage culture is a crucial aspect of HL students’ motivation to learn their language, which reflects the value of including cultural components in HL education. Moreover, through a research on twenty-four Korean heritage students who were enrolled in an HL program in the United States, Cho, Cho and Tse (1997) found that the main reasons students learn their HL are: (a) to communicate with their parents and other relatives more; (b) to keep their Korean identity as an integral part; (c) to get a better job by being bilingual. Similarly, three of them appear as intrinsic motivations, the former two are integrative and last one is instrumental in a sense. From these two studies, it can be concluded that both integrative and instrumental orientations are important in HL development. And learning about the culture and interacting with their community account for the two main reasons to acquire HL. Therefore, an intrinsic dimension is of great significance to the students’ motivation to learn their heritage language.

Motivational orientations and HL learning. When it comes to the impact of motivation on HL development, there is a consensus that motivation greatly affects HL acquisition, however, researchers come to different conclusions about which motivational orientation influences HL learning more (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Gardner, 2001; Lu & Li, 2008; Wen, 1997). Some of them stated that students who have an intrinsic motivation tend to develop a more positive attitude towards their HL learning as compared to those who have external motivation. Comanaru and Noels (2009) conducted a study to examine the motivation of 145 Chinese learners, including both
heritage and non-heritage students. Through the correlation analysis, they found that students who were motivated by intrinsic motivation, e.g., “I love doing it,” or “It’s fun,” showed a higher correlation (0.46, p<0.01) with learning engagement than those who had external motivation (0.13) such as “to gain the benefits (e.g., job, money, course credits)” (Comanaru & Noels, 2009, p. 139). And both intrinsic and external orientations have a positive correlation with learning engagement, however, intrinsic motivation showed a stronger relationship than external motivation, concerning learning engagement. In other words, when students feel that learning Chinese is interesting and pleasant, they are more actively involved in the learning activities and are willing to put effort into learning it. This finding also emphasized the role of intrinsic motivation. Following this statement, students’ motivation in HL learning can be modified from the external situation, for example, the teacher can provide various reading materials to make the lessons interesting and fun, thereby stimulating students’ interest in learning.

In a research of 341 learners’ motivational orientations with diverse backgrounds, Yang (2003) found that compared with instrumental motivation, integrative motivation was of greater significance in HL development, in spite of the ethnic background is Korean, Chinese or Japanese. Through questionnaires about motivation of HL learning, the result showed that the integrative motivation (5.66) had a higher mean score than instrumental motivation (4.98). That is, compared with instrumental motivation, students with an East Asian background were more stimulated by integrative motivation. Yang (2003) explained that students expressed why they learn the language as “I will be able to participate in the cultural activities of the language group” (p. 54), “I will be able to meet and converse with more people” (p. 54) etc. This finding is consistent with Carreira
and Kagan’s (2011) report that students have a strong desire to learn about the culture and communicate with people. It also indicates that improving communicative skills is an important component in HL education to fulfill students’ needs.

Other researchers have come to the conclusion that suggests that students are both integratively and instrumentally motivated to learn their HL. Lu and Li (2008) did an analysis of the different motivational factors on 120 Chinese students, including those of heritage and non-heritage backgrounds, and they found that heritage students not only expressed their interest toward Chinese culture and the desire to interact with Chinese speakers, which appeared as integrative motivation, but they also indicated that instrumental motivation influenced students’ HL development positively. For example, some HL students with Chinese cultural and linguistic backgrounds already have some basic knowledge of Chinese, they choose to take Chinese classes because they want to get credits easily and fulfill school requirements. That is, both integrative and instrumental orientations contribute to students’ positive attitudes toward HL learning. Moreover, Lu and Li (2008) also indicated that integrative motivation is important for HL students’ listening and speaking skills. It is mainly because HL students have a strong desire to communicate with people from the community, thus, HL students would put more effort into enhancing their communication skills.

Therefore, we can conclude that all motivational orientations (intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental) contribute to HL learning, however, when students have an intrinsic interest in learning, they are more engaged in the learning process. In addition, it seems that an integrative sense of intrinsic motivation plays an important role on students’ listening and speaking skills,
which is in accordance with their strong desire to communicate with people in their own ethnic group.

Some research found that HL students’ motivation could be varied due to external factors such as learning tasks and course-specific contexts. There is an interesting finding from Wen (1997, 2011), who studied the different motivational factors that made students start the language and keep learning separately in a Chinese learning context. From an investigation of Asian background and non-Asian background participants, Wen (1997, p. 239) found that at the beginning stage, the main reason for students to learn Chinese was their intrinsic motivation: interest in Chinese culture, however, at an intermediate stage, “expectations of learning task and effort” became the main factor for them to continue learning. As Wen (1997) explained, at the beginning, students chose to learn Chinese because of their interest toward the culture; however, as their learning proceeded, they realized that it was difficult to learn Chinese, which would negatively influence their behavior to continue learning. For example, a participant in Wen’s (2011) study considered his failure as a cause from an external factor—the difficult learning task, he said, “I’m trying to memorize all the homework exercises…it is extremely difficult” (p. 56). Therefore, difficult learning tasks and a Chinese learning context could be classified as external factors that decrease students’ intrinsic motivation of HL development. Due to the fact that Chinese and English belong to different orthographic systems, learning Chinese may take a longer time and require much more effort than learners expected before learning. Hence, if students do not have enough preparation for the difficulties of Chinese learning, they may lose self-confidence and feel unmotivated during the process of learning Chinese and they may give up. Concerning
Chinese HL development, teachers should take these factors into account in order to encourage students to continue learning.

**Comparison of heritage and non-heritage students’ motivation.** Many studies on HL education conducted comparative analyses of heritage and non-heritage learners’ motivation, which investigated the motivational differences with regard to students’ different backgrounds (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Geisherik, 2004; Lu & Li, 2008). Most of the reviewed studies hold the view that HL learners are more affected by integrative motivation than non-heritage ones. For example, Gersherik (2004) conducted an investigation of 40 heritage and non-heritage Russian language learners. They used a questionnaire containing 20 reasons for learning Russian, including integrative and instrumental orientation. Students selected 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to demonstrate to what extent they agreed with each reason. From the questionnaires, with respect to questions on integrative motivation, HL students (average mean 3.71) were found to show higher integrative motivation than non-heritage students (average mean 2.58). For example, there was a reason that “I want to become a member of the Russian community,” HL learners (average mean 4.26) more strongly agreed with this reason than non-heritage students (average mean 3.28). In other words, HL students expressed more integrative motivation than non-heritage students with respect to learning their language. It could be explained by the fact that HL students do not only take HL as a foreign language; rather, they consider it a language with an emotional connection to them. They have the desire to know the heritage culture and enhance the connection to their heritage community.
**Conclusion.** In summary, existing research on motivation for HL learning indicates: (a) knowing about heritage culture and interacting with people from their community are important aspects that contribute to students’ motivation of HL learning; (b) students with intrinsic motivation are more strongly motivated to become involved in learning activities than are those with extrinsic motivation; and (c) compared with non-heritage learners, heritage students are more influenced by integrative motivation, which particularly affects students’ communicative skills. However, it seems that most studies on motivation for HL learning emphasize the internal dimension—e.g., intrinsic motivation, integrative motivation—and a few of them investigate the external dimensions of motivation such as class environment or rewards.

**Ethnic Identity and Heritage Language Learning**

**Introduction.** HL students’ sense of ethnic identity is another internal factor that influences HL development, however, the formation of ethnic identity can be affected by stereotypes from others. Thus, ethnic stereotypes appear as an external factor that influences one’s ethnic identity, and therefore affects HL development.

**Definition.** Ethnic identity has various definitions in the research reviewed. For example, Tajfel (1981) stated that ethnic identity is “part of an individual’s self-concept which drives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). According to Phinney (1990), ethnic identity indicates the sense of belonging in a community, and attitudes toward one’s ethnic group. From these two definitions, both Tajfel and Phinney noted that ethnic identity includes the feeling towards one’s ethnic group, however, Tajfel described ethnic identity as a way of how
people perceive his or her ethnic group and Phinney emphasized more on the sense of belonging. It is obvious that researchers appeared to share a broad general understanding of ethnic identity, when they emphasize different specific aspects, different definitions appear.

**Relationship between ethnic identity and HL development.** Research has identified that ethnic identity as an internal factor is closely related to students’ HL development. Some of the research indicates that the strong feeling of ethnic identity has a positive impact on students’ HL learning. For instance, Kang and Kim (2012) did research on 30 second-generation Korean-Americans to examine the correlation between their HL competence and a sense of ethnic identity. Through a questionnaire about their Korean ethnic identity, they categorized participants into two groups: students with a strong and a weak Korean identity. To compare their speaking and writing test scores, researchers found that the group of students with strong ethnic identity achieved higher scores than those with weak Korean identity. Moreover, they found that the learners’ competence in the speaking test was significantly correlated with their Korean identity. In other words, students with a stronger sense of ethnic identity are more likely to achieve a high HL proficiency. Additionally, the correlation between ethnic identity and speaking skills indicates that the strong sense of ethnic identity positively contributed to students’ speaking achievement. It can be explained by their desire to integrate into a community and communicate with their family and friends, which also appears as intrinsic motivation. Thus, the sense of ethnic identity contributes to intrinsic motivation and is an important aspect of the internal factors that influence HL development.
Conversely, some studies found that a high proficiency of HL is also beneficial to the formation of strong ethnic identity. Through an analysis of 114 Korean Americans, Cho (2000) found that those who have better competence in HL, have a stronger sense of who they are. Also, students with a high proficiency of HL tended to be closely related to their ethnic group with a better understanding of their culture, beliefs and values. For example, Su Mi, who was a participant in Cho’s investigation, expressed that because she was fluent in Korean, she could watch Korean TV programs and videos and communicate with other native speakers, thus having strong emotional relationships with her ethnic community. Also, Albert, one of the participants, said that Korean proficiency made him close to Korean international students in college, and he felt like belonging to his ethnic group. From these examples, the proficiency of HL facilitates students to interact with people from the same community and get to know more about their culture, which is of a great significance for ethnic identity formation.

There is literature that provides a counter-argument to the claim that ethnic identity and HL efficiency are highly correlated, which means that HL maintenance may contribute to forming one’s ethnic identity, but it may not be the essential element (Mah, 2005). For instance, Brown (2009) interviewed four Korean American students, which revealed that for some students, the high proficiency of HL may not be a necessity for their ethnic identity formation. However, in his study, a girl named Ruby, who was fluent in both English and Korean, did not possess a positive view of her Korean identity. She explained, “I’m good at language[s]. I think that is why I’m good at Korean. I’m also good at Spanish” (p. 9). As Brown (2009) explained, to her, Korean is just another foreign language instead of a language that connects to her self-concept, she described her
ethnic identity this way, “I’m basically an American girl trapped in a Korean’s body” (p. 10). Ruby’s story demonstrated that some students may have a higher proficiency of heritage language, but that does not mean that they have a positive ethnic identity. As Ruby explained, older Korean males “always wear like a polo shirt, plaid pants, and like those little penny loafers and like socks pulled right up to here and it’s just embarrassing” (p. 10). It is the negative perception of Korean people that results in her negative feelings regarding being Korean. Therefore, high proficiency of HL does not mean a strong sense of ethnic identity, because the formation of ethnic identity is a complicated process, affected by various elements such as social environment, and attitudes toward the group.

To sum up, there are mainly two perspectives of the relationship between ethnic identity and HL development. On the one hand, students with a strong sense of ethnic identity tend to foster a positive attitude towards HL learning, thus they are integratively motivated to learn their HL and are more likely to achieve a high proficiency; on the other hand, the process of learning HL can help students construct an ethnic identity, however, high proficiency does not necessarily mean a strong ethnic identity. Thus, a sense of ethnic identity as an internal factor is correlated to one’s HL development.

**Ethnic stereotype and HL learning.** Another ethnic identity issue relevant to the current study is the impact of ethnic stereotypes, which pertains to external factors. Research revealed that positive stereotypes would facilitate HL maintenance, whereas negative stereotypes of one’s ethnic group might result in HL students’ low self-esteem and thus negatively affect HL learning (Brown, 2009; Lee, 2013). For Asians, ethnicity is often “visible” due to their racial appearance.
For example, if immigrants from Europe arrive in Canada, they easily disappear into white mainstream society because they have a similar skin color, which makes them appear like an “average” Canadian; but, for Chinese people, even those who have been in Canada for generations are always being identified as different. On the one hand, those students who regard their heritage ethnicity as a special characteristic seem to have a positive attitude toward their heritage language and are likely to retain it. For example, Ariel, a Korean girl involved in Lee’s (2013) research, said that her friends were curious about her heritage language, and they often asked her to teach some Korean, which made her feel special and funny. On the other hand, HL speakers who feel confused about the identity conflict and have a strong desire to integrate into an English-dominant society, may not develop a strong ethnic identity, therefore negatively influencing their attitude toward HL learning (Brown, 2009; Tse, 1998, 2000). For example, a participant in Lee’s (2013) study told a story about the time her mom came to school to pick her up and her mother called her by her Korean name. As a result of that, a few of her classmates teased her. She was so angry and asked her mother not to call her by her Korean name at school ever again. She even said that if she spoke Korean at school, her friends would leave her out. So she felt embarrassed about being Korean, and was unwilling to speak it as a result. From this story, it is the negative stereotype from outside that negatively impacts the girl’s ethnic identity, thus resulting in her negative attitude towards HL. The society surrounding the HL students, as an external factor, has a great influence on individuals’ feeling about their ethnic identity and their HL development. In order to help HL students improve their HL learning, a more accepting and harmonious environment needs to be created.
Conclusion. Generally, a strong sense of ethnic identity can facilitate the acquisition of one’s HL. Students with a high proficiency of HL are more likely to make better connections with their ethnic groups. However, we cannot guarantee that the high competence of HL can definitely lead to a positive ethnic identity formation for heritage learners. Some HL learners hold negative attitudes toward their ethnic culture and groups, but they can also reach high levels of language proficiency for pragmatic reasons.

Parental Attitudes and Engagement

Introduction. In this section, with respect to parents’ attitudes toward their HL, it can be concluded that there are mainly three views that parents hold of children’s HL maintenance: first, parents take their HL as a useful resource that is beneficial to children’s future development in academics and for their future career (Lee, 2013; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009), it reflects the external factors—school and employment market influences parents’ attitudes toward their HL. Second, parents take the language as an essential feature of children’s ethnic identity so that they cannot lose (Lao, 2004), which appears to be an internal factor; third, parents believe that HL can enhance the family cohesion between immigrant families (Hu & Whiteman, 2014; Park & Sarkar, 2007), and it can also be regarded as an internal factor—emotional connection to a family. In this section, several issues will be discussed, including what parents’ attitudes toward HL are, how parents’ attitudes influence children’s HL development, and what kind of involvement the parents adopt.

Family plays a crucial role for immigrant children to practice and maintain their HL. Because in the English-dominant society, family is the first place that children can build up an impression
of their HL. As Wu (2007) stated, regardless of whether the language is English or HL, parents’ influence is the most essential factor for children’s language development. He also indicated that children’s language proficiency varies due to parents’ attitudinal and behavioral support. That is to say, parents’ attitudes toward the HL and involvement in HL education may also have a significant influence on immigrant children’s HL development. According to studies reviewed, the parental support to children’s HL development can be categorized into two types: parents’ attitudes toward HL and parental involvement in HL education. In the following sections, three main attitudes held by most immigrant parents are discussed.

Parents regard heritage language as a resource. From the interviews of 18 Chinese immigrant families, Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) found that most parents in the study held “resource-oriented attitudes toward their HL” (p. 83). For example, Lulu’s mother, who was a participant involved in the research, said “If you (Lulu) go to college, or get a PhD, you are required to have two to three...that foreign language, you can use your Chinese” (p. 83). In other words, parents believe that being bilingual is beneficial to children’s future development, which is consistent with the external motivation. For instance, children can use their HL to get credits of foreign language requirements in school, or take advantage of their heritage language to get a job in international companies. With this perspective, parents certainly want their children to maintain the HL.

HL as a way to keep ethnic identity. Unlike the sections of ethnic identity above, in this paragraph, I focus on parents’ attitudes instead of students’ perceptions of ethnic identity. As for parents’ attitudes, a lot of research has reported that parents regard maintaining HL as an important
way to keep children’s ethnic identity. In a research of nine Korean parents’ attitudes toward HL in Montreal, Park and Sarkar (2007) found that all the parents expressed that maintaining Korean is an effective way to keep children’s ethnic identity. That is, these parents firmly believed that the maintenance of HL could benefit their children’s ethnic identity formation. Chinese immigrant parents also shared the same opinion. For example, parents in Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe’s (2009) study emphasized the importance of where they came from and they believe that “Chinese people cannot forget Chinese” (p. 84). According to these studies, parents take the HL as a key characteristic of their ethnic group.

**Heritage language serves to ensure family cohesion.** According to Luo and Wiseman (2000), “the different languages used or preferred by different generations may create a language barrier within an immigrant family. This language barrier may cause misunderstandings and conflicts between children and their parents” (pp. 320–321). Thus, the HL is regarded as a tool to keep family cohesion by immigrant parents, especially for those who do not have a high proficiency in English. For example, Lee (2013) conducted research on seven Korean parents’ perspectives and their actual HL practices, and the parents shared their opinions, “When they (children) grow up and something serious happens, if we can’t converse with them, it would be terrible” (p. 1584), “They would not understand me. I can’t speak English like them. That would be so tragic if parents and children can’t converse with each other” (p. 1584). In other words, immigrant parents view the HL as a tool so that they can communicate with their children, and this also reflects the purpose of enhancing family cohesion and is consistent with the instrumental sense of intrinsic motivation of HL learners. Because some of immigrant parents do not have a
high proficiency in English, they want to communicate with their children “deeply” not only on a routine level, but they also want to exchange emotion and inner feelings, and talk to their children beyond the surface (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). If children lose the HL, their parents cannot get to know them due to the language barrier. Maintaining the HL would be an effective way for them to connect with one another. Even if there are some parents with a high English proficiency, they still want their children to keep the HL, because of their desire to connect their children to their extended family, which can enhance family cohesion with other relatives, for example, my cousin’s parents.

Even if different research reflects on parents’ various wishes, all the preceding studies (Lee, 2013; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Park & Sarkar, 2007; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009) indicate that parents hold positive attitudes toward children’s HL development, which means that they want children to keep their HL.

When it comes to the correlation between parents’ attitude and children’s HL development, research indicated that the more parents value their HL, the more children are likely to cultivate positive attitudes and keep the HL. It reflects that children’s extrinsic motivation is influenced by their parents’ attitudes. Li (1999) conducted a study based on her experience as a heritage language mother in an American context. Li shared a story in which there was one time her daughter—Amy, asked questions loudly in Chinese at a supermarket, Li required Amy to be quite so Amy stopped talking. Later, Li found that Amy would no longer speak in Chinese in public. Actually, Li just asked Amy to be quiet instead of not speak Chinese altogether. But Amy thought her mother did not want her speak Chinese. When Li realized the situation, she explained to Amy and encouraged
her to keep speaking Chinese. Because of Li’s positive attitudes towards Chinese, she made an effort to develop Amy’s Chinese, for example, they often sang Chinese songs together, observed traditional Chinese festivals and visited Chinese friends. As a result, Amy also developed a positive attitude towards Chinese and was willing to learn it. Thus, if parents have positive view of their HL and engage in children’s HL learning actively, children are more likely to keep the HL.

Due to the individual differences and different relationships between parents and children, not all the children were influenced by their parents’ positive attitudes toward HL and many followed their parents’ advice about learning a language that is not used frequently. Luo and Wiseman (2000) conducted an investigation of 245 Chinese-American children, including first and second-generation immigrants, and they found that the correlation between parental attitudes and children’s HL maintenance would vary according to the parent-child relationship (external factor). For example, they divided participants into high and low parent-child cohesiveness groups. As for highly cohesive parent-child group, parents’ attitudes toward HL maintenance were significantly correlated with children’s attitudes, whereas in low parent-child cohesiveness groups, the correlation between these two variables was low. That is to say, when children are emotionally close to their parents, parents’ positive attitudes toward HL greatly influences children’s HL maintenance attitude; conversely, when children are not cohesive to their parents, the influence of the parents’ attitudes is not significant. That is mainly because of the fact that when children feel close to their parents, they tend to listen to their parents’ advice, otherwise, children do not obey their parents willingly and have less motivation to maintain their HL. Therefore, parent-child
relationships and parental attitudes also act as external factors that influence children’s HL maintenance.

Because of the strong parental emphasis on their HL, research indicated that parents also get involved in HL education to help children maintain it. There are mainly four ways that parents use, which are concluded from the studies reviewed. First, some parents use HL as the home language, for example, parents set an “only mother tongue at home” rule to force children to speak HL, creating a learning environment (Brown, 2011). Second, parents send children to HL schools and participate in heritage community activities, for example, some Chinese parents would bring children to attend activities arranged by a local Chinese community, or they would sign up for some out-of-school programs, or they would send their children to Chinese heritage schools (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Because parents believe that HL education in HL schools is systematic, children can learn the language more in a formal classroom context (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Third, parents choose to teach children at home by providing bilingual materials, such books, TV programs and computer games (Hu & Whiteman, 2014; Lao, 2004). Last, some of them bring children to visit their relatives in a home country, in order to enhance the relationship between their children and their extended family (Li, 1999).

All of these studies indicated that parents try various ways to maintain children’s HL. However, none of them gives evidence about the extent of parents’ involvement influences children’s HL proficiency, negatively or positively. They just state that parental engagement is essential to children’s HL development. I think that mainly because the measurement of HL proficiency is complex, it is difficult to measure the correlation between parental efforts and
children’s learning outcomes. The learning outcomes can be varied due to a lot of factors, such as family environment, parents’ proficiency in HL, or the time they spend on it, etc.

**Conclusion.** Studies on parental attitudes and engagement can be summarized in four aspects: parents play an essential role for immigrant children to practice and maintain the HL; and, if parents hold a positive view of their HL and culture, children are more likely to maintain their language; the majority of research reported that most parents have positive and supportive attitudes toward the HL and expect their children to maintain HL, because they regard HL as a resource that is beneficial to children’s future development; an essential feature of children’s cultural identity; and parents believe that HL can potentially enhance the family’s cohesion. As a result, we can also find that parental support in children’s HL development contributes to their motivation and ethnic identity formation, which indicates a relationship between these factors.

**Heritage Language School**

**Introduction.** In this section, the role of HL schools will be demonstrated from two aspects: first, HL teaching activities in schools are an external factor that influence children’s language acquisition; second, attending HL schools is beneficial to students’ formation of ethnic identity, thus it pertains to internal factors. As mentioned above, the majority of immigrant parents have positive attitudes toward their HL, and most of them want their children to keep the HL. As a result, Chinese HL schools are increasingly established in order to fulfill immigrants’ needs. On the one hand, parents are busy with working so that they do not have enough time to teach children themselves, on the other hand, HL schools can provide systematic teaching strategy and create Chinese-speaking environments outside the home (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Thus, HL
schools are becoming more and more popular among immigrant families. Moreover, with the increase in the number of Chinese people moving to Canada, the number of Chinese HL schools has increased over the years (Pu, 2012).

An HL school commonly refers to a community-based school, where one’s ethnic language and heritage culture are taught (Huang, 2012). An HL school is regarded as “an independently effective agency that can attain, or by virtue of its own efforts significantly foster and augment the attainment of language maintenance” (Fishman, 1980, p. 237). HL schools are usually established by ethnic group members and have class during the weekends or after school, in order to help HL learners get to know their cultural background and acquire linguistic skills related to their ethnic identity (Compton, 2001; Pu, 2012). So the term Saturday school also refers to heritage schools. Because HL schools are separated from the national education system, school administrators need to design the curriculum, collect textbooks and hire teachers by themselves (Pu, 2012).

The role of heritage language schools. According to Fishman (1980), an HL school has two main functions: one is to improve children’s HL development whereas the other is to offer a chance for children to learn about their ethnic identity. Through a qualitative research on a Japanese HL school in the United States, Shibata (2000) stated that “Saturday school is one of the most effective ways to teach children a heritage language, the role of Saturday school is not only to teach Japanese language and culture, but also to offer a place to use it through interaction with other co-ethnic children and adults” (p. 471). For example, a student from Shibata’s (2000) investigation, Ken, who initially did not have an interest in Japanese, started to like learning Japanese in HL school due to a three-month school he did. He gradually developed a positive
attitude towards his HL due to external motivation. It is consistent with Tse’s (2001) statement that when surrounding people are speaking the target language, students have a sense of “ethnic group membership,” which is important to their HL learning and they tend to learn it better. For example, in a Chinese HL school, because all the people speak Chinese, students would feel like they belong to the group and would, therefore, tend to learn it better. It also indicates that in order to promote students’ HL learning, an environment, in which all the people speak the target language, needs to be created.

Additionally, based on a study of 31 Japanese-American students in a Japanese HL school, Chinen and Tucker (2005) indicated that when students developed a positive attitude towards their HL school, they had a strong ethnic identity, which signifies the important role of HL school in fostering students’ ethnic identity. For example, the interview data of six of eight focus-group students showed that all these students expressed that it was interesting to get along with friends who were also Japanese at the HL school. Due to the similar ethnic background, students felt comfortable when learning with co-ethnic children. Thus, it suggests that HL schools should provide an environment and opportunities for HL students to socialize with children from the same ethnic group and therefore create an opportunity that will allow them to develop their ethnic identity. The sense of ethnic identity also developed students’ intrinsic motivation, which is particularly beneficial to their speaking skills (Kang & Kim, 2012). Phinney et al. (2001) also stated that the formation of ethnic identity is strongly influenced by social interaction with peers from the same ethnic group. In other word, HL schools’ role of cultivating ethnic identity can be explained like that in HL schools, students can interact with co-ethnic peers, which helps students
feel like they belong to the ethnic group and that, enhances their ethnic identity. As explained by Oriyama (2010), HL schools provide a place that belongs to one’s ethnicity, and “an opportunity for ethnic group membership” (p. 92).

Moreover, Lu (2001) also emphasized many other positive changes of internal dimensions after children attending Chinese HL school, for example, some parents in Lu’s study noticed that children even develop ethnic pride of being Chinese, which not only constructs their self-esteem, but increases their self-confidence in learning Chinese. The children felt proud of teaching their American friends how to speak Chinese, or showing them how to write Chinese characters. Lu (2001) also found that some children could combine American and Chinese cultures in daily life. A girl stated that, “she knows how to save money like a Chinese, but also knows how to spend money like an American” (p. 211).

All these studies demonstrated that HL schools are of significance in HL education, on the one hand, students are exposed to a Chinese-speaking environments and a systematic teaching approach would be provided. On the other hand, through their interaction with co-ethnic peers and adults, students can form a positive ethnic identity, which also indicates a relationship between HL schools and ethnic identity factors.

**Chinese heritage schools.** In addition to the role of HL schools, research on Chinese HL schools also revealed some challenges that they were facing, including weak teacher professionalism and low quality of teaching, and these problems influenced students’ HL development negatively as an external factor. Basically, there are three aspects: first, there is no standardized teacher requirement among Chinese HL schools, most of the Chinese teachers did not
have a certificate (Li, 2005). Thus, the majority of teachers in Chinese HL schools are not qualified to be teachers and have little professional experience and a lack of training in teaching Chinese to HL students in an English-dominant country. Wu et al. (2011) interviewed three teachers in a community-based Chinese school in southern Texas. The teachers expressed that because of the lack of training, sometimes they do not know how to improve their teaching because of students’ increasing language abilities. Second, most Chinese teachers have full-time jobs during the weekdays and just regard working in Chinese schools as an alternative job (Li, 2005; Wu et al., 2011). That is mainly the distinguishing feature of HL schools—having classes on weekends or after school so that Chinese HL schools do not need full-time teachers. Thus, Chinese teachers pay more attention to their full-time jobs instead of their teaching activities. Third, in Chinese classrooms, teachers tend to adopt teacher-centered and teacher-controlled approaches to teaching (Curdt-Christiansen, 2006), which may not suitable for students enrolled at a Western education system. Because most Chinese teachers get used to classroom discourses in China, and their experience of studying and teaching in China would influence their teaching practice. Thus, the conflict between Chinese and Western classroom discourses would be another challenge for Chinese HL schools.

In summary, the role of HL schools in HL development cannot be ignored. It creates an environment for immigrant children to learn HL and interact with peers from similar backgrounds. However, even if studies admitted the important role of HL schools in students’ HL development, there are also problems that Chinese HL schools need to deal with. Thus, in the following section, suggestions ought to be raised to improve HL schools development.
Concluding Discussion

In summary, this study reviewed literature pertaining to HL education from four parts: (a) the impact of motivation on HL leaning; (b) the relationship between ethnic identity and students’ HL development; (c) parents’ attitudes toward and engagement of children’s HL development; (d) the role of HL school in promoting ethnic identity and proficiency in HL. There are connections between internal and external factors. Firstly, both internal factors (e.g., intrinsic motivation and ethnic identity) and external factors (e.g., learning tasks, ethnic stereotypes, or parents’ engagement) affect students’ HL maintenance. Secondly, research indicates that external factors have an influence on internal factors, for example, as an external factor, ethnic stereotypes from the outside can impact the other internal factors—such as, ethnic identity. Also, the requirements from schools (external factors) contribute to students’ instrumental motivation (internal factor). Moreover, among the factors of motivation, ethnic identity, parental support and HL schools, there also exist close relationships. For example, students’ strong sense of ethnic identity contributes to their positive attitudes toward HL, thus improving the intrinsic motivation to learn the language (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997), which indicates the relationship between ethnic identity and intrinsic motivation. In addition, the more parents value their HL, the more children are likely to cultivate positive attitudes and remain motivated to learn the language (Li, 1999), that is, a relationship between parental attitudes and children’s intrinsic motivation. Lastly, HL school is not the only one way to improve children’s HL development, but also a place where children can learn about their ethnic identity (Fishman, 1980), which signifies a relation between HL schools and ethnic identity. Thus, it can be concluded that none of these factors is independent. They have
multidirectional relationships and influence each other. As a result, in order to help children maintain and enhance HL development, various types of support need to be provided. In other words, developing one’s HL not only requires individual working, but also the cooperation between parents, teachers, HL schools and the community.
Implications

Introduction

Several findings have significant practical implications for HL education and teaching strategies. In this part of the project, a list of suggestions on how to improve Chinese HL students’ learning at home and in a formal Chinese HL schools will be presented, drawing on findings from the review of research and partly based on my personal experience. When imagining an HL school, I use the example of the Chinese HL students and Chinese HL schools in Richmond because I have had direct experience with these. The children that I have encountered at these schools are bilingual to some extent and have a Chinese immigrant background.

The implications are presented in four main parts, following the order of the literature review. First, I discuss how to improve HL students’ motivation from the outside. Second, I give some suggestions for constructing a positive ethnic identity in the classroom such as promoting co-ethnic peer interactions. Third, I suggest a way to allow parents to create a supportive learning environment at home and a way to allow HL teachers to involve parents in children’s learning process. Last, in terms of Chinese HL schools, I raise some suggestions on how to improve teacher development and Chinese HL school development. Due to students’ various characteristics and needs, it is impossible to provide a framework that can fit all the Chinese HL class and all situations. My intention is to raise some strategies that might give Chinese HL teachers inspiration and ideas.

Consider Students’ Motivation in Chinese HL Teaching
Motivation is a crucial factor to influence students’ HL learning. Research has indicated that intrinsic motivation is of great significance to HL development (Yang, 2003), and knowing about heritage culture is an important aspect of students’ integrative sense of intrinsic motivation to learn their HL (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Cho, Cho & Tse, 1997). Hence, it is necessary to take students’ desire to learn about heritage culture into account and make the curriculum in accordance with their motivation. Also, as Cho and Krashen (1998) stated, as a multicultural experience, HL learning provides learners an opportunity to get to know culture difference and similarities of ethnic groups. Thus, including cultural components in the curriculum would be an effective way to fulfill students’ needs and improve their HL development. Here, I offer some specific suggestions in the classroom context.

Various resources related to Chinese culture should be adopted in teaching strategies. For example, the teacher can apply Chinese traditional stories and fairy tales as teaching materials, which is not only an important aspect of the culture, but also leads to interesting learning experience. Instead of giving general instruction, I created a specific classroom context and provided explicit steps on how to design a lesson with cultural elements.

Imagine a classroom context in a Chinese HL school in Richmond where Rachel is a Chinese teacher. She is going to teach students some Chinese traditional stories, in order to help students know more about Chinese culture. Today, she will tell the story of the Monkey King, who is the best-known legend character in China. Almost everyone knows his story. Before the class, Rachel prepares some pictures of main characters in the story such as Tripitaka, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing. At the beginning of the class, Rachel asks the students to hold a little discussion and share
some of the Chinese stories they already know. There must have been someone who mentioned the Monkey King. So, Rachel then led the class to today’s topic. But, firstly, she teaches students how to write the Monkey King’s name in Chinese. After that, she starts to introduce some background information. The Monkey King is a fictitious character that comes from a classical novel of Chinese literature—Journey to the West. During her lesson, Rachel speaks mainly in Chinese, but when students have confusion, she explains it with some English. And Rachel uses the pictures she prepared to show them each character in the story. After telling the story, Rachel writes all the keywords in Pinyin, which is the learning task of the lesson. She teaches the meaning, the pronunciation and how to make sentences with these words. In order to assess the students’ learning, she asks some students to write these characters on the blackboard. After that, Rachel invites students to hold a discussion and talk about the main characters, plot and what they have learned from the story to make sure students understand the whole story. Because in Journey to West, there are more than 80 stories of the Monkey King, Rachel gives students homework at the end of the lesson—to collect a different story of the Monkey King through searching online, reading the book or asking their parents. For the next class, the students need to bring their stories and share them with their classmates, saying them in Chinese.

Teaching Chinese through traditional stories, students can not only learn about the language, but they can get to know Chinese culture beyond textbooks, which is aligned with their motivation and needs. For example, in the Monkey King’s story, the most powerful character is Buddha, which reflects the most popular religion in China, Buddhism.
In addition to knowing about their heritage culture, the desire to communicate with family, friends and people from their ethnic group also contributes to students’ intrinsic motivation (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Cho, Cho & Tse, 1997). As a result, it suggests that the teacher should pay more attention to students’ communication skills in their HL learning. For example, in the first or second class, the teacher should teach students how to say a greeting in Chinese such as “Ni Hao” (Hello), “Zui Jin Hao Ma” (How are you), “Xie Xie” (Thanks) etc. And then, the teacher can have two students as a group, practicing greetings with each other. At the same time, the teacher should act as a facilitator to provide help. In Richmond, even if some students are to some extent bilingual and already have prior knowledge in Chinese, the teachers teach these basic greetings, because some of them do not have accurate pronunciation or cannot read and write these characters. Gradually, the teacher can also set various scenes and topics to teach some simple dialogs according to students’ interest. For instance, the teacher can have students imagine a scene at a Chinese theater in China, and create two roles—the customer and the ticket seller. The teacher should present a dialog between these two people and teach students how to ask the movie show times, how to buy a ticket, and so on. After the teacher’s presentation, students are encouraged to role-play the dialog in groups. Through these activities, students are provided with opportunities to practice their communication skills with the teacher’s help. When they go back home, they can use what they learned in class to communicate with their parents or relatives. If students are aware of the efficacy of learning HL, they will attain a sense of achievement and therefore feel motivated to learn.
Additionally, unexpected difficulties in Chinese learning contexts may decrease students’ intrinsic motivation (Wen, 1997). Since acquiring a language requires long-term effort, if learners lose self-confidence and feel anxious during the learning process, it would be more difficult to keep learning. Moreover, because of the very different language systems, English-dominant students may encounter a lot of difficulties during learning Chinese. If students cannot get some extent of the sense of achievement when they are learning it, they may become frustrated and develop negative reactions to the language. To decrease students’ anxiety and improve their confidence in the learning process, teachers can set attainable sub-goals for students so that they can achieve things gradually in order to build up a sense of accomplishment. First, at the beginning, the teacher can set some easy goals for students such as learning 50 Chinese characters every week, including how to read, write and know the meaning. Second, the teacher should assess students’ learning outcomes and adjust the task according to students’ abilities. For example, before the class, the teacher can choose twenty out of the fifty characters randomly and have students write them down according to the teacher’s pronunciation. Then, the teacher can collect students’ work and mark it. According to the students’ performance, the teacher can give them three stars, two stars, or one star.

After each semester, the teacher can give some prizes according to the student’s number of stars. After marking, the teacher should adjust the task according to the students’ feedback. If 80% of the students can complete the task of learning 50 characters per week, it can be continued. Otherwise, the teacher should make the task easier to fulfill students’ sense of accomplishment.
For example, a teacher at an HL school gave students homework after each week’s class, he usually required students to submit a composition in Chinese each week. It basically consisted of a recording of what happened during the week. The teacher said that most of the students could complete the task, even if they had not learned some of the characters, students used Pinyin instead. As for the students who couldn’t finish, he would give them some extra tutoring after class. And those who did good job had a chance to read his or her composition in front of the whole class, which is regarded as an honor by students. They felt the pride of being selected to read their composition. Thus, if students can acquire a sense of accomplishment during their learning process once in a while, they feel more motivated to continue learning.

**Ethnic Identity Construction**

When students have strong sense of ethnic identity, they are more likely to achieve a high level of HL proficiency (Kang & Kim, 2012). Thus, constructing learners’ ethnic identity is of great importance in HL development. Research indicates that interactions with peers from the same ethnic group are beneficial to ethnic identity construction (Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001). That is, interacting with peers of the same ethnicity can help students feel like they belong to the ethnic group, according to Oriyama (2010), group membership is one of the influential factors in sharping one’s ethnic identity.

In the Chinese HL classroom, the teacher can create more opportunities for students to interact with one another. For example, teachers can organize more group activities among peers. Firstly, the teacher can get students into groups of two, and have students to talk about their weekends. During their discussions, students are advised to record the activities with pictures and...
words, and the teacher can walk around the classroom in case some students need help. Then, the teacher has students share their notes. And, the teacher can choose several activities to get more details. In this activity, students practice communication skills and exchange information with their classmates. In addition, teacher can have students choose topics related to the aspects of Chinese culture they are interested in, and encourage them to do research in groups. The following week, each group needs to present their findings. Or, the teacher could play a Chinese movie in class and, after that, have students interview classmates about their opinions and what they have learned.

Through such activities, students have more opportunities to interact with their peers instead of interacting with only the teacher. Students who share the same background can thereby connect with each other more effectively. When they talk about culture-related topics, they can also build up a deeper understanding of their heritage culture and, in turn, facilitate their HL learning. Moreover, friendships between students can also be enhanced. From my observations in Dr. C’s HL class, I found that students were close to each other and played together during the breaks. Dr. C prepared Chinese storybooks, chess games, card games and comic books for them. Some of them shared the books, whereas others played chess and other games.

Coming to school provides opportunities for parents to connect as well. Dr. C told me that when students become close friends, even their parents get to know each other and become friends. Some parents bring their children and socialize outside of school. Chinese school becomes the place where Chinese people can socialize with each other and enhance children’s ethnic identity. This is mainly because immigrant parents regard their HL as an effective way to keep children’s
ethnic identity (Park and Sarkar, 2007), and they tend to create more opportunities for their children to use HL and interact with other peers.

Collaborative learning approaches could also be adopted in Chinese HL classrooms to increase peer interaction. For example, those students with a higher language proficiency could act as mentors for the other students. Communicating within a group would provide each student more chances to actively practice the language and exchange information with peers. Imaging that there are 20 students in one class, the teacher divides the class into 5 groups and selects 5 students with better performance to serve as each group’s mentors. Then the teacher can give them several questions to discuss or they can choose the topic they are interested in. This type of group work is similar to a brainstorming activity, where students would use vocabulary and sentences they learned in class. Students should express their own feelings. During the process, students can acquire help from mentors. And mentors can consolidate their learning by teaching and correcting others.

According to Fishman (2001), language maintenance “depends in large part on the communities where the languages are spoken. The work of policymakers and educators will have little impact unless it is matched by the community’s commitment to make the language a vital part of life” (p. 4). It indicates that HL schools need to cooperate with local communities to improve HL development. Organizing activities with Chinese communities and churches can foster HL students’ perception of ethnic identity membership. Because the majority of members of these communities are native Chinese speakers, they can provide HL children with the opportunity to speak Chinese and feel like they belong to their ethnic group. It also fulfills HL students’ desire to
integrate into their community (Carreira & Kagan, 2011) and benefit their HL learning. Thus, Chinese HL schools should cooperate with local Chinese communities in order to offer more chances for students to interact with native speakers.

There are various Chinese communities in Richmond including Chinese dance groups, Chinese painting group and Chinese calligraphy, etc. HL schools can invite these groups to hold various workshops for students to learn more about Chinese art forms and lifestyles. For example, in Richmond, the City Center and Community Center has Chinese art classes in calligraphy. The teacher could cooperate with the class to hold an activity of “Chinese calligraphy,” inviting the class to teach Chinese students how to write Chinese characters with traditional tools such as with a brush and ink. The teacher should find pertinent information on the website and send an email to the community supervisors, talking about organizing an activity of Chinese calligraphy at school (http://www.richmond.ca/parksrec/centres/city/cityctr.htm). Before the activity, students could prepare questions in Chinese to ask each artist. During the activity, each community member pair with a student, of course, should introduce themselves to one another. The instruction could be conducted in Chinese. If necessary, the teacher could be a facilitator to provide some English support. After the activity, students could present their work and talk about their feelings. Through the activity, students get the chance to be exposed to their HL and culture, with the support of native Chinese speakers, which would be beneficial to their group membership and it would foster positive attitudes toward the ethnic group, which would also contribute to their intrinsic motivation for their HL learning.
Research also indicates that a negative ethnic stereotype negatively influences children’s ethnic identity, and therefore influences their HL learning. Thus, teachers should create a harmonious atmosphere in order to cultivate ethnic pride and decrease the impact of negative ethnic stereotypes outside of school. In the Chinese classroom, the teacher should use Chinese most of the time and require students to speak Chinese as much as they can. Only when students cannot understand, should the teacher explain in English. Also, the teacher could demonstrate the strength of China in order to cultivate learners’ positive perspectives on their ethnicity. For instance, during my teaching practice, I told students that in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, China got first place among 204 countries in the medal tally. They were excited and some of them even asked me to play the competition videos. I believe that those positive aspects of the country seemed to help the children build their self-esteem and pride, which could encourage the children to keep their ethnic identity and have a positive attitude towards their HL even in the dominant culture.

**Create Supportive Learning Environment in Family Context**

Living in an English-dominant society, home becomes the place where children develop their original perception of heritage language. In the literature review, research indicates that what parents think of their HL and what parents do influences children’s HL maintenance greatly. As Li (1999) suggested, in order to help immigrant children keep their HL, parents should provide supportive interactions with children at home by using their HL. However, due to various immigrant backgrounds, parents have different levels of Chinese proficiency. Therefore, I would divide parents into two categories: Chinese-dominant and English-dominant parents, and provide
different suggestions. As for Chinese-dominant parents, they should take Chinese as the home language in order to provide a Chinese-speaking environment for their children. Parents can set “Chinese Only Rules” at home, that is, when children speak Chinese at home, they could get positive reactions such as praise, encouragement, or even prizes. Alternatively, if children break the rules, parents could give them a gentle warning or a little punishment such as not giving them candy, which could be regarded as external factors that influence children’s extrinsic motivation to speak Chinese. Certainly, if children cannot understand some Chinese phrases or sentences, parents can use English as a facilitator. The rule should not be fixed but it ought to be flexible. For instance, in Zhang and Slaughter’s (2009) research, Lulu’s father provided an example of when he required Lulu to speak Chinese at home—sometimes Lulu’s father squeezed the toothpaste and forgot to put the lid back on. Lulu then wrote a note to her dad in English. However, her dad wrote back in Chinese: “If you write a note in Chinese, I will follow your advice. If you don’t, I won’t follow [it]” (p. 87). Lulu’s mother also expressed that speaking Chinese at home is an effective way to instill HL in her child.

In addition, Chinese-dominant parents could also read interesting Chinese storybooks to children, and provide Chinese reading materials at home such as newspapers and magazines. Parents can bring these materials from China or ask friends to bring some, moreover, in Richmond, there are many Chinese resources available. Some supermarkets provide free Chinese newspapers each week, e.g., PriceSmart Foods or T & T Supermarket. There is also a Chinese bookstore on the second floor of Aberdeen Center that sells Chinese or bilingual books. By using Chinese reading materials, parents can set a fixed time of “reading story” twice a week. Interesting reading
materials can make learning processes more fun. I was a volunteer at a Chinese language center in Richmond for a few weeks. Chinese class usually ends at 11:30 am, but sometimes the teacher finishes earlier. Thus, I would stay with these kids and wait for their parents. During that time, the teacher suggested that I read some Chinese stories. At first, I did not expect children to be interested in these stories, however, when I was reading the stories to them in Chinese, they were listening to me very attentively. And when I came across strange phrases that they didn’t know, I would explain them to the students with simple words in Chinese or with some English. Several children even asked their parents to read more stories to them. Thus, I believe that Chinese parents could apply this approach at home to cultivate children’s interest and improve their Chinese learning.

As for English-dominant parents, because of their limited Chinese proficiency, they should bring children to attend family activities to increase children’s communication with their grandparents or other Chinese relatives who are native Chinese speakers. Interaction with extended family members not only enhances family cohesion, but also can promote children’s extrinsic motivation. What is more, they can provide Chinese learning materials that children can learn by themselves, for instance, Chinese-English bilingual books, Chinese TV programs and movies. For example, Kung Fu Panda series movies are useful resource for children to learn Chinese (Figure 1). This series contains a lot of Chinese elements such as Chinese Kung Fu, Chinese traditional buildings and festivals. The picture is a screen shot of the bilingual version of Kung Fu Panda, which includes both English and Chinese subtitles. When watching the movie, children can compare the meanings between English and Chinese with standardized Chinese dub.
Parents can download bilingual movies from various websites at a low cost, e.g., Youku (http://www.youku.com), iQIYI (http://www.iqiyi.com).

Figure 1. Screen print from the Kung Fu Panda series

Additionally, the teacher could make an effort to engage parents in the children’s Chinese learning in order to increase supportive interaction at home. For example, the teacher could invite students to draw a family tree after school with their parents, through which students would form a better understanding of their immediate and extended family, which would also enhance the cohesion with extended family (Luo & Wiseman, 2000). The teacher should provide an example of what a family tree looks like, and a requirement list that children can show their parents. The requirements include: first, telling your children the different notions of a family in Chinese. For example, in Canada, both the mother’s parents and the father’s parents are grandparents. However, in Chinese, they are different. We usually call the mother’s parents “Wai Gong” and “Wai Po”, and the father’s parents “Ye Ye” and “Nai Nai”. In addition to learning this vocabulary, students could
also get to know the family structure in Chinese culture. Advice to parents: let your children draw a family tree by themselves, including the names and birthplaces of parents and siblings. Third, help children draw an extended family tree, including the names and birthplaces of grandparents and parents’ siblings. Lastly, explain the relationships among your extended family and tell your children the story of your family’s migration and explain where your family came from. Through this activity, parents can get involved in children’s HL learning and provide some help at home.

Almost all the parents express positive attitudes towards their children’s HL development. However, they tend not to feel confident about teaching them at home, which is one of the main reasons they send their children to HL schools. Thus, more opportunities should be provided for parents to communicate with Chinese teachers in order to instruct parents how to teach Chinese at home. I suggest that the teacher organize regular parent meetings. At the meeting, the teacher should report what they have learned during this month in order to help the parents know more about their children’s learning process. Then, the teacher could show the parents how to collect valuable Chinese materials, for example, there is a Chinese TV program called Happy Chinese available on CCTV website (http://tv.cctv.com/lm/klhy/), which is updated once a week and talks about one specific topic at a time with standard Chinese pronunciation. The program is interesting and suitable for children to learn at home.

What’s more, the school could also offer parents various types of Chinese reading materials. And, at the next meeting, parents could communicate with the teacher about their children’s Chinese learning. In China, regular parents meetings are an effective ways for teachers to contact and cooperate with parents to improve children’s learning. It could be adopted in children’s HL
learning as well. Additionally, Liu (2010) suggested that it would be useful to provide Chinese programs for parents, especially for those for whom English is their first language. For example, the Key Language Chinese Learning Center in Richmond (http://keylanguagetraining.com), where I have volunteered, sometimes provides Chinese programs for parents.

**Improve Teaching in Heritage Language Schools**

Research indicates that an HL school not only improves children’s HL development, but can also enhance their ethnic identity (Fishman, 1980; Shibata, 2000). However, some researchers have also found that weak teacher professionalism and low-quality teaching in Chinese HL schools were problems (Li, 2005; Wu et al., 2011). Thus, to improve students HL development, Chinese HL schools should deal with these problem. Here, I provide some suggestions.

Suggested by Wen (2001), teacher-centered lectures are the most widely adopted teaching approach in Chinese classes and that should be shifted to a student-centered context. That is to say, Chinese teachers have to realize the difference between teaching in China and teaching in Canada, because most Chinese teachers in Canada have gotten used to traditional Chinese teaching approaches—teacher-centered practices. However, in Canada, schooling tends to be more creative and student-centered. Thus, when they apply previous teaching experience to western classrooms, student-centered learning might not be accommodated. In a case study of classroom discourse in the Zhonguo Saturday School (Montreal, Quebec), Curdt-Christiansen (2006) found that the Chinese teachers got used to a teacher-centered methodology. They were the most authoritative person in the class and they controlled everything in the classroom. Because most of the teachers received education and training when they were in China, their previous experience of being
teachers and students also affected their teaching style. There is no doubt that the traditional way of teaching Chinese can be problematic for students who have already engaged in western classroom discourses. In order to address the conflict between Chinese traditional teaching approaches and western classroom discourses, teachers need to adapt more effectively to the western classroom and try to find a balance between these two approaches.

From my observation of Zhonghua Chinese School, I found that Dr. C’s teaching approach is a good example of combining these two styles together. For instance, at the beginning of the class, when Dr. C said “Shang Ke” (Class begins), all the students need to stand up and bow, saying “Zao Shang Hao” (Good morning teacher). It is a traditional Chinese way for students to show respect to their teachers. When I was in China, from elementary school to high school, we had to do this before each class. During the class, Dr. C required students to sit in rows and face the blackboard, and he did not allow students talk to each other when he was talking. That reminds me of the rules in Chinese classrooms. In other aspects, Dr. C acted like a Canadian teacher. In the teaching process, he taught characters through students’ lived experiences, and made sentences by telling stories and he also organized group discussions and encouraged students to express their own voice. In addition, he required students to finish their homework after each class, which seems like a traditional teaching way in China. However, he gave students choices so that they could choose the homework they liked, more like a western way. From my observation of two classes, I found that Dr. C’s teaching approach taught Chinese effectively and efficiently. For example, most students could follow the teacher’s pace and could acquire the meaning and pronunciation of a
character in a short time, but the teacher also encouraged the students to get involved in classroom activities.

Moreover, participating in Chinese teaching conferences and workshops can help Chinese teachers obtain the latest educational information and improve their teaching quality. For example, there is an organization called the Centre for Research in Chinese Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia that has done a lot of research on Chinese as an HL in Canada (http://crclle.lled.educ.ubc.ca). Chinese teachers can find information of the Centre for Research in Chinese Language and Literacy Education on UBC’s website and, once they have conferences or lectures, they will release a newsletter on their page. The scholars often hold related lectures. Other organizations run by Chinese scholars also provide information on some conferences on Chinese HL teaching, such as The Chinese Teacher’s Association of Canada (http://www.clta-ca.org) and The Canadian Teaching Chinese as a Second Language Association (http://www.canadiantcslassociation.ca). There is also a website called Vansky (http://www.vansky.com/index.html), which is the most popular online discussion forum among Chinese immigrants in Vancouver. It has a section on lectures and educational activities. Various educational institutes post information on it. Teachers can find useful information online.

As Liu (2010) suggested, cooperation between HL schools and local Confucius institutes funded by the Chinese government are also an effective way to improve teacher development. Confucius institutes are responsible for spreading Chinese culture, teaching Chinese in foreign countries and training Chinese teachers. Until now, there have been more than 500 Confucius institutes established among 134 countries, including 10 in Canada. The one located in Vancouver
is operated along with the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) (http://bcit.ca.chinesecio.com). If Chinese schools in Richmond can operate closely with the Confucius Institute at BCIT, teachers could receive professional training systematically. Also, Confucius institutes periodically invite some Chinese experts from China to hold lecture or training classes. These activities can bring new thoughts for Chinese teachers. Those teachers who attended professional conferences in Wu et al.’s (2011) study stated, “Attending a conference enhances my professional identity. I have attended a conference provided by the Chinese school. I learned a lot and tried to implement what I learned in class. I found that students had more motivation to learn” (p. 51). The other teacher suggested, “Training gives you new information and better ways to teach these kids” (p. 51). Hence, teachers are encouraged to share their teaching experiences and exchange their teaching ideas with other educators or scholars at the conferences. By doing so, language teachers will gain a global perspective on literacy and language education.
Conclusion and Reflection

In the preceding section, I highlighted four possible implications that arose from the review of the literature on heritage language. These implications include: (a) how to take students’ motivation into account in HL teaching; (b) how to construct ethnic identity; (c) how to create a supportive learning environment; and (d) how to improve the HL schools’ development. Teachers are encouraged to include cultural components in the syllabus, create a Chinese-speaking environment in classroom, set attainable goals to promote students’ self-confidence and decrease anxiety by providing regularly suitable instruction, and improve their own development by attending conferences and professional training. Parents also have a responsibility to teach children at home, using heritage language as the home language, by enhancing the connection between children and Chinese relatives, and arranging extra-curricular activities. In terms of heritage language schools, they can arrange various cultural activities, and cooperate with local communities and Confucius Institutes. Therefore, the development of Chinese heritage language education is not only the teachers’ job but it also refers to the cooperation of teachers, parents and heritage language schools.

When I reflect on this study, I have two thoughts that come into my mind. Firstly, it provokes a lot of thinking of my future teaching strategies in Chinese. As a Chinese teacher in the future, I will put students’ motivation as a priority, because it decides their attitudes and behavior in learning. I do not have the experience of being an HL student, but I have learned English as a foreign language for more than ten years. When I was in elementary school, Harry Potter was the main reason for me to learn English. I liked the Harry Potter’s story very much. Even though I had
read the Chinese translation many times, I wanted to read the original in English to know more about Harry’s world. It is the story of Harry Potter that fostered my interest in English. This accounts for what I now know to have been my intrinsic motivation to learn English. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, I listened to my teacher carefully and asked her a lot of questions after class. I was extrinsically motivated to learn English after attending an English speech competition in Grade Six, because I got second place, which gave me a strong sense of achievement. Moreover, my English teacher in elementary school always created an encouraging environment in class with diverse activities and interesting reading materials. It really motivated me to learn English to the point that it became my favorite subject. However, when I entered secondary school, things started to change. My new English teacher only focused on the requirements of examinations and, as a result, she required that we memorize a lot of vocabulary and grammar each day. If we could not get a high score in exams, we would be punished—write English words many times. Since then, I gradually lost interest in English because of the external factor. This experience will always remind me of the importance of motivation.

Second, in the course of this project, I started to think about the reason why my cousin Lily has developed a negative attitude towards her HL. As far as I am concerned, her parents’ attitudes and their lack of engagement are the most influential elements that are affecting my cousin. Since she was born, her parents spoke to her mainly in English. I did not ask her why, but I assumed that her parents wanted Lily to integrate into the English-dominant society as soon as possible. Moreover, her parents rarely took Lily back to China. Lily, therefore, did not have the opportunity to develop an emotional relationship with her grandparents, uncles, or other relatives. When Lily’s
parents realized the importance of their heritage language, it was too late. Even though they sent Lily to Chinese school, she just did not want to learn the language. Because her parents are fluent in English, she does not want to go back China. She does not have Chinese friends, and she does not even care about her other relatives. Based on my cousin’s experience, I strongly believe in the importance of parents’ participation in children’s language learning. In China, it is common to think of parents as children’s first teachers. It is the parents’ ignorance of Chinese that results in Lily’s HL loss. If Lily’s parents had spoken to her in Chinese since she was young, and told her more about her Chinese culture and her family, Lily might have fostered a more positive attitude towards her HL and her ethnic identity. It seems that the girl Ruby that appeared in the review (Brown, 2009) and Lily are in similar situations. If she were living surrounded by Korean families and people, she might develop a more positive view of Korean people and her Korean identity. Therefore, the influence of external factors cannot be ignored in children’s development.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations

The literature review mainly focuses on the factors that influence HL learning, whereas it does not raise questions regarding the specific skills, such as how to improve students’ literacy skills. Moreover, the findings emphasized suggestions for teachers and parents, which did not give suggestions for learners. One of the limitations of this research exists in the scope of the literature reviewed. Because the limited search path, I did not find enough research on Chinese HL development. When I expanded the span of the literature scope, covering various heritage languages and not only specifically focusing on Chinese HL, I arrived at the body presented here.

Most of the suggestions for implications are based on my personal experience and my observations of the classes. However, personal experience is by definition subjective, and observation of several classes cannot cover the situation in teaching practice. Additionally, there are many kinds of HL schools in Richmond and Vancouver. Due to limited resources, however, the implications only focus on one kind of formal classroom discourse in Richmond, which may not be suitable for various classes.

Suggestions for Future Research

As noted in the section devoted to HL schools, I found that community-based Chinese schools encounter many challenges. For example, they do not have standardized teaching materials, and there are no unified requirements for Chinese teachers. Thus, future research on HL education is needed to further investigate the challenges HL schools are facing in North America and to explore how to deal with these problems.
As for the implications, I indicate that heritage school plays an important role for children’s development of an ethnic identity. The need for a more in-depth study on HL learning experience in Chinese schools, such as how students interact with their teachers and peers, and what the structures of the classes are, are significant topics for future research. Furthermore, a comparison between heritage schools and mainstream schools in terms of keeping heritage language for students would also be an interesting topic to explore. Finally, teachers might want to cooperate with parents and local communities to improve heritage language teaching. Future research can keep investigating how these factors can work together effectively.
Reference


