



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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**“Supporting Children’s Chinese Heritage Language Maintenance in the  
Home: A Case Study of One Chinese Canadian Immigrant Family”**

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Tuesday, December 15, 2015  
12:30pm  
MacLaurin Building  
Room A341

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Ruth Ann Tobin, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Li-Shih Huang, Department of Linguistics, UVic (Outside Member)

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Dr. Pablo Restrepo-Gautier, Department of Hispanic & Italian Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

This dissertation presents findings from a three-month qualitative descriptive case study that examines the home literacy practices employed in maintaining a heritage language by a Chinese immigrant family living in a mid-sized city in western Canada. Influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as well as the foundational concepts of *d/Discourse*, *diglossia*, *funds of knowledge*, and *culturally responsive teaching*, the research questions guiding the study were: (1) What activities do Chinese parents use in the home to maintain and develop their children's Mandarin home language? (2) How do children respond to these activities? (3) What beliefs and attitudes do the parents and children hold in relation to heritage language maintenance (HLM)?

Most of the literature on HLM has focused primarily on post-secondary learners, children in metropolitan areas, or heritage language schools and communities, whereas this research is an in-depth examination of home literacy environment provided by immigrant parents to support their children's HL, with limited community resources. An additional factor in this particular case was that both children in this family were enrolled in a French Immersion program.

Data were collected through interviews, home observations, video recordings selected by and submitted by the parents of their HL activities, semi-structured interviews of individual members of the family, and children's work samples. All of which were analyzed using NVivo 10 software through inductive analysis. Four themes emerged from the study: (a) parents' intentional provision of a rich and robust HLE; (b) a range of children's responses to Chinese, English, and French literacy activities in the home; (c) parental perspectives on children's learning; (d) parents' expectations and attitudes towards learning Chinese.

One significant finding of the study was that the parents drew extensively on their own funds of knowledge in interacting with their children, and drew on learning practices from both Western and Eastern traditions. One powerful activity that the family used was an extended read-aloud practice in which the mother made innovative use of the same texts/resources in different languages, along with exploratory talk that engaged the children. Various homework practices elicited a mixture of responses, ranging from enthusiastic involvement to mild engagement to frustration. The practices were related to the parents' beliefs about how language learning occurs. Two other findings were that (a) the parents faced significant challenges in supporting their children's HLM in a diglossia society, which offered few opportunities to use Chinese at a high cognitive level; and (b) the parents demonstrated strong impact beliefs and integrative language attitudes.