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Japanese-American Heritage/Community Language Learner Reflections:
Key Themes for Informing Bicultural Student Educational Experience

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Mary Ann Triest

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Japanese-American Heritage/Community Language Learner Reflections:
Key Themes for Informing Bicultural Student Educational Experience

by

Mary Ann Triest

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Kathryn M. Anderson, Co-Chair

Professor Robert A. Rhoads, Co-Chair

The purpose of this study was to learn about the bicultural educational experiences of Japanese heritage and community language learners, and how they felt their heritage language learning influenced their ethnic identity development. Utilizing the power of reflective practices, current students and alumni of Japanese heritage schools were interviewed to understand their perceptions of their experiences. From an educational leadership standpoint, data that shows the effectiveness of heritage language pipeline/articulation agreements could help fund more heritage language schools as well as provide valuable information to language program coordinators and lifetime learning programs.

Ethnic identity is a major factor in heritage language development and is often viewed through a social and cultural lens (Chinen & Tucker, 2005a; Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004; He,

2014; Nunn, 2005; Shin, 2005). When researching heritage language learning, ethnic identity is examined alongside attitude, motivation, and self-identity.

Interviews with 14 learners and six teachers were completed. The results of the 20 semi-structured narrative interviews and 10 post-interview reflection essays written by learners will be shared. One learner also submitted the critical thematic autobiography they wrote in their Japanese heritage language class in university.

There were seven overarching themes that emerged from conducting interviews with learners and teachers, and reading learners' post-interview reflections. The Japanese heritage language learners and teachers both agreed on the following points. First, there are significant differences between how learners of Japanese as a heritage language and learners of Japanese as a foreign language learn Japanese, and these learners have very different needs. Second, learners gain a deeper understanding of their ethnic identity through attending Japanese heritage school in K-12 and during their higher education. Third, heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status. Fourth, family life impacts the motivation of heritage language learners to study Japanese. Fifth, learners' ability to balance both Japanese heritage school and U.S. local schoolwork impacts their motivation. This then impacts their ability to continue in Japanese heritage school. Sixth, it is challenging to attain a high enough literacy and Japanese speaking ability to use Japanese in a career. Seven, intergenerational language transfer was important to the learners.

The dissertation of Mary Ann Triest is approved.

Mark P. Hansen

Teresa L. McCarty

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Robert A. Rhoads, Co-Chair

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2018

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Hatsuko M. Triest. As a Japanese immigrant to this country, she decided to stay in the U.S. after losing her husband as a young woman, and raised and supported my two brothers, Karl, Freddy, and I so that we could have the American dream. She gave us the gift of learning about our Japanese-American and Jewish heritage and helped us feel proud of our cultural heritage. She inspires me to be cautiously optimistic, hopeful, and grateful for each day, and I am forever thankful for everything she has done for me.

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**JAPANESE-AMERICAN HERITAGE/COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNER
REFLECTIONS: KEY THEMES FOR INFORMING BICULTURAL STUDENT
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Although I've grown up in this country and am educated in this country, a large part of my way of looking at the world, my artistic approach; is Japanese. Because I was brought up by Japanese parents, speaking in Japanese inside a Japanese home. And so I think I've always looked at the world partly through my parents' eyes, as we all do.

–Kazuo Ishiguro, Nobel Prize in Literature winner, 2017

A seminal conference was held at the University of California, Los Angeles, on September 21-23, 2003, The Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference. Many founding scholars of this field, including Terence Wiley and Olga Kagan were members of the steering committee and working panel, and “prominently shaped broad research areas in heritage language education and defined key research questions that were political, sociological, psychological or linguistic in nature” (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], 2000, p. 7).

Scholars have given several definitions of heritage and community languages. “As with any attempt to apply a single label to a complex situation, defining heritage language is problematic” (Wiley, 2014a, p. 19). A United States-based definition of a heritage language is that heritage refers both to those who have some proficiency in a community or ancestral language...and to those who desire to learn one, including those who speak only English (Wiley, 2014a). Broad and narrow definitions used for pedagogical considerations are further explored in the literature review. It is also inclusive of learners from any area of interest or expertise; ranging from those who have a beginning interest in exploring a language of their ancestors or heritage to

those who grew up immersed in and are fully fluent speakers and who have a high literacy level. The goal in using an inclusive definition is to allow any language learner to find support and resources within their interest and affiliation with a language community. The notion of heritage language is socio-cultural as it is defined in terms of a group who speak it (He, 2014). Heritage mother tongues is the notion of a shared identity of mother tongue-ness and how language connects people to a certain place or lineage (McCarty, 2008). “Mother tongue denotes a deep, abiding, even cord-like connection between language and identity” (p. 202). While this idea of mother tongue-ness is referenced in connection with Indigenous languages and communities, this definition can apply widely across languages in the spirit of an inclusive definition of heritage language learning. In addition, if heritage languages are thought of as a mother tongue, any stigma that connects heritage languages as something of the past and not of value in the present or future can be eliminated.

Providing extensive opportunities in K-12 and beyond for heritage language and culture education helps create a multilingual population of students with stronger self-concept and pride in their heritage(s). The development of heritage language is positively correlated with better English skills, greater self-esteem, stronger ethnic identity and creating stronger familial ties (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011). Language learning is a pathway for understanding cultures for all learners and is especially the case for learners when they study the language of their heritage (National Heritage Language Resource Center [NHLRC], 2016).

As a past Japanese heritage/community language learner myself, this study focused on the reflections of Japanese heritage and community language learners, regarding their previous experiences learning Japanese or in the present as adult learners in Japanese heritage schools in K-12 and or during their higher education. Many communities have created community schools

that meet after their local school ends for the day, or on weekends to help students maintain their language skills and gain literacy skills. Moving forward, the Japanese heritage/community language learners will be referred to as Japanese heritage language learners or heritage learners for ease of use. Within Japanese heritage language learners, the learners' conceptualizations of their language learning and identity will be examined. While much research exists on how students in K-12 think about language learning and identity, we have yet to see much research with alumni of Japanese heritage language schools and current adult students reflecting on their experiences.

This study seeks to examine how these learners make sense of their experience learning Japanese in the United States. First, I will share the background and provide context of heritage language learning, Japanese heritage language learners, and the significance of studying this topic. Second, the literature review will present research on the value of language learning, specifically focusing on Japanese heritage language learners through an ethnic identity development lens. Third, I will describe the research design of this study. Fourth, I will share the study results and present analysis. Fifth, a discussion of the results with future implications will be shared. A common thread throughout is the value of reflection for adults in processing and learning from their experiences. This study is conceptualized from a U.S. based perspective.

Background

The proportion of the US population speaking a language other than English at home has increased by 140% in the last 3 decades (Carreira, 2014). In California, 43.8% of the population 5 years of age and older speak a language other than English at home. In metropolitan Los Angeles, 57% of the more than 12 million residents speak a language other than English at home (Kagan, 2014). According to the 2007 American Community Survey data, there are

approximately 459,000 people nationwide who speak Japanese at home; about 16.8% of these people live in the Los Angeles area (Kondo-Brown, 2014). From 1980-2010, the number of heritage language speakers grew 26.98% per decade, while the average population grew 10.88%, this rate however was not consistent across languages and regions (Nagano, 2015). These data illustrate that there has been a large increase in people speaking a language other than English at home, and these numbers continue to grow.

Providing extensive opportunities in K-12 and beyond for heritage language and culture education helps create a multilingual population of students with stronger self-concept and pride in their heritage(s). Many of the community schools are offered on a part-time basis, on Saturdays or Sundays, or after U.S. local school. However, on this part-time basis, many community schools are unable to help students maintain their heritage language(s) to become biliterate enough to use the language in a professional capacity as adults. Successful maintenance of a heritage language is a challenging task that requires active community and familial involvement in addition to attending heritage language schools (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011).

According to Brecht and Rivers (2000) and the National Security Education Program (NSEP), the U.S. has an unprecedented need for individuals with proficiencies in languages other than English for social, economic, and diplomatic reasons. Heritage language learners have the potential to fill this need because they have an understanding of a language and culture in the natural environment of a home or community versus foreign language learners, whose understanding may be limited to didactic language instruction within a classroom. Such skills can contribute to intercultural biliteracy and global communication. The expansion of the global marketplace has created a need for multilingual speakers who can apply their skills in the

workforce. This is backed up by reports from high-level commissions and documented by experts in this area (Carreira, 2014).

However, without active intervention, heritage languages typically die out within three generations (Wiley, 1996). Rumbaut (2009) analyzed data from the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) study that included 5,000 Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and other immigrant groups. This study concluded that language loss happens at a faster rate in the 1.5 generation, the immigrant generation who immigrated as children at less than 12 years old. Rumbaut then merged this study with the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) to extrapolate more data. The CILS included 5,000 plus immigrants of 77 ethnic groups living in San Diego, CA and Dade County, FL, and followed 1.5 and second generation immigrants for 10 plus years, surveying them in 1992, 1995, and 2001-2003. In 1992, more than half preferred to speak English to their heritage language, however by 2002, the majority preferred English. Interestingly enough, three out of five people in the CILS study still spoke their heritage language with their grandparents in 2002 (Fee, Rhodes, & Wiley, 2014). The importance of family, especially grandparents, to learners' motivation is a strong theme in this study as well.

With the recognition of the value and benefits for learners to learn their heritage language, the hope is that the teaching and learning of heritage languages will gain in status in the curriculum. Schools that prioritize heritage language and/or general world or foreign language learning include language immersion programs or schools that award biliteracy by awarding regular school credits for attending heritage language schools (Lee & Wright, 2014). In these types of schools, students have the option to engage with their heritage identity within their American identity.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have found that there is large attrition of Japanese heritage language learners between grades seven to nine (Chinen & Tucker, 2005a). This attrition is tied to students feeling disengaged from the classroom, and Japanese language learning taking a back seat to their regular school and college preparation. There have been multiple studies on current students' experience in Japanese heritage school such as Chinen and Tucker's (2005a) study cited previously. However, there is a gap in research on what comes to mind when alumni of these schools reflect back on the connection between Japanese heritage school engagement and ethnic identity. The goal is to learn more about adult heritage language learners' experiences in college programs, and their experiences learning Japanese in continuing education programs. For this study, the focus will be on Japanese heritage language learners' experience learning Japanese in K-12 and or their higher education.

If heritage language learners are able to attain a moderate level of speaking ability and literacy, several career programs currently exist to support heritage language learning. There is no federal policy for K-12 world language education, so language program decisions are nearly always made at the state level (Davin & Heineke, 2017). Federal support for heritage languages exists through programs such as the National Security Education Program (NSEP). NSEP focuses on the critical languages and cultures of Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America by providing language and cultural instruction to participants who agree to serve in the federal government following successful training. Japanese is a critical language according to the State Department, Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs (National Security Education Program, n.d.).

Higher education can connect K-12 heritage language learners with these career opportunities that build international bridges for the U.S. Linton (2003) found a “positive relationship between upward mobility and bilingualism” (p. 24). Among speakers of minority languages, speakers who are highly proficient earn 14.2% more than their monolingual counterparts. Individuals who speak an Asian or European language in addition to English can earn substantially more than English-speaking monolinguals. Overall, there is a wage premium of 2.1% for college graduates with foreign language skills (Saiz & Zoido, as cited in Carreira, 2014). The occupations of translation and interpretation, education, healthcare, and business are cited as areas of high need. Occupations such as educators, multinational corporation executives, service providers in foreign countries, and employees of foreign language media in the U.S. earn a premium for their foreign language skills (Carreira, 2014). In addition to securing a role of interest to the candidate that fulfills a societal need, the ability to earn higher wages is an added incentive to develop a bilingual/multilingual skillset.

Background of the problem. The current U.S. education system does not provide resources to maximize the power of a multilingual population (Fee et al., 2014). The U.S. ranks last out of 24 countries for the age at which students enrolled in foreign language courses. Most high schools in the U.S. only require foreign language study for 2 years, this was also last place amongst the 24 countries (Wiley & García, 2016). In the U.S., English has the highest value and other languages take a second place. The consequence of this language hierarchy is that families and communities focus on English language learning, unless their heritage language is also considered an asset. A *linguistic market*, driven by cultural capital, also exists within the heritage language community.

In many cases, home use alone is insufficient to teach language; explicit instruction is needed in a school environment (Lee & Wright, 2014). The school environment creates a supportive community that enhances a student's willingness and enthusiasm to learn (Kagan, 2014). To support foreign language study at the university level, the U.S. Department of Education funds 16 language resource centers. Fishman (2014) recommends that it is best to leverage governmental support when it is available, but educators should focus on community-based support for heritage language education for long-term stability and reliable growth. Community language schools strive to educate heritage learners on weekends and evenings after regular school; however, even these efforts end at 12th grade. Upon graduation from high school, opportunities to continue heritage language learning often disappear unless students actively seek them out if they continue on to higher education. In the event that they do, some larger universities with a high level of student population who speak a particular language offer heritage language courses. Currently there are few options.

Heritage language teaching, learning, and bilingual education should not be separated from questions of identity (Leeman, Rabin, & Roman-Mendoza, 2011). Ethnic identity is a major factor in heritage language development and is often viewed through a social and cultural lens (Chinen & Tucker, 2005b; Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004; He, 2014; Nunn, 2005; Shin, 2005). When researching heritage language learning, ethnic identity is examined alongside attitude, motivation, and self-identity. In a study of Asian-American adults, Tse (1998) writes that language acquisition is improved when an individual feels positively about their ethnic group. Chinen and Tucker (2005a) conducted a study of 31 Japanese-American adolescents who attended a Japanese heritage school in Los Angeles. This study found connections between ethnic identity; attitudes towards the heritage language school, and the students' self-assessed

Japanese proficiency. Students who identified as more Japanese than another ethnic identity felt that they had higher proficiency and a more positive attitude towards the school. Another interesting finding was that the high school students had a stronger sense of identity than the younger students did. This supports Tse's (1997) ethnic-identity formation model that indicates that ethnic identification grows as a person grows older and engages more with the language and community (Chinen & Tucker, 2005a). Citing Shibata's (2000) research, Chinen and Tucker (2005a) believe that these schools are an ideal place to foster heritage language development because they offer an opportunity to strengthen ethnic group membership as well as foster language learning.

Existing interventions. The historic approach to teaching K-12 students about their Japanese heritage is through communities that have created their own heritage/community language programs. These courses are usually offered in the evening after local school or on weekends. These schools are often affiliated with traditional Japanese religious organizations such as Buddhist temples or established by Japan's federal education ministry, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Teachers are often volunteers or provided with a small salary or stipend (Morimoto, 1997). Furthermore, parental involvement within and outside of schools is shown to significantly affect students' interest and diligence in attending heritage/community language schools and students' involvement in learning to speak, read, and write in the language (Lee & Wright, 2014). In addition to heritage/community language schools, non-profit, sometimes foreign-government sponsored organizations contribute to language and cultural learning. One example of a foreign-government sponsored organization is the Japan Foundation, a non-profit organization that offers language courses, cultural events,

libraries, and scholarships for language learning and cultural exchange for those interested in Japan.

History of Japanese immigration to the U.S.

In order to understand the unique context of Japanese heritage language learners in Southern California, it is important to review the historical and legal background of Japanese immigration to California. Immigration has ebbed and flowed in accordance with U.S. government immigration policies. In 1869, the first Japanese immigrated to the mainland United States in search of better lives. The U.S. census indicates that the Japanese population in 1873 in California was 80 people (68 men, eight women, four children). This population quickly rose to 1,147 Japanese residents in 1890, with an exponential increase to 41,356 in 1910. By 1930, this number rose to 71,952 (Morimoto, 1997). The Immigration Act of 1924 included a ban on Japanese immigration, which was in place until 1952. There was an exception for the Japanese brides of U.S. servicemen post-World War II. Immigration from Japan was allowed again with the McCarran-Walter Act, signed into law in 1952. However, this law was very discriminatory; Asian countries were allowed to send only 100 immigrants each year, while European countries were able to send many more based on national origins quotas set by the Immigration Act of 1924. The McCarran-Walter Act repealed racial clauses that forbade non-white immigrants from obtaining U.S. citizenship. By 1965, over 46,000 Japanese immigrants became naturalized citizens. The next major legislation was the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated national origin, race and ancestry quotas; 20,000 immigrants per Asian country were allowed to enter per year. By 1960, 52% of the Asian American population in the U.S. was Japanese-American. By 1985, this number went down to 15%. According to the U.S. Census of 1990, there were 847,562 Japanese-Americans living in the U.S. (Easton & Ellington, 2000).

In 2000, there were 1,148,932 Japanese-Americans, in 2010, 1,304,286 Japanese-Americans. As of 2010, California had the highest population of Japanese-Americans in the country at 428,014 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Japanese Heritage Language Schools

In order to teach their children Japanese, the *Issei*, or first generation Japanese immigrants, established Japanese heritage schools. *Issei* were born in Japan and immigrated to the U.S. before the National Origins Act of 1924, which stopped immigration from Japan and other Asian countries. Nisei are children of at least one *Issei* parent, and they are known as Japanese-Americans. *Sansei* are children of at least one Nisei parent, they are third generation Japanese Americans. *Yonsei* are children of at least one *Sansei* parent, they are fourth generation Japanese Americans. These generations of Japanese Americans grew in the U.S. without immigration of Japanese nationals until the National Origins Act of 1924 was lifted by the Immigration Act of 1965, which opened U.S. doors to immigration once again. Soon after, a new generation of Japanese immigrants started arriving called *Shin-Issei*. Shin means *new* in Japanese, so they were the new-first generation. Their children are called *Shin-Nisei* (Metoki, 2012).

It was very important to the *Issei* parents and community that their children and future generations learn about their Japanese heritage. The main philosophies for these heritage schools were harmonization of eastern and western cultures and the principles of bridging cultures. In 1902, the first Japanese heritage school was established in San Francisco. From 1903-1912, 18 Japanese schools were established (nine of which were affiliated with Buddhist temples). The schools became community centers, providing socialization for parents and the wider community. Parents enrolled their children with the expectation that they would learn Japanese

language and culture. By the early 1930s, approximately 69% of *Nisei*, or second-generation Japanese, attended Japanese heritage schools for an average of 3 years. In 1935, Los Angeles alone had 117 schools with 9,277 students and 244 teachers (Morimoto, 1997).

The outbreak of World War II led to the closing of all Japanese heritage schools in the mainland U.S. and Hawaii. School principals and teachers were some of the first sent to internment camps. Japanese heritage language learners continued at the internment camps with 4,300 students enrolled at Tule Lake Japanese heritage school. In 1949, post WWII, Japanese heritage schools re-opened with lower enrollments. In 1979, there were 49 schools in California. In the 1980's, there was a renewed interest in Japanese with the era of strong Japanese economic growth worldwide; however, the number of schools never reached pre-WWII levels (Morimoto, 1997).

With the history and legal background of Japanese-Americans in mind, the constructs of segmented assimilation and selective acculturation are helpful to keep in mind when thinking about how Japanese-American identity is connected with their perceptions and engagement with their heritage language. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Chicago School of Sociology studied first and second generation European immigrants, and developed a theory called standard assimilation theory. This theory states that each succeeding generation will gain upward social mobility and become more integrated into mainstream U.S. society (Waters, Tran, Kasinitz, & Mollenkopf, 2010).

Seeing a need to describe a different phenomenon they were seeing with the *new second generation*, children born to post-1965 immigrants in the U.S., Alejandro Portes, Ruben Rumbaut and colleagues developed the segmented assimilation theory. Segmented assimilation states that children of immigrants can go through three main types of assimilation. These are

upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility, combined with biculturalism (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). These trajectories are also interwoven with consonant, dissonant, and selective acculturation. Consonant acculturation is where parents and children assimilate into American culture at the same space. These children tend to achieve upward mobility. Dissonant acculturation occurs when children assimilate much faster than their parents and this can lead to downward assimilation. Downward assimilation happens when parents are not able to support their children to be resilient against racial discrimination and other negative factors. Selective acculturation leads to upward mobility and biculturalism.

Selective acculturation is the ideal scenario because both parents and children assimilate into American life while also retaining and appreciating their ethnic identity and community (Waters et al., 2010). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) describe selective acculturation as the “preservation of parental authority, little or no intergenerational conflict, and fluent bilingualism among children” (p. 52). Selective acculturation is seen as way to create a resilient second-generation, especially children of non-white poor immigrants, to strengthen community and family bonds to keep children safe and thriving. Bilingual education is considered part of this formula of successful selective acculturation. Portes and Rumbaut write that segmented assimilation experiences differ across immigrant groups and their experiences depend on four main factors. These factors are the history of the immigrant first generation, the pace of acculturation of the parents (first generation) and their children, any cultural and economic barriers that the first and second generations face in adapting to life in the U.S., and the level of family and community support that they have. Selective acculturation and segmented assimilation are key concepts to keep in mind when thinking about the Japanese-American

assimilation experience and how this affects thinking about their heritage language learning experience.

Statement of Project

The research design grew out of a small mixed method pilot study conducted in November 2016, which included surveying a combination of four Japanese heritage school adult alumni and two Japanese foreign language learners. The purpose of this pilot study was to learn about what comes to mind for Japanese heritage school alumni when they reflect back on their experience in the heritage language school and their interpretation of how learning Japanese affected their identity formation. Two alumni of Japanese foreign language programs at universities were also included in the study to compare their experiences. Also part of the pilot study was a Japanese class observation at a large public university in Southern California that included Japanese heritage language learners and Japanese foreign language learners. The survey was developed by consulting other heritage language learning materials from (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Karapetian, 2018; Reynolds, Howard, & Deak, 2009) and consisted of 17 questions about biographical information, Japanese language learning educational history, Japanese language proficiency, and culture and identity connections. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for themes. Notes were taken during the observation of the Japanese language course at a large public university in Southern California. The survey responses were taken from The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL, 2017) Can-Do Statements`, and respondents were asked to select from the mid-novice through the advanced-high level Japanese language proficiency.

The sampling criteria were that the participants were alumni of Japanese heritage schools, or alumni of Japanese foreign language learning programs. This sample included five women

and one man. For the two interviews, the survey served as a starting point for more in-depth discussion about their experiences learning Japanese. The results of these Japanese heritage language learners' perception of their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills coincide with the widely accepted understanding that heritage language learners excel in listening and speaking over literacy skills of reading and writing. Common themes from the interviews were that siblings embraced learning Japanese differently, Japanese learning became less of a priority as they approached high school age, and using Japanese helped them connect with family, especially their grandparents. Two interviewees would like to learn more Japanese now, although both do not believe it plays a role in their current or future personal or career goals.

The information from the survey and semi-structured interviews showed that the participants all felt that attending Japanese heritage school helped them feel more connected to their Japanese identities. The interviewees also all actively engaged with Japanese culture in some way such as watching Japanese TV shows or reading news articles in Japanese online. The pilot study proved helpful because while I personally also experienced the findings, it was affirming to know that other Japanese heritage language learners had similar perceptions to one another. Analysis of the interviews was also helpful in my desire to expand upon themes of how Japanese language learning affects identity and the value of adults reflecting back on educational experiences. I expanded upon these themes because the pilot study indicated that there was more material to be discovered in the connection between Japanese heritage school participation and identity, and there is a gap in research. There are studies on how Japanese ethnic identity affects language learning, but few on how learning Japanese affects the identity development of Japanese-American heritage language learners. Since there is a marked drop in heritage language school attendance in middle and high school, an area of interest is also how this drop in

motivation affects heritage language learners' ability to choose or navigate a bicultural-bilingual identity.

The research questions for the dissertation study were modified because of the pilot study. Utilizing the power of reflective practices, alumni of Japanese heritage schools were interviewed to understand their perceptions of their experiences. The following research questions guided my study:

Research Questions

1. What are Japanese heritage school alumni and adult learners' perceptions of how their participation in the school helped/helps them connect, if at all, with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community?
 - a. How do Japanese heritage school alumni connect their language journeys to their ethnic identity development?
 - b. What factors influence a heritage language learners' ability to choose or navigate a bicultural-bilingual identity?
 - c. How has their perspective changed over the years about their heritage language learning experience?
2. What are Japanese language teachers' perceptions of how Japanese heritage language learners connect, if at all, with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community through learning Japanese?

A qualitative research design was utilized and included semi-structured interviews, journaling, and analysis of one thematic autobiographical essay. This study involved two groups of people.

Group 1: Learners who took Japanese language courses in K-12 and or higher education through a Japanese heritage or foreign language course. Fourteen participants were in this group.

Five participants were currently enrolled in a large public university in Southern California, and were taking or had taken Japanese classes there. Five participants took university level Japanese heritage or Japanese foreign language classes and graduated within the last 10 years. Three participants took university level Japanese heritage or Japanese foreign language classes and graduated more than 10 years ago. One Japanese heritage language learner took Japanese in K-12 but did not take Japanese heritage language courses in higher education.

Group 2: Teachers who teach Japanese language for foreign language learners and Japanese heritage language learners in K-12 and higher education; they are expert consultants. Six teachers were in this group.

The goal to interview at least 10 learners and five teachers who have had varying core experiences with Japanese heritage language learners and teaching was achieved. The focus for the Japanese learner participants was how their Japanese heritage language learning had affected their ethnic identity development. The population for my study was located in the United States and Japan. The focus was on alumni of a large university in Southern California and teachers in Southern California.

Significance of research for solving the problem. I investigated the intersection of Japanese language learning and identity, and showed different ways in which heritage language learning can affect students' perceptions about their own heritage as well as in their ability to contribute as a multilingual speaker in society. Providing continuous heritage language learning resources helps maximize learners' existing skills and support them in becoming bilingual enough to apply their language skills to personal and career goals. Research indicates there is great value in many fields for individuals who are multilingual (AAAS, 2017). The National Heritage Language Survey (Carreira & Kagan, 2011) surveyed heritage language learners across

the U.S. This study suggests that the majority of higher education heritage language learners enroll in courses to learn more about their heritage, and to strengthen their career prospects. Organizations such as the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) at UCLA may find this study useful. The NHLRC identifies key areas of need in heritage language learning as strengthening the K-12 and higher education pipeline as well as hearing more instructor voices. To address this issue, I collected Japanese heritage school alumni reflections of their experience to help inform current Japanese heritage school experiences. Sharing key themes about bicultural student educational experiences with stakeholders in Japanese language education may contribute to the field by helping to tie the experience to students' future goals so they can see the benefit of continuing their Japanese language education. Stakeholders include Japanese American associations and Japanese cultural organizations that would benefit by understanding which programming is impactful for their constituents. I hope to collaborate with the faculty and staff at the NHLRC at UCLA and share the results of the study and dissertation.

This dissertation resulted in rich data obtained from 14 learners from their experiences as Japanese heritage language learners, and from six teachers from their experiences teaching Japanese heritage language learners. Both the learners and teachers participated in semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Ten learners also contributed post-interview reflections in the form of journals that provided insight into their perceptions of their experiences as they looked back. There were seven overarching themes that emerged from conducting interviews with learners and teachers, and reading learners' post-interview reflections. The Japanese heritage language learners and teachers both agreed on the following points. First, there are significant differences between how learners of Japanese as a heritage language and learners of Japanese as a foreign language learn Japanese, and these learners have very different needs. Second, learners

gain a deeper understanding of their ethnic identity through attending Japanese heritage school in K-12 and during their higher education. Third, heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status. Fourth, family life impacts the motivation of heritage language learners to study Japanese. Fifth, learners' ability to balance both Japanese heritage school and U.S. local schoolwork impacts their motivation. This then impacts their ability to continue in Japanese heritage school. Sixth, it is challenging to attain a high enough literacy and Japanese speaking ability to use Japanese in a career. Seven, intergenerational language transfer was important to the learners.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in Chapter 1, I looked at the experiences of Japanese American alumni of Japanese heritage language schools and asked them how this experience affected their ethnic identity development. There have been multiple studies on current students' experience in Japanese heritage language schools. However, there is a gap in the research on how alumni of these programs reflect back upon their experience; therefore, my study focuses on the reflections of Japanese heritage language learners. The study seeks to examine how these learners make sense of their experiences learning Japanese in the United States.

First, this literature review expands the definition of heritage language learning in K-12 and higher education provided in Chapter 1, and provides historical and cultural context of heritage language learning in the U.S. Challenges to heritage language education in the U.S., as well as the connection to educational capital will be discussed. Thereafter, the status of heritage language learning in higher education, and some key benefits of heritage language learning, including career and practical applications and bi/multilingualism and biliteracy, will be discussed.

Second, I present research on the connection between ethnic identity development and heritage language school participation for heritage language learners. I focus on the connections between heritage language learning and ethnic identity development. The specific focus is how Japanese heritage language learning influences learners' ethnic identity development, and how the heritage language school community and surrounding Japanese community also influences learners' ethnic identity development. The frameworks of language as cultural capital and assimilation are the frameworks in which ethnic identity development is explored.

Third, the specific case of Japanese heritage language learning will be examined, looking at Japanese heritage language schools in the U.S. and the structures that are in place for heritage language learners to study Japanese. Understanding how Japanese heritage language learners reflect on their heritage language learning experiences adds to the dialogue of how K-12 and higher education communities can work together to not only nurture language learning but also maximize positive ethnic identity development and connection to Japanese and Japanese American culture.

I emphasize a theory that supports the value of reflection for adults in processing and learning from experiences. The goal is to learn about the experiences of Japanese heritage language learners so we can continuously improve the experience of Japanese heritage language learners. It would then be beneficial to share these experiences with stakeholders that include heritage school educators, higher education educators, and organizations that are working to expand heritage language learning such as the federal Language Resource Centers.

Heritage Language Learning

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a United States-based definition of a heritage language is that heritage refers both to those who have some proficiency in a community or ancestral language...and to those who desire to learn one, including those who speak only English (Wiley, 2014a). A heritage language is an immigrant, Indigenous or ancestral language (He, 2006). Polinsky and Kagan (2007) and Carreira and Kagan (2011) offer broad and narrow definitions of heritage language and heritage language speakers (Wiley, 2014a). A broad definition, applicable more globally to heritage language learners, is that the heritage language is part of that person's family or cultural heritage, the language may not have been spoken in the home, and the person has no functional proficiency in the language and would need to study the language as a second

language learner. An example is a third or fourth generation person born in a country. Fishman (2001), Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), and Hornberger and Wang (2008) conceptualize their work within this broad definition of heritage languages (Fee et al., 2014). A narrow definition given by Polinsky and Kagan (2007) and Carreira and Kagan (2011) is that heritage language “was first in the order of acquisition but was not completely acquired because of the individual’s switch to another dominant language (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007, p. 369). In contrast to the broad definition, “heritage speakers who have grown up hearing their heritage language bring some measure of competence into the foreign language or heritage language classroom” (Carreira & Kagan, 2011, pp. 41-42). The latter definition points to the significance of a dominant and non-dominant language in heritage language learning. Regarding speaking skills, a typical 5-year-old heritage language speaker has attained a level of proficiency that exceeds that of foreign language learners who have studied in high school or university courses for many years (Campbell, as cited in Fee et al., 2014). The broad definition applies to this study and all of the participants fit into this definition.

Heritage Language Learning in K-12

There is a mismatch between the most-widely spoken languages in U.S. homes, and languages offered in U.S. schools. For example, while Spanish is the most widely spoken language in U.S. homes, most Spanish foreign language courses are not designed for Spanish heritage language speakers (Fee et al., 2014). The following data illustrates the value that heritage language schools bring to fill in the gaps in our U.S. local school language offerings.

Overall, language instruction is down in the U.S. The Center for Applied Linguistics conducts a national survey of elementary and secondary schools every 10 years to see how well U.S. schools are preparing students to learn languages. The 2008 survey saw a decline in

language instruction over the previous decade that Fee et al. (2014) ascribe to a marked decrease in languages offered at public elementary schools, down from 24% in 1997 to 15% in 2008. The reasons given for this decrease are budget constraints, a shortage of language teachers, and federal No Child Left Behind legislation. Private elementary schools were still offering language classes at 50% of schools. Public and private middle and high school were able to offer language classes at the same rate, although it did decrease from 86% to 79% in 1997 and 2008, respectively. In tandem with language classes offered, the overall enrollment of students in language classes also declined. From 1997 to 2008, enrollment went down 12% in elementary, and 11% in middle school. The most popular languages offered in middle and high school in 2008 were Spanish, French, German, Latin, Spanish for Spanish Speakers, and Chinese. Japanese was offered at 7% of middle and high schools in 2008 but this decreased to 3% in 2008.

History of Heritage Language Schools in the U.S.

Heritage language schools have a long history in the U.S., and have existed since the dawn of immigration. By the mid-19th century, when non-English speaking immigration was in full swing, German heritage language schools were rapidly expanding. In the Midwest, by the end of the 19th century, the number of German heritage language schools began to equal the number of German-English bilingual public elementary schools (Fishman, 2014). Heritage language schools were created so that students would not forget their cultural heritage. Without federal, state, or local support, the schools started small with a team of volunteers or parents often out of a church or other community organization. This is known as *bottom-up* planning in which stakeholders in the community, and parents and family members create their own structures for language learning. This is especially common and noteworthy among Indigenous communities (Hornberger, 1996; McCarty, 2011; Wiley, 2014).

Historically, heritage language schools have become embroiled in state and federal legislation and politics. One example of this is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that put a 10-year moratorium on Chinese immigration. This act extended through the Geary Act of 1892 and the National Origins Act of 1929. The National Origins Act of 1929 was then repealed in 1943 by the Magnuson Act because China was an ally in the war against Japan (Harvard University Open Collections Program, n.d.). Thirty-four states passed laws by 1923 stating that English was the sole language of instruction in U.S. public schools. In 1885, California declared that English could be the only language of instruction. This started to change in 1923 due to the U.S. Supreme Court case of Meyer vs. Nebraska in which the Supreme Court struck down restrictive language laws in Nebraska, Idaho, and Ohio (García, 2014). However, post WWII, in 1949, Harvard's General Education in a Free Society report declared that foreign-language study was only useful "to improve one's English" (Huebener, as cited in García, 2014, p.64).

Heritage language schools have been at the mercy of the ebbs and flows of how the US has felt about different immigrant groups throughout history. U.S. public schools adjust their offerings according to major world events and political dynamics. For example, the Cold War, and the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite spurred the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 that influenced an increase in Russian language teaching. The NDEA also provided financial support for the teaching of foreign languages. This marked the first time that foreign language would be taught in U.S. public elementary schools. Due to active lobbying by civil rights groups, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) was passed in 1968. This act granted federal funding to school districts with a high number of speakers who were not proficient in English. The Bilingual Education Act was

renewed in 1974, at which time bilingual education was considered *transitional*, with the goal of assimilating students into English-only classrooms (García, 2014).

Soon thereafter in 1979, President Carter established a Presidential Commission that found that U.S. citizens were grossly incompetent in foreign language. This commission recommended that resources be put towards study abroad programs and international exchanges and experiences. However, in 1981, Senator Hayakawa introduced an amendment to the Constitution to make English the U.S.'s official language (García, 2014). This era was a contentious time in federal language policy, during which the Bilingual Education Act required renewal every 4 years. This was followed by the U.S. government's support of Japanese language instruction in the 1980s-1990s to position the U.S. to maximize Japan's economic boom. From the 2000's to the present there has been a marked rise in Chinese language instruction as a result of China's position as a world power, China's support of U.S. language programs, and its' designation, along with Arabic, as a strategic language by the U.S. government (Fee et al., 2014). In 2001, the Bilingual Education was repealed and replaced with Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act. This dictated that teaching was to be conducted in English only (García, 2014).

Challenges to Heritage Language Education

Due to inconsistent support outlined previously, heritage language schools do not have a solid foundation in the U.S. educational infrastructure. Therefore, there are many areas of need. Areas include program funding, meeting space, meeting the needs of students with a large diversity of language background, student recruitment and retention, parental support, teacher recruitment and training, teaching materials, articulation with public schools and university

programs, and public awareness and support (Brecht & Ingold, 2002; Valdés, 2001; Wiley, Arias, Renn, & Bhalla, 2015).

Financial stability is a challenge to heritage language schools. In addition to charging nominal tuition, heritage language schools must rely on sometimes unstable, grant-based financial support from home countries, U.S. government foundations, research associations, or higher education institutions (Wiley et al., 2015). Wiley et al. (2015) recommend that heritage language schools work with the local community as much as possible. For example, the Contemporary Chinese School of Arizona (CCSA) developed a partnership with the Confucius Institute at Arizona State University, which sponsored a number of activities for CCSA. Another example is the Minneapolis Public K-8 schools decision to offer Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. They recognize the benefit in maximizing these students' abilities in their heritage language (Fee et al., 2014). Finding large enough or appropriate space to hold classes is also an ongoing issue for many schools.

State and local governments should also be aware of the heritage languages of students and families in their communities and work to fulfill those needs. Heritage language schools are encouraged to collaborate with local communities such as religious organizations and local schools to rent space at a discounted price, or free (Wiley et al., 2015). Successful heritage language schools have a history of support from religious organizations and continue to be supported today (Tse, 2001). There is a mutual community building benefit because the heritage language school can hold classes, and the local organization can help support cultural learning and diversity.

Thoughtful involvement of parents in planning, teaching, and celebration of cultural events can also strengthen the heritage language schools and its impact in the community

(Carreira, 2014). Many heritage language schools exist largely due to parental support and volunteerism. Successful heritage language learning also connects with engaging with the language outside of school. Studies show that outside of school activities such as regular reading of books in the heritage language and attendance at cultural festivals help reinforce that students' heritage language learning is not an isolated activity. Engaging with Japanese culture outside of the Japanese heritage school helps students see the respect and interest that Japanese has in the outside world, and how learning about their heritage language and culture can be useful for them to communicate now and in the future.

Heritage Language Learning and Educational Capital

A major motivation for heritage language students to continue attending heritage language school through 12th grade is the amount of educational capital they can gain in the U.S. educational system. Educational capital includes earning high school foreign language credit for attending heritage language school, the ability to take and do well on the Japanese language AP exam and/or SAT II language subject exams, the ability to earn a Certificate of Biliteracy in some states, and ultimately utilizing the language in a future career (Doerr & Lee, 2013). Many heritage language school participants are forced to make a difficult choice between increasing participation in their local school or dropping out of heritage language school.

Heritage language school administrators and teachers emphasize the value of continuing in order to maximize bilingualism for students' personal and professional development. As previously mentioned, Japanese became a *critical language* in 2006 under the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI). The NSLI, in collaboration with the Departments of Education, State and Defense allocated funding to spread language education from kindergarten through post-secondary education. Because of this designation, an AP Japanese exam was created in

2006. This led some Japanese heritage language schools to offer preparation for the AP Japanese exam. The ability to prepare for and take this exam through the heritage language school encouraged some students to continue their language learning because they saw the benefit for applying to college and future career opportunities. The U.S. education system explicitly assigned value to learning Japanese by offering the AP Japanese exam as well as high school credits (Doerr & Lee, 2013).

However, out of 123 higher education institutions surveyed, only 50% said that they accept AP Japanese test scores. The most popular answer to the question of why 50% of schools do not accept the AP Japanese for credits with an approximately 40% response was “I don’t know” followed closely by “Not enough students took AP [Japanese]”, and “Admin/profs are unfamiliar with the AP Japanese exam” (Rollins, 2017, p.23). These data indicate that more outreach is necessary to find out why many schools profess they do not know about the test. Additionally, educational outreach is necessary to administrators and professors about the AP Japanese test. Perhaps if the AP Japanese test were widely accepted, much like the SAT II in Japanese, then students would perhaps be more motivated to study Japanese in high school at heritage language schools. However, there are issues with the Japanese SAT II test including lack of information and sample tests for students wishing to take it. One of the recommended preparation steps for success on the Japanese SAT II is “gradual development of competence in Japanese over a period of years” (College Board, n.d., p.1). Overall, U.S. schools need to offer language instruction over many years in order for students to acquire proficiency and utility in a language (Fee et al., 2014). Heritage language schools help students acquire speaking and literacy skills that over time that they can utilize for many purposes, including academic achievement in tests such as the Japanese SAT II or AP exam.

Heritage Language Learning in Higher Education

When students choose to continue learning their heritage language in higher education, they are motivated by the desire to connect for the first time or reconnect with their heritage language (Chinen & Tucker, 2005a), and in some cases for professional and career goals (Carreira, 2014; Carreira & Kagan, 2011). Some postsecondary foreign language programs are able to provide a separate track for heritage language learners versus foreign language learners. This is a pedagogically sound strategy because heritage language learners' profiles and needs are different from non-heritage language learners (Andrews, 2000; Campbell, 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown & Fukuda, 2008; Mazzocco, 1996; Pino & Pino, 2000). Large universities in metropolitan areas often have well-established heritage language programs or heritage language tracks. However, there is a need to establish heritage language programs across a diversity of schools in the U.S. "Higher education needs to recognize heritage language education not as a discrete academic course of study but as part of a learner's lifelong educational career" (Kono & McGinnis, 2001, p. 201). While heritage language education is recognized as a distinct type of language learning from foreign language and dual language learning, there is still much more to share to gain buy-in from higher education administration to put resources towards providing students the opportunity to learn their heritage language.

Other areas of need include teacher training on the unique needs of heritage language learners, and the need for articulation between K-12 and higher education (Kono & McGinnis, 2001). In 1990, the U.S. Department of Education established the first Language Resource Centers (LRCs) at U.S. universities. This was in response to a need for expertise and competence in foreign languages across the U.S. As of 2018, Title VI of the Higher Education Act supports 16 LRCs. These centers provide resources to further the growth of foreign language education

across the U.S. They do this by providing professional development opportunities for teachers, learning and teaching materials including digital resources, research, assessment, K-12 initiatives, less commonly taught languages initiatives, and outreach and dissemination (NFLRC, 2018). The National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) at UCLA is one of these 16 LRCs.

A survey conducted in 2011 by the NHLRC with 1,732 college students studying their heritage language showed that the majority felt positively about their heritage language. The college students' first priority was to learn their heritage language for a career or job; second, to connect with cultural and linguistic roots; third, to communicate with family and friends in the U.S.; fourth, to fulfill a language requirement; and fifth, to communicate with family and friends abroad (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). The priorities ranked differently among the languages, reflecting that groups of heritage language learners have various personal but also professional reasons, depending on how valuable they feel their language may be useful in U.S. society.

Benefits of Heritage Language Learning

My study is based upon the assumption that there are many positive outcomes for students in K-16 to learn about their heritage. Heritage language learners are primed to develop into multilingual speakers if they have early and continuous exposure to languages (Fishman, 2014). Research has shown that students who learn about their heritage develop a stronger self-concept and pride in their heritage (Tse, 2001). Strong self-concept contributes to overall higher levels of confidence for many key life areas. The development of heritage language correlates with better English skills. Learning another language has been shown to improve learning in other subjects, cognitive development, empathy (American Academy of Arts and Sciences [AAAS], 2017) as well as greater self-esteem, stronger ethnic identity and creating stronger

familial ties (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011). Multilingualism has lifelong benefits including improved executive functioning (Bialystok, 2007), delayed onset of dementia (Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 2007), greater intercultural awareness and open-mindedness (Byram, 2007) and increased access to postsecondary education (Kroll & Dussias, 2017). Heritage language learning is a path to cultural self-understanding (NHLRC, 2016).

Career and Practical Applications of Heritage Language Learning

The language and literacy of world languages, in addition to English, “is critical to success in business, research, and international relations in the twenty-first century” (AAAS, 2017, p. viii). The U.S. needs more speakers of non-English languages in order to provide social and legal services for a changing population. In 2012, the US Department of State increased their number of *language-designated positions* by 15%, and the Department of Defense requested that U.S. schools train more language speakers at an earlier age. In addition, the U.S. lags behind most nations in the world in the percentage of citizens who are bilingual to great intercultural detriment (AAAS, 2017). The U.S. is missing a great benefit to our country. While Fee et al. (2014) speak to the benefit of developing U.S citizens that can adeptly navigate a multitude of languages and cultures to promote international cooperation and national security; this could be extrapolated to countries all over the world.

A benefit to the individual is that studying a second language links to improved learning outcomes in other subjects and the development of empathy and interpretation skills. Students often realize the value of achieving bilingualism and biliteracy only when they realize that powerful societal institutions such as the federal government and corporations value their skills and this motivates heritage language learners to strive for bilingualism and biliteracy (Tse, 2001). Heritage language students who stop learning their heritage language in elementary or

middle school later often try to play catch up in high school and college to recover the language and literacy skills they have lost (Portes & Hao, 2004). The lost time where students have not been maintaining their language skill leads to a decreased chance that heritage language learners can apply their skills in a career in the future (Tse, 2001).

Bi/Multilingualism and Biteracy

Bilingualism can be defined in many ways. Wei (2000) discusses how complicated this can be and writes that the word ‘bilingual’ primarily refers to someone with “possession of two languages” (p. 7). In her presentation at the 2017 Community-Based Heritage Language Conference at American University in Washington, DC, Guadalupe Valdés from Stanford University shared her research on bilingualism and heritage language learners. Valdés (2017) spoke about how bilinguals are not like monolinguals; their two language systems interact in numerous ways. Bilinguals carry out various functions in different languages and they establish relationships in a specific language with different people. Bilinguals also think about different subjects in one language over another, so it often takes some thought to translate ideas from one language to another. Bilinguals can often use resources from multiple languages, and she emphasized the point that bilinguals are not two native speakers in one person. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has created extensive proficiency guidelines to help educators and learners understand their level of proficiency, or their level of bilingualism. ACTFL measures speaking, reading, writing, and listening, and learners can be classified from Novice level (low/mid/high), Intermediate (low/mid/high), Advanced (low/mid/high), and Superior/Distinguished.

Educators like García (2014) advocate for a flexible bilingual use, where learners do not feel that *code-switching* or switching between languages to complete thoughts and sentences is a

negative or incomplete form of communication. Educators use the word *translanguaging* to describe how many bilingual speakers shift flexibly between their languages depending on the context in which they know certain words or are comfortable speaking about certain topics. García feels that “Educational authorities would do well to build on this translanguaging, rather than stigmatize it and attempt to extinguish it” (p. 75).

Biliteracy can be defined as “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing” (Hornberger, 1990, p.213). The Seal of Biliteracy is a national certification that serves as recognition of a state-determined proficiency in English and an additional world language by the time of their high school graduation. It is a direct benefit for heritage language learners. While it is in its early stages, the seal has the potential to serve as a *signal* that a high school graduate has achieved literacy in English and another language (Davin & Heineke, 2017). The seal goes on a student’s high school transcript and diploma.

This program started in California in 2008, and was developed jointly by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the National Council of State Supervisors (NCSSFL), the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) and the TESOL International Association. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia offer the Seal of Biliteracy as of 2017 (AAAS, 2017). Substantial variation exists across states regarding the minimum level of proficiency in the world language and English, and the number of language classes or credits required to receive this seal (Davin & Heineke, 2017). A challenge is to create a national standard, much like the Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams.

More than 70 government agencies have a need to hire individuals who are fluent in foreign languages (Brecht & Ingold, 2002). In a survey administered to 2,101 businesses

nationwide, 41% gave preference to multilingual candidates during recruitment (Damari et. al., 2017). The country has relied on the U.S. education system to teach and nurture individuals who can then contribute with language skills. However, few U.S. students have enough instruction to achieve this level of fluency (Brecht & Ingold, 2002). Heritage language learners who are able to achieve biliteracy often have a peer group that uses the heritage language; contact with institutions that value the heritage language; and parents who spoke the heritage language to their children and integrated it into their family life (Tse, 2001). Individuals who are proficient in their heritage language and English perform better academically; achieve greater professional opportunities; and view themselves in connection to their heritage culture, community, and ancestry (Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan, 1998; Shin, 2005).

Ethnic Identity Development

One of the most important effects of heritage language learning is that it contributes to positive ethnic identity development (He, 2010; Hornberger & Wang, 2008, Van Deusen-Scholl, 2018). Learners are often motivated to learn their heritage language as their ethnic identities develop while at the same time language learning contributes to the development of their ethnic identity. Age is an important factor for consideration in thinking about heritage language learner experiences. Learners tend to lose motivation to learn their heritage language in the middle school and early high school years. There can be a surge of interest in high school and then college depending on how attuned they are with their family and community (He, 2006). The shift from negative or neutral feelings about the language and culture in the younger years to positive feelings as learners' age has found to be common among some cultural minorities in the U.S. (Tse, 2001). This research study will examine Japanese heritage language learners' feelings about how their learning experience has changed over the years.

My study concentrates on ethnic identity development based on what people learn about their ethnic identity from family and community (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Alternative ethnic identity development theories focus on the idea that an individual's perception and their response to societal pressures determine their embrace or lack of connection to their heritage language and culture (Tse, 2011). Since this study will have a focus on Japanese heritage language learners' perceptions of their exposure to Japanese language and culture through their family and community, the lens that Chávez and Guido-DiBrito's (1999) model provides is a fitting way to examine ethnic identity development.

Among the many models of ethnic identity development, the common themes are that identity formation and development are dynamic and socially constructed. Norton (2000) views identity as the way a person understands his/her "relationship to the world, how this relationship is constructed in time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Bilinguals, including heritage language speakers, navigate between different languages and communities regularly, especially if they live in a home where a language other than English is spoken regularly (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001; Valdés, 2017). For heritage language learners, each time they switch between languages, they are also re-negotiating their own identities. With these identities come differing power dynamics and social history that affect the speaker to different degrees, depending on their level of sensitivity and awareness to these dynamics. For this reason, it is important to understand the identity negotiation process within and among different language communities. A heritage language is in competition with the dominant language in any community. A social constructivist approach is that learners are acquiring language at the same time as they are learning what it means to use different languages in different social contexts. This refers to sociocultural habitus,

Core values, customs, lifestyles and demeanors that heritage learners have acquired through socialization by family, school, friendship groups, institutions, and the mass media. The sociocultural habitus disposes the learner to cope with different social agents in different ways. (He, 2010, p. 75)

Learner identity is the core piece in heritage language development (He, 2010).

Language as Cultural Capital

During this negotiation between languages and cultures, heritage language speakers alternate between a minimum of two languages with different cultural and social value in the United States. There is a language hierarchy that exists in every country depending on the history and assimilation of ethnic groups and who has been in power. Minority and ethnic groups may want to maintain their languages, which are different from the majority or often governing language of a country (Wei, 2000). Bourdieu (1999) writes about this as a “linguistic market” (p. 39) as heritage language speakers become aware of the power and acceptance of certain languages over others. In the U.S., English has the highest value and other languages take a second place. The consequence of this language hierarchy is that families and communities focus on English language learning, unless their heritage language is also considered an asset. A linguistic market, driven by cultural capital, also exists within the heritage language community. The Tokyo dialect in Japanese is held in highest regard in the market as it is the dialect of commerce within Japan and in U.S - Japan education, business, and government communications. This type of attitude may unfortunately push some heritage language speakers into the realm of the other and into a position outside of the heritage language community (Val & Vinogradova, 2010).

With heritage language learners negotiating their identities within two communities that exist simultaneously, it is easy to see why heritage language learners feel less conflicted when they try to focus on one language or identity at a time. Valdés (2001) writes that bilingual-bicultural individuals exist in a language continuum where a choice is made depending on the social and cultural expectations in that moment and how affected they are by these expectations. An example is the expectations that family members may have for the heritage language learner to use specific appropriate language to show respect to elders or act and speak in a certain way during a cultural ceremony. The path of least resistance would be to stick with the dominant language, which for the U.S. would be English. It is interesting to consider why some people strive nonetheless to learn their heritage language.

When a heritage language speaker chooses to learn their heritage language, they are making a choice that contrasts with the dominant culture. Language identity develops in constant dialogic interaction among social constraints, personal language choice, and personal agency (Val & Vinogradova, 2010). American students mainly learn the dominant culture and English language in U.S. schools, termed *authoritative discourse* and heritage languages remain in the *other, heritage, or private* (Tse, 2001) domain of families, communities, and heritage language schools or programs. This leads to a discussion of what impacts a heritage language learners' ability to choose or navigate a bicultural-bilingual identity.

He (2006) and Chinen and Tucker (2005a) write that a motivating factor for heritage language learners is that they would like to stay connected to their heritage culture. With this desire, the degree to which someone can learn their heritage language also depends on their family language policy, the proximity to a heritage language community, and if there is a heritage language school nearby, the availability of resources and commitment to attend. The

degree of language maintenance and development achieved ties to how much contact the person has with the heritage language and its cultural community (Tse, 2001; Val & Vinogradova, 2010). Alternatively, heritage language learners may have or have had negative experiences or misunderstandings associated with their heritage language and culture that can lead to their disengaging from their family, community, or heritage language learning experience (Shin, 2005; Tse, 2001). These experiences or memories may strongly affect the person's self-concept and thinking about their affiliation with an ethnic group. My study seeks to learn about the spectrum of these experiences through the reflections of Japanese heritage language learners.

Assimilation

Heritage language learners position themselves by age, ethnicity, and affiliation with their cultural background, gender, or class. The history of the group within the U.S. also affects these factors (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) write that assimilation experiences differ across immigrant groups and their experiences depend on several factors. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these factors include the history of the immigrant first generation; the pace of acculturation of the parents and their children; any cultural and economic barriers that the first and second generations face in adapting to life in the U.S.; and the level of family and community support that they have.

Tse (2000) focuses on Asian Americans' ethnic identity development and has a four-stage model of ethnic identification. The stages from low to high assimilation are lack of awareness, ethnic ambivalence/evasion, ethnic emergence, and lastly, ethnic identity incorporation. At the first stage, lack of awareness, the heritage language learner has not differentiated between her majority language and heritage language. At the second stage, the learner feels her identity with the majority language and prefers the majority culture. At the third

stage, the learner expresses interest in learning about her ethnic identity culture and language. At the fourth stage, the learner discovers her ethnic minority American group, assimilates, and finds group membership and affiliation (Chinen & Tucker, 2005b).

Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) and Tse (1997) write that the self-esteem of minority children increases when they incorporate elements of their ethnicities into their self-identity. These models serve as references for how people may relate to their ethnic identity, without intending to be illustrative for a particular group. While Tse's model includes stages, it is referenced here not to illustrate that everyone will fit into a specific stage, but that people may be on the continuum within a stage or somewhere in between.

Case of Japanese Heritage Language Learning

My study focused on the case of Japanese heritage language learners because of my personal insight as a Japanese heritage language learner who attended Japanese heritage school on Saturdays from K-12, I took Japanese courses as an undergraduate and graduate student, and worked for a Japanese company. There is also wider value in understanding the case of Japanese heritage language learners so that as educators and a society we can best serve this community. This reasoning applies to all immigrants but I specifically take up Japanese heritage language learners as I can contribute most to this particular group. The Japanese American community also has a rich history in the United States, especially Hawaii and the West coast. Japanese Americans have a significant place in modern U.S. history. Many Japanese American soldiers fought in WWII for the U.S. while their land and property were seized and their families were sent to internment camps. Heritage language schools never reached their high attendance numbers post WWII, and continue to face multiple challenges. A main challenge is how to

educate Japanese and Japanese American heritage language learners who are juggling both their local public school and Japanese heritage school educations.

From multiple studies of the current experience of Japanese heritage language learners, we know that it is challenging for Japanese heritage language learners to balance the commitment to do well academically in both their U.S. local school and their supplementary Japanese heritage school. Additionally, it is challenging to maintain interest and engagement in the Japanese heritage school unless engagement is a priority (Douglas, Kataoka, & Kishimoto, 2003; Hamada, 2008; Hashimoto & Lee, 2011; Shibata, 2000).

Japanese Heritage Language Schools in the United States

Schools that students can attend to learn Japanese in the U.S. include Japanese heritage language schools (*Nihongo hoshyuu jigyoukou* or *Nihongo gakkou*) and Japanese full-day schools where students are enrolled full-time and do not attend a local U.S. school (*nihonjin gakkou*; Kondo-Brown, 2014). There are also two types of bilingual Japanese-English programs within mainstream public and private schools. One are ESL programs that strives to shift children from their heritage language to English. The second type is Maintenance Bilingual Education, such as immersion programs, or two-way programs, whose goals are to teach children English while helping to maintain their Japanese. My research study will focus on the Japanese heritage language schools because these have the largest enrollment and are most accessible to students since students attend in the evenings or weekends after local U.S. schools. Japanese heritage schools typically hold classes for 4-6 hours every Saturday or Sunday morning. The schools utilize a curriculum approved by MEXT that is utilized at all government funded public schools in Japan (Chinen & Tucker, 2005b). With the mandate to teach as much of the MEXT curriculum as possible, the Japanese heritage school teachers teach as much as they can each

class day, and a great deal of homework is assigned to try to keep up with the mandate. While challenging to do so, the Japanese heritage schools attempt to incorporate the most vital information from a whole week's worth of material into one weekend day session. The academic year runs from April through March and each year, students meet on 42-44 Saturdays or Sundays or after U.S. local school.

Each Saturday or Sunday, students learn Japanese *kokugo* (reading and writing), mathematics, science, social science, and history. The teachers, many of whom are native Japanese immigrants, are often trained in Japan to teach native Japanese learners, so the curriculum is not geared towards Japanese heritage language learners. These schools were originally created to teach Japanese nationals' children while they are living overseas for a few years, with the intention that they would seamlessly be able to re-enter the curriculum in Japan upon their return (Chinen & Tucker, 2005b). However, as of 2017, the majority of students who attend these Japanese language schools are heritage language learners with no intention of living in Japan in the future (Rollins, 2017).

This demographic shift happened after the Japanese economic downturn in the 1990s (Chinen & Tucker, 2005b). Out of 1451 Japanese teaching institutions, approximately 50% of students are learning Japanese in K-16 because "Japanese is the family language" (Rollins, 2017, p.10). In U.S. public schools, Japanese was the first Asian language to be mainstreamed into the K-16 education system in the U.S. (Kondo-Brown, 2014), and continues to have a high enrollment, especially on the west coast. The number of Japanese learners has increased across the west coast since 2012 (Rollins, 2017).

Curriculum geared towards the needs of heritage language learners, *keishogo*, is "The acknowledgement of the students' lack of knowledge about Japan was treated constructively as a

chance to provide this knowledge to the students” (Doerr & Lee, 2013, p.89-90). Japanese heritage school sometimes have dual curriculums, one geared towards Japanese American students who plan on returning to Japan for school and or work and one for Japanese American students who plan to stay in the U.S. (Uriu & Douglas, 2017). Japanese people overall have positive attitudes towards bilingualism and are highly motivated to become bilingual and have their children become bilingual (Hayashi, 1999). One challenge to this is that English and Japanese are highly dissimilar, so students must work extra hard to become bilingual. Activities such as hearing from guest speakers who only speak Japanese, visiting Japan and seeing relatives and friends, and maintaining contact with them through regular spoken and written communication were found to motivate Japanese heritage language learners to continue their learning. Japanese heritage language learners’ motivation to learn two languages was found to be influenced by major life experiences such as living and traveling worldwide, as well as the support they felt from family, school and community (Hayashi, 2006).

Studying Japanese Heritage Language

Past research includes the experiences of current Japanese heritage language learners’ experience at heritage language schools including weekend and evening schools, and ESL and immersion programs. With the majority of Japanese Americans clustered in Hawaii, California, New York, and Washington State (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2010), Japanese Americans living in these states have the most exposure to other Japanese or Japanese Americans, and Japanese resources and educational opportunities that include bookstores, authentic Japanese food, and cultural events such as festivals. An important consideration is also the cost of attending Japanese heritage school. For example, the largest Japanese heritage school in Los Angeles, Asahi Gakuen, with four different campuses located in Santa Monica, Torrance, San

Gabriel, and Garden Grove, CA charges \$1920 for a 10-month school year (Asahi Gakuen, n.d.). This tuition may preclude families from sending their children to the heritage language schools. In cities with large Japanese populations, such as Los Angeles, there are more opportunities to speak Japanese and take part in cultural events and Japan-related activities. In areas with only a small Japanese population, exposure to Japanese is limited and often becomes a *home-only* language. I have not seen evidence of scholarships or reduced tuition.

The experience of Japanese Americans' assimilation into the United States provides valuable context for how heritage language schools were established and grew between the late 1800's and present. Similar to other immigrant groups, the Japanese assimilation experience was strongly affected by U.S. foreign policy and economic interests (Fishman, 2014). The first wave of immigrants from Japan arrived in the late 1800's in Hawaii and California to work as farmers and laborers (Morimoto, 1997). The Japanese American population grew steadily and occupations expanded to trade and industry until the National Origins Act of 1924 that curbed all immigration from Asia. The efforts of Japanese Americans to assimilate were further deterred due to the forced relocation and internment of about 120,000 Japanese Americans after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Pew Research Center, 2012). The most recent wave, starting from the 1980's to the present, is predominantly business people who are sent by their companies to work in the U.S. for an average of 3-5 years (Hamada, 2008). Some families stay longer or become permanent residents. They transition from being dominant Japanese speakers to heritage language speakers when circumstances provide that they remain in the U.S. This study focuses on the experiences of the descendants of Japanese immigrants, known as 1.5 generation and beyond. Out of the majority of Asian subgroups in the U.S., the Japanese are the

only group that is majority U.S. born (73% of the total population and 68% of adults; Pew Research Center, 2012).

An example of Japanese heritage language schooling outside of a major city is the study of the experiences of several Japanese families' experience in a small city in Indiana (Hamada, 2008). The Japanese heritage school was the core of the Japanese community in an area with very little Japanese cultural influences outside of the school. Hamada (2008) researched parents and children's reflections on their current or immediate past experience at a Japanese heritage school. Several of the case study themes illustrated that there was conflict within the community and family because parents and children wanted to assimilate into U.S. school and life, but also wanted to maintain their Japanese language and identity. The conflict resulted because often there was not enough time for students to complete their studies in the local U.S. school and the Japanese heritage school. The theme of being pulled in both directions became a stronger factor to leave the optional Japanese heritage school as students move upward from elementary school to the middle and high school age.

The interviewees in my study attended Japanese heritage schools in different parts of the United States and the Japanese community around them may have affected their experiences. Attending a school such as the one in Hamada's (2008) study versus attending a Japanese heritage school in a city with a high Japanese and Japanese American population would provide a different level of exposure to the Japanese community that is shown to have an effect on assimilation and engagement with the community.

Students' motivation to maintain their Japanese as a heritage language largely depends on whether they enjoyed their school environment and the amount of pressure that their parents put on them to study. The efficacy of more or less familial pressure depended on the student (Chik,

2010; Douglas et al., 2003). The ways in which Japanese heritage language learners become or do not become biliterate largely depends on the level of support and student and family motivation. Family, school and the local community are necessary to create cultural milieus that encourage a balanced use of both English and Japanese so that children can achieve bilingualism and biculturalism (Hayashi, 2006). Heritage language learners often also play the role of a *language broker* in their homes. Acting as a language broker navigating between English and the heritage language aids in heritage language literacy acquisition (Tse, 2001). However, there is a gap in research in exploring how alumni of these programs feel about their experience once they have had time to process and reflect back on the dynamics of their experience. Areas for exploration include the academic, psychological, emotional, and social and cultural elements of their experiences.

Conclusion

There is a need for more research on the value of heritage language learning as a whole, and especially for research on less commonly taught languages such as Japanese. The benefits include a more bilingual, biliterate population, and the nurturing of cultural diversity and positive ethnic identity development that leads to positive outcomes for society (Brecht & Ingold, 2002; Tse, 2001, NHLRC, 2017; Wiley et al., 2015). Gaining a better understanding of how alumni of Japanese heritage language programs reflect on their learning experiences adds to the communication and collaboration between stakeholders invested in maximizing the many benefits of becoming a bilingual and biliterate individual. These learning experiences empowered by reflection can illuminate ways in which to improve and grow opportunities for Japanese heritage language learning in K-12, higher education, and beyond.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

From the reflections of Japanese heritage language learners and teachers of Japanese heritage language learners, this study sought to understand how learners make sense of their experiences learning Japanese in the United States. Participants were asked to narrate their language learning journeys. The interviews and post-interview reflection helped elicit stories about learners' unique experiences as heritage language learners, about how learning Japanese affected their feelings about their bicultural ethnic identity and vice versa, and their feelings about bilingualism, and biliteracy. The learners' shared how they felt their families impacted their motivation as well as the challenges around balancing U.S. local school and Japanese heritage school academic responsibilities. Learners were also asked about their careers and if and how Japanese has played a role in their current or future career plans. Finally, learners shared their ideas about passing their language skills on to future generations in their families.

Research Questions

As previously mentioned, the following research questions guide this study:

1. What are Japanese heritage language school alumni and adult learners' perceptions of how their participation in the school helped/helps them connect, if at all, with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community?
 - a. How do Japanese heritage language program alumni connect their language journeys to their ethnic identity development?
 - b. What factors influence a heritage language learners' ability to choose or navigate a bicultural-bilingual identity?
 - c. How has their perspective changed over the years about their heritage language learning experience?

2. What are Japanese language teachers' perceptions of how Japanese heritage language learners connect, if at all, with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community through learning Japanese in school?

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research design was utilized and included semi-structured interviews, journaling, and analysis of thematic autobiography essays. Qualitative methods were appropriate because qualitative research is ideal for engaging in research that studies how people “engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2016, p.23). Quantitative instruments such as a survey provide a “numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population” (Creswell, 2014, P.13). However, numeric data does not meet the aims of capturing the narratives of Japanese heritage language learners; therefore, the study was not well served by quantitative methods. I wanted to capture the narratives of Japanese heritage language learners as they reflected upon their feelings as they navigated their language learning journeys. In-depth semi-structured interviews, journaling, and thematic autobiography essays served this purpose well in order to learn as much as possible about these learners' experiences due to the in-depth nature of these methods.

This type of research is well suited to this study because I wanted to learn about their perceptions of their experiences engaging with heritage language learning throughout their lives. Since I would like to learn about their stories, a narrative inquiry design provided the best fit. The data are the stories themselves. Our stories reflect how we make sense of our experiences and understand the world around us (Merriam, 2016). In his work with Indigenous communities, Brayboy (2005) validates the stories and narratives that impart valuable community history and a multitude of experiences. Stories are not separate from theory, the

stories inform theories and are “real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). In-depth interviews produced a singular, deep perspective of stories that show how the participants have made meaning out of their experiences. “When we ask participants to reconstruct details of their experience, they are selecting events from their past and in so doing imparting meaning in them” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). In contrast with in-depth interviews with students about their personal experiences with heritage language learning, interviews with Japanese language teachers provided a broad, surface overview as they have observed the experiences of many students throughout their years of teaching.

The analysis of one previously written critical thematic autobiography also informed the narrative inquiry. “Personal documents are a good source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (Merriam, 2016, p. 166). They reflect the participant’s perspective that is a goal in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2016). In addition, I provided prompts and asked Japanese heritage language learners to reflect in their journals. Please see sample prompts in Appendix C.

Participants and Site

I utilized selective and purposeful sampling to identify Japanese-Americans who had engaged with Japanese language learning. The study participants included alumni of Japanese heritage schools and Japanese heritage school teachers. My preference was to interview heritage language learners who attended a language program in K-12 and then continued learning Japanese in college. Being able to compare learners’ language journeys was helpful in order to see if there were any major differences in the perceptions of their experiences. I also interviewed teachers as they provide valuable insights into the Japanese heritage language learning

community due to their first hand exposure to learners in the classroom. This study took place in Southern California.

My goal was to interview five alumni of a large university in Southern California's Japanese heritage language course, and five people who attended Japanese heritage programs in K-12 only, I called this group, "Group 1." The rationale for the goal of 10 Japanese heritage language learner interviews was to have a range of gender, background, and occupations. I planned to interview a minimum of three Japanese language teachers with a range of gender and teaching experience, I called this group "Group 2."

Group 1: Learners who took Japanese language courses in K-12 and or higher education through a Japanese heritage or foreign language course. Fourteen participants were in this group. Five participants were currently enrolled in a large public university in Southern California, and were taking or had taken Japanese classes there. Five participants took university level Japanese heritage or Japanese foreign language classes and graduated within the last 10 years. Three participants took university level Japanese heritage or Japanese foreign language classes and graduated more than 10 years ago. Only one Japanese heritage language learner took Japanese in K-12 but did not take Japanese heritage language courses in higher education.

Group 2: Teachers who teach Japanese language for foreign language learners and Japanese heritage language learners in K-12 and higher education, they are expert consultants. Six teachers were in this group.

The Japanese heritage language learners who participated in my study lived in the U.S. and Japan. The main focus was on alumni of a large university in Southern California and teachers in Southern California for several reasons.

The Western United States was home to several Japanese internment camps during World War II and these camps have had a lasting impact on the Japanese-American narrative. In addition, California is home to the largest number of Japanese language learners in the U.S., 41,462 learners (Rollins, 2017). In addition, Los Angeles, one of the largest cities in Southern California, is home to a large number of heritage language learners as 56.8% of its population 5 years of age and older speaks a home language other than English (U.S. Census, 2015). Furthermore, one of the 16 federally sponsored Language Resource Centers, the NHLRC, is located in Southern California. The NHLRC's (2017) mission is to "develop effective pedagogical approaches to teaching heritage language learners both by creating a research base and by pursuing curriculum design, materials development, and teacher education" (p.1). The NHLRC and this large university's language departments work closely to create holistic language courses for heritage language learners. Lastly, I have personal experience taking a Japanese heritage language course at this large university in Southern California. I am familiar with the content of the course and have firsthand experience. I feel that my firsthand experience was an asset to my understanding of the participants' experience.

Data Collection Methods

This study included semi-structured interviews, journaling, and analysis of one thematic critical autobiography. I had access to one thematic autobiography of a Japanese heritage language learner in the study. I contacted potential participants via email as soon as I received IRB approval and introduced the study and myself.

Reflection. Reflection is a meaningful pedagogical experience because "at the heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language" (Seidman, 2013, p. 8). The importance of reconstructing and sharing experiences and

stories as a way towards understanding is a foundational idea within reflection as a pedagogical experience (Seidman, 2013). It is the idea at the heart of this study. I asked adult alumni of Japanese heritage schools to reflect back upon their experience because I believe they can learn a lot about their Japanese language learning experiences through reflection. Creating prompts within the interview questions and the post-interview journaling enabled learners to reflect. This helped learners to share their stories and narratives about their experiences. Then, as researchers, we can learn a great deal from their reflections to inform stakeholders in heritage language education. The power and benefit of reflection lies in the opportunity to take time to process and make meaning of our experiences. John Dewey wrote that reflection moves a learner from a state of disequilibrium, or feeling perplexed, to a harmonious state, or equilibrium (Rodgers, 2002).

While past or current Japanese heritage language learners may not be in a current state of disequilibrium, they may have felt this way during the negotiation of their multiple identities as referenced above in the ethnic identity literature. Dewey's (1938) theory of reflection includes four criteria: first, reflection is a meaning-making process that allows us to move from one experience into the next with a deeper understanding. Second, reflection is a systemic and rigorous way of thinking with roots in scientific inquiry. Third, reflection happens in community with others. Fourth, reflection requires that a person has an attitude that values personal and intellectual growth of one's self and others (Rodgers, 2002). "What [an individual] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue" (Dewey, 1938, p. 44). This study sought to discover how Japanese heritage language program alumni connect their language journeys to their ethnic identity development,

within the context of learning in a Japanese heritage school community to connect and interact with their own unique Japanese community.

For an alumna who wrote a critical thematic autobiography in her Japanese heritage language class at the large university in Southern California, she was asked to re-read it and reflect upon how it made her feel in the present. For alumni who did not write critical thematic autobiographies, a common event and artifacts at Japanese heritage language schools, such as the annual field day competition, *undou kai* and the annual yearbook, were referenced to serve as a catalyst for stirring their ability to reflect and ideally reconstruct some of their experiences.

The interview protocols (see Appendices A-D) aimed to answer my research questions; and interview protocols from multiple studies on heritage language learners (Chinen & Tucker, 2005a; Doerr & Lee, 2013; Phinney et al., 2001; Tse, 2001) helped formulate the protocols.

The main goal of the Japanese heritage language learners' interview protocol was to learn how each interviewee felt about their experience, especially in relation to their ethnic identity and how that may have changed throughout their learning experience. The main goal of the Japanese language teachers' interviews was to gain their perspective on how they believe the heritage classes influenced the students' ethnic identity development.

Interviews took place in person as much as possible. Online interviews in a private online conference room were arranged for one interviewee in Japan. This one interviewee grew up in the U.S. as a Japanese heritage language learner and currently lives in Japan. For interviewees who live in the Los Angeles area, I arranged a private room to meet them that was convenient for them. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes. I selected semi-structured interviews because I asked interviewees to reconstruct and reflect upon their perception of their ethnic identity in the

past and connect it with the current perception of their ethnic identity. I collected the data by directly asking interviewees to reflect and share their memories, feelings, and experiences.

Journaling. I asked Japanese heritage language learners to journal post-interview. The journal exercise included reflection prompts to help them, which they could choose to answer, or they could free-write. I gave the participants the option to write their journal in person or to email me their journals. I provided prompts and asked participants to write for 10-15 minutes post interview, in person, or to send me their reflection via email (See Appendix C). They were encouraged to write freely, for as long as they would like, about any thoughts or feelings that they had post-interview. I found that reflection on this experience brought up memories that were unexplored during the interview.

Thematic critical autobiographies. The original intention was to read the thematic critical autobiographies of several Japanese heritage language learners who enrolled in the course for Japanese heritage language learners at this large public university in Southern California. Ultimately, only one autobiography was obtained. However, even just the one was valuable to trace this learner's language journey, and she is profiled in the findings chapter. I asked this learner additional questions in how re-reading her critical thematic autobiographies made her feel post-experience (See Appendix B).

Access and Participant Recruitment

A lecturer in the Japanese department at this large public university in Southern California was a key contact for access to participants in groups 1 and 2. I had met with her twice about my interest in Japanese heritage language learning. She proposed that I review the critical thematic autobiographies of past students in the heritage language class she previously taught. She provided contact information for several alumni of the Japanese heritage language class.

This is also a key research interest area for her. I shared an abbreviated version of my dissertation proposal as she offered to provide guidance. I also interviewed her as an expert in both teaching Japanese heritage language learning in K-12 and higher education. An advantage of accessing participants through this teacher is that she is committed to the mission of my research. She is also interested in the results, as she has expressed the belief that Japanese heritage language learners have unique stories and needs and we should support them to a greater degree throughout their language learning experience. I had access to Japanese heritage language learners in K-12 who did not take Japanese heritage language courses in higher education through my own contacts as well as through several Japanese-American associations.

These associations include this large public university in Southern California's Nikkei student group, the Japan America Society of Southern California, Japan Foundation Los Angeles, and the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center. I had access to teachers who teach Japanese language for foreign language learners and Japanese heritage language learners in K-12 and higher education (Group 1) through Japanese teachers and researchers who study Japanese heritage language learning and teaching (Group 2). I utilized snowball sampling for groups 1 and 2 to maximize the number of participants from which to learn from their reflections.

Data Analysis Methods

I recorded each interview with an Apple computer-recording device and a phone. The use of two devices was for one to be a backup should one fail to record properly. I took notes during the interviews, especially to record key themes that came up during the interviews. I transcribed each interview within 72 hours of the meeting. After I transcribed each interview, I also read it again and compared with my notes to ensure I had as complete a transcription as possible. I

analyzed each transcription as soon as possible for the theme of Japanese heritage language school experience, ethnic identity, bilingualism and biliteracy, family and Japanese-American community, cultural heritage, motivation, career, and intergenerational transfer.

The timing after the interviews was important to maximize my observational memory during the interview and connect it with the themes that emerged from the transcript. I separated the most poignant or relevant data to the study from non-relevant as “other” information. This other information was stored on a separate document to review later in case it became relevant further along in the process.

I analyzed the journals and thematic autobiography for themes of Japanese heritage language school experience, ethnic identity, bilingualism and biliteracy, family and Japanese-American community, cultural heritage, motivation, career, and intergenerational transfer. The journals offered an alternate way for participants to share their reflections as writing on their own allowed private exploration that is impossible in an interview or conversation. The thematic autobiography was an additional way to gain insight into the experience of one Japanese heritage language learner as she navigated through her K-16 Japanese heritage language learning journey.

Since my study focuses on the experience of Japanese heritage language learners at heritage language schools and those who have taken heritage language classes in higher education, I analyzed these experiences separately for the key themes mentioned above. Data analysis was done “hand-in-hand” with data collection and write up because the interviewing, analysis, and write-up all informs each other in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). I compared the themes that emerged from each person as well as compared across the individuals. I also compared how different individuals process their experiences in Japanese heritage language programs and their perceptions of how this affected their identity.

Role Management and Ethical Issues

There were no breaches of human subject protocols. All interviewees were adults. I gave them a full explanation of the purpose of the study and shared how the results would be used to inform Japanese heritage language stakeholders. I also prepared a summary of my findings to the participants utilizing pseudonyms to ensure identity protection. I ensured participant confidentiality. All IRB protocols were followed including obtaining consent forms from each participant, and confirming their approval to record the interviews and include the data obtained from the interviews and analysis of the autobiography in this study. I used pseudonyms from time of transcription. All files are saved to password protected drives. Any document that contains actual names was destroyed as soon as transcription occurred.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

A threat to the credibility of my study was my own bias as a former Japanese heritage language learner. Another threat to the credibility was a smaller sample size, which precluded me to be able to generalize to all heritage language groups. I tried my best to gather the same detailed and concrete background information from each participant to account for depth of experience and specificity. I triangulated the data results by looking at the semi-structured interviews, analysis of reflections and autobiography, and speaking with experts. Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object, “is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies” (Denzin, 1978, p.294). By combining methods, researchers can achieve the best of each method (Denzin, 1978). The results were also analyzed across several ethnic identity theories and reflection theories. A small set of hypotheses guide a study, and there is value in approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind (Denzin, 1978).

While there is a gap in research with in-depth interviews of alumni of Japanese heritage language programs, I drew on existing interview protocols given to current heritage language learners that focus on the connection between heritage language learning and ethnic identity development. This should minimize the threat to credibility by using existing research as a foundation. Ultimately, I believe I have internal generalizability to Japanese heritage language learners across the U.S. so they can compare their own experiences with the participants in the study.

Summary

By hearing the stories of Japanese heritage language learners and assisting them in reflecting on their experiences, this study helps us understand the perceived effect and meaning of heritage language experiences for alumni. Gaining a better understanding of how alumni of Japanese heritage language programs reflect on their learning experiences adds to the communication and collaboration between stakeholders invested in maximizing the many benefits of becoming a bilingual and biliterate individual. These learning experiences, empowered by reflection, can illuminate how to improve and grow opportunities for Japanese heritage language learning in K-12, higher education, and beyond.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of this study that included semi-structured interviews, post-interview reflections and one critical thematic autobiography. First, information about the participant population will be shared including demographic information and background information on their heritage language learning experience. Then, the major themes that resulted from the semi-structured interviews, post-interview reflections, and analysis of one critical thematic autobiography will be shared. In-depth narratives of four learners that highlight the major themes are interwoven with the combined narratives of the participants.

Interviews with 14 learners and six teachers were completed. The results of the 20 semi-structured narrative interviews and 10 post-interview reflection essays written by learners will be shared. The interviews were qualitative, semi-structured narrative-style interviews. One learner also submitted the critical thematic autobiography they wrote in their Japanese heritage language class in university.

Participant Population

The 14 learners ranged in age from 19 to 59. There were eight women and six men. Twelve students attended heritage school during their K-12 years, and nine learned Japanese in a heritage school both in K-12 and in their higher education. The status of the learners was that five were enrolled in a large public state university in California, six were alumni who graduated within 10 years of this large public state university in California, and three alumni graduated 10 plus years ago. In the U.S., the learners were educated in California, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Washington D.C. In Japan, the learners were educated in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Five learners were educated in MEXT (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) curriculum schools, seven were

educated in non-MEXT community schools, and two did not attend heritage language school in K-12. Eleven took Japanese language in a Japanese foreign language or heritage language class within their higher education. Table 1 below provides this data.

Before interviewing the learners, I interviewed teachers to gain their overarching perspective on what their perceptions are of the heritage learners over the course of their teaching experience, with a focus on how they felt that students connected with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community through learning Japanese in K-12 and higher education. Out of the six teachers interviewed, all were experienced K-12 and higher education teachers, with 12 to 39 years of experience teaching in both heritage language schools and university courses. Table 2 below indicates the number of years teaching Japanese as a heritage language versus teaching Japanese as a foreign language. The teachers also had national and international teaching experience in Arizona, Australia, California, Japan, and Kentucky.

Table 1

Heritage Language Learner Information

Name	Age	Heritage School Location	MEXT?	Yrs Attended	# Years JFL/JHL	JFL or JHL	Location
Adam	59	CA	No	3	3	JFL	Japan
Anne	35	HI, MA	Yes	7	3	JFL	MA
Douglas	30	CA	Yes	2	4	Both	CA
George	35	HI	No	3	0	N/A	NA
Hanna	28	CA	Yes	11	1	JHL	CA
Jennifer	29	CA	No	4	1	JHL	CA
June	28	CA	No	13	1	JHL	CA
Ken	32	N/A	N/A	0	3	JFL	CA
Kotaro	20	CA	No	6	2	JFL	CA
Lauren	18	NJ	Yes	13	0	N/A	NA
Mariko	19	CA	No	6	2	JFL	CA
Naoko	20	N/A	N/A	0	1	JFL	CA
Osamu	32	CA	No	5	0	N/A	N/A
Stephanie	19	NY, DC, IL	Both	10	1	JHL	CA

Table 2

Teachers' Information

Name	# Yrs JHL	# Yrs Total	JHL Teaching (State/Country)	Ethnic Self-Identification
Prof. Matsu	14	16	Washington, D.C	Japanese
Prof. Biwa	13	23	CA	Japanese
Prof. Take	19	39	Australia, CA	Japanese
Prof. Momiji	3	12	AZ, CA	Japanese
Prof. Kaede	5	23	CA	Japanese
Prof. Fujii	16	16	KY	Japanese

Note. Pseudonyms are types of traditional Japanese trees/flowers.

Organization of the Chapter

Major themes that arose out of teachers' and learners' perceptions will be shared. There were seven overarching themes that emerged from conducting interviews with learners and teachers, and reading learners' post-interview reflections. The Japanese heritage language learners and teachers both agreed on the following points. First, there are significant differences between how learners of Japanese as a heritage language and learners of Japanese as a foreign language learn Japanese, and these learners have very different needs. Second, learners gain a deeper understanding of ethnic identity through attending Japanese heritage school in K-12 and during their higher education. Third, heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status. Fourth, family life impacts the motivation of heritage language learners to study Japanese. Fifth, learners' ability to balance both Japanese heritage school and U.S. local schoolwork impacts their motivation. This then impacts their ability to continue in Japanese heritage language school. Sixth, it is challenging to attain a high enough literacy and Japanese speaking ability to use Japanese fluently in a career. Seven, intergenerational language transfer was important to the learners.

In-depth narratives of four learners that illustrate the significant themes in various contexts will be woven into the narrative as major themes are presented. Each of the four stories was selected because they feature characteristics of a “typical” Japanese heritage language learner. Jennifer attended a Japanese heritage language school where she was able to have her schooling count towards language credits at her Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) high school. The ability to earn credits for heritage language learning is still limited across the U.S., but is a growing trend, especially in metropolitan areas with a diversity of heritage language schools. Stephanie attended several Japanese heritage schools in K-12, and experienced some common challenges of bi/multiracial students in Japanese heritage schools. Hanna grew up in a Japanese-only speaking household, attended Japanese heritage school throughout K-12, and was able to achieve a level of fluency that enabled her to work at a Japanese company in Japan and at a Japanese not-for-profit organization in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Osamu’s family has lived in the U.S. for several generations, and Japanese heritage school was a catalyst to help them connect as a family with their ethnic identity and culture.

Heritage Learners versus Japanese Foreign Language Learners’ Needs

As mentioned in the summary of findings above, the first main theme is that it is important to understand that there are significant differences between how learners of Japanese as a heritage language, and how learners of Japanese as a foreign language learn Japanese. These learners also have very different needs. It is also important to differentiate between whether learners took university classes that were Japanese foreign language, Japanese heritage language, or if they took a combination of both during their higher education experience. Eleven out of the 14 learners enrolled in Japanese classes in their higher education. Six out of 11 of these students took Japanese as a foreign language, four took Japanese as a heritage language, and one took

both Japanese as a foreign language and Japanese as a heritage language courses. See also table 1.

Several of the teachers interviewed explained that when students arrive at college and take their language placement exams, they can only place into Japanese as a heritage language classes if they have a high speaking and a high literacy level. There are many Japanese heritage learners who have a high speaking level from attending Japanese heritage school, or speaking casually with family and friends, but they do not have the professional Japanese speaking skills or literacy skills to place into the heritage classes. Many heritage learners get placed into Japanese as foreign language entry-level classes, but this is not a good fit for their language abilities. Therefore, this creates disconnect between the learners' needs and what institutions can provide to them.

When asked about his choice to take Japanese classes, Douglas said,

The placement test allowed me to take classes that were attuned to my level of Japanese. I believe it was due to my speaking level. I took six to eight [Japanese-related] classes in college. That includes Modern Japanese, some sort of translating class, and a couple of classical courses. The modern Japanese classes were fun, the professors were great. I did have difficulty with the linguistics classes. I found them a bit more challenging than I thought it would be, which is a good thing.

Three of the six heritage language learners who took Japanese as a foreign language in college expressed they felt they were not in the right class for them, but understood why they were not able to be in the Japanese for heritage speakers class. Two of these current students strived to take the heritage class as a goal, while one gave up on Japanese because she felt it was too difficult for her.

All six teachers supported the idea that heritage learners had different learning needs than Japanese foreign language learners. Flexibility is an attribute cited as important in working with heritage learners since their speaking and literacy levels were all different. Professor Momiji said,

Learners are often better at speaking than writing...they can do daily conversation, but sometimes cannot explain deeper...There is a huge gap...It's hard to assess heritage learners understanding because their levels are so different. They learn top-down skills versus bottom up (Japanese Foreign Language Learners).

A challenge worth noting is that in some cases, there are too few students that enroll to form a heritage language class during a given semester. Professor Take commented that at the large public university in Southern California where she teaches, that there needs to be at least 15 students to form a Japanese heritage language class. She is not sure of the best way to market to more students, or how to better recruit those students so they know that the class is available. She suggested that the Nikkei student groups across the state system should work together to market the classes to students.

Heritage Learner Jennifer

Jennifer's experience is a reflection of a best practice in how educational institutions working together can help enable heritage language learners to learn and explore their heritage. Her narrative highlights a type of heritage school that is designed for Japanese heritage language learners to embrace their identities and learn about their Japanese cultural heritage. These educational institutions also understand how to motivate learners. Jennifer earned high school credits for her Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) school for her attendance at the Japanese heritage school. Jennifer self-identified as Japanese-American, *Yonsei* (fourth

generation), and *Shin-Nisei* (New second generation). While technically she is *Yonsei* as the child of two third generation parents, she also identified as *Shin-Nisei*. These types of generational identifications serve the purpose to help describe someone's experience, but they are fluid in that people can identify with however they conceptualize their generational identities. Jennifer's sentiment captures this feeling below,

It was easier for me to fit in with *Shin-Nisei*...sometimes I feel more culturally *Yonsei*, other times I feel like I don't fit in with that kind of *Yonsei* group...definitely college is when I thought about that more because everyone would argue with me about what I was.

Jennifer felt it was strange how people's ideas of what those identities are can also shape how you perceive your identity too. She attended a non-MEXT Japanese heritage school in the San Fernando Valley connected to a Buddhist temple during high school for 4 years. She felt that the program was specifically designed for Japanese-Americans who grow up in English-speaking families. She said, "Programs like Asahi [Gakuen] are very intimidating for people like me."

Asahi Gakuen is a MEXT-sponsored school in Los Angeles, and several learners and teachers expressed that it has a challenging curriculum, much like students would experience if attending school in Japan. When asked what motivated her to start attending Japanese heritage school in high school, Jennifer explained that she had always been interested, but had been intimidated, and her parents did not push her to attend heritage school in her elementary and middle school years. When she learned that she could earn foreign language credits at her Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) high school, she was eager to give Japanese heritage school a try. Some of her *Sansei* (third) and *Yonsei* (fourth) generation Japanese-American friends were also planning to start the school at the same time, so she felt that she had a

community going into school. She said, “We did a lot of cultural activities with language skills. It was really nice, it didn’t feel intimidating.”

She expressed appreciation that she was able to easily obtain credits from her LAUSD school for attending the Japanese heritage school. Jennifer explained that her younger brother went to a private school, and they would not accept the credits from the Japanese heritage school. Jennifer’s class size decreased as she progressed through the 4 years, they never had more than 12 students in the class. As a result, her teacher was able to provide very personalized and individualized instruction. Towards her fourth year, it turned into small group and individual tutoring, the students worked through workbooks at their own pace. Jennifer felt that having these customized lessons increased the efficiency of her learning process.

As mentioned earlier, MEXT schools also run on a different academic calendar (April - March) than U.S. local schools, but her heritage school aligned with the U.S. local schools calendar (September-June). An additional bonus was that she gained a free period at her LAUSD school. Jennifer took 2 years of Japanese courses at university, and continued to stay involved with the Japanese-American community. She volunteered as a representative of a Japanese prefectural government affinity group. Japan is divided into prefectures, akin to the states in the U.S. Jennifer joined the prefecture affinity group where her great-grandparents were born, and acted as an Ambassador for them. The affinity group had a program where they host Japanese-American students to visit the prefecture. Additionally, Jennifer participated in *nihon buyou* (traditional Japanese dance), and continued to enjoy watching Japanese dramas and listening to Japanese music. She desired to keep finding more ways to use Japanese in her daily life. Jennifer also felt that there were large gaps between the Japanese-speaking and English-only Japanese-American communities. She said, “I would like to help bridge some of those gaps. I think a lot of

people have a strict vision of what being a Japanese-American is, and so if they can expand their vision it would be good.”

In a community where there are natural divisions between shared and non-shared experiences, it is vital to try to come together to strengthen ties to maximize the presence of the community to maintain the culture in a foreign space. Jennifer had a positive experience learning Japanese in heritage language school. This was a result of the heritage school understanding heritage language learners’ unique learning needs and the local U.S. school validating the value of heritage language learning by creating a structure where students can earn credits for their attendance.

Heritage Language Learner Perceptions and Reflection

Participant Self-Identification

In this section I will introduce the learner participants and share how they self-identified by ethnicity and generation in the U.S. In the Japanese American experience, the generations differentiate by how long their family has been in the U.S. because the generations have unique immigration/assimilation experiences depending on when they arrived. *Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, Gosei* respectively mean first, second, third, fourth and fifth generation in the U.S. *Shin-Nisei* is a second generation person of Japanese heritage whose parents moved to the U.S. within the last 30 years, and is used to differentiate between Nisei who have lived in the U.S. pre-World War II (Metoki, 2012; See Chapter 1 for a full description of generations.).

Table 3

Heritage Language Learner Ethnic Self-Identification and Generation Information

Name	Age	Ethnic Self-Identification	Self-Described Generation
Adam	59	Japanese American	<i>Nisei</i>
Anne	35	Japanese American	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>

Douglas	30	Half Japanese, Half White	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>
George	35	Japanese American	<i>Yonsei</i>
Hanna	28	Japanese American	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>
Jennifer	29	Japanese American	<i>Yonsei and Shin-Nisei</i>
June	28	Japanese American	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>
Ken	32	Half-Japanese, Half Black	<i>Sansei</i>
Kotaro	20	Half Japanese, Half Chinese	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>
Lauren	18	Half-Japanese, Half White	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>
Mariko	19	Half-Japanese, Half-Filipino	<i>Yonsei</i>
Naoko	20	Japanese American	<i>Yonsei</i>
Osamu	32	Japanese American	<i>Yonsei</i>
Stephanie	19	Half-Japanese, Half-White	<i>Shin-Nisei</i>

Seven of the 14 learners were of mixed ethnic background; this ratio is not typical of the ethnic background at Japanese heritage schools. However, it was a focus of this study to learn about the perceptions across a diversity of Japanese heritage learner backgrounds. Several teachers commented that mixed-race Japanese-American students have unique experiences that differ from those of non-mixed race students, especially in the traditional MEXT schools. Stephanie’s narrative is shared as a way to learn about her experience navigating different types of Japanese heritage schools and the impact the schools and community has had on her sense of identity and her overall learning experience.

Heritage Learner Stephanie

Stephanie was a second year, 19-year-old student at a large public university in southern California who self-identified as half-Japanese and half-white and “new” second-generation Japanese, *Shin-Nisei*.

Stephanie attended various Japanese heritage schools in K-12, in several parts of the U.S., including Illinois, New York, Washington, D.C., and Japan. She was born in New York, and her Japanese mother had a peer group of Japanese mothers that would get together and have Japanese playgroups. Stephanie remembered being part of these playgroups until the age of five.

Several of the learners' mothers were part of this type of mothers' group. At age five, Stephanie's family moved to Japan, and she attended a school designed for learners who wanted to have an American educational curriculum overseas. The language of instruction was English. In fourth grade (approximately age 8), she moved back to the U.S. with her family, to New York. She started at a MEXT-sponsored Japanese heritage school in New York, and was put 2 years behind. At age 8 she was in a classroom with 6-year-olds. Stephanie felt challenged to be put in a class with younger students. In her reflection when writing about what she wishes had been different, she wrote,

I wish I was sorted into a class that was older, because I think it was harmful to be stuck in a class with kids that are younger than you, but yet hold a power over you because they can communicate better. I think at that age, it really does matter if you are older than your classmates because it's isolating and demeaning- I think it does a number on your self-esteem.

She quit the Japanese Weekend School at age 11, largely due to her negative experience of being put into a class with younger students and being bullied for being half-Japanese.

The issue of bullying did come up with other participants as a challenge for them, although it was only the case for less than a quarter of the participant pool. Three of the 14 learners mentioned bullying as an issue for them during their heritage school experience. While bullying in Japanese heritage schools is not limited to mixed race students, in this study, the students who spoke about bullying identified as mixed race. While these learners felt that the heritage schools were a space to explore biracial identity, on the other side were experiences with bullying. Stephanie spoke openly about her experience with bullying,

The only friend I made was half, and she was in my situation [put 2 years behind], we bonded over this shared negative experience...The most vivid memory of Japanese school was like, a girl had a binder with stationary, and she would pass it around, but I was outside that group, so she was like, "Don't touch it." After that, nobody really played with me.

Mariko was also kept behind. As a sixth grader; she was in a class with second graders. She felt it was "weird," and inappropriate from a peer socialization perspective.

Well, I was the oldest in the class. In all the classes, because I never advanced, and I was held back a bunch...So, yeah. A lot of my friendships were with these little kids. I was still pretty young, too, but they definitely like ... They're probably like second graders, first graders, while I was already a sixth, fifth grader. Yeah.

Stephanie took a break from Japanese Weekend School for about one year, and then she and her family moved to Washington, D.C. At age 13, she started attending a school specifically designed for heritage learners, which she said was much more "culture-focused" and it was "more geared towards half [Japanese] people." She said that the teaching style at the heritage school in Washington D.C. gave students more freedom. Some examples are that they were asked to write a proposal for what they wanted to learn and why, and present this to the administration. Teachers would ask, "What do you want to do with your time?" She said, "It was kind of democratic, asking us what do you think will be most useful to you?"

Stephanie stayed at the heritage school until her sophomore year of high school, and then did academic tutoring for her last 2 years, until she went to college and took the Japanese heritage language class. Stephanie said she would take additional Japanese or Japanese heritage language classes in college if they fit in her schedule. From Stephanie's perspective, as "College

undergraduate kids, the biggest thing on everyone's mind is identity, which comes up a lot in conversation, and it's in a place where you are allowed to talk about it."

Higher education is focused on creating safe spaces for conversations about identity and encourages and provides opportunities for exploration of identity for discussion both in the curriculum and in co-curricular activities such as with cultural affinity groups. Stephanie joined two Japanese-affiliated organizations in her first year of college, and continued to be active in conversations about identity exploration. She felt that she had become well versed in what it meant to be Japanese-American, versus half-Japanese, half-white. Through her engagement with these Japanese-affiliated organizations, she learned about the Japanese-American experience in the United States and so felt she understands the differences between identifying as part of the Japanese-American experience in comparison to two racial categories.

Stephanie felt that learning Japanese helped connect her with her grandparents and other extended family. When she would speak about her challenges at heritage school such as being held back or being bullied she felt that her parents could not relate, and would "look at her like she was crazy." She felt that it was not because her parents did not really know her, but that they did not share her experience going to heritage school, so could not relate to her experience. Through attending heritage school, Stephanie said she learned about characteristics she associates with Japanese culture, such as *enryo* (holding back your personal wants), and how it is important not to stand out, "don't rock the boat," but to assimilate to the group norms.

Stephanie also mentioned her two brothers, one older and one younger. Her older brother is the first-born son, which is a privileged position in comparison to a daughter's position in a traditional Japanese family. Stephanie said her mother treated them differently for that reason.

She also discussed how both her brothers had different Japanese learning experiences because of the timing of their ages when they were in Japan or the U.S.

When asked if she felt more or less Japanese at certain times in her life, Stephanie reflected that she felt more American in Japan, and more Japanese in the U.S. Some examples of this are confrontations she had with classmates from her U.S. local school. She talks about a time when a student in middle school told her that it was in her blood to be smarter because she's Asian. Stephanie's experience of writing her college application essay helped her "examine myself and my relationship to race. I was thinking I don't really count as a Japanese person, even though I feel like I did everything I could to be considered Japanese."

Regarding the Japanese-American community,

With the Japanese-American community, there's a sense of solidarity, when I see another half-person, I can guess that if I bring up this topic, we can bond over that. That's an experience I did share with Japanese-Americans in my classes.

For Stephanie, "Japanese-American" means mixed-race ethnicity, whereas it would typically mean a U.S. citizen whose parents or earlier ancestors came from Japan. When asked if she felt that learning Japanese at heritage school helped her connect with her ethnic identity, she said, "speaking Japanese is a way for me to prove that I can relate to them, their culture." She also spoke about how she feels pressure to perform in front of Japanese people, to showcase her understanding of Japanese language and culture by speaking well and as much as she can during conversations in Japanese. When talking about how she felt different in U.S. local school versus heritage school, she felt that heritage school was more group-oriented and she and another biracial student bonded over the shared negative experience of being held back 2 years.

Stephanie considers herself to be bilingual and multicultural. She speaks about how part of herself is always ready to “fight, is always ready to say I am American and Japanese. Another part of me understands that I don’t look obviously Japanese.”

Stephanie expressed that she would like to incorporate Japanese language and culture in her career in the future, but is not sure exactly how she would do that. In the future, she may want to work in Japan, or at least somewhere she could interact with Japanese. Additionally, her interests lie in working with mixed-race individuals and cross-cultural experiences. When asked if she had thought about if she would like possible future children to speak Japanese and attend heritage school, she said,

Yes, being Japanese and American has given me a lot. I’m able to wear two hats, for example my American ability to speak my mind more, as well as how to socialize with Japanese people more, to navigate with consideration, with mindfulness.

Speaking Japanese and connecting with her culture is a result of attending heritage school. Additionally, she felt that she would be able to help her children as they attended, because she could understand their experience.

Stephanie felt that reflecting back on her experience was cathartic. The interview experience may have helped to normalize the heritage school experience for her. She also felt that going to heritage school helped her make friendships with those who shared her ethnic background. She wrote,

I made a lot of mixed/half-Japanese friends that share a very specific experience that others can’t relate to as much...I do remember one time, for an essay assignment a friend who was in the same school (we were both put two grades below) wrote about how our friendship was something that kept her in the school. It was something I also believed as

well, and I think friendships with people who are half are so important and empowering, partly because it can be an isolating experience. And I would have never known that had I not learned Japanese.

The value of friendships, especially in feeling comfortable with their ethnic identity in heritage school is one that came up frequently among the learners.

Stephanie's narrative illustrates the fluidity of feelings about ethnic identity and how the kind of heritage school environment may impact how comfortable learners feel with their ethnic identities in the Japanese heritage school environment. Her narrative provides a glimpse of what some mixed heritage learners experience at Japanese heritage schools, and should help to enlighten the Japanese heritage school community in how they can help these learners feel as supported as possible.

Ethnic Identity

In this section the experiences of all 14 participants will be examined for their perceptions of the influence that Japanese heritage language learning had on their ethnic identity development. All 14 learners felt that their Japanese language ability directly connected with their identity. In addition, all 14 of the learners expressed that identifying as part or full Japanese has been a big part of their identity. Better Japanese language ability meant they felt more Japanese. Their language learning in Japanese heritage school directly connected with how they felt about the Japanese part of their ethnic identity. Lauren, a learner who self-identified as biracial, is a college student at a large public university in Southern California, who attended heritage school from K-12 in a MEXT- sponsored program on the east coast. She spoke about her fear of losing her Japanese language ability:

Being Japanese has been a big part of my identity, so if I lose my language ability, I feel panicked because that would be a loss of identity for me...I really don't want to lose my Japanese, I am proud that I studied so long...I don't want to lose the privilege that I have.

She felt pride in how attending heritage school from K-12 helped her become fluent and how this impacted her sense of ethnic identity. Mariko, who grew up in the San Fernando Valley in a predominately white suburb, said she felt that going to heritage school as a child helped her feel more comfortable and that there were several other biracial students there as well. She said, "I definitely feel like going to Japanese school helped me figure out what being Japanese was."

Adam grew up in the 1960s -1970s, when there was less societal acceptance overall for mixed-race children. He said that he experienced a lot of racism when he was young, and felt that half-Japanese children were scapegoated. When WWII related matters arose in U.S. school, students of Japanese heritage are sometimes made to feel guilty for Japan's actions during the war. Anne speaks of her experience attending a largely white elementary school in Hawaii in the early 1990's.

I remember an experience where we watched a video on Pearl Harbor, and the kids around me started name calling and I felt Japanese in a negative way and I couldn't say anything back to them because my English skills were poor...other times I would feel great when people would ask me to say things in Japanese...when I grew older I felt better about being Japanese.

Anne discussed how her perceptions changed about her ethnic identity and cultural heritage, as she grew older, and also added, "When you're young, you're just trying to assimilate, you're trying to be the same as any kid in school. I tried to push away any ethnic or culture aspect that would show in me."

Professor Take, a teacher who has taught for 39 years, said,

All of our research shows that students who go to Japanese heritage schools have higher Japanese ability... I observed the students became very close, speaking in both Japanese and English. I think they feel comfortable with each other because of their similar backgrounds.

The remaining five teachers' comments supported the value of attending Japanese heritage school for Japanese language ability, as well as learning about their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. When asked about the strengths of Japanese heritage learning, Professor Matsu felt that having a positive attitude and understanding about their family's cultural heritage promoted self-confidence. She said,

Heritage school helps students learn about their identities and embrace them, and meet other kids who have a similar identity...they can learn a positive attitude and have an understanding about their families and heritage language learning can help deepen this connection...this helps promote self-confidence.

Professor Biwa echoed this sentiment:

The positive of separating into [an] only heritage language class, is that they can connect closely together with others who identify with their same identities...I have found that students in the heritage language class become friends very quickly...they have similar backgrounds, or similar experiences exploring their identities.

All of the teachers expressed interest in how heritage language learning connected with their students' identities; one teacher especially took interest in this and interviewed her students to learn more about them. She has continued to do research in how heritage schools in K-12 and higher education impact how heritage language learners feel about their cultural identification.

When Professor Kaede started teaching Japanese heritage speakers, she interviewed her students one-by-one to learn who they were and what they wanted from the class. She said she was surprised that they identified as Japanese. She said that her students felt that way because their home life was Japanese, and for many, it is only when they started college that their lives became more centered on American culture. All three of the second generation learners whose parents maintained a highly Japanese cultural environment at home commented that it was at college that they felt they assimilated more into U.S. culture. Five out of six teachers said they felt that heritage learners engaged in exploration of their identities in Japanese heritage school or in their higher education, and 12 out of 14 heritage learners said that they did so.

Bilingualism and Bi/Multiculturalism

Heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status. Eight out of the 14 learners identified as bilingual. Some qualified their answers, for example, Lauren said, “Yes, but my Japanese is not as good as my English ability, I wish it were completely fifty-fifty but it’s not.” Kotaro said, “No, I feel like when you are bilingual, that means you are fluent, and I am far from fluent in Japanese or Indonesian.”

All 14 learners said that they identified as bicultural or multicultural. On being bicultural, Kotaro said, “Yes, I would say so because I integrated myself in my activities and my life into multiple cultures.” Stephanie felt that her continuous heritage language education in K-12 allowed her to learn the nuances of Japanese language and culture, “I think speaking at a native speaker level, allows for a lot of nuance, which I don’t think I could have otherwise if I only studied in college.” Two students wrote about their identities in their college application essay and how their heritage school experience had a large impact on their identity development and how they embrace their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Stephanie said, “I was writing a

college essay that examined myself and my relationship to race. I was too American to be considered Japanese.” On the other hand, some learners expressed that sometimes they felt they were not bicultural, that they did not fit into either Japanese or U.S. culture, that it is a “strange in-between.”

Lauren spoke about feeling like an outsider in both Japan and the U.S. She said,

When I go to Japan I feel the least Japanese. It’s better now, but I still feel like an outsider. Most people will speak to me in English, sometimes I can’t read things or understand things, it’s a reminder that I’m not as Japanese as I think I am. In the U.S., I feel like I am easily identified as Asian, speaking Japanese here feels more special since a lot of people can’t speak it...I feel like I am in a strange in-between.

On the other hand, Kotaro, who looks phenotypically Japanese, felt like people in Japan expected him to speak Japanese because of the way he looks. He felt pressure from this.

Interestingly, the three learners who felt that they were in a “strange in-between” were all younger, in their late teens and early twenties. Comparatively to the other learners, they have had less time to experience and reflect upon their identities in a society that more often than not likes to impose in conscious and unconscious ways how people fit into various categories.

Another learner, Ken said, “I started feeling more Japanese after I lived in Japan, but also less Japanese at the same time, I started to realize how American I was, how really America is the country for me.” Four teachers commented on how students bring up identity and culture within Japanese heritage school and Japanese heritage learner classes in college. Professor Matsu said,

Students will bring up themes of identity and culture and its’ incorporated into class projects or discussions...however, if I don’t ask, students may not bring it up on their

own...Our students often talk about bilingual and bicultural identity. In what scenarios they are or feel Japanese or American, or what situations they speak Japanese or English.

Heritage Learner Hanna

Hanna's story illustrates someone who grew up attending Japanese heritage school and was immersed in Japanese language and culture at home. Her narrative is one common to *Shin-Nisei*, or second-generation Japanese-Americans whose families have a strict Japanese-only policy at home. These families often expect to return to Japan after a few years of living in the U.S. This family language policy was instrumental in her becoming bilingual. She felt it was beneficial to enroll in the heritage courses in college. "I do consider myself bilingual, not so much bicultural, because I didn't have the exposure to Japanese culture as much as I would have liked." She was able to work in Japan post-college graduation, and used Japanese in her career serving the Japanese-American community in Los Angeles.

Hanna is a 30-year-old woman who worked full time in Public Relations at a non-profit organization in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. She attended the same MEXT-sponsored Japanese heritage school from K-12 in Los Angeles, and took two Japanese heritage classes when she was a student at a large public university in southern California. She felt it would be interesting to take the classes, and to "keep my language skills alive as well." She identified as Japanese-American, and *Shin-Nisei*. I was introduced to Hanna through her friend who also took the Japanese heritage class with her in college.

Hanna said that she did not enjoy heritage school until middle school. Hanna wrote in her critical thematic autobiography, "I cried while I did my homework, and it was really hard to study for character *kanji* tests...I can count on both hands the number of times I played with my friends on the weekend." Around middle school, she said she realized the merits of learning

Japanese, and she was simultaneously exposed to Japanese pop music, a teacher with whom she connected well, and Japanese television dramas. She would look forward to going to school each Saturday, so she could talk to her friends in both English and Japanese about what happened that week in the television drama. She said her desire to live in Japan in the future arose at this point as well.

Hanna's parents were very strict about her only speaking Japanese at home, and she took this very seriously. When Hanna was young, her parents thought that they would only be living in Los Angeles for a few years, and that thereafter, the family would move back to Japan. Therefore, Hanna's parents prioritized Japanese language learning for their three young daughters. At home they ate Japanese food, and watched tapes that their grandparents would send from Japan. Hanna especially loved watching Japanese variety shows that featured comedic routines. Her parents encouraged her to watch as much as she would like, because "if you know comedy, that means you know the culture well." Hanna felt it was important that she knew Japanese in order to speak with her parents, as they were Japanese immigrants and felt most comfortable speaking Japanese.

Thirteen out of the 14 learners talked about how media, such as music and television dramas or variety shows piqued their interest in Japanese culture and helped them learn the language and culture. It also may have given them an unrealistic idea of what life in Japan is about if they did not have experience visiting Japan in-person. Twelve out of the 14 learners said that Japanese media played a role in their interest in learning the language and culture, as well as helped them learn through phone apps and online resources such as dictionaries and translation tools. Hanna said, "Watching dramas and variety shows really idealized my image of Japan."

Hanna wrote in her critical thematic autobiography (translation), “While I was living in America, I was living a Japanese person’s life.” Hanna’s home environment was so culturally Japanese that she felt she was living in a Japanese bubble. Later in Hanna’s narrative, we see how her feelings changed on her journey as she navigates college, living and working in Japan, and returning to the U.S. She concluded that she is more “American” than she realized.

After several years, her father decided that he enjoyed life in the U.S. and her family obtained green cards to stay long-term. While the pressure for Hanna and her sisters to learn Japanese to successfully enter school in Japan was no longer there, they still felt it was important “just in case something happened, and they needed to return.” Selective acculturation is the concept that, “children who learn the language and culture of their new country without losing those of the old have a much better understanding of their place in the world” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 274). Parents may feel more secure if they know that their children would have the skills to live comfortably in both the U.S. and Japan, just in case something were to happen, and they needed to return to Japan.

Hanna’s family visited Japan each summer and experienced *taiken nyugaku*, where children can attend school in Japan each summer after their U.S. school ends. Schools in Japan run until the middle of July each year. This leaves approximately 3 weeks to 1 month for Japanese-American students to have an immersive Japanese experience each year. Out of the 14 learner interviewees, only two learners had this experience throughout their childhood. This was a unique experience among the learners. Hanna felt that she did not fit in with the other children when she attended local school in Japan. Aside from the Japanese heritage school community, Hanna’s parents did not involve the family in the Japanese-American community. When Hanna

arrived at college, she became really involved in the Japanese-American community through her involvement with the Japanese-American/Nikkei student group. She said,

I think I felt I was Japanese until college (but I wasn't). My language skill kind of dictated who I was I think. My English skill was pretty poor, and it was a struggle to explain things in English until college. I thought I was more Japanese, so I loved learning Japanese growing up. But I think in reality my thought process and such was very American. But either way it definitely gave me tools to identify myself close to the Japanese identity... if that makes sense.

Hanna took two Japanese classes starting in her junior year of college. Unlike when she studied for character tests in elementary school, she felt it was fun this time around. She felt that as a result of strengthening her Japanese in the heritage classes in college, her Japanese skills would give her an advantage in her post-college job search and she widened her circle of friends. In her critical thematic autobiography, Hanna wrote that she would like to move to Japan and become an event planner. She wrote (translation), "In order to become truly bilingual, I would need to live in Japan, experience everyday life, and feel the culture with my skin." Indeed, after graduating from college, Hanna secured a sales job for a large multinational company and worked in Japan for 5 years, after which time she said she felt fully bicultural. After her time living and working in Japan, she felt that she is adept with both interpretation and translation. After her time in Japan, she returned to Los Angeles, and worked at a non-profit in Little Tokyo where she was able to use her Japanese. She and her family also attended a local Buddhist temple and she translated for them. Hanna felt that her experience as an interviewee, re-reading her critical thematic autobiography, and writing her post-interview reflection was beneficial because it helped her think about what factors affected her becoming the person that she is today. She

wrote, “I think growing up among two cultures, I asked myself “who am I?” throughout childhood.”

Family and Japanese-American Community

Japanese helped the heritage learners connect with family, especially older generations. Ten learners emphasized how much of a role their grandparents have had in their Japanese language learning. Especially poignant is how learners who had grandparents who experienced life during World War II shared how their families felt about Japanese (See Osamu and Anne’s comments in Table 4).

Table 4

Learners’ Perceptions of Grandparents

Learner	Perspective
Adam	“My <i>Sansei</i> friends were not really in touch with their linguistic heritage. Some of them even were a bit annoyed or envious that I could converse with their parents or grandparents.”
Anne	“Learning about Japanese history and therefore the culture and heritage through books helped me understand what my parents and previous generations went through. When I spoke to my grandparents about their past helped me understand what they went through during the war and previous when my great grandparents lived in the countryside. What Japan went through as a country helped me connect with family members in Japan and their experiences.”
Hanna	“All my relatives live in Japan. Every summer my parents made sure we can see our grandparents, so it helped me communicate with them. Same with parents.”
Jennifer	“Even my grandparents who were all born in CA too, they do speak Japanese, but I basically never hear it... I always hear stories from my grandparents about camp, they talk about how baseball was really popular, and I don’t really hear about basketball, so I’m not really sure when that shift happened. It’s definitely a really crucial part of JA culture in SoCal.”
June	“Being Japanese is a huge part of who I am, all my relatives live in Japan, so if I didn’t know Japanese I wouldn’t be able to communicate with them...My parents really emphasized that it was important I could communicate with my grandparents, siblings, all my relatives.”
Ken	“I thought it would be nice to speak with my grandparents and other family members...I did a report on <i>osechi</i> with one of my classmates who was also half-Japanese, we called our grandparents to ask questions.”
Lauren	“If I weren’t able to connect with my relatives, it’s a little sad for me. I’m glad I can directly communicate with them.”

Naoko (F)	“Then just connecting more with my grandparents, because my grandpa watches a lot of Japanese TV and he doesn’t talk to anyone about it. I was like, maybe I could just talk to him.”
Osamu (M)	“For like 40 years after they came back from the internment camps, they tried to do away with their Japanese culture, but seeing my sister and I come back with these very firm cultural values that we learned from my dad and the school, it really meant something to them. To this day I tell people that my grandparents didn’t speak Japanese from 1945 - 1980’s (when my parents got married) and so I think the Japanese school was really helpful to be that bridge for my grandparents to reclaim Japanese ethnic identity.”
Stephanie	“I think learning Japanese helped me speak with my grandparents.”

Heritage Learner Osamu

Osamu is 32 years old; he attended a Japanese heritage school in K-12 but did not take Japanese language classes during his higher education. He grew up near Los Angeles, CA and his heritage school was part of a cultural center attached to a Buddhist temple. He attended this school from kindergarten through fourth grade. Osamu self-identified as an “inter-generational Japanese Nikkei person”, both fourth generation Japanese on his mother’s side, and “new” second-generation on his father’s side. I share Osamu’s narrative to show how generational differences have an impact on language use and learning in the Japanese-American community. He said, “It has really played out with how I see Japanese-America, and Nikkei people, and how I interpret cultural situations.”

Osamu’s ethnic self-identification pointed to the fluidity of ethnic identification and how his parents’ differing generational identities impacted how he saw himself. Osamu grew up with multiethnic and multicultural friends and he said they often talked about how heritage school fit into their lives. Recently, Osamu and a childhood friend who also attended Japanese heritage school, talked about ethnic identity and culture, and they discussed how going to Japanese heritage school was “weird for us because we didn’t know how we fit in.” Osamu said, “For me, I didn’t want to learn Japanese, I was forced to be there.” Osamu grew up in a heavy Japanese

cultural household, but did not feel pressure to speak Japanese. He said, “Acculturating to broader American culture, trying to fit in as a *Yonsei*, or fourth generation Japanese was really emphasized.” At the same time that Osamu’s family encouraged him to assimilate into American culture, his family emphasized the strong Japanese cultural value of communicating with and respecting elders and peers. He felt that learning how to communicate in Japanese was a sign of respect to his grandparents.

One important way that Osamu’s family shared their history and passed down values was to talk about their experiences in the Japanese internment camps. He said,

For like 40 years after they came back from the internment camps, they tried to do away with their Japanese culture, but seeing my sister and I come back with these very firm cultural values that we learned from my dad and the school, it really meant something to them. To this day I tell people that my grandparents didn’t speak Japanese from 1945-1980s, when my parents got married, and so I think the Japanese school was really helpful to be that bridge for my grandparents to reclaim Japanese ethnic identity.

As an individual in his thirties, Osamu has had time to reflect upon how Japanese heritage school was a “bridge” between generations in his family to create a forum for conversation and mutual understanding. Later on, in college, Osamu started doing his own research on the Japanese-American experience, and interviewed his grandparents many times and talked to them about their experiences. Osamu’s family carried on Japanese cultural traditions such as *mochi-tsuki*, pounding *mochi* on New Year’s Day in celebration of the New Year. They have done this since the 1880s in the U.S. His family is proud that they only missed one year, 1942, when they went to the camps the first year.

These kinds of stories help generations of families appreciate their grandparents and senior members' experiences, and also feel gratitude to them for carrying on valuable cultural traditions. Osamu also brought up the idea that he often did not want to display his Japanese heritage and traditions amongst friends in case they made fun of them. However, he did feel comfortable at the temple where and his family worshipped. He did not feel comfortable showcasing his Japanese side outside of his family and temple until he arrived at college. He became active in his university's Asian American Studies program and helped students reclaim and learn Japanese-American identity and culture through a program for young adults. Osamu said,

That was really what got me fired up about being a workshop facilitator, wanting to pursue educating folks on reclaiming their heritage. For me it was like I felt I was a white kid my whole life, I am helping these other kids who are experiencing the same thing, helping them reclaim their ethnic identity and culture.

Osamu's interest in Asian-American Studies led him to pursue a career that is strongly tied to the Japanese-American community in Los Angeles. He was involved with service learning organizations and organizations that support Japanese-Americans to learn about and reclaim their ethnic identity and culture. He felt that once he became engaged with the community, "I could really be what my face displays to the public." He felt proud that, "I'm no expert on these matters but I know how to bring people together for a common goal, and in this case, to experience, appreciate, and celebrate Japanese and Japanese American culture and art."

In his written reflection, Osamu wrote that he wished he took Japanese language courses in college and "maybe even in high school." He went on to write,

But, things happen for a reason and in some ways my ignorance to the spoken and written language has made my bond with the culture that much stronger...At some point when I make a little more money and have someone to push me, I want to learn in a classroom setting again. I think for those around me, learning will be a group effort as a *Shin-Nisei* wanting to frequently return to Japan.

Osamu was active and engaged with the Japanese-American community in his work and personal life. Osamu's narrative illustrates how meaningful his family history is to him, and how he chose to embrace his heritage and the Japanese-American community. Osamu's story is shared to illustrate how strongly these learners feel that their families and Japanese American community influence their motivation and ability to learn Japanese and be a part of their own unique Japanese American communities.

Several learners' narratives showed their strong affiliation with their heritage, family, and community. Adam, George, Osamu, and Jennifer attended a heritage school that is connected to a Buddhist temple. As described in Chapter 1, there is a history of Japanese heritage schools being established and supported by Buddhist temples. Ken and June were active in their local Buddhist temples and did Japanese translation and interpretation for the community. Seven out of the 14 learners also spoke about the community that the heritage schools created for their families as well, Anne commented, "We were in the Japanese community bubble."

Naoko said that she planned to create an online database of Japanese cultural practices of their family. She said that she felt responsibility to put this together and help her family learn more about their community. She said, "I don't think I'd able to teach [Japanese] to them, but I would want them to know some of it."

Five of the six teachers recommended taking advantage of the surrounding community and environment. They emphasized the importance of creating homework and lesson plans that would help students learn about their cultural heritage and ethnic identity by interacting with Japanese organizations, attending festivals and community events, reading Japanese books and watching Japanese TV and movies. All of the teachers commented that when their students in K-12 and higher education spent time in Japan for vacation or short-term stays, their Japanese speaking ability improved.

Cultural Heritage

All of the learners felt that their family and community influenced how much they learned and connected with their cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is often passed down through generations of families and within communities. Families can provide cultural heritage information to varying degrees. Japanese heritage language schools help students whose families and communities are unable to share cultural heritage information, or help supplement and serve to connect Japanese heritage learners with their cultural heritage by providing exposure to Japanese cultural activities and lessons. These include annual Japanese traditional ceremonies such as *Obon* festivals, where ancestors are honored each summer, and seasonal festivals that align with the lunar calendar. Cultural activities that the learners frequently cited they were exposed to in heritage school include *shodo* (calligraphy), *ikebana* (flower arrangement), Japanese movies, and traditional sports such as kendo and judo. Kotaro, a current college student said,

Judo is probably the biggest way I am connected at this point. About 13 years. I've done judo since I was 6, and still doing judo now in another Japanese community center, so I attend their cultural events as well.

Speaking of his father, who is a Japanese immigrant, “I sometimes practice with him and speak with him for fun. I am glad I can directly communicate with him.” Anime (Japanese cartoons) is another strong influence on Kotaro. He said, “The lingo in anime is very different, and it doesn’t really help me to understand much, but its fun to identify certain grammar rules that I learned in class, and it shows up in the anime.”

Ken, who started his formal Japanese education in college, said that learning Japanese gave him more of an appreciation for, “All of my cultural heritage, like all sides of it...learning the language meant learning the culture even more.”

After Ken graduated from college, he did the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) that is a teaching program designed to recruit native English speakers to come teach English in K-12 schools in Japan. The Japanese government sponsors the JET program. He said that after teaching English in Japan for 2 years, learning the language meant even more to him. Ken said that he felt proud of his Japanese cultural heritage when a Vice Principal at the school where he was teaching told him that he was more “Japanese” than a lot of people he knew. Ken went on to elaborate that the Vice Principal meant that he was “old school Japanese” which is likened to the Japanese cultural norm of having a strong work ethic. He said,

So it made me really happy I was around to inspire other teachers as well. I think learning the language really helped me understand what my ethnic identity was even more, and it just gave me a better appreciation for my Japanese heritage.

Ken was actively involved in the Japanese-American community. He served on the cabinet at a Buddhist temple, played *taiko* (Japanese drums) and did *ikebana* (flower arranging). He felt especially proud when he could help his family at the temple, for example, he spoke of a time when he was able to help arrange a funeral service and his family would ask him, “What is

the meaning of this, what is the meaning of that”, and he felt proud that he was able to provide that information because he understood Japanese. Ken’s engagement with the Japanese community extended to a role with the city of Los Angeles, as a bilingual outreach specialist for the election division. He felt he was able to connect with the greater community since he would give presentations to Japanese seniors about upcoming elections, and help share materials.

The professors agreed that language and culture were part of one package, that you can’t teach one without the other. Professor Fujii said, “You can’t teach language without teaching culture.”

Motivation

Family and community life impacts the motivation of heritage language learners to study Japanese. Learners’ ability to balance both Japanese heritage school and U.S. local schoolwork impacts their motivation. The degree to which they can balance two academic programs, as well as their personal interest in doing so impacts their ability and desire to continue in Japanese heritage school. Since attendance at Japanese heritage school is optional; learners attend only if they are self-motivated to attend, or their parents mandate that they do so. Learners’ academic achievement at heritage school does not have a direct connection in comparison to their academic achievement in U.S. local schools to long-term goals such as getting into a good U.S. college. This can lead to learners’ feeling that they do not need to take their heritage school studies seriously because they feel it does not count towards the goals that they or their parents have set for them.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, therefore there is often a struggle to retain students as they approach the high school years. Learner’s own motivation to attend, as well as the motivation of the community, plays a role in continuing their heritage language education. Both

learners and teachers shared similar insights into learners' motivation or lack thereof to take heritage school seriously and study.

There is also the challenge of doing the additional homework and studying in addition to their U.S. local school homework and responsibilities. Learners may also feel torn between attending heritage school and participating in sports or other events that take place on Saturdays. Additional challenges shared include being bullied, and being held back because they could not perform at the same level as classmates who had more Japanese speaking and literacy ability. Twelve learners attended heritage school in K-12. Out of these 12, four attended through graduation, one attended in grades 9-12, two had to stop for financial reasons, and one stopped because there was no high school program. The remaining four learners had a choice of whether to continue into middle school and high school.

George lost interest, he said, "I understood, and I learned, and I went through middle school, but at that point I kind of stopped because my interests kind of changed towards the end of elementary school." Anne stopped because there was no high school program available to her. "Hawaii school didn't have the high school program due to many people leaving after middle school." Kotaro felt overwhelmed with the increasing difficulty of heritage school assignments, "Around middle school, they started teaching us verbs, and I started to have to write a lot of verb conjugations. My parents couldn't help me with my homework at all. I had to do everything by myself."

On the other hand, some students felt energized by Japanese school, as they grew older. Lauren said, "By middle school I was so happy and I felt like I would never quit. It made me sad that others quit...Slowly more and more people leave, and so only me and one other girl graduated from high school." Hanna said, "I wanted to live in Japan ever since middle school. It

was when I started enjoying studying Japanese, but also a time when I think I wanted to “run away” from the realities of struggling in English.”

Learners also felt that there were significant differences between heritage school and U.S. local school. Stephanie said, “In Japanese school, there is usually one big classroom, everyone is doing the same thing at the same time, in contrast to U.S. local school where small group work was the norm.” Ten out of 14 learners expressed that a major difference between Japanese heritage school and their U.S. local school was also the focus on memorization in heritage school. Five out of 14 learners said they felt there was less room for creativity in the curriculum. Three mentioned a lack of group work. Learners were not asked if these differences affected their motivation to study and continue in Japanese heritage school. However, eight of the 10 learners who mentioned a focus on memorization expressed that they wished that it was not this way. The five learners who mentioned there was less room for creativity also wished there was more room for creativity in the curriculum.

Lauren attended a heritage school where she had the option of choosing one of two tracks. She could opt-in to a MEXT-sponsored course, which was considered more challenging, or a Japanese heritage language course in K-12. She felt she was in the middle of both of these tracks, and her mother enrolled her in the MEXT course. Lauren said it made her feel more insecure at first, but ultimately she felt more comfortable there with time. She said, “Grades did not matter as much for Japanese school, so I didn’t study as much as I should have.”

In a similar vein, Mariko said, “I got grades back, but they were always not good. But I never really felt responsible for any of it...versus at American school, I was like, oh this is real.”

Kotaro felt that his non-MEXT Japanese school was very relaxed. He said that the teachers did not care if you did not turn in your homework, compared to other Japanese schools

in the area. He explained that a large part of the heritage school day was dedicated to cultural activities. He said, “It was a fun experience, even though we didn’t learn much Japanese.”

When reflecting back on his experience, Kotaro felt that, “Going to class every weekend became less worth my time...all those years and I was only able to pass out of Japanese I...it became something that was impeding my American school stuff.”

Naoko discussed how challenging she found it to start learning Japanese formally in her first year of college. She spent 2-5 hours each day during her first year completing her homework assignments and working hard to memorize *kanji* (Chinese characters used in Japanese). This was in addition to her class that she attended 4 days a week. Naoko told her mother about her experience learning Japanese her first year, “I went to Japanese school and then college on the side.” Twelve out of 14 learners expressed frustration with learning and memorizing *kanji* as a difficult and frustrating process. Several teachers also discussed how learners expressed frustration to them and how it is a large part of learning Japanese.

Hanna said her family’s support helped to motivate her to continue taking classes and learning Japanese in college. Douglas had a positive experience learning Japanese during his higher education, he said,

I was fortunate enough to meet many people of similar backgrounds and similar upbringings. The maximum amount of people we had was 15 in each class; their grasp of Japanese and English was amazing to me. I always felt I was behind in terms of the Japanese education level, which in the beginning was overwhelming. But by end of second year, after taking Japanese classes and becoming friends with these people, they were nice enough to pull me along and help me stay up to speed...it created an intimate environment, and I still keep in touch with people, including the professors I met.

Jennifer felt that after she completed Japanese heritage school, her only motivation to study on her own was the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). She took it and passed to level two, level one is the top level. All six of the teachers agreed that heritage learners' experience was affected by the learners' motivation levels and how much Japanese they were exposed to at home. When asked to describe a typical Japanese heritage language learner, Professor Matsu said, "Overall they like Japan, and they want to speak more Japanese, they have that motivation. They have a connection with Japan and so in relation to Japan/Japanese, they think they should know more."

Professor Biwa said, "The students who make it to Japanese heritage language classes in college are students who have succeeded in learning Japanese as they grew up. They are people who have managed to keep up and maintain their Japanese."

Teachers expressed the idea of the value of putting students with unique identities, who have a shared interest in connecting and learning more about their culture, together in courses. This is an argument for separate classes for heritage learners in higher education. All six teachers supported having a separate class in higher education for Japanese heritage learners, or if there was not a specific Japanese heritage language class, to allow heritage learners entry into upper division classes. One teacher expressed, "to start at Japanese I in college is demoralizing for students, it would be better if students can match up in college with higher level Japanese classes."

This theme ties in with how heritage language classes are offered in the curriculum. All students take a language placement exam that assesses speaking and literacy skills. The existing heritage classes are higher-level classes; only students who place at a high level of Japanese are able to take them. Therefore, a heritage learner who did not have the opportunity to learn, or has

not successfully maintained Japanese, would not be able to place in the heritage class. In this study, learners Kotaro, Mariko, and Osamu were enrolled in Japanese heritage schools in K-12, but did not attend for as many years as the other learners. Mariko said, “I’m taking Japanese classes, not the heritage classes, because I don’t qualify for that. Because my Japanese is so beginner, right now.” Another common attribute of the learners who only attended Japanese heritage school for a few years, is that they attended non-MEXT schools where the focus was learning an appreciation of Japanese culture, versus a more rigorous curriculum like one would find in a MEXT school.

Ken and Naoko, who did not attend Japanese heritage school at all during K-12, started with the elementary Japanese class, Japanese I, in college. Kotaro, who attended a non-MEXT school through middle school, also placed into Japanese I. Mariko was able to start at Japanese II. Regarding standardized tests as motivational tools for continuing to study Japanese in K-12, Professor Take said that the popularity of the Japanese Proficiency Test run by the California Association of Japanese Language Schools (CAJLS), is down because the AP Japanese exam is now offered. She believed that the popularity of the SAT II is down as well because of the AP Japanese exam. Professor Kaede’s child, who attended Japanese heritage school, took the AP Japanese exam and received the highest score, a 5. She said that her child thought it was easy, and did not credit studying in heritage school. Lauren also took the AP Japanese exam and felt it was easy. Professor Kaede’s thoughts on how testing fit into the Japanese heritage school mission were that, “Japanese school is not meant to prepare students for these tests, it’s more to learn the foundation of Japanese, to communicate with elders and others in a polite manner.”

To help motivate learners, teachers said they invited alumni to come speak to students in heritage school about how they use Japanese in their careers. Professor Kaede says, “It is

important to share what is on the other side of the *Nichibei* [Japanese-American] identity. We need to help them understand why they are going to class.”

Four teachers also shared the opinion that the heritage learners often reported that they wished they had studied more or worked harder in their heritage school while they were in K-12. Professor Kaede said, “When they go to college, they wished they worked harder in Japanese school.” Five of the 12 learners who attended Japanese heritage school in K-12 expressed that they wished they had studied more or that they had taken Japanese heritage school more seriously. The teachers’ overarching message in regards to motivation was summed up by Professor Kaede, “Motivate students, keep the classroom fun so students want to keep learning.”

Career

Six learners expressed interest in utilizing their Japanese skills in the future in a career, or wanted to complete a major or minor in Japanese. Six learners used Japanese in their careers or have used it in the past in in their careers. Out of the nine learners who have graduated from college and have the potential to utilize Japanese in their career, four have been able to do so. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the occupations of translation and interpretation, education, healthcare, and business are cited as areas of high need (Carreira, 2014). Four learners worked in law, business, government, and education. Therefore, they were able to work in two out of the four areas of high need.

While heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status, language ability can also be measured on a spectrum and many learners may not have attained the speaking and literacy level needed to utilize in their career. As mentioned in Chapter 2, bilingualism and or biliteracy can be measured by assessments such as ACTFL’s Can-do statements. For example, heritage schools may help a learner achieve the “intermediate” level, where they are able to talk about familiar

topics related to their daily lives. However, many jobs may require the “advanced” level where they may need to speak and write about topics that are of community, national, or international interest. This level of complication may not be possible, and really depended on the speakers’ abilities and familiarity with any given topic.

Five learners had a desire to utilize Japanese in their careers in some way now, but felt they did not have the level of fluency or avenue to do so. Ken said, “Career wise I would like to use Japanese more, as a civil servant it would be great to help Japanese speakers in the LA area, it would be great to utilize again.”

Adam, a lawyer wrote,

I use it every day. For example, today I am reading about 150 emails between Japanese antitrust violators and next week I will be taking the deposition of one of those people...other lawyers will be reading the English translations, but I will be reading the originals. I will have to ask my questions in English and have them interpreted, as required under U.S. legal procedure, but I will know if the interpreter mistranslated (which happens frequently) and I will know what the witness is testifying in Japanese before it is translated into English.

In Adam’s case, his bilingual skills gave him a distinct advantage in his career, because he would have already absorbed the information before the opposing counsel had time to process the translation. Others who do not have enough Japanese speaking and literacy skills to use in a career, felt challenged by the question of whether and how they would like to use Japanese in their careers. Adam is an example of a learner who achieved a high level of Japanese where he could integrate it into his career. George said, “I want to continue learning Japanese, but I’m not

sure where, and I'm not sure how I can use it." His experience was that he did not have the skill to apply it within his career, but had an interest in doing so.

One lesson that can be drawn from learners' feelings about their Japanese abilities and career is that heritage schools and teachers can help them by maximizing their opportunities to learn Japanese. Presenting how they can use Japanese in their careers in tangible ways such as the aforementioned career panels and other career development opportunities would also help frame realistic goals and expectations. Another lesson is that career did not seem to be a primary motivation for the majority of learners to learn Japanese. The ability to use Japanese in their career felt like an additional benefit to the primary motivation of learning Japanese to speak with their families and become closer to their heritage.

Intergenerational Language Transfer

Twelve learners wanted their future children to learn another language. Seven learners wanted their children to learn Japanese in some way, although they were not sure about the best way to do so. Stephanie hoped that heritage programs would be more inclusive and understanding of different backgrounds by the time she had children. Jennifer said that she does not know anyone who regretted going, even if they complained while they were going, and felt that it was especially important for future generations. Douglas, who only attended Japanese heritage school for 2 years, expressed that he would want future children to attend heritage school at least until the sixth grade. He would also send them for *taiken nyugaku*, or other study abroad type programs. Three learners were not sure if Japanese would be the language, it would depend on the background of their future partner. Learners' answers to this question were also telling of how they wished their experience had been different. Several learners said they would change their experience by telling their children how important it is for them to pay attention,

and tell their children how important it is to communicate and understand their culture. Some were hesitant in their ability to guide their children. June spoke extensively on this topic,

My boyfriend is not Japanese, he's Caucasian, and I do think about whether I am going to be able to maintain it, in LA there's a lot less Japanese people now. Little Tokyo is not what it used to be anymore, so I do worry that I won't be able to sustain the level of cultural immersion.

June also mentioned that her sister had found a viable alternative to Japanese heritage school on Saturdays. June's sister actively sought out a group of mothers who were interested in hiring a Japanese schoolteacher to do an after-school program. She did not want her children to miss weekend events like birthday parties and sports. Others, like Ken, were confident that Japanese heritage school would be a great solution for potential future children,

I definitely would, I would be that parent that would force them to go. My mom went when she was growing up, after school and Saturdays, and I think because she had such a hard time with it, she didn't want to force it upon me.

Ken felt that learning Japanese would give his children an advantage; he felt that having a bilingual brain developed a person in a different and better way, and that understanding cultural background was an advantage to everyone.

Two learners currently have children. Adam, with three grown children, raised two in Japan, and his youngest child has been in the U.S. since third grade. Adam's youngest child was in high school in northern California, and was taking Japanese classes at a local community college and earning high school credit for taking these classes. Anne lived in Japan, and has a young son and daughter. When her son was 2 years old, she thought about enrolling him in a school where teaching would be in English. However, she decided against it for several reasons.

First, the teachers had heavily accented English, which she felt would impact the type of accent her child may develop for English. Secondly, the school was three times the cost of a regular local preschool, so it was cost-prohibitive. Regarding the type of culture in which she was raising her children, Anne said, “I would say I am mixing in American heritage or culture in raising my kids. When I talk to people about how I do things, it makes me aware of my background.”

Summary

Hearing the stories of Japanese heritage language learners and helping to draw out their perceptions through interviews and written reflections resulted in narratives that highlight key themes that supported the research on the experiences of Japanese heritage language learners. The learners and teachers’ reflections supported the major themes of learning Japanese as a heritage language versus foreign language, ethnic identity, bilingualism and bi/multiculturalism, family and the Japanese-American community, cultural heritage, motivation, career, and intergenerational language transfer. Within these themes, learners and teachers also shared unique attitudes and ideas that both substantiate the research and open up avenues in need of exploration. The significance of the findings from this study for recommendations for practice and research, as well as future implications for study will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The study's overarching goal was to understand the experience of Japanese heritage language learners so that we may create or enable creation of educational environments that meet the needs of current and future students. In this chapter, I summarize the study's findings and draw conclusions from the data. Limitations will also be discussed and how these can be accounted for in future studies. I make recommendations based on previous research and my own findings, and then reflect upon the implications to inform current research and practices in heritage language learning. Opportunities for future further research are discussed. The audience is teachers, administrators, parents, and students of heritage language learning. The teachers and learners are on the same page in terms of the value of heritage language learning in K-12 and higher education. The teachers also have a good idea of how their students feel in heritage language school, their needs, and areas of improvement. The goal of learning from teachers from a macro perspective, and learning from learners from a micro perspective was achieved.

Summary of Findings

There were seven overarching main themes that emerged from conducting interviews with learners and teachers, and reading learners' post-interview reflections. The Japanese heritage language learners and teachers both agreed on the following points. First, there are significant differences between how learners of Japanese as a heritage language and learners of Japanese as a foreign language learn Japanese, and these learners have very different needs. Second, learners gain a deeper understanding of ethnic identity through attending Japanese heritage school in K-12 and during their higher education. Third, heritage schools help students achieve bilingual status. Fourth, family life impacts the motivation of heritage language learners to study Japanese. Fifth, learners' ability to balance both Japanese heritage school and U.S. local

schoolwork impacts their motivation. This then impacts their ability to continue in Japanese heritage school. Sixth, it is challenging to attain a high enough literacy and Japanese speaking ability to use Japanese in a career. Seven, intergenerational language transfer was important to the learners.

The Japanese heritage language learners felt that attending Japanese heritage school in K-12 and or during their higher education helped them connect with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family and community to some degree. The learners who spent more time in heritage language school felt the connection more deeply. Learners also felt that as they participated in learning Japanese, their Japanese ethnic identities were also developing and therefore their language learning journeys informed their ethnic identity development, and vice-versa. The level of support that learners felt from their families and resources such as top-down teaching that took into consideration their social-cultural context influenced learners' ability to choose or navigate a bicultural and or bilingual identities. The learners felt that their perspectives about their experience had changed throughout the years, and inevitably would continue to do so as their journeys continued. As would be expected, there were differences between the generations of Japanese heritage language learners. *Nisei* or *Shin-Nisei* (second or new second generation Japanese-Americans) often had more direct access to Japanese, such as Japanese being spoken in their homes. *Sansei* or *Yonsei* (third or fourth generation Japanese-Americans) spoke more often of reclaiming their language or culture through attending Japanese heritage language school. The interviews make clear that the benefits are not the same to all generations of Japanese heritage language learners as they attend the same schools.

The Japanese teachers felt that Japanese heritage language learners did connect with their cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and family/community through attending Japanese heritage

school in K-12 and or during their higher education. The teachers offered significant insights with their perceptions on how schools can better meet the needs of Japanese heritage language learners, and the type of curriculum and resources that can help maximize the experience of attending Japanese heritage language schools.

Significance of Findings

This study's central tenet was that there are many positive reasons for students in K-16 to learn their heritage language which enables them to both learn their heritage language and about their heritage. The most important contribution of my study is that it reinforces previous research findings around heritage language education, specifically Japanese heritage language education. It has been well documented that there are challenges to meeting the needs of students with a large diversity of language backgrounds. The teachers in this study all agreed that there should be separate classes for Japanese heritage language learners and Japanese foreign language learners, and learners' feedback also showed the benefits they experienced when in Japanese heritage language school and classes. This finding reinforced the research of many researchers that argue that heritage language learners' profiles and needs are different from non-heritage language learners (Andrews, 2000; Campbell, 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Kondo-Brown & Fukuda, 2008; Mazzocco, 1996; Pino & Pino, 2000). The findings reinforced CAL's findings that retention of students in heritage language schools is an issue, and that areas of need include more resources for teaching materials specific to heritage language learners, articulation with public schools and university programs, and public awareness and support.

For the heritage language learners who had access to attend heritage school through 12th grade, the findings coincided with Doerr and Lee (2013) in that the ability to earn high school foreign language credit for their attendance and the ability to take the Japanese language AP

exam was a motivating factor to continue heritage language school. However, one learner who took the Japanese AP exam and the child of one of the teachers who took the Japanese AP exam received high scores, said that they felt they would have scored just as well even without their attending heritage school for so many years. The learners who attended Japanese heritage school in K-12 had to make difficult choices between increasing their participation in local school or leaving heritage school. Previous studies also indicate this is a common difficult decision as well for learners and their families. It is challenging to weigh the benefits of possible future bilingualism and biliteracy over a learners' current well-being or desire to participate in other non-Japanese activities. Some of the learners in the study felt that leaving heritage school or stopping Japanese classes in college was the right decision for them, while others wish they had continued taking Japanese while in K-12 or in higher education.

This study supported the idea that learners are often motivated to learn their heritage language as their ethnic identities develop while at the same time language learning contributed to the development of their ethnic identity. Motivation to learn the language and learners' ongoing ethnic identity development were influencing each other in a circular, on-going pattern. Attending Japanese heritage language school helped learners develop a positive ethnic identity and learners' families influenced learner's motivation to attend and continue attending as they grew older. This study reinforces Tse's (2001) findings that students who learn about their heritage develop strong self-concept and pride, and that heritage language learning helps create stronger familial ties (Hashimoto & Lee, 2011). Attending Japanese heritage language school helped students become bilingual. This reinforces Tse's research showing that heritage language learners who are able to become bilingual often have a peer group that uses the heritage language and have contact with institutions that value the heritage language. Japanese heritage language

school naturally provides a peer group and heritage schools were created and exist due to the inherent value of the language and culture. Providing environments and resources that speak to Japanese heritage language learners' experience that help them to balance learning Japanese and their other academic responsibilities so that they can learn Japanese and learn about their ethnic identity and culture heritage helps nurture bilingualism and biculturalism.

The next significant finding was how family life and the Japanese American community impacted the motivation of learners to learn Japanese and stay in Japanese heritage school. The learners who attended Japanese heritage school in K-12 had to make difficult choices between increasing their participation in local school and leaving heritage school to do so. This study found that students who had left Japanese heritage school in K-12 tried to reclaim their language skills, ethnic identity and cultural affiliation by enrolling in Japanese as a foreign language or Japanese as a heritage language classes during their higher education. Several learners discussed how they were able to improve their Japanese language skills, connect with other Japanese heritage language learners, and participate in and learn about Japanese American history and cultural activities by joining Japanese affinity groups on campus. This corroborates Portes and Hao (2004) study that found that heritage language students who stopped learning their heritage language often tried to make up for lost time in high school and college to become bilingual in the language.

Another important finding was that learners' family life and the extent to which families spoke and encouraged the learners to learn Japanese influenced heritage learners' motivation to study in Japanese heritage school and engage with Japanese culture in some way. This supports findings by He (2006) and Chinen and Tucker (2005a) that a motivating factor for heritage language learners is that they would like to stay connected to their heritage culture. Learners

found it that it was difficult to strike a balance between learning Japanese and all of their other academic and social responsibilities. Past studies have found that heritage language learners who had a negative experience or series of negative experiences learning their heritage language may want to disengage from this part of their identity (Shin, 2005; Tse, 2011). One of the learner's experience with bullying was a significant factor in her leaving Japanese heritage school for a few years. This study reinforced Hayashi (2006) study that found that it is vital to balance the use of English and Japanese, and that family, school and the local community are necessary to create an environment that is conducive to achieving bilingualism and biculturalism. As Hamada (2008) found, there was conflict within the community and family because there was a struggle to know how to best assimilate into U.S. life, but also how to best maintain their Japanese language and identity. Multiple options for learners to continue learning Japanese and maintaining their skills would help alleviate this struggle.

While several learners wished to use their knowledge of Japanese culture, and speaking and literacy skills in their career, this study found that it was challenging to attain a high enough literacy and Japanese speaking ability to do so. Many learners in this study did not have an intention of living or working in Japan in the future, but still wanted to learn Japanese and utilize it in their careers. This reinforced a study done by Rollins (2017) that the majority of students who attend Japanese heritage language schools have no intention of living in Japan in the future, but wanted to attain some level of speaking and literacy ability. Almost half of the learners expressed interest in utilizing their Japanese skills in the future in a career, or wanting to complete a major or minor in Japanese. Six learners have used Japanese in their careers in the past, or use it presently. However, five learners were unable to achieve a level of fluency in speaking or literacy to utilize Japanese in their careers. Therefore, lack of fluency inhibited their

possible career interests. All of the heritage learners felt they were more fluent in speaking over literacy, which fits the profile of a typical heritage language learner across languages, especially if they are 1.5 or second-generation (Kagan, 2014), since they often speak with family members growing up. More resources that meet the needs of heritage language learners are needed to maximize their language potential. With appropriate instruction and expanded social use, heritage language learners can attain high levels of proficiency to achieve fluency in speaking and literacy to open up the possibility of using Japanese in a career.

Furthermore, this study found that intergenerational language transfer was important to the learners. If they had or were planning on having children, the learners voiced that they would want them to learn Japanese in some way. Many learners felt that it would be challenging to pass this education onwards, when their own education felt imperfect, but overall, they felt it was important and that they would find a way to do so. Several learners expressed their wish that they would be able to find a program that was more supportive of Japanese heritage language learners' needs by the time that they had children. The idea is that there is a need to improve heritage language learners' experiences at schools that take into consideration social-cultural context to provide a sense of belonging to the learners. This finding supports one of the key motivations behind this study, which is to help provide insight into learners' experiences to help strengthen Japanese heritage language schools.

Kono and McGinnis (2001) write that heritage language education is part of a learner's lifelong education. Just as our ethnic identities stay with us throughout our lives, learning how we connect with and feel about our backgrounds is a lifelong endeavor. All of the participants felt that there was value in reflecting back on their experiences and several felt they learned more about themselves from doing so.

Research Limitations

There are several limitations that I would like to acknowledge. First, ideally this study would have included a larger number of participants to learn from more interviewees' experiences. The participant pool was limited to 20 because that was the number of participants that were able to participate during the limited timeframe. Second, the goal was to have a diversity of participants across age and self-identified generation in the U.S. There were no participants in their 40s, and 60 years old and above. The participant pool consisted of more women than men. I had also wished to read more critical thematic autobiographies, but this was not possible due to lack of response. As a result of these limitations, we did not hear from as wide a learner base in both age and gender as would have been ideal. Heritage language learners in their 40s and 60 years old and above may have contributed unique reflections on their experiences learning Japanese connected to the era when they were learning and potentially actively using Japanese in a career. Also, looking back from middle age, they would have a longer timeframe to draw from to share about their experiences. It also may have been possible to hear about their reflection on their children and grandchildren's experiences learning Japanese, and this may have led to rich reflections on their experience observing and possibly engaging with their children and grandchildren about it. Another point to note is that 11 of the 14 learner interviewees attended a large public institution in Southern California for their higher education, so this is an important bias to note in reading about their experience learning Japanese in their higher education. Many of the learners' experiences are uniquely situated in the Japanese-American Southern California experience. Japanese heritage language learners from other parts of the U.S. with a less robust Japanese population may not have the same community resources or level of exposure to Japanese culture.

Improvement and Policy Recommendations

For areas of improvement, all six teachers said that more curricular resources are needed for non-MEXT sponsored heritage schools, as well as university programs, and that teachers and families should avoid putting too much pressure to learn Japanese at a young age. All six of the teachers also mentioned that K-12 students' familial relationships sometimes became strained when teachers and families pushed learners too hard to do their homework and attend school. It's "dangerous to force kids because they may grow to hate it, so they may rebel against learning the language." Three of the six teachers mentioned *ma no kinyoubi*, which translated means "unlucky Friday." This common phrase among families of learners who attend Japanese heritage school on Saturdays refers to the stress of Friday nights where learners are trying to do a week's worth of homework and study for a character or *kanji* test in one night, before the Saturday deadline. Japanese immersion schools may be an ideal solution to avoid the stress of condensing so much material for weekend Japanese heritage school. A school is considered full immersion when all subjects and activities are taught in Japanese. Partial Japanese immersion is when a portion of the school day is taught in Japanese. Eleven states in the U.S. have full or partial immersion programs. In California, there are seven partial-immersion schools, but no full immersion schools as of yet (Japan Foundation [JF], 2018). "Immersion programs are considered to be the most effective road to fluency among young learners of a foreign language" (Japan Foundation, 2018, p. 1). I would be interested in conducting future research in this area to learn about Japanese heritage language learners' experience in partial or full Japanese immersion programs.

Four teachers spoke extensively about their recommendations for improvements in broader national policy around heritage languages. They commented that there should be more

recognition among the mainstream, inter-ethnic community about the importance of heritage language schools. Historically, pre-WWII, there were many Japanese-American gyms and culture classes that offered Japanese cultural activities like *ikebana* (flower arranging), tea ceremony, and calligraphy to the whole community, as well as an extensive network of Japanese-American basketball teams. Ideally, all different ethnic and community groups would come together to collaborate and share resources. This very much ties in with the mission of the federally funded Language Resource Centers, and specifically the National Heritage Language Resource Center.

The importance of understanding and meeting the needs of heritage language learners was also a view that was reinforced by teachers and learners alike. Japanese heritage language learners' needs include providing environments and resources that speak to their experience and help them balance learning Japanese and their other academic responsibilities so that they can learn Japanese and learn about their ethnic and cultural heritage. Metoki (2012) writes,

If we come to understand our students' identities, this can become a very powerful classroom tool that may aid in facilitating a more meaningful language learning experience...We must approach our profession with a sense of responsibility and passion since heritage language educators are not only teaching their students a language, they are also assisting in their development of ethnic identity. (p. 84)

Large universities in metropolitan areas often have well-established heritage language programs or heritage language tracks. However, there is a need to establish heritage language programs across a diversity of schools in the U.S. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the population of heritage language learners is growing. While heritage language education is recognized as a distinct type of language learning from foreign language and dual language learning, there is still

much more to share to gain buy-in from higher education administration to put resources towards providing students the opportunity to learn their heritage language.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

While Japanese as a foreign language is commonly taught in many colleges and universities in the U.S., Japanese as a heritage language is much less commonly taught. Heritage language learners are often stuck in the middle of a continuum. On one side are native speakers; on the other end of the continuum are foreign language learners. Heritage language learners are in the middle because they often have excellent listening comprehension from listening to their families and communities speak in the language. However, literacy skills such as reading and writing skills suffer due to lack of learning at home or in a heritage or community language school (Isurin & Sullivan, 2008).

In order to help improve literacy skills and create an engaging curriculum, Kagan and Carreira (2011) recommend a macro-based strategy that includes scaffolding strategies within mixed foreign language and heritage language classes to teach students within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).

With heritage language learners, a micro based or more traditional foreign language teaching approach is not as effective, because it ignores the broader language and cultural knowledge that heritage language learners already have. Therefore, in the case of heritage language learning, where the heritage language learner is connected more deeply psychologically to the language and culture, teachers try to have a heightened awareness of a student’s ZPD.

Examples of macro-based teaching practices include content-based, task-based, and experiential or project-based tasks that take advantage of heritage language learners' broad skill-set. It would be interesting to evaluate macro-based teaching methods in heritage language courses and see how effective they are to improve students' level of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Another innovative way of engaging heritage learners is to use a negotiated syllabus. McPherson (2016) describes a negotiated syllabus as a way to meet heritage language learners where they are by involving them in creating their own syllabus that meets their learning interests and needs. One of the main parts of a Japanese language course is learning *kanji*, or Chinese characters. A very interesting result of the negotiated syllabus McPherson used in her Japanese heritage language class was that the students experienced a marked positive change in their attitude towards learning *kanji* because they felt empowered by being able to pick the ones they were expected to learn and memorize.

An additional idea for future research and practice is to collaborate with peer institutions and utilize technology in a way that connects Japanese heritage language learners in an online interactive environment across institutions. I attended a presentation at the Third International Conference on Heritage/Community Languages in February 2018 given by Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl. Van Deusen-Scholl (2018) discusses the Shared Course Initiative (SCI) as a collaborative project between Columbia University, Cornell University, and Yale University to teach Less-Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL).

The SCI supplements these schools' in-person language teaching with synchronized classroom time that creates a "highly interactive, learner-centered, multi-modal environment." (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2018, p. 4). This study and others before it have found the importance of the heritage language community in motivating heritage language learners. Van Deusen-Scholl

(2018) has found that heritage language learner enrollments are robust in the SCI, and therefore this model has the potential to create communities of practice that help nurture students' identity exploration as they learn their heritage language. It is also worth mentioning that there are challenges such as establishing Memoranda of Agreement (MOUs) between the various institutional partners and ensuring that administrative matters such as course scheduling in different academic calendars is synchronized (Van Deusen-Scholl & Charitos, 2016). Strong and frequent communication between the school partners is considered vital to it's' success.

Coinciding with this theme of institutional collaborations is the need for K-12 and higher education institutions to create structures for articulation so that more heritage language learners are able to smoothly continue learning Japanese as they transition from high school into college. As with general U.S. schools, there are currently no established protocols or structures to share information about student learning from high school to college. For Japanese heritage language learners, information such as students' abilities in speaking and literacy would be an excellent supplement to college and universities' language placement exams.

Interviewing both learners and teachers provided a well-rounded narrative of the experience of Japanese heritage learners attending Japanese heritage schools in the U.S. However, adding heritage language learners' family and close friends' perspectives would have added another dimension to learning about their life journeys as they learned Japanese.

He (2014) suggests that research on identity should focus on how learners navigate many different cultural contexts and dimensions. I agree that there is a need to speak with many more Japanese heritage language learners, and heritage language learners overall, who have learned in many different geographical areas around the world with different resources. The more interconnections we can find between learners of all backgrounds, the more collaborations and

pooling of resources can happen to maximize our strength as a dynamic community of multilingual and multicultural citizens of the world.

An important, and growing field of research is that of raciolinguistics, led by Samy Alim, Geneva Smitherman, John Rickford, Nelson Flores, and Jonathan Rosa. Moving forward, I am deeply interested in exploring this field that examines how language shapes our ideas about race and vice versa, that language is raced and race is languaged (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016).

Reflection

I felt that my position as a Japanese heritage language learner added to this study in that I was able to relate to the learners' experiences and also create a comfortable connection with my participants. I think this may be due to our common experience in navigating Japanese heritage language school and the spectrum of academic, social and familial dynamics that are part of this unique learning experience. Both the learners and I were surprised about how much rich information came from the exercise of written reflection after speaking about their experiences. All of the learners who completed written post-interview reflections felt it was a positive experience for them. Hanna wrote,

I think it made me recall memories and think on what changed me, what factors affected me to be the person who I am today. I think growing up among two cultures, "identity" is something that I think I have always been thinking about, asking myself "who I am" throughout my childhood. I think I didn't consciously think about that 24/7 but looking back, I feel that "identity" was a theme that was right beside me all along.

Ann wrote,

This was a great opportunity to reflect back on my experiences based on how "Japanese" I felt and to put into words how those experiences meant to me after close to two decades.

I never really thought about the past experiences based solely on my identity and it gives me a new lens to understand the past and what I perceive now.

Ken wrote, “It was really nice to remember the days of studying Japanese. Although there were times that I struggled with some grammar points, it was really great to learn the language and develop my fluency.” Jennifer wrote,

It was a great reminder of the many ways that both the language learning experience and being able to use what I learned have benefited me in so many different aspects of my life. Feeling really grateful to all of the people that helped me learn Japanese (teachers, friends that spoke it around me, Japanese people that kindly and patiently made efforts to understand me and help me improve).

I have learned the value of reflection in processing our experiences, and have also wondered why we retain certain memories over others, both positive and negative memories of our past experiences. This practice has shown me the value of narrative inquiry to look forward and backward to see interwoven trends (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This ability to see trends can greatly enhance how we use our past experiences to create lives that fulfill our goals as we look ahead.

In addition, I was also surprised about how much I enjoyed conducting the qualitative, narrative interviews. Perhaps this was due to my personal passion for this topic, but I greatly enjoyed asking these questions and engaging with learners and teachers about this subject. I hope to share parts of this dissertation at conferences and in publications that reach stakeholders in Japanese language education. My hope is that stakeholders including learners, families, teachers, schools, and cultural organizations understand the experience of Japanese heritage language

learners to a greater degree, and therefore can meet the needs and expand resources to maximize positive language and cultural learning.

APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Heritage Learners Groups 1 and 2

Thank you for taking the time to contribute your unique experience with Japanese heritage language learning to this project. The goal of this project is to learn authentic stories of Japanese heritage language learners as they reflect back on their experience learning Japanese. These stories will help us learn ways that educators and the community can ideally improve the educational experience of current and future Japanese heritage language learners. This interview will be focused on learning about your language and cultural background and pivotal moments in your language journey.

1. Please walk me through your experience learning Japanese. Did you participate in a Japanese heritage/community language program in K-12?
 - a. If so, how many years did you attend?
 - i. Where was your school located?
2. Did you take Japanese language classes or specifically Japanese heritage language classes during your higher education?
3. How do you feel learning Japanese helped you connect with...
 - a. Your ethnic identity
 - b. Your cultural heritage
 - c. Family (especially parents & grandparents)
 - d. Japanese - American community
4. Can you tell me about a time when you felt learning Japanese helped you connect with your ethnic identity?
5. If you have siblings, how was their experience learning Japanese different from yours?

- a. Where were you born?
 - b. Where have you lived in the past?
 - c. Was there a large Japanese community there?
6. If you attended, can you tell me about a time or share an experience that illustrates how Japanese heritage language school was very different than your U.S. local school?
- a. What were some differences in teaching styles?
 - b. What were some differences in the friendships you made?
7. If you attended, how did your experience with Japanese heritage language school change over the years?
- a. Were you more heavily involved during elementary, middle or high school?
 - b. Why was that? How did that affect you?
8. Did you feel more/less “Japanese” at certain points in your life?
- a. Please tell me about a time when you felt more Japanese.
 - b. Please tell me about a time when you felt less Japanese.
 - c. Why do you think that might have been?
9. Would you describe yourself as bilingual?
10. Would you describe yourself as bicultural?
11. In terms of ethnicity, how do you usually describe yourself?
- a. How has your self-identity changed over the years?
 - b. Please tell me about a time when you felt like your various identities were in conflict with each other.

12. What do you consider the strengths of your Japanese language and literacy ability?
 - a. What do you consider to be less strong than you would like?
13. What have been your goals for learning Japanese?
 - i. Have these goals changed over time? If so, please share how they have changed.
14. How do you interact with the Japanese language and culture now?
 - a. Can you give me some examples of how you interact with Japanese?
15. Do you currently utilize Japanese language & literacy in your career/school life?
 - a. Please tell me about a time when you utilized Japanese language and or literacy in your career/school.
 - b. In what ways would you like to use Japanese more than you currently do?
16. In what ways have you participated in (or created) a Japanese language or cultural learning community in your own family or community?
17. If you choose or have chosen to have children, would you want them to learn Japanese?
 - a. What aspects of Japanese language and culture would you like your children to acquire or understand?
 - b. If so, would you enroll them in a Japanese heritage language program?
 - c. What might you change about their experience to make it different from your experience?

APPENDIX B: Additional Questions for Heritage Learners who wrote Critical Thematic
Autobiographies

1. Have you reread your critical thematic autobiography since you wrote it for your Japanese heritage language class?
 - a. If yes, when did you reread it?
 - b. If not, how do you feel after reading your critical thematic autobiography for the first time since ____?
2. What memories from your Japanese language learning experience came up from reading it?
3. Several years after writing this autobiography, how have your perceptions of your experience changed?

APPENDIX C: Second Interview: Reflection on the Meaning (Japanese Heritage Language Learners)

The second interview is focused on hearing about how you felt reflecting on your time at Japanese heritage / community school and learning more details about your experience.

1. Last time, I asked you to reflect on your experience at Japanese heritage language school. How did it feel to think back on those experiences during our interview together?”
2. Since we last talked, which additional memories surfaced (if any) about your experience, please share them if you are comfortable doing so.
3. In what ways was it a beneficial experience to reflect back on your experience?
4. What have been your goals for learning Japanese?
5. Have these goals changed over time?
 - a. If so, please share how they have changed.
6. Since taking Japanese in heritage/community language school, have you pursued learning Japanese in other ways?
7. In what ways have you engaged with your Japanese family or community?
8. In what ways have you participated in (or created) a Japanese language or cultural learning community in your own family or community?

APPENDIX D: Teacher Interviews

1. Personal Background
 - a. Length of teaching Japanese language classes
 - b. Length of teaching Japanese heritage language classes
 - c. Where have you taught Japanese? (K-12/which colleges & universities, etc.)
2. How would you describe a “typical” Japanese heritage language learner that you meet in your classes?
3. What are your perceptions of the main differences between Japanese heritage language learners and Japanese foreign language learners?
4. How do students talk about their Japanese-American ethnic identity or cultural heritage? That is, how do they talk about being Japanese?
5. How do students talk about the challenges of being bicultural or bilingual? How do they talk about the benefits of being bicultural or bilingual?
6. What are your perceptions of Japanese heritage language learning in K-12 education?
 - a. What are the strengths?
 - b. What are areas in need of improvement?
7. What are your perceptions of Japanese heritage language learning in higher education?
 - a. What are the strengths?
 - b. What are areas in need of improvement?
8. How do K-12 & Higher Education Japanese heritage language programs work together?

a. What might be some benefits of collaboration between K-12 and Higher Ed Japanese heritage language programs?

Second Interview

Follow up within 1-2 weeks of first interview to see if any other thoughts and reflections about teaching Japanese heritage language learners came to mind after first interview.

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