

A First Grade Chinese Student's Self-Efficacy Beliefs about Learning English in American Classrooms and a Chinese Community

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Abstract

Through a single case study and from the interpretive paradigm, the author described a first-grade student's self-efficacy beliefs about learning English in various English language learning tasks and across school-based and home-based contexts. The student came from China and had been living in a Chinese community in the United States for one year when this study started. Data were collected from interviews, observations, reading and writing think-aloud protocols, and student documents over eight months. Constant comparison method was used to analyze the data during the iterative process of comparing and contrasting themes and concepts. The participant's self-efficacy beliefs were found to be malleable and task-specific. He reported higher self-efficacy to complete listening and speaking language activities than reading and writing activities. His self-efficacy beliefs were associated with his familiarity with the content area, self-perceptions of English proficiency level, the task difficulty level, interests, attitude toward the English language and the English speaking community, and the social and cultural context. This descriptive study provided some insight into how to understand a young language learner's perceived self-efficacy.

Key Terms: *Self-efficacy; First-grade Child; English Language Learner; Case Study; Interpretive Paradigm*

There were 5.5 million school-age English language learners (ELLs) in American public schools during the 2003-04 school year (Leos, 2004). Approximately 76% of public schools with ELLs provided English as a second language (ESL) programs, but only about 30% of public school teachers instructing ELLs received training to do so and less than 3% of teachers with ELLs earned a degree in ESL or bilingual education (Hoffman, 2002). These figures indicate a strong need for teachers and educators to understand the needs of these students in public schools in order to help them acquire English language proficiency.

Extensive studies had been conducted to help researchers, teacher educators, and classroom teachers understand the process of second language learning and identify the characteristics of good language learners (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Reiss, 1981). Most of these studies, however, focused on the linguistic nature of language acquisition and/or strategies in learning the language from the perspectives of the researchers within the school context. As is known, language learning takes place not only in schools but also in the home community. This study aims to provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of a first grade Chinese student's self-efficacy beliefs about English in both school and home contexts. The description of the participant's perceived self-efficacy contributes to the investigation of how to interpret young children's self-efficacy beliefs and how their self-efficacy beliefs were constructed in the social environment.

Self-efficacy beliefs were found to be indicators of academic achievements measured by their performance in mathematics problem solving and English reading and writing tasks (Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Schunk, 1994). While adult learners' self-efficacy beliefs in learning English have been documented, few studies have been done with elementary school ELLs (Huang, Lloyd, & Mikulecky, 1999).

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Self-efficacy refers to the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses rather than the

judgments of the skills themselves. According to Bandura (1997), there are four major sources of self-efficacy information: Mastery or enactive experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional state.

Mastery or enactive experience refers to past experience of success and/or failure. "Successes raise efficacy appraisals; repeated failures lower them, especially if the failures occur early in the course of events and do not reflect lack of effort or adverse external circumstances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 399). Vicarious experience refers to observations of others' successes and failures. As we make observations, we draw conclusions about our ability in similar contexts. Thus, peer models are important sources of self-efficacy information (Schunk & Hansen, 1985). Self-appraisals of competence are also partly based on the opinions of significant others (Bandura, 1997). The social persuasion in the form of feedback from adults regarding the adequacy of performance impacts students' self-efficacy beliefs. The final source of information related to competence is somatic information conveyed by physiological or emotional states. It is not the arousal state per se but the meaning given to it that affects one's perceived self-efficacy. For example, high achievers may read arousal as challenge, which bolsters their sense of efficacy. Similarly, mood also has an impact through activation of associated memories. A positive mood activates thoughts of past accomplishments whereas a negative mood activates memories of past failings.

Previous research indicated that self-efficacy was malleable (Klassen, 2004) and was influenced by a student's interest to the task, the teacher's role, the complexity of required tasks, the student's past experience of success or failure, the comparison to other learners, effort put into the task, and metacognitive awareness (Huang & Chang, 1998; Shih & Alexander, 2000).

In one of the few studies to investigate self-efficacy of young children, Wang and RiCharde (1987) investigated the developmental basis by which children's ability to monitor their cognitive performances interacts with their perceived self-efficacy. Both second- and fourth-graders in a U.S. elementary school were assigned to a training group and a control group. The only difference between the control group and the treatment group was that metacognitive awareness was encouraged in the treatment group. All students were taught two different strategies to memorize words: rote-repetition method and sentence elaboration method. These children's memorization of the words was measured afterwards. Regardless of grade or group, all participants exhibited gains in self-efficacy from pretest to posttest. The successful learning performance by second- and fourth-graders led to enhanced self-efficacy, which also generalized to other similar tasks such as remembering numbers.

Understanding children's development in metacognition is crucial for us to interpret their self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy is one's beliefs of his/her capabilities to learn or perform a task at a designated level, that is, one's prediction of future performance which is influenced by age and familiarity with the materials. Although preschool and kindergarten children tended to overestimate their performance (Schneider, 1986; Schneider, Borkowski, Kurtz, & Kerwin, 1986), they made more realistic predictions when asked about performance that they were familiar with, e.g., how far they can jump (Markman, 1973). Young children's predictions were also more accurate when assessments of memory span were nonverbal rather than verbal (Cunningham & Weaver, 1989) or were conducted in a familiar context, such as a game (Wippich, 1981, as cited in Schneider, 1998). The current study was conducted in contexts that were familiar to the participant such as game-playing at home and classrooms where the participant regularly attended in order to get a good understanding of the child's self-efficacy beliefs.

With a single case, this study described the self-efficacy beliefs of a first grader across different language learning activities in both home-based and school-based contexts and discussed how the first grader's self-efficacy varied across different language learning tasks and across different contexts. The critical research questions that guided this study were: (1) What behaviors of this participant are indicators of perceived self-efficacy? (2) How are this participant's self-efficacy beliefs manifested in the language learning process? (3) What impacts the development of this participant's self-efficacy beliefs? And (5) how this participants' self-efficacy beliefs vary across home-based and school-based language learning contexts?

Method

An ethnographic intrinsic case study approach was taken to understand the complexity of the participant's self-efficacy beliefs because, to my knowledge, no survey or instrument was available to measure young children's self-efficacy beliefs about learning English as a second language. As a result, the traditional survey method is not appropriate for this particular study. The openness of interpretivism allowed me to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and the development of the participant's self-efficacy. As an interpretivist, I regarded my research task as coming to understand and interpret how my participant in a social setting constructed the world around him. My qualitative study design, therefore, focused on in-depth, long-term interaction with my participant in several sites. I became the main research instrument as I observed, asked questions, and interacted with my participant. Although intrinsic case studies were focused on describing the cases but not generalization, readers may interpret the "thick descriptions" of the cases, vicariously experience what was described, and draw conclusions (Stake, 2000).

Participant observations and on-going interviews were used in this study. Participant observation considers the perspectives and experiences of the participant and enables the researcher to investigate the complex and rich social phenomena in greater depth and detail (Patton, 1987). It ranges across a continuum from observation to participation depending on the context of the study (Glesne, 1999). My role in the present study moved from *observer as participant* to *participant as observer* when I was easily and readily incorporated into the life of my participant.

A case study design was used because it "offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the readers' experiences. These insights can be constructed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research" (Merriam, 1988, p.32). This study was consisted of observations, reading and writing think-aloud protocols, student reading and writing document analysis, and interviews and provided information for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), the detailed description of the participant's behavior with the researcher's thinking and reflecting, through my intellectual effort. I approached the topic with a more pluralistic, interpretive, and open-ended perspective. The "thick description" makes possible "thick interpretations" in which the researcher "has no privileged voice in the interpretations that are written" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.15). To enhance the trustworthiness/credibility of the study, I conducted "emic analysis" (from insider's perspectives) and to stratify a hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of how the activities were "produced, perceived, and interpreted" (Geertz, 2001, p. 58). Moreover, cross-checking by analyzing data from various sources (triangulation) as well as asking my participant and his parents to check my interpretations (member checks) and using multiple researchers to code the data (peer debriefing) were employed.

I played multiple roles in this ethnographic study. As a member of the participant's community and the father of a boy about the same age of the participant, I had been playing with the participant and my child (as their playmate) for a year before this study started. During the long engagement with the child, I learned how to be attentive to his point of views while maintaining the parental role. This special connection helped me develop rapport with the participant and made it possible for me to provide "emic analysis" by interpreting the participant's actions through his own perspectives. In the classroom, I sometimes served as the teacher's aid and sometimes as an observer and researcher.

Settings

This study was conducted in the United States in two settings: an urban public elementary school and an adjacent apartment complex, known as a Chinese community, where more than half of the residents were Chinese. During the 2002 through 2003 school year, there were 294 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. The majority of the students were Caucasian (40.1%), and the second largest group was Asians (33.6%). African American and Hispanic children accounted for 20.8% and 5.10% respectively. Of all the students, 67.2% were economically disadvantaged, 54.6% were limited English proficient, and 14.1% were identified with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The school was the recipient of the No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) Blue Ribbon Award, the national award given to schools with high academic achievement. The 2002-03 school year report card indicated that the average achievement scores of the fourth grade students in this school on state-wide standardized tests were among the top ten public schools in the district. According to the report card, the percentages of the students at or above the proficiency level for citizenship, mathematics, reading, writing, and science were 65.9%, 71.4%, 69.0%, 80.5%, and 42.9%, respectively.

Of the 18 teachers in this school, there was one African American and 17 Caucasians at the time of this study. All the teachers had state authorized certifications or licensures, and the average years of teaching experience of the teachers in this school was 18 years.

In addition to the school, observations occurred on the playgrounds within the Chinese community and the participant's house. Naturalistic settings were used because this would allow the participants to feel most comfortable during the study. The naturalistic settings also allow the researcher to examine and understand the participant's behaviors in the most natural way in a daily life context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Participant

Doudou was the pseudonym for the participant who was only child in his family. Doudou was six years old and was in the first grade at the time of the study. He came to the United States in the summer of 2002 and started his schooling in Kindergarten in September. Although both his mother and I thought that his English was good enough to catch up with average learners in his class after staying in the ESL program for a year, he was still placed in the ESL program for the first grade. He stayed in the ESL program for a total of 18 months (the average length of stay in the ESL program in the school where this study was conducted was 12 months) but he exited successfully from the program by the time the data collection for this study finished.

A pseudonym was used for the sake of confidentiality and privacy of the participant and his family. Doudou's mother was a doctoral student at a Midwestern university, and his father was an undergraduate student at another university in the same city.

Data Sources and Languages Used

I collected data from (a) parent interviews and child pre-interviews; (b) participant observations of the child at play and in the classroom; (c) on-going follow-up interviews related to observations; (d) English reading and writing think-aloud protocols; (e) post-interviews with the child; and (f) analyses of student documents such as the student's work in reading and writing and report cards. Since both the participant and I were native speakers of Chinese, I always used Chinese for communications with him. Nevertheless, the participant sometimes used Chinese and sometimes used English when answering my questions. When I was in doubt of his responses, I used both Chinese and English to verify what he meant. Therefore, a mixture of Chinese and English was used for all interactions during the study, including interviews and communications during the participant observations. The choice of the language was made by the participant, and code switching (the change from one language to another) was always led by the participant.

Procedures

The study began during the summer of 2003 when I conducted pre-interviews with the participant and his parents to collect the participant's demographic information including family background. Following the pre-interviews, I spent time with my participant as he played in our home community during July, August, and September, learning what and how he lived by actually participating in his games.

When the school started in late September, I began visiting both Doudou's ESL and regular education classrooms for four months until January 2004 to examine and understand Doudou's behaviors in the classroom context. Four reading and writing think-aloud protocols were also conducted with Doudou during this period. This method was similar to the think-aloud protocols described by Chamot and El-Dinary (1999). Doudou was allowed to choose an authentic English literature book of which difficulty level was appropriate. Following the reading task, Doudou was asked to write either a summary of the reading or a description of a person or game. During the process of administering the protocol, I asked Doudou to verbally tell me what he was thinking when I noted hesitations or a long period of silence.

I videotaped all activities within the home-based context including the reading and writing think-aloud protocols. Due to the difficulty in getting the permission from the classroom teacher and the parents of other children, I did not tape the classroom observations. Instead, I took detailed field notes. Altogether, I conducted 16 observations (760 minutes) across home-based and school-based contexts.

Follow-up interviews were on-going and followed each observation. That is, I conducted 16 follow-up interviews. I transcribed all the video tapes for observations and audiotapes for interviews. Follow-up interviews and the reading and writing think-aloud protocols served to provide additional information about the participant's self-efficacy beliefs. Questions were asked to elicit his self-efficacy beliefs related to language-learning activities during the observations.

A post-interview was again conducted with the participant at the end of the study. These interview questions were designed after the analyses of the previous data to triangulate my interpretations of the participant's behaviors related to self-efficacy beliefs. During the

post-interview, the participant was asked to rate his self-efficacy beliefs in five levels: cannot do it (level 1), not sure if I can do it (level 2), can do it but not very well (level 3), can do it well (level 4), and can do it very well (level 5) for questions such as “How well do you think you can read the instructions on Pokemon cards?” The participant’s self-efficacy was considered high if he said that he could do something well or very well.

Data Analyses

Coding and analyses of the data began with proofreading the field notes and participants’ responses to open-ended interview questions. Following the sociological tradition, I treated the participant’s responses as a window into his experience (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Guided by the grounded theory, two coders independently sorted the participant’s responses into thematic piles and developed a codebook to record detailed process of the data coding process, including the description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplars for each code. The codebook was refined when new data did not fit into existing themes and when the two coders had disagreement during the discussion after coding the data separately. The intercoder agreement measured by Kappa before the discussion was .86. Using codes to organize the data allowed me to identify the links, relationships, and patterns while reducing and making meaning out of the data.

Constant comparison method (Glaser, 1994) was used to analyze the data during the iterative process of comparing and contrasting themes and concepts. I examined closely the circumstances under which these themes occurred. Using multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis, I induced subthemes from each theme and merged some closely related subthemes in the end. The finalized themes and subthemes with selected verbatim quotes from participant were used to answer each research question.

Results

In the following paragraphs, I present and interpret Doudou’s behaviors in categories of emerging themes related to self-efficacy. Persistence across contexts and self-awareness of English proficiencies were two major themes emerged from the data that gave suggestions of Doudou’s perceived self-efficacy. Factors that influenced Doudou’s self-awareness of English proficiency and the development of his self-efficacy beliefs were found to be expertise in the content area, task difficulty level, past experience of success associated with effort, social persuasion, interests, attitude toward the English language and the English speaking community, and the social cultural context.

Persistence across Contexts

Through my eight classroom observations, four observations of Doudou at play, and four observations of Doudou when completing reading and writing think-aloud protocols, I observed a total of 65 behaviors that may provide evidence of his self-efficacy or self-regulation. Among them, 24 were related to persistence. In the following paragraph, I provide evidence that Doudou had low level of persistence when he thought he could not do the task well.

Doudou liked to play with Maomao, a boy of the same age with him. Maomao came to the U.S. from China shortly after Doudou did. These two boys had a lot in common and played together frequently because their parents took turns babysitting the boys. One of the first observations of Doudou occurred at Maomao’s apartment. Doudou and Maomao were

learning how to play a computer game by watching the demonstration. “That is how to battle,” Doudou told Maomao. The followings are excerpts from their interactions:

Doudou: You know what? They are going to *Zhan Hao* [moat], you know why?

Maomao: I don’t know.

Doudou: There is *you yi ge zhan hao* [There is a moat].

Maomao: I don’t know.

Doudou: Let’s skip this first.

Doudou shifted his language from English to Chinese, his native language, when he met a difficulty in speaking English to his friend. He also gave up his effort to figure out how to say *Zhan Hao* [moat] in English and how to use it in the game when Maomao could not help him either. It is quite common for bilingual children, and bilingual adults, to switch from one language to another. Although there are many reasons for this phenomenon of code switching (Jorgensen, 2003), Doudou’s lack of persistence in figuring out the English term for *Zhan Hao* [moat] indicated that he might have low self-efficacy to do so. Doudou’s responses during the post interview revealed low self-efficacy to translate words from Chinese to English.

The following observation in the ESL classroom indicated Doudou’s persistence in completing the task to tell a story. When the students were asked to tell a story about themselves, Doudou talked about his experience at Wendy’s but was stuck with the choice between *noon* and *afternoon*. Although encouraged by the teacher to skip this part and continue the story, Doudou did not give up easily. He used *noon* and *afternoon* interchangeably throughout his story to the end. While telling the story, Doudou showed a lot of hesitation and struggled with the choice of the word for *noon* or *afternoon* but he persisted in trying to finish telling the story and to find the appropriate word in that situation. During the follow-up interview, I asked him what time was noon and what time was afternoon. He was confused with the time and struggled for a long time. This was because in the Chinese culture, noon is often considered a period between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M., but this same time span is considered afternoon for speakers of English. Doudou finally told me that afternoon was after recess at school. So, Doudou’s concept of noon and afternoon was influenced by both the Chinese culture and his school context. His persistence in finishing telling the story and overcoming the difficulty of the choice of words was associated with his self-report of high efficacy in telling stories about himself during the follow-up interview.

Self-Awareness of English Proficiencies

Of the 65 behaviors recorded, 41 were related to his self-awareness of English proficiency. As an ELL, Doudou was aware of his English language skills in certain areas. In the following paragraphs, I provide evidence that Doudou’s awareness of his English proficiency influenced his self-efficacy beliefs to some extent.

Doudou and Maomao were watching the computer demonstration of a game at Maomao’s apartment. Maomao made several comments that somebody on an island would come and beat them up. Doudou did not seem to agree with Maomao and kept asking Maomao five times by using the phrases of “you do?” twice, “they can?”, “that island?”, and “you think so?” once. After another couple of minutes, Maomao went back to the bed and pretended to be sleeping. Doudou jumped toward Maomao and yelled at him. Maomao woke up.

Doudou: Is that, is that, is that, so, so, so, so loud?

Maomao: Yeah. And you bumped me.

Doudou: Did I scare you?

Maomao: Eh Hum. You scared me. You scared me.

Doudou: You thought I was a ghost?

Maomao: Yeah. I thought you were a ghost.

Doudou: I'm NOT ... a ghost.

Maomao: Ah Hum.

Doudou: I'm a, is a people.

Excited with the play, Doudou stammered on the word *so* because he was trying to recall the English word *loud*. Apparently, his hesitation was due to his limited English proficiency. When I asked Doudou how well he could ask Maomao about Maomao's thoughts, he replied "Not very well because there are many words I don't know." So, his awareness of limited English vocabulary may contribute to his low self-efficacy in using the language in communication in this situation. He also made an English grammar mistake by saying "I'm a, is a people." Although he used self-correction as a strategy to check his own mistakes in speaking English, his over-correction revealed his limited English proficiency at the same time. While the previous episode provided some evidence of his awareness of limited English vocabulary, the next episode implied his awareness of high English proficiency in the contexts familiar to him.

Since Doudou had been in the ESL class longer than most students and every child in the class was not proficient in English, Doudou reported high self-efficacy to help other children in English. His awareness of comparatively high English proficiency in his ESL class may be a source of his high self-efficacy to help other children. For example, a student was talking about an accident when playing on the playground, but was stuck with the words *monkey bar* in an ESL classroom activity. Doudou figured out what he was trying to say and uttered the words *monkey bar* for him. He later reported in an interview that he could help his ESL classmates to think of an English word very well and he could correct their English mistakes well because he thought his English was "good." His self-reported high self-efficacy to correct his classmates' English mistakes was triangulated in an observation later. When a student pronounced the word *wrong* as *wronger*, Doudou corrected her pronunciation immediately. When another student said that she "eat" soda, Doudou said, "You are not going to *eat* soda. That means, you can't *eat* soda." These behaviors of Doudou coupled with the follow-up interviews helped me understand that he was aware of his English proficiency in different contexts, and he could help his friends in English when he felt self-efficacious to do so.

Although his teacher taught in class about the use of capital letters and the singular and plural forms of verbs, Doudou forgot to use capital letters and made a lot of mistakes with singular or plural forms of words in his writing documents. This indicated that Doudou's English writing proficiency was limited. An interview helped me understand that Doudou had low self-efficacy in writing English diaries. This might be due to his lack of practice and interest in writing diaries and his bias against it.

Interviewer: How well do you think you can write English diaries? You know diaries?

Doudou: You mean like those things for girls?

- Interviewer: Why are those things for girls?
Doudou: Of course those things are for girls.
Interviewer: Why? Diaries are for girls?
Doudou: Yes. Because girls keep it like a secret.
Interviewer: You never write diaries?
Doudou: I never write diaries.
Interviewer: How well do you think you can write a diary if I ask you to do so?
Doudou: Cannot do it.

Doudou's responses to my questions during the interview revealed low self-efficacy for writing English diaries. The samples of Doudou's writing documents and his performance at most writing think-aloud protocols indicated that Doudou's English writing proficiency was low, which may be associated with his low self-efficacy to write an English diary. His low self-efficacy to write an English diary might also be interpreted as the result of not having any successful experience of accomplishing the task. Another possible factor that influenced Doudou's self-efficacy to write in English was social persuasion from his parents and teachers. His parents often asked him to practice writing Chinese characters and always told him that his writing was horrible. Although the feedback that he received from his parents was about his Chinese writing skills, Doudou might have interpreted it as writing skills in general. Doudou's teacher's comments on his report cards also suggested him to keep working on writing tasks.

The previous two episodes provided some information about Doudou's self-awareness of his English proficiencies in vocabulary and writing tasks associated with his self-efficacy beliefs. Doudou's self-efficacy beliefs and self-awareness of English proficiencies in listening, speaking, spelling, and reading stories contexts were also observed.

Doudou's self-efficacy to understand a native speaker's English was high (a level of 5) but low (a level of 3) to understand a non-native speaker in his class. I noticed in a classroom observation that William was reading the news from the student council with a very strong accent. Therefore, I wanted to know about Doudou's self-efficacy to understand William's words in comparison to his self-efficacy to understand his other classmates' words.

- Interviewer: How well do you think you can understand your classmates?
Doudou: Very well.
Interviewer: William is a student from the student council. If he is reading news to you, how well do you think you can understand him?
Doudou: Can do it but not very well.

My classroom observations told me that William was not a classmate that Doudou often played with. This helped me understand why he chose 5 for understanding his classmates but 3 for understanding William's words. I also learned from this interview that the discrepancy between Doudou's report of high self-efficacy to talk to his peers but inactive participation in his regular education classroom was associated with the classroom context. Doudou was quite active in the small group activities while inactive in the whole class activities. So, he reported high self-efficacy to speak to his classmates even in the regular education classroom because he usually talked to the children within his small group in this context.

In speaking, Doudou had higher self-efficacy (a level of 5) for telling stories about himself than telling stories from the book he read (a level of 3). When I probed into the

reason for this difference, he said that he could speak very well about himself but forgot almost every single paragraph after reading. So, Doudou was aware that retelling a story from a book was more demanding than telling a story about himself because he had to read and keep the information in mind in order to retell the story well. Parent interviews showed that his parents believed that they had strong accent in speaking English but Doudou did not have accent. As a result, they often asked Doudou to speak English to them so that they could practice their own English speaking skills. This sent Doudou a message that his English speaking skills were much better than those of his parents. Another reason that Doudou had high self-efficacy to speak in English was that he often spoke English to other children in the community although these children also spoke Chinese. Doudou told me that he spoke English because "This is America and I like it here." His positive attitude toward the English speaking community and his understanding of others' expectations from him helped him to practice speaking English a lot, and this long practice helped him develop high self-efficacy to speak English. On the other hand, his low self-efficacy to retell a story from a book was supported by his teacher's comments in the report card, "Doudou should work on retelling a story – what happens at the beginning, middle, and end. He should work on connecting his ideas in a story." Doudou's low self-efficacy to retell a story was also associated with his awareness of his limited reading comprehension skills elicited from the interview.

For spelling English words, Doudou reported high self-efficacy for color words and his classmates' names but low self-efficacy for certain names of objects such as *airplane* and *applesauce*. The classroom observation field notes suggested that Doudou's teacher practiced the spelling of color words with the students, and Doudou often wrote his classmates' names correctly in class. Therefore, Doudou reported high self-efficacy to spell the words that he was familiar with because "successes raise efficacy appraisals" (Bandura, 1986, p.399). On the other hand, I never saw Doudou using the word *airplane* or *applesauce*. As a result, the spelling of these words might be novel tasks for Doudou and lack of successful experience might be associated with his low self-efficacy beliefs. This conclusion was supported by Doudou's other responses in which he reported high self-efficacy to read books about animals but low self-efficacy to read chapter books. The observation field notes also indicated that Doudou often read books about animals but never read a chapter book. Doudou gained expertise in animals not only from reading books by himself but also from his classroom. For example, his teacher often asked a student to describe an animal in two or three sentences in class and then asked other students to guess what that animal was. This activity might arouse Doudou's interest in reading books about animals and helped him gain expertise in animals, the interest and expertise in turn might have influenced his self-efficacy beliefs.

Discussion

Doudou showed persistence in performing language-learning tasks. In this analysis, such a behavior was considered an indicator of high self-efficacy beliefs in the ESL class. At play, Doudou lacked persistence when confronted with tasks that he had low self-efficacy to accomplish. The connection between Doudou's behavior at play and in the classroom with his self-efficacy beliefs to perform related tasks supported Schunk's (1990) argument that efficacious children were more likely to participate and persist while less efficacious children were more likely to withdraw. When Doudou was aware that his English proficiency was

good, he also reported high self-efficacy. This supports Bong and Skaalvik's (2003) claim that perceived competence was a major component of self-efficacy.

A close examination of Doudou's self-efficacy helped me understand that his self-efficacy is task-specific. Take reading comprehension as an example, Doudou reported different levels of self-efficacy for reading activities. His self-efficacy to read storybooks was higher than to read chapter books. He also reported comparatively higher self-efficacy to read books about animals because he was familiar with the content of these books. This is to say that Doudou's self-efficacy was amenable to change depending on the specific task. We need to provide children with a specific task in order to elicit their self-efficacy beliefs.

Factors that influenced the development of Doudou's self-efficacy beliefs were expertise in the content area, self-perception of English proficiency, task difficulty level, past experience of success associated with effort, social persuasion, interests, attitude toward the English language and the English speaking community, and the social cultural context. Understanding these factors is important for us to learn how to help our children develop high self-efficacy in the process of learning ESL. For example, we might enhance children's self-efficacy beliefs by helping them develop their interest in the language-learning task, helping them develop a positive attitude toward the English language and English speaking community, lowering the task difficulty level so that they can experience success, providing them with encouragement and positive feedback, and helping them develop their English language proficiencies. Children who have low self-efficacy in one area may not necessarily hold these same beliefs in all areas, and low self-efficacious children can develop into high self-efficacious students by putting effort in the language-learning process and experiencing successes.

Given that teaching and learning are an integral part of education, the detailed description of Doudou's case is a supplement to teachers of children to understand their students' self-efficacy beliefs and incorporate these in their classroom teaching. These conclusions have significant implications in the field of ESL classroom teaching.

Limitations

The participant in this study was a Chinese boy with only 1 year of exposure to the English language-learning environment, lived in an international graduate student family, and had highly educated parents. Therefore, this descriptive study is not intended to generalize the findings to students of other cultures and families. Special caution should be kept in mind even when generating the results to students of similar characteristics because each individual is different from others even if common characteristics are shared in the group.

Another limitation of this study is that classroom teachers were not involved although their permission to observe their classrooms was obtained. Teachers' participation would have brought the teachers' perspectives into the study and would have helped me better understand the children's behaviors in the classroom.

Finally, this study was conducted in a natural setting, and no intervention was implemented. The participant was observed while playing or studying as he would usually do without this study. Therefore, causal relationship between self-efficacy and other factors such as peer modeling were not investigated.

Significance and Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributes to the literature of children's self-efficacy beliefs in studying English as a second language. Studies with such young and non-native English speaking

children are scarce. Nevertheless, there is considerable convergence of the findings in the areas of adolescents' English writing and mathematics that students' self-efficacy beliefs are important components of the learning process (Pajares & Miller, 1994; Schunk, 1994). Compared with other students, higher achieving students have been found to have higher self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares & Valiante, 1997). Nevertheless, ESL students' perceived self-efficacy has not been examined systematically even though it is particularly important for language learning (Huang & Chang, 1998; Huang et al., 1999). The present study extends prior research by examining a Chinese child learning ESL. Observations of Doudou at play in the home environment were incorporated with classroom observations as well as reading and writing think-aloud protocols. The inclusion of the natural home environment and the ethnographic intrinsic case study approach were contributions to the research methodology to investigate children's self-efficacy beliefs.

The findings from this study as well as from previous studies supported the argument that students' self-efficacy beliefs are not fixed but rather task specific (Klassen, 2004). This is very encouraging to classroom teachers because students not so successful in one area can be taught to be successful in another area, and students can also be taught from not successful to successful in a particular area. Their self-efficacy beliefs to perform language-learning tasks can then be enhanced through their successful past experience and lead to their future success in similar language-learning contexts.

As discussed, teacher participation is appreciated to investigate students' self-efficacy beliefs. Teacher efficacy beliefs in teaching these ELLs to perform different language-learning tasks might also be an interesting variable to study. Newly arrived students and students from a variety of family backgrounds are recommended for future research, and both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies should be used to obtain in-depth descriptions of individual students as well as results that are able to be generalized to populations.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

1. How well do you think you can tell others what to do at play?
2. How well do you think you can tell others where to go at play?
3. How well do you think you can tell the rules of a game?
4. How well do you think you can explain to your friends why something happened?
5. How well do you think you can make a suggestion about how to play a game?
6. How well do you think you can give directions to your friends about how to play a game?
7. How well do you think you can tell news to your friends/parents/teacher?
8. How well do you think you can tell a joke to your friends/parents/teacher?
9. How well do you think you can ask your friend how to do something in a game?
10. How well do you think you can ask your friend if they want to play with you?
11. How well do you think you can ask your friends what they want to play?
12. How well do you think you can ask your friend who they are in the game?
13. How well do you think you can ask your friend where they are in the game?
14. How well do you think you can ask your teacher for permissions?
15. How well do you think you can tell your friends what you think about somebody?
16. How well do you think you can tell your friends about what you think about some games?
17. How well do you think you can tell your friend whether you like or dislike something?
18. How well do you think you can make a complaint about something?
19. How well do you think you can read chapter books?
20. How well do you think you can read story books?
21. How well do you think you can read books about science/chess/animals?
22. How well do you think you can read the instructions on Pokemon cards?
23. How well do you think you can write a birthday card to your friend?
24. How well do you think you can write a diary?
25. How well do you think you can write a message for your parents in English?
26. How well do you think you can do it if I ask you to write something about what happened in the morning?
27. How well do you think you can understand your teacher's instructions?
28. How well do you think you can understand your friends in English?
29. How well do you think you can correct you friends' English mistakes?
30. How well do you think you can describe something in the name?
31. How well do you think you can make a comparison between two characters in the movie/game?
32. How well do you think you can make a comparison between two games?
33. How well can you tell others what you have read in a book?
34. How well do you think you can tell me what happened in a movie that you just watched?
35. How well do you think you can translate Chinese words into English?
36. How well do you think you can translate English words into English?
37. When you are watching English movie or TV for children, how well do you think you can understand it?
38. How well do you think you can understand English words on children's websites?