

UNC Charlotte Document Delivery



95940

Liad TN:

Journal Title: Journal of Research in
Childhood Education

Volume: 21
Issue: 4
Month/Year: 2007
Pages: 364-377

Article Author: Wang, C & Pape, S.

Article Title: A probe into three Chinese boy's
self-efficacy beliefs learning English as a
second language

Imprint:

Call #: LB1028 .J69 BEGAN WITH VOL.5
1990

Location: Periodicals--2nd Floor PER:
5(1990)-16(2001/02)-, INCOMPLETE: 17-
18(2003/04)

Item #:

CUSTOMER HAS REQUESTED:
Electronic Delivery

Chuang Wang (cwang15)
9201 University City Blvd
Charlotte, NC 28223

A Probe Into Three Chinese Boys' Self-Efficacy Beliefs Learning English as a Second Language

Chuang Wang

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Stephen J. Pape

University of Florida

Abstract. In this case study, we investigate three Chinese boys' self-efficacy beliefs learning English as a second language across English language learning tasks and home-based and school-based contexts. Participants reported higher self-efficacy to complete listening and speaking activities than during reading and writing activities. All participants claimed limited vocabulary and reported low self-efficacy for reading tasks that demanded advanced vocabulary. Our analyses provide descriptive evidence for associations between the participants' self-efficacy beliefs and various factors, such as content area expertise, English proficiency self-perceptions, task difficulty level, social persuasion, interest, attitude toward the English language and the English-speaking community, as well as the social and cultural context in which development is occurring.

There is growing pressure to better understand factors that affect the learning process of young English language learners (ELL) in public schools in general and their acquisition of English language proficiency in particular. This pressure comes from growing numbers of school-age ELLs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (Hoffman & Sable, 2006), the number of school-age ELLs in American public schools during the 2003-04 school year was 9.9 million, or 19 percent of all children in this age group (ages 5-17). This case study represents initial efforts to investigate elementary school ELLs' self-efficacy. Specifically, we sought to examine contexts that may influence self-efficacy in these children. Further, we examine among these young language learners the complex relationships between self-efficacy and children's learning documented within other areas.

The first author's experience with ELLs helped him notice individual learning differences among groups of young children learning English. Given the research support for relationships between self-efficacy and academic achievement in general (e.g., Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Schunk, 1994; Shih & Alexander, 2000), there is a need to explore the impact of self-efficacy within this novel domain. Enhancing students'

Authors' Notes: Chuang Wang is an assistant professor at the Department of Educational Leadership of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Stephen J. Pape is an associate professor at the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Chuang Wang, Department of Educational Leadership, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223. E-mail address: cwang15@unc.edu. Telephone number: 704-687-8708.

self-efficacy beliefs may be crucial to the development of language learning. For example, higher self-efficacious students may be more persistent in solving language problems. These relationships have not been investigated among young ELLs (Huang, Lloyd, & Mikulecky, 1999). In addition, most of the previous work was situated in western settings and so less is known about how self-efficacy operates with non-western individuals (Klassen, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis of three Chinese boys' self-efficacy beliefs.

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' judgments of what they can do with the skills they possess, rather than the judgments of the skills themselves, and four major sources of self-efficacy information impact the level of self-efficacy: mastery or enactive experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional state (Bandura, 1997).

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 & Hanson, 1985). Self-appraisals of competence also are partly based on the opinions of significant others (Bandura, 1997). That is, social persuasion—in the form of feedback from adults in the environment regarding the adequacy of performance—affects students' self-efficacy beliefs. The final source of information related to competence is the somatic information conveyed by physiological or emotional states (Bandura, 1997). 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 (Bandura, 1997). A positive mood activates thoughts of past accomplishments, whereas a negative mood activates memories of past failures.

Additional factors that influence students' self-efficacy beliefs have been examined within the field of English language learning. Self-efficacy has been shown to be influenced by students' interests, the teacher's role, complexity of required tasks, learners' performance, comparison to other learners, effort put into the task, and metacognitive awareness (Huang & Chang, 1998; Wang & Ruie, 1987).

Studies that examined the impact of self-efficacy on academic outcomes (e.g., Pajares & Graham, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Voss, 2001) provide important insight for the present study. In the present study, three Chinese boys' behaviors were observed and associated with their self-efficacy beliefs elicited through interviews following the observations. The following questions guided our research:

- 1) Which of the participants' behaviors provide evidence of their self-efficacy beliefs related to learning English across different learning tasks and across home-based and school-based contexts?
- 2) What factors affect the development of the participants' self-efficacy?
- 3) What are participants' self-efficacy beliefs across tasks and contexts?
- 4) How do participants' self-efficacy beliefs vary across different learning tasks and across home-based and school-based contexts?

Method

Settings and Participants

All three participants were Chinese citizens who attended the same U.S. public elementary school in a metropolitan city. The school was located near a large mid-western university. The student population was drawn from 35 different countries; international students constituted approxi-

mately one-third of the enrollment. ELLs in this school were mainstreamed in regular classes for most of the day and then participated in pull-out classes to receive English as a second language services (ESL classes). Participants in this study were observed in regular classes because they all exited from the ESL classes.

In 2002-03, the majority of the K-5 students (294 students overall) were white (40.1 percent) or Asian (33.6 percent). African American students accounted for 20.8 percent, and 5.1 percent of the students were Hispanic. Approximately 67 percent were considered economically disadvantaged (according to free lunch status), 54.6 percent were limited English proficient, and 14.1 percent were identified with various disabilities.

The school was a recipient of the No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Award for high academic achievement. For 2002-03, the school ranked among the top 10 public schools in the district's 4th-grade achievement scores on state-wide standardized tests. The percentage of students at or above the proficient level was greater than 65 percent for all areas except science, which resulted in a 42.9 percent proficiency rating.

This study was conducted not only in the school, but also at the playgrounds within the community and in the participants' houses. The authors selected naturalistic settings with no intervention, because we believe it is important to collect data in the setting where the participants feel most comfortable and spend most of their time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

All of the participants were boys and

spoke Chinese as their native language. Brief information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

The Research Approach

The social-cultural approach was employed in this case study because such a framework places the learners' experience in context and incorporates major stages of cognitive development that represent the changing relation between the children and their environment (Vygotsky, 1978). The contexts under which this study was conducted included the children's classrooms and their home communities.

Data were collected over 6 months and included 3 audiotaped parent interviews and 3 initial interviews with children (about 6 hours in total), 15 videotaped observations of children at play in the home community (about 15 hours in total), 15 classroom observations with detailed field notes (about 15 hours), 30 audiotaped follow-up unstructured interviews (about 5 hours), 12 videotaped English reading and writing tasks (about 3 hours), 30 reading and writing documents (e.g., homework assignments) collected from the participants, school report cards for each participant for the year prior to this study, and 3 audiotaped final interviews with the children (about 90 minutes). The language used during all interviews and interactions with the participants was a mixture of Chinese and English, because the first author is a fluent speaker of the two languages and tended to use the language with which the participants felt most comfortable. Similarities between the researcher and the participants in language and culture aid in

Table 1
Background Information and Data Resources for Each Participant

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Number of Years Learning English</i>
Jian	9	4	2
Rui	8	3	4
Dawei	8	3	3

Note. All names are pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality.

developing rapport (Esterberg, 2002), and the use of the participants' native language for communication purposes during interviews was quite popular (see Liu, Ahn, Baek, & Han, 2004; Morita, 2004; Wang & Pape, 2005). More detailed information of each data resource is described in the following paragraphs.

Parent interviews provided information about parental involvement with the students' acquisition of English. They also helped us explore how home environment affected the students' self-efficacy beliefs. Students' demographic information, attitudes toward the English language and the English-speaking community, and perceived usefulness of English were elicited during the children's initial interviews.

Children's language interactions with others while playing video games, computer games, soccer, chess, card games, as well as trading Pokémon and/or Digimon cards, were recorded during observations of children at play. These observations provided evidence to support our understanding of the participants' behavior related to their self-efficacy beliefs when learning English and perceived contributions of social factors to students' self-efficacy beliefs.

Classroom observations provided sources to examine participants' behavior in the classroom context (formal English language-learning setting) with a focus on English reading and writing tasks. These field notes supported our exploration of the impact of classroom context on students' self-efficacy beliefs.

Follow-up unstructured interviews were ongoing and followed each observation. Questions that occurred to the researchers during the observations were included in the interview to further understand the children's behavior. Students' self-efficacy beliefs related to performing English language-learning activities were recorded during the observations. To elicit the children's self-efficacy beliefs, a chart with five stars was presented. The children were asked to choose a star to indicate how well they could accomplish a specific language-learning

task. The largest star (the fifth one) indicated "can do it very well," and the smallest star (the first one) indicated "not able to do it." Future tense was used to elicit self-efficacy beliefs because "self-efficacy represents future-oriented conceptions of the self and its potential" (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 9). Students' responses were probed for further understanding.

For English reading and writing tasks, all participants were asked to read a self-selected chapter from *The Book of Questions and Answers* (2003) and then write a journal entry or a summary of what they had read. Before students actually proceeded to the reading and writing tasks, we elicited the participants' self-efficacy beliefs to triangulate their self-reported self-efficacy during previous interviews.

Final interviews were conducted with each participant near the end of the study. These interview questions were adapted from a survey developed through a pilot study (Wang & Pape, 2005). These interviews served as triangulation for students' previously reported self-efficacy beliefs.

We used generic theorizing processes and general analytic procedures (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) to construct an interpretive description of the children's English language learning processes associated with self-efficacy in the classrooms and their home community. The procedures to analyze the data involved scanning the data, creating categories, noting patterns, looking for counter evidence, and selecting important domains for further analysis.

Results

Evidence of Young ELLs' Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Evidence of the participants' self-efficacy beliefs were classified within three categories: persistence in accomplishing language tasks, self-awareness of English proficiency, and willingness to engage in language activities.

Persistence in accomplishing language tasks. Participants in this study persisted longer in the activities that they believed

they could do well on, but gave up easily or avoided performing tasks that they did not think they could do very well. This proved to be a clue that children's persistence in accomplishing the language tasks might be an indicator of their self-efficacy beliefs. The following episode of Jian playing Pokémon cards best illustrates our argument.

Pokémon cards are Jian's favorite game. He liked trading Pokémon cards and playing Pokémon games with his friends. After he traded a Pokémon card with his friend, Tai, Jian wanted to battle with Tai, using his Pokémon cards. He asked Tai for the rules first: "Can you tell me the rules first because I don't really . . . when I was playing with my friends, I don't really follow the rules." Tai read parts of the instructions on the card and told him that he did not really have to follow the rules. Jian, however, insisted on learning the rules, which involved such language-learning activities as listening and reading comprehension related to the rules on the individual cards. Although Jian showed a high level of persistence in learning the rules of the game by asking Tai questions, he showed a lack of persistence in several instances related to reading the instructions on the card.

In the follow-up interview, we asked Jian about each of the instances. Specifically, we asked him how well he could learn the rules by asking Tai questions and by reading the directions on the cards. Jian provided the following rationale for his lower estimation of his capacity to learn the game by reading than by asking questions.

Ask a question is easy but read the instructions can be hard because sometimes . . . I don't . . . just like sometimes you know it's like thing makes up things. You know when you don't know, it doesn't make sense. So just sometimes [it] doesn't make sense to me.

This conversation explained Jian's reason for not using the card he was supposed to use during the game (because the instructions did not make sense to him). Nevertheless, he could understand his friend's

explanation of the rules very well. He showed persistence in the task for which he had high self-efficacy but avoided the task for which he had lower self-efficacy to accomplish. This supports Schunk's (1990) conclusion that students who hold low self-efficacy tend to avoid tasks, while those who judge themselves efficacious were more likely to participate.

Our observations and interviews with Rui also supported this assertion. While Rui persisted in finishing his reading task in the class, he showed a lack of persistence for retelling a chapter that he read during the reading task implemented for this study, which reflected his relative beliefs in his capability to accomplish reading and retelling tasks.

For example, when we entered his classroom during a break between classes, Rui was concentrating on his own reading, even though most other children were either talking or going to the restroom. He was trying to finish his reading before the next class started. During another class, when the teacher asked all the students to read a copy of an article from a journal and then answer the questions, Rui started to read immediately, while most of the other children cut and glued the pages before reading.

Rui showed a lack of persistence, however, when he was asked to retell what he had read in a chapter. During the reading task that we implemented, he chose the chapter *Solid, Liquid, and Gases* and explained that he chose this chapter because his class was learning this concept. When asked to recall what he had read, Rui gave up quickly and told us that he could not do it, recalling only discrete facts but not the main ideas even when asked to reread. In the interview that followed this reading task, Rui reported high self-efficacy to read but low self-efficacy for retelling.

This association between persistence and self-efficacy beliefs also was observed during writing activities with Dawei, who reported low self-efficacy for writing tasks during the interview. Therefore, it was not surprising to observe his lack of persistence

during such activities. For example, on several occasions, when Dawei was asked to write about some of his experiences (e.g., a performance during a summer week-long program and a visit to a park), he wrote for only several minutes. In the latter instance, the interview started with eliciting his self-efficacy:

I: How well do you think you can write a journal of today's visit to the recreation center?

D: Not very well.

Dawei spent only four minutes in writing and could not write more, even with encouragement. He wrote the following:

We saw a boring movie called "Bears." After we were done, we went to "Adventures." We figured out all of the codes. Then we played some games. Then we went on Kid Coaster. Then we played some games. The End.

The observation of Dawei's lack of persistence in writing was supported by his teacher's comments. His teacher mentioned that Dawei really needed to slow down and describe things in more detail. Although the teacher's comment could also be interpreted as Dawei lacked patience in writing, this, when linked with other data, suggested that Dawei viewed the writing task to be difficult and time-consuming and then did not persist to write in details. In order to make the teacher and us believe that he could not write any more, he quickly put an ending to it and even used "The End" to show that he finished the writing. His low self-efficacy in writing and low English-writing proficiency were associated with lack of persistence.

Self-awareness of English proficiency. All participants were aware of their level of English proficiency, which was manifested within their vocabulary. Among all the kids, Jian's case is most exemplary and is therefore used to illustrate the association between self-awareness of English proficiency and self-efficacy beliefs. Jian reported low

self-efficacy to retell a chapter he had read and provided the following reasons:

Because . . . I am not like can [I can] memorize everything or the main, the little parts instead of the main idea. Or what I said doesn't make sense. Or I said the word wrong and people don't understand the word, what I am saying.

Through this quote, Jian indicated that his low rating of self-efficacy to retell a chapter was influenced by his self-awareness of his English proficiency, limited vocabulary, and his lack of confidence to memorize what he had read.

Jian was also aware of the different demands for English writing and speaking tasks. When we asked him about his self-efficacy to leave a message in English on the phone for his parents, he said that he could do this very well (at a level of 5), but he indicated less confidence (a level of 4) to write them a message in English. His justification that writing was harder and talking was safer was articulated within the following quote:

Writing . . . you might make mistakes on, you know[,] if you forget the period or you wrote something wrong. . . . you have to like check over and stuff to see if you did right or you did wrong, because it is very easy to make mistakes in writing.

Jian's reported self-efficacy was associated with his self-awareness of English proficiencies. Self-awareness of English proficiencies, also known as perceived competencies, is a central component of self-efficacy (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that Jian reported comparatively low self-efficacy when he was aware of his lack of competence to perform the task.

Willingness to engage in language activities. The participants showed different levels of willingness to participate in particular tasks. Our classroom observations provide evidence for a relationship between children's self-efficacy beliefs and

their willingness to participate. Interestingly, within these instances, evidence existed that the children's self-awareness of their English proficiency yielded to their willingness to participate with respect to the influence on self-efficacy. That is, they seemed to overcome the self-awareness of their English proficiency in situations in which the children showed a great deal of willingness to participate.

Our observations of Jian gave us the impression that he was quite a passive participant in the classroom. For example, he seldom answered the teacher's questions. When asked for a reason, he said that he could not answer some of the questions well (low self-efficacy) and he was concerned with his classmates' responses to his answers. Rui, on the other hand, was quite an active participant in classroom activities, especially when interested in the material. He reported that he was able to talk to his friends in English and answer the teacher's questions very well (high self-efficacy). Dawei was the most active student in the classroom among all participants. He always raised his hand up high and leaned his body forward in order to increase the likelihood his teacher would call on him. These behaviors were well-aligned with Dawei's reports of high self-efficacy to speak English in public and to answer the teacher's questions.

On one occasion, Dawei's teacher read a passage about rocks with the students and brought her own collection of rocks to share with the students. Dawei was very excited to see the rocks and asked the teacher, "What if I found [find] a volcano and the igneous rocks that is [are] cooled?" Although Dawei had difficulty in pronouncing the word *igneous*, he did not look embarrassed at all. The teacher helped him out, and Dawei's question initiated a discussion in the class. Dawei asked another question, which, although grammatically inaccurate ("What if I found [find] some rocks hot melted them together"), caused another conversation in the class. The students talked about rocks and magma. His self-efficacy to ask

the teacher questions in class and to ask his friends at play, triangulated through interviews, turned out to be very high.

At play, Dawei was also the boy who talked the most. The following observation was about the boys playing Pokémon games on Nintendo 64. Dawei frequently asked other boys about how they made some tricks and made comments about others' performance, while other boys talked much less. The other boys talked about the rules of the game as they played. They also discussed what they were going to play and how they could take turns to play, since there were only two controllers. Dawei did not show any hesitation to speak in English during the whole game. When Tai was showing them how to use the buttons on the controller for various actions, Dawei was again the person who asked the most questions. Therefore, we asked him during the follow-up interview to elicit his self-efficacy to speak if he were to play new games in the future. We received very positive responses from him, which indicated his very high self-efficacy to speak in English to his peers at play.

The only time that we noticed Dawei to be quiet and hesitating to speak was when he was playing soccer. He spent most of the time listening. He spoke in broken sentences, because he gave up two goals when he was the goalie and because he was not playing well, even when he was playing on defense. His teammate blamed him: "You shouldn't just stand there. You should do something else." Dawei's response was "I don't know." We learned later that Dawei did not like soccer very much, and he did not often play soccer. He joined the team just because all his friends were playing and he had nobody else to play with. He said that he could not talk to his teammates very well in English while playing soccer because he did not know many English words that pertain to soccer and he did not know the game's rules, either. In such a circumstance, Dawei's low interest in the game, coupled with his self-awareness of his limited vocabulary in the context, explained his low

self-efficacy to communicate with his friends in English. In the following section, we will address in detail factors that influenced the participants' self-efficacy beliefs.

Factors That Affect the Development of Young ELLs' Self-Efficacy

These factors include self-awareness of English proficiency, past experience of success associated with effort, expertise in the content area, task difficulty level, social persuasion, physiological or emotional state, interest, attitude toward the English language and the English-speaking community, and the social-cultural context.

Self-awareness of English proficiency. All the participants were aware that their English vocabulary was limited. Accordingly, they reported comparatively low self-efficacy to accomplish language tasks that require a mastery of vocabulary. Jian reported low self-efficacy to explain the rules of a game because he might lack the vocabulary to do so. Both Rui and Dawei thought that reading chapter books was much more difficult than reading English storybooks, because chapter books might have more words that they did not know. The participants evaluated their English vocabulary as limited. As a result, there might be more impending danger or risk in participating in a language-learning activity that requires a good command of vocabulary. Therefore, they all reported comparatively low self-efficacy to complete the reading and speaking tasks that demanded advanced vocabulary.

Past experience of success associated with effort. Rui also said that he never wrote a diary in English or Chinese. Jian's and Dawei's writing documents indicated that they had negative experience in English writing. This negative experience is possibly associated with their reported low self-efficacy to write English diaries or journal entries. This discussion supports the research findings that positive prior experience (success) enhances one's self-efficacy, whereas negative experience (failure) undermines self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997;

Nicholls & Miller, 1984).

Expertise in the content area. Rui was exceptionally good at chess; he knew the rules and tricks of playing chess very well. Pokémon Stadium was Dawei's favorite game. Each participant had his own expertise in certain areas and reported high self-efficacy for performing language activities in the area where he could use his expertise. Therefore, students' expertise in the content area boosted their self-efficacy to accomplish these tasks.

Task difficulty level. The task's difficulty level also influenced the participants' self-efficacy beliefs. When we asked them how well they could write a note to their parents in English, all reported very high self-efficacy. When asked about writing a summary of a chapter, however, all reported very low self-efficacy. The reason behind this discrepancy was because the boys had to read and understand the chapter in order to write a summary, and writing a summary usually takes much longer than writing a brief note. Therefore, task difficulty level affected the development of the children's self-efficacy beliefs.

Social persuasion. Rui reported low self-efficacy in reading and writing, and his beliefs were found to be associated with the social persuasions from his parents and his teacher. His teacher gave him low grading (S, which stands for *satisfactory*, or S-, which stands for *less than satisfactory*) for oral communication, reading, and writing compared to his classmates. His teacher expressed her concern on Rui's homework and report card about his reading and writing several times and called on his parents to borrow some books for him to read. His parents also frequently told the researcher, in front of him, that his English proficiency was low. A friend of his parents, who was a public school teacher, once visited them and told them that Rui's English was very bad and he needed to go to a "better" school in order to improve his English. As a result, Rui's family moved to a more expensive apartment so that he could go to a "better" school. Consistent social persuasion, espe-

cially those from significant people to him, influenced Rui's self-efficacy beliefs and his self-awareness of his English.

Other children's self-efficacy beliefs also seemed to be influenced by the comments about their past performance on certain tasks from their teachers and parents. The participants received a report card at the end of each quarter and an interim progress report in the middle of the quarter from the teacher. Jian's report of high self-efficacy to read English chapter books also was found to be connected with his teacher's comments about his great progress in reading fluency and vocabulary and his parents' encouragement. Dawei's low self-efficacy to write a journal entry in English was consistent with the comments from his parents and the teacher about his writing skills. His teacher said that "his writing will improve by slowing down, giving the topic more thought, and adding more details and descriptions."

Physiological or emotional state. Emotional state, such as fear and mood, also was found to influence students' self-efficacy beliefs. Jian's self-efficacy to write a journal entry was low, and he reported anxiety about writing in English. He said that he could write a journal entry but with great difficulty if we gave him a limited period of time. He also said that he could write the journal entry but not well if there was no time limit. In another case, Jian justified his comparatively low self-efficacy to answer the teacher's questions in class by saying that he had to think about whether he was able to answer the questions as well as what his classmates would think of his answers. Rui and Dawei seldom indicated language anxiety across the home-based and school-based context. They were often found actively participating in the language-learning activities. They reported very high self-efficacy for so doing, although the English proficiencies required for these tasks were not necessarily very high. This is because anxious students tended to underestimate their ability and less anxious students tended to overestimate their ability. That is, less anxious students

are more likely to hold higher self-efficacy (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). This finding is in line with Hashimoto's (2002) claim that language anxiety reduces perceived communicative competence. Dawei and Rui were less anxious. Therefore, they reported high self-efficacy to perform the language-learning tasks and actively participated in those activities.

In addition to anxiety, an individual's mood also impacts the person's self-efficacy. A positive mood activates thoughts of accomplishment and boosts perceived self-efficacy. A sad mood leads to thoughts of past failings and diminishes self-perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Observations of Dawei's and Rui's behavior at play indicated that they easily gave up complaining to others in English, when they lost their temper, due to their low self-efficacy. When we saw these children playing the game that they enjoyed, they both showed a high level of persistence and reported high self-efficacy to communicate with their peers in English.

Attitude and interest. Students' attitudes toward learning English also impacts their self-efficacy beliefs. A positive attitude toward an ethnic group leads to positive interactions with that group, and negative intergroup issues, such as prejudice and discrimination, hinder the interactions (MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998).

All participants stated in the interviews that they liked English, liked living in the United States, and wanted to become part of the English-speaking community. Their positive attitude toward the English-speaking community led to increased involvement with the community (Noels, Pelletier, & Vallerand, 2000). Their frequent use of English and success in using the English language in daily life increased their self-efficacy to speak English (Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999).

All participants in this study spoke English when they were playing together, although they all shared another language: Chinese. Our observations helped us understand that they used Chinese infrequently, usually when they encountered a

word in English that they were not familiar with. Although the participants frequently spoke Chinese at home, they still spoke more English than Chinese in the community and at school. As discussed earlier, the participants were willing to identify with the American English-speaking community. Maybe this identification was under a normative pressure to speak English in this community, which is not the focus of this study. The pressure to identify with the second language group entails seeking more active contact in the second language (Clement, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003).

Participants' willingness to engage in language activities, which are strongly influenced by their interests, also impacted their self-efficacy beliefs, as discussed in the previous section.

Social-cultural context. Finally, the social-cultural context also influenced the development of participants' self-efficacy. The social-cultural contexts, such as the relationship between the interlocutors and cultural understandings of the appropriateness of performing some tasks, affected the participants' self-efficacy beliefs. For instance, Rui reported low self-efficacy to tell rules of a game to his friend Frank, but high self-efficacy to tell the same rules to other kids. This was because Frank always tried to dominate at play, always finding a reason to make Rui follow his rules. For example, Frank would say that Rui had to listen to him because they were playing at Frank's house. If the two were at Rui's house, Frank would say that he was older than Rui and again Rui had to listen to him. Describing the rules for a game is not simply a language task but rather a social interaction with the use of language skills. Social context, together with English proficiency, had an impact on Rui's self-efficacy to accomplish this English language task.

Young ELLs' Self-Efficacy Across Tasks and Contexts

In this section, we discuss the participants' self-efficacy beliefs and how their self-efficacy beliefs vary across different learning

tasks and across home-based and school-based contexts.

All of the participants reported high self-efficacy in English listening and speaking activities. They all reported that they could understand the classroom instructions and talk to their friends in English very well. They had, however, comparatively lower self-efficacy related to reading. Within reading activities, they generally held higher self-efficacy for reading stories than for reading chapter books. As for writing, all of them had low self-efficacy.

Participants thought that they could accomplish the language-learning tasks very well if the tasks were familiar to them and reported much lower self-efficacy to perform novel tasks. In the home-based context, participants reported more self-efficacy beliefs about language interactions during play. They reported their self-efficacy beliefs to understand the rules, communicate with their friends, and solve problems occurred at play when using English. In the school-based context, participants reported more self-efficacy beliefs regarding listening, speaking, and reading and writing activities. The listening and speaking activities include oral interactions with their teachers and classmates, and the reading and writing activities include finishing the reading and writing assignments.

Participants' self-efficacy beliefs were found to vary across the social-cultural context. Their self-efficacy beliefs for the same language task varied in relation to the attitude of the interlocutors and the relationship between them. During an interview about his self-efficacy to speak to different receivers, Rui reported low self-efficacy to talk to his friends, high self-efficacy to talk to his teacher, and very high self-efficacy to talk to his parents in English. His justification was very interesting: "If I tell my friends, it's a little bit boring, they just get away. If I explain that to my teacher, and the teacher [does not] like it very well, she just say 'Stop reading it.' And if I tell to my parents, no matter how bad is it, they just listen to it." So, Rui's self-efficacy to speak

in English was influenced by his audience rather than his English proficiency. If he perceived his audience to be listening, he felt more self-efficacious. He felt less self-efficacious if his audience was not perceived to be listening.

Dawei's self-efficacy to speak in English was very high. He reported five (the highest level) for most language-learning tasks to speak to his friends or the teacher. When he reported comparatively low self-efficacy in these cases, it was not because of his own English proficiency, but because of the social-cultural contexts:

I: So how well do you think you can ask other children if they want to play with you?

D: Three.

I: Why?

D: Because I don't know them and I think they are gonna be mean.

I: Alright. How well do you think you can tell your friends what you think about somebody?

D: Oh . . . four.

I: And how well do you think you can tell your friends about what you think about some games?

D: Oh, five.

I: Why five for games and four for somebody?

D: Four because maybe they want, don't want me to talk about them and five because it's just like a game.

Dawei reported low self-efficacy to speak to his friends if they were mean. We understand from this interview that Dawei's self-efficacy belief to talk to his friends in English was influenced by the receiver as well. He reported comparatively higher self-efficacy to talk about games than to talk about his friends, because he was concerned that his friends did not like him to talk about them, but games had no feelings. In this context, Dawei reported higher self-efficacy to talk about games because he thought others would approve his doing so, while he reported comparatively lower self-

efficacy to talk about his friends because he knew that others would not approve of his doing this task.

Conclusions

The three cases presented above helped us understand the context, specifically the language learning activities in both home-based and school-based contexts, in which their self-efficacy may be elicited or examined. In home-based contexts, these activities include, but are not limited to, understanding the rules of a game through listening to or reading the instructions, telling the rules of a game, asking how to play a game in English, reading chapter or story books, and writing a message to their parents or a journal entry. In a school-based context, these activities include, but are not limited to, understanding the teacher's instructions, asking questions (or answering the teacher's questions), talking to their classmates in English, telling a story about themselves or a story read, answering the reading comprehension questions, and writing journal entries or a summary of what they read. Understanding these contexts will assist future researchers in identifying language-learning tasks in order to solicit children's self-efficacy beliefs. These language-learning activities also may be included in self-efficacy questionnaires for a large-scale study.

Certain factors were found to have an influence on these children's self-efficacy beliefs: self-awareness of English proficiency, past experience of success associated with effort, expertise in the content area, task difficulty level, social persuasion, physiological or emotional state, interest, attitude toward the English language and the English-speaking community, and the social-cultural context. These findings confirmed three major sources of self-efficacy information that impact the level of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (1997): mastery or enactive experience, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional state. The influence of vicarious experience on the participants' self-efficacy beliefs was not

observed in this study, possibly because no modeling was provided to the participants. Some other factors were unique in language learning—for example, participants' self-awareness of English proficiency, their expertise (content knowledge), the task difficulty level, their interest in the activity itself, and their attitude toward the English language and the English-speaking community. These factors had a strong influence on the participants' self-efficacy beliefs and were considered unique in language learning contexts.

A close examination of participants' self-efficacy efficacy helped us understand that each individual child's self-efficacy is task-specific. Take reading comprehension as an example—the participants reported different levels of self-efficacy for reading activities. Their self-efficacy to read storybooks was higher than for reading chapter books. They also reported comparatively higher self-efficacy to read books about animals or chess because they were familiar with the content of these books. This is to say that children's self-efficacy is 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.

Significance

Research in the area of self-efficacy consistently supports the contention that students' self-efficacy beliefs are malleable instead of fixed (Klassen, 2004), and students with high self-efficacy are more likely to succeed in subsequent achievement tests (Huang & Chang, 1998; Pajares & Graham, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999). Consequently, enhancing young ELLs' self-efficacy beliefs may help them achieve more in the English language-learning process as well. In order to enhance students' self-efficacy, we need to understand their self-efficacy beliefs and factors related to the development of their efficacy beliefs. Therefore, this study is significant in that it provides information about how to elicit

elementary school children's self-efficacy beliefs, as well as information about possible factors that might influence their self-efficacy beliefs.

Understanding these factors is important for us to learn how to help our children develop high self-efficacy in the process of learning English. 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 good 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. This study also extends prior research by including the home environment.

Among the factors identified in this study that influenced the development of children's self-efficacy beliefs, some are consistent with the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and some are aligned with the willingness to communicate theory (Clement et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1997, 1998). A link between self-efficacy theory and willingness to communicate theory has been established.

Limitations

All the participants in this study were Chinese boys who had at least two years of exposure to an English language-learning environment. Another common feature of these children is that all of them were the children of graduate students. 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.

Another limitation of this study is that classroom teachers were not involved, although their comments on students' report cards and student homework assignments were used. Teachers' participation would have brought their perspectives into the study and would have helped us better understand the children's behaviors in the classroom.

Finally, this study was conducted in a natural setting, and no intervention was implemented. Students were observed while they were playing or studying as they would usually do without this study. Therefore, some research interests, such as the relationship between peer modeling and self-efficacy, were not investigated.

Suggestions for Future Research

As discussed in the previous session, teacher participation is integral to investigating students' self-efficacy beliefs. Teacher efficacy beliefs in teaching these young ELLs to perform different language-learning tasks will make this study more directly applicable to classroom practice. Teacher participation will also make it possible to implement quasi-experimental designs to investigate ELLs' self-efficacy. In addition to natural settings, students can also be observed in an experimental setting where self-efficacy and peer-modeling are incorporated in the curriculum.

Including newly arrived students and students from a variety of family backgrounds is 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 can be generalized from samples to populations.

References

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W. H. Freeman

and Company.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bong, M., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: How different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review*, 15, 1-40.

Book of questions and answers, The. (2003). New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc.

Clement, R., Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2003). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The effects of context, norms, and vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 22, 190-209.

Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. (1984). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Hashimoto, Y. (2002). Motivation and willingness to communicate as predictors of reported L2 use: The Japanese context. *Second Language Studies*, 20(2), 29-70.

Hoffman, L., & Sable, J. (2006). *Public elementary and secondary students, staff, schools, and school districts: School year 2003-04* (NCES 2006-307). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Huang, S. C., & Chang, S. F. (1998). Self-efficacy in learners of English as a second language: Four examples. *Journal of Intensive English Studies*, 12, 23-40.

Huang, S. C., Lloyd, P., & Mikulecky, L. (1999). *ESL literacy self-efficacy: Developing a new scale*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 427541)

Klassen, R. M. (2004). Optimism and realism: A review of self-efficacy from a cross-cultural perspective. *International Journal of Psychology*, 39, 205-230.

Liu, D., Ahn, G., Baek, K., & Han, N. (2004). South Korean high school English teachers' code switching: Questions and challenges in the drive for maximal use of English in teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38, 605-638.

MacIntyre, P. D., Clement, R., Dornyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing

- willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, 545-562.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Noels, K. A., & Clement, R. (1997). Biases in self-ratings of second language proficiency: The role of language anxiety. *Language Learning*, 47, 265-287.
- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38, 573-603.
- Nicholls, J. G., & Miller, A. T. (1984). Development and its discontents: The differentiation of the concept of ability. In J. G. Nicholls (Ed.), *Advances in motivation and achievement: Vol. 3. The development of achievement motivation* (pp. 185-218). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L. G., & Vallerand, R. J. (2000). Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning*, 50, 57-85.
- Pajares, F., & Graham, L. (1999). Self-efficacy, motivation constructs, and mathematics performance of entering middle school students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 24, 124-139.
- Pajares, F., & Valiante, G. (1997). Influence of self-efficacy on elementary students' writing. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90, 353-360.
- Pajares, F., Miller, M. D., & Johnson, M. J. (1999). Gender differences in writing self-beliefs of elementary school students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91, 50-61.
- Schunk, D. H. (1990). Goal setting and self-efficacy during self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 25, 71-86.
- Schunk, D. H. (1994). Self-regulation of self-efficacy and attributions in academic settings. In D. H. Schunk & B. J. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Self-regulation of learning and performance: Issues and educational applications* (pp. 75-99). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schunk, D. H., & Hanson, A. R. (1985). Peer models: Influence on children's self-efficacy and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 313-322.
- Shih, S., & Alexander, J. M. (2000). Interacting effects of goal setting and self- or other-referenced feedback on children's development of self-efficacy and cognitive skill within the Taiwanese classroom. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 536-543.
- Voss, M. M. (2001). Building self-beliefs: A child overcomes writer's block. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 19, 347-361.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, C., & Pape, S. J. (2005). Self-efficacy and self-regulation in learning English as a second language. *The CATESOL Journal*, 17(1), 76-90.
- Wang, Y. A., & Ruie, R. S. (1987). Development of memory monitoring and self-efficacy in children. *Psychological Reports*, 60, 647-658.