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This capstone explores the affect of self-efficacy in reading in fourth-and-fifth grade ESL students. The participants were nine fourth-grade and ten fifth-grade students. The Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995), a survey designed to measure self-efficacy beliefs in reading in upper elementary aged students, was administered. Students participated in focus group sessions and discussed beliefs about reading. The data were examined and revealed students feel they are good readers, are making progress in reading regardless of reading levels, feel unsure about the feedback received from peers and teachers but feel strongly supported by their family members. Students in both grade levels are able to define good readers and tell what good readers do. There is a clear shift between the grade levels in how they see themselves compared with peers and how they engage in the act of reading.

EXPLORING SELF-EFFICACY IN READING

By

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To the memory of Edna Olivia Nelson Smedstad, my beloved grandma, for teaching me her first language, Swedish, and for her many years of love, encouragement and laughter.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Self-efficacy is defined as the beliefs people have about their ability to perform a particular task (Walker, 2003). In a school setting this sense of efficacy is extremely important for students in all areas of education. Self-efficacy is particularly important in reading, as it is the foundation for all other academic areas. It is imperative for students to believe in their ability to read and experience success as readers. This may be an even greater challenge for students whose home language is not English. This population, English as a Second Language (ESL), requires additional support while developing language and literacy skills. Because these students are acquiring an additional language, it may also be necessary to provide additional support in order for them to gain self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to be a good reader with strong fluency and comprehension skills. This chapter introduces some of the issues and challenges faced by ESL students in schools today which can affect self-efficacy in academics. The issues associated specifically with ESL students and efficacy beliefs in the academic area of reading will also be presented.

English as a Second Language Students and Cultural Differences

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar & Baily, 2007), the number of ESL students between the ages of five and 17 who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 million in 1979 to 10.6 million in 2005. In the

2003-2004 school year 3.8 million children received ESL services, which is 11% of school children nationwide. The increase in numbers of non-native English speakers in schools continues to rise and includes families who have relocated to the United States as refugees, including those from Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War, and more recently from Somalia, immigrants, secondary migrants, and undocumented workers (Minnesota Department of Education, 2005).

While the numbers of ESL students have risen greatly over the past few years and are projected to continue to grow up to the year 2016, it is evident by the low graduation rates that the needs of this group of students is not being properly met in schools throughout the country (Hussar & Baily, 2007). For example, about 15% of Latino students between the ages of 16 and 19 drop out of school. This is double the number of white students within that same age range who drop out (Fry, 2008).

One reason for low graduation rates is a consequence of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which was implemented by congress and President Bush in 2001. Part of NCLB includes a type of accountability, which relies upon high-stakes testing, including those students with limited English proficiency. These tests are considered high-stakes because rather than using them for the sole purpose of identifying areas of need or gaps in learning they are used to penalize schools not making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) (Hussar & Baily, 2007). In addition, standardized tests and their results have in the past been misinterpreted and used against those of lower cultural status in the community (Baca & Ceravantes, 1998). Validity and interpretation of such testing is, therefore, problematic (Mahon, 2006). Along with students struggling to pass mandated testing,

other reasons for underachievement of ESL students can include disempowerment of minority families, cultural differences and lack of efficacy in academic achievement, particularly in the development of literacy skills.

Developing efficacy is a greater challenge for ESL students as they are operating within and often against the majority culture. Members of the majority culture in any country are often resistant to the influences of minority cultures within their boundaries. Frequently the majority culture believes they know what is best for the minority culture based upon prevailing views and cultural orientation. Minority cultures are expected to be humble, appreciative, and assimilate into the majority culture as quickly as possible. One example of such disempowerment involves a community which changed from supporting a bilingual school setting, having Latino representation on the school board, and embracing the leadership provided by these members to dismantling the well-established, successful bilingual program, not electing Latinos to the school board, and civic leaders giving up or leaving the area because of the changes. This was accomplished under the leadership of an influential superintendent who refused to acknowledge the success of bilingual education and sought to end it in support of an English only plan (Soto, 1997).

It is important to note that culture is not simply holiday celebrations, traditional clothing, and special food associated with a particular group of people. There is a surface level and a deep level of culture within every society. Culture affects how individuals function daily in their environments and relate to one another. It is a way of thinking and of viewing oneself in the world. It is a mentality. Culture is what shapes perspective and perceptions. An example of deep versus surface level culture is given by a Puerto Rican

student who, when interviewed, stated she enjoyed hip-hop music, pizza, and lasagna. Upon further questioning however, she revealed that she showed respect for her elders, valued her family and showed her commitment to them by spending time with them and honoring their traditions and beliefs. On the surface pop-culture was important, but on a deeper level family connections and devotion to them was what truly mattered (Nieto, 2002).

English language learners are in a unique position as they live in one culture at home with their families while being surrounded by American culture. The children must then also function within the school system, which has its own unique culture. Schools have their own rules and systems in place to function smoothly but are unlike businesses, homes or churches. Further complicating the culture of school, teachers may have a different set of rules and expectations within a particular classroom. Like the student mentioned earlier, ESL students must function in two or more worlds at the same time. Functioning within these cultural shifts provides daily challenges for these students, particularly if the home culture is not acknowledged by the school. Culture affects interpersonal relations and attitudes, and for students it affects how they view school and education in general, and how they are in turn viewed by the members of the school culture.

Self-efficacy in Reading

There are many variables which affect the development of strong efficacy beliefs in ESL students. One problem is that ESL students arrive at school with diverse background knowledge, often making it difficult for them to make connections with

typical leveled-reading texts. Students may be able to make text-to-text connections but may struggle to make any personal connections with what is being read. One study examined groups of third grade students, some who spoke Dutch as a first language and others learning Dutch as a second language. In the study students read three types of texts, those which were culturally neutral, those which focused on Dutch culture and those which represented the cultures of the non-native speakers. The study suggests that students had much greater comprehension of texts which related to them culturally (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). The connections with the texts resulted in improved comprehension. Without providing culturally relevant materials with which students can connect, or explicitly helping students make connections, they may become discouraged with their progress in reading.

Self-efficacy in reading can also be supported by explicit instruction in previewing materials prior to reading (Chen & Graves, 1998). This is also a way to improve comprehension. Previewing material is done by making a few general statements about the text which will generate interest, then relating what will be read to something familiar to the students. The next step is providing a discussion question to pique interest in the story. The final step is giving a brief synopsis, including a summary of the plot up to but not including the climax of the story, and an introduction of the characters. These simple steps can provide the necessary scaffolding to help ESL students engage better with texts and improve comprehension.

Interpreting texts is also a phonological process. Written language shows the sounds of the language when spoken (Drucker, 2003). Therefore, there is also a close

correlation between listening and reading. Some languages, like Italian and Spanish have direct sound symbol correlations while others, like English, have complex sound symbol associations. These differences can cause problems for students learning English (Grabe, 1991; Paulesu, et al., 2001; Wade-Woolley, 1999). Frustration arising from not learning sound symbol relationships at the same time they are learning the phonology system of the target language can have an overwhelming effect on students and their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy in reading is supported by using reading materials that are the appropriate reading and maturity level for students, giving students tasks which will result in success by starting with easier tasks then gradually building up to more challenging ones, modeling expected behaviors, setting attainable goals and assisting students in meeting those goals, and finally, having students participate in paired reading and repeated readings (McCabe & Margolis, 2001; Ferrara, 2005).

Role of the Researcher

I teach reading and writing to third-and fifth-grade ESL students. I see all of my students daily in small groups within the context of a regular classroom, sometimes known as a push in model. It can also be considered a parallel teaching model, as I teach reading and writing to my students at the same time the rest of the class is receiving instruction in those same subjects. I spend additional time each day with the newcomers who have little or no English skills. I have developed strong relationships with the parents of my students and am comfortable meeting with them and discussing any concerns they may have as well as sharing the progress their children are making. I worked with current and some former students when gathering data for this study. Most

of the students who participated know me well and were very comfortable working with me throughout this process. While every attempt has been made to be as objective as possible while conducting this research and interpreting the data, I acknowledge that I have my own background, experiences and biases which may possibly influence the outcomes of this study.

Background of the Researcher

I work in a suburban school outside a large Midwestern city. The school currently has a total of 591 students with 123 of them receiving ESL services. The English language learners represent seven different countries. The majority of the ESL population is Latino, mostly from Mexico and Central America. The second largest group of ESL students in my school is from Somalia. Most of these students' families have been in the United States for a few years but recently two siblings arrived from a refugee camp in Kenya and are non-speakers of English. Each family situation is special and each child brings his or her own culture and beliefs and experiences to school every day.

Teaching reading is important to me because I am an avid reader and passionate about passing on my love of reading to my students. For me, self-efficacy in reading was developed both through school and through my home environment. I was also highly motivated to read as a child, an important tool in building efficacy, because motivation is what causes involvement in a particular activity (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). As a result, I am very interested in learning about the reasons behind what may help my ESL students become engaged and enthusiastic about interacting with texts and building self-efficacy in reading.

Guiding Questions

I was interested in knowing more about how self-efficacy beliefs can affect the progress in reading of ESL students and how these students perceived the role of reading in their lives. The questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

Summary

In this study I focused on the importance of self-efficacy as it pertains to ESL students in reading. I examined self-efficacy beliefs of fourth and fifth grade students in reading through a mixed media study, using the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995), and focus group sessions. I explored how fourth and fifth grade ESL students perceived themselves as readers both individually and in comparison with their peers. I also explored how students perceived feedback from teachers in their reading abilities, if they believed they were making progress as readers, and how they viewed the role of reading in their lives. The basis for this study came from my own love of reading and an interest in how to better instill a sense of self-efficacy in reading with my ESL students. This is important because without self-efficacy, the belief that a specific task such as reading can be accomplished, it is difficult for students to continue to strive to make progress. I hope this study demonstrates that with the proper scaffolding, modeling and feedback, self-efficacy can be attained by struggling readers.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter One introduced my research by showing the significance and need for this particular study based on the growing population of ESL students in our schools and the importance of meeting their needs academically with cultural sensitivity. The need of ESL students to develop self-efficacy in reading was also explained. The role of the researcher described who I teach, what my background is and how that may impact this study. The context of the study was also introduced.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature about the background of self-efficacy as a psychological construct and how it is influenced by cultural differences. Some questions I focus on in this chapter include: How can self-efficacy be developed in students? How does self-efficacy affect students in academics?

Chapter Three includes the research design which is a mixed methods study using a survey known as the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) and focus group sessions. The RSPS is a five point Likert scale survey in which students answer questions about how they perceive themselves as readers, how they compare themselves in reading with their peers, how they perceive feedback from peers, teachers and family members regarding their reading, how they feel while reading and whether or not they are making progress as readers. The focus groups provided students the opportunity to participate in discussions about various aspects of reading.

Chapter Four presents the outcome of this study, which includes the results of the Reader Self-Perception Scale. The responses to the four different categories of questions; Progress, Physiological States, Observational Comparison and Social Feedback were

examined for patterns based on student responses. An example of a pattern that emerged was the strong belief students held about their development and progress in reading.

Chapter Five contains the analysis of the data, the limitations of the study and the implications for further research and recommendations for my school and my peers as we continue to help our ESL students achieve high levels of self-efficacy in reading.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a key factor in how people view themselves and approach their lives. It is important to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy but also to realize that self-efficacy is a growth process. Some ways in which individuals develop self-efficacy throughout their lives, from childhood into adulthood and even into a person's advanced years, are through interactions with families and peers, experiences in schools, transitional experiences in adolescence, and other life challenges in adulthood (Bandura, 1986).

Within families, children develop, grow and change physically, mentally, socially and linguistically. Children are constantly experimenting, testing and evaluating themselves in a myriad of situations encountered on a daily basis. Very young children are completely dependent upon adults to care for them and promptly learn to control their environment through actions and vocalizations. These behaviors produce self-efficacy experiences which are vital in developing social and cognitive development in young children. With the development of oral language, children begin to be able to acquire the self-awareness to learn about what they are capable and incapable of doing. The family provides the initial foundation of self-efficacy but as children get older their peers become more and more influential in their development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Peer relationships broaden the range of experiences of children but also cause a greater awareness of what they can and cannot do. On the one hand, peers provide models in areas in which they succeed, on the other hand, peers provide a point of comparison and children become acutely aware of their capabilities and/or lack of skill in particular areas. Schools, while providing peer relationships, also function as the primary source for children to develop cognitively. Teachers who differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the students and provide safe learning environments help to build efficacy in their students. Refraining from comparing students with one another and providing a system of showing individual progress is essential in helping to build efficacy in students in academics (Bandura, 1986).

Adolescence is a time when children are moving toward becoming well-developed adults. The transition is not always an easy one and is generally made smoother if children have experienced success and have a realistic view of their competency and efficacy. In adulthood and in advanced years efficacy continues to be significant. Those who have experienced a good sense of self-efficacy through positive mastery of tasks will move forward in life in a more positive way. Those who have not experienced positive mastery of tasks and therefore not developed strong efficacy beliefs will struggle with many challenges facing them in adulthood. Problems with self-efficacy can occur when people grow older, reevaluate their lives, and focus on loss of abilities. However, when adults continue to be active their sense of self-efficacy can help them maintain cognitive processes well into their advanced years (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy and Cognitive Theory

Within the framework of social cognitive theory the concept of achieving self-efficacy is dependent upon interactions between a person's behavior, thoughts, beliefs, and environment (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Behaviors, which promote achievement which are closely linked with building self-efficacy, include having academic choices and being determined and resolute in one's work. These behaviors are closely connected with being able to perceive that progress is being made towards specific goals. If students perceive progress, the belief in the capability to accomplish those goals builds self-efficacy and promotes learning (Schunk, 1991). This ties in with both mastery experiences and social persuasion, two methods of increasing self-efficacy. When students master a challenging task and when they are convinced they are able to be successful at a task, they will experience an increase in positive self-efficacy.

The efficacy beliefs of students are also directly associated with the learning environment. Students with high efficacy may be challenged by an assignment and exert effort to complete it. This behavior contributes to a productive, engaged classroom environment. The reverse may also be true in that students with low efficacy may try to avoid tasks. This often results in a disruptive, disengaged classroom environment. An additional note in regard to success and self-efficacy is that while successes cause increases and failures cause decreases in self-efficacy, once a strong sense of self-efficacy is established, experiencing failure will not have as great an impact on the learner (Schunk, 1991).

Self-efficacy and Academics

The key components of building self-efficacy in academics are modeling, goal setting, and self-evaluation. When beginning a new academic task, students have goals which cause them to be engaged. Self-evaluation promotes motivation to continue which ultimately causes achievement of the goals, which in turn builds self-efficacy.

Goals can be described in several ways. Schunk (2003) defines proximal goals as those which can be achieved within a few minutes and are easily achieved. These are particularly effective when used with small children who do not have an accurate sense of time and distance. An example of such a goal would be when first graders who participate in Reading Recovery lessons sort magnetic letters into two or three groups as a method of identifying different letters and comprehending that each letter has unique qualities which distinguish it from the others. This activity is powerful and takes only one to two minutes to execute (Clay, 2005). Achieving a proximal goal is beneficial in building self-efficacy and promoting motivation.

Two other types of goals are learning goals and performance goals. Learning goals are ones in which students participate in order to attain certain knowledge or skills. Students who engage in learning goals are typically those who are eager to improve and increase their knowledge. Performance goals refer to tasks to be completed by students and those who participate in such goals are interested in receiving positive feedback about their expertise about a particular subject. Students seek out these different types of goals to receive the desired result by either gaining new knowledge or receiving feedback about the performance (Meece, 1991; Dweck & Legget, 1988). One way of meeting

different types of goals can be done through modeling. An academically focused student will be motivated to learn by the instructor serving as the model in the classroom.

However, students who attach a greater importance to social identity will be more motivated to learn through the demonstrations or modeling provided by peers rather than the teacher (Schunk, 2003).

Self-evaluation is necessary for building self-efficacy because it gives the learner the opportunity to examine his or her own learning and recognize that continued learning is possible. If low self-evaluations of learning occur, positive efficacy building can still take place. This is because individuals possessing positive self-efficacy still believe achievement is possible. The learners will reflect on the work done and use resources available to them to improve their work in order to accomplish the assigned task. This type of adaptability leads to continued achievement on part of the learner (Schunk, 2003).

Self-efficacy with respect to academics and evaluation methodology is comprised of four distinctive traits. First, self-efficacy pertains to students being able to judge their performance of a particular activity rather than their character or physical characteristics. The second issue is that self-efficacy beliefs are multifaceted. That is, a student may have differing self-efficacy beliefs between various subjects such as science and art. The third trait is that self-efficacy is contingent upon context. One example is that some students may have lower efficacy in a classroom which is competitive in nature vs. a cooperative learning environment. The fourth aspect is related to a student's ability to judge his or her efficacy based on having mastery of a particular skill or assignment. That is to say, students judge their efficacy on their own ability to perform or complete a task without

comparisons to other students and their abilities. It is important to develop self-efficacy in schools because it is central to students not only succeeding in academics but becoming lifelong, active, and engaged learners (Zimmerman, 1995). One instrument designed for students to evaluate themselves in reading is the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995). This survey is specifically designed for elementary students in grades four through six and measures self-efficacy in reading in the following four categories: Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States. Students reply to a series of statements using a five point Likert scale. The RSPS is a valuable instrument, allowing students an opportunity for self-evaluation in various areas of reading which allows for the development of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy and Reading

Many factors can cause students to be labeled as poor or struggling readers by teachers and support staff. Current test scores may be low or students might find reading class boring or frustrating. Instead of being in a reading program which promotes interaction with the text involving the use of metacognitive strategies and meaningful discussions, children may unfortunately be involved in a reading program that emphasizes perfect decoding of words with little focus on comprehension strategies. One student, prior to exposure to a balanced approach to literacy, for example, defined reading in the following way, "I used to think reading was words but now I know it's stories." (Strickland & Walker, 2004). This child had a lack of understanding about what reading could be. He did not have a sense of story grammar because his earlier experiences with

texts had been to focus on each word individually and reproduce it perfectly with no emphasis on comprehension.

As it pertains specifically to reading, self-efficacy is the opinion a person has of his or her own aptitude or capability to complete a task in addition to the ramifications this awareness has on the present task and any future endeavors (Bandura, 1977). In other words, if children believe they can do something they will be more likely to participate fully in the activity and their engagement will continue to similar activities in the future. For reading, the affective factor of self-efficacy causes children to either connect or engage with reading or disengage from it. An interesting definition of engagement in reading is related to the idea of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) use this idea of flow when they describe reading engagement as the sense of being totally engrossed in a text. An additional definition of engagement in reading is thought of as a combination of several skills at one time such as attention to what is being taught or shown, action on the part of the learner, and the learner being able to take risks and believe he or she is capable of learning. This definition incorporates the idea that the reader as a stakeholder, has something invested in the action and involvement in the text and that this activity is meaningful. It also suggests the reader possesses self-efficacy in reading (Cambourne, 1995).

Children who make positive connections with reading and books tend to be more confident and highly engaged and therefore experience success, while those who are not self-efficacious tend not to experience achievement in reading (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Walker (2003) characterizes self-efficacy as the belief that an individual can execute a

specific task. It is the basic idea that if someone thinks they can do something, they can. In addition, Walker (2003) states that the specificity of self-efficacy can be based on the goals of the learner. Being confident about specific tasks leads to deeper engagement with the task and therefore leads to success in completing the task. Self-efficacious students are characterized as being hard working and persistent (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). They are willing to ask for help when needed and engage in the task at hand using both cognitive and metacognitive strategies which aid in greater comprehension. The concept of self-efficacy, the belief that one can do something specific, is closely linked with motivation, which is the desire to do something. The interest in, usefulness, and value of what is being learned also aids in learning. Learning is clearly enhanced by both self-efficacy and motivation (Walker, 2003).

Culture and Self-efficacy

Believing in one's own abilities to take the necessary steps in order to accomplish a specific task is the definition of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 2003; Walker, 2003). A strong sense of self-efficacy can be accomplished in four ways: mastery experience, social modeling, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states. It is important to note that most studies involving the theory of self-efficacy have been conducted in western cultures, the majority of these studies having taken place in the United States. Examining the same four areas of self-efficacy development listed above through different cultures is important because the concept of self-efficacy can be influenced by cultural perspectives and aspects such as individualism and collectivism (Klassen, 2004).

Individualist and Collectivist Cultures

Collectivist cultures assert the belief that one belongs to a certain group, is loyal to and receives loyalty from the other members of that particular group. In addition, members receive protection from the group. Individualist cultures, on the other hand, promote a more independent system in which people care for themselves and their own families. They place a higher value on the individual rather than the group (Oettingern & Zosuls, 2006).

Individualism and collectivism define how much or little individuals and groups within a culture are connected to one another or separated from each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Oettingern & Zosuls, 2006). Some tendencies of individualist cultures emphasize a focus on the self, being independent, taking initiative and insisting on privacy. Collectivist societies emphasize the importance of the identity of the group, unity, and sense of duty (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1995). There has been some debate as to whether the terms individualist and collectivist are too simplistic. This is based on the idea that the labels attributed to various cultures are not able to be empirically measured and are really based on broad conjectures about a particular society rather than fact (Voronov & Singer, 2002). This criticism was directed at studies done in 1980 and again in 2002 which categorized societies as either individualist or collectivist. According to these studies the following countries were labeled as the most individualist: the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Western Europe and Canada. Collectivist areas included Asian countries, along with Yugoslavia, Mexico and South America (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002).

While many would assume that self-efficacy would only be evident in western individualist cultures, that is not necessarily true. Collectivist cultures also have individuals within a spectrum of the characteristics of that culture. No one person in any society or culture is completely individualist or collectivist all the time. There is variation within groups and among individuals in every society who demonstrate more or less of the assumed characteristic of that particular group but every person fluctuates within their cultural norm as a group member and as an individual.

Psychological Theory, Culture and Self-efficacy

The psychological concept of self-efficacy can be found in both types of cultural groups. Collectivists exhibit self-efficacy when accomplishing group focused duties while individualists utilize self-efficacy beliefs when accomplishing individual tasks. Collectivists must also have personal self-efficacy because without that core belief, improvements to the collectivist society would be severely hampered by opponents to the changes the group seeks to undertake. While there is collective or group efficacy, it is not a replacement for self-efficacy. Group efficacy works in conjunction with and is based upon self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 2006). The ways of developing self-efficacy, through mastery experience, social modeling, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states can be found in both the individualist and collectivist cultures.

Mastery experience. Mastery experience, the first and greatest source of self-efficacy is gained and a true sense of positive self-efficacy developed, when individuals are challenged and experience success through effort. Those who have a strong sense of self-efficacy in a learning environment tend to try harder, persevere when engaging in a task,

even if it seems difficult, and tend to attain higher levels of success (Bandura, 1977, 1995; Schunk, 2003). An excellent example of mastery experience can be found in Korean society, an Asian culture with collectivist characteristics. In Korea, students have a profound belief that success in academics is acquired through discipline and great effort. Korean students do not believe in intrinsic abilities but rather in working hard to achieve academic goals. This is evident through the outscoring of students from western cultures in the areas of reading, the sciences and mathematics by Korean students (Kim & Park, 2006). In another study Taiwanese and Japanese students exhibited strong self-efficacy beliefs through mastery experience, again by believing in working diligently to produce desired results as opposed to the American students in the study who had greater belief in innate abilities (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995).

Social modeling. Social modeling is another way to develop positive self-efficacy. Modeling is the act of replicating the ideas, values, accomplishments, and behavior shown by those who are acting as models. When people observe others who are similar to themselves experience success in a particular area, they believe they are able to accomplish the same thing. The opposite is also true. If people observe others similar to themselves failing at a particular task they will be uncertain about their abilities to succeed, therefore self-efficacy would be negatively impacted. Models not only provide information by showing a sequence of actions which will cause success if followed correctly, but also increase motivation for the observer to attempt the task (Schunk, 2003). Students who are academically focused will likely do well observing the teacher

as a model. For students who are more socially motivated, peer models can provide motivation and help build self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

One study examining the early literacy practices of Latino families in Southern California, found many families involved in the research by Mason (1986) believed children are not able to comprehend the concepts in books and stories until they are about five years old and in school. The cultural modeling provided to some of the children in this study included not recognizing excitement over receiving a book, not acknowledging connections with print such as recognizing letters on TV or on a t-shirt, and finding early attempts at reading and writing by their children as amusing. This is not because the parents did not believe in the importance of education or exhibit a lack of care for their children but rather it was an engrained cultural belief and the same cultural belief, which is that learning begins when a child starts school. Prior to beginning a formal education children are basically considered babies who are unable to comprehend much about letters and words. The Latino parents in this study were simply following the model they had experienced themselves.

The beliefs mentioned above, which were embraced by the Latino parents are quite similar to those found in American culture during the first part of the twentieth century. However, in American culture today literacy development is encouraged at a young age. Parents are encouraged to read to children, allow them to write and draw about experiences, engage them in letter and word recognition to help develop literacy skills well before children attend kindergarten. Parents are models for the development in literacy skills they hope to see in their children (Mason, 1986). As children progress

through school teachers and peers also become effective models who aid in building self-efficacy in literacy skills.

Social Persuasion. Social persuasion is the third way of increasing self-efficacy. The premise of social persuasion is that if people can be convinced that they will be able to achieve something, they will try harder to accomplish the task at hand. If, however, they doubt themselves, they will fixate on their inadequacies rather than put effort into accomplishing the task or objective. This is vital as it pertains to the role of the teacher in a classroom setting or the coach in a gymnasium. Teachers and coaches often provide encouragement in the form of phrases such as “You can do it”. This type of positive encouragement may impact a child initially causing an increase in self-efficacy, but if the performance is poor the increase will be fleeting. It is important to remember that the skills and understanding of a topic, task, or assignment of some kind must be present in order for the student to experience genuine achievement and gain self-efficacy as a result. Not only can the teacher be the principal aid in helping students be convinced they can accomplish certain tasks or assignments, but they can arrange for successful circumstances to occur and prevent placing students in situations where they will most likely fail (Schunk, 2003). An example of providing a successful learning environment which is culturally aware would be to offer separate reading groups for girls and boys of Latino background.

Latinas will often not exhibit knowledge of a subject in mixed gender groups (Delpit, 1992). Providing a safe learning environment for this group of students may aid in allowing them to become more confident, try harder, and be convinced academic

success in reading is attainable, thus allowing social persuasion to work in building self-efficacy. Another way teachers help in developing self-efficacy in students and support the positive effects of social persuasion is to expose students to others (peer models) who have a positive, enthusiastic attitude toward learning (Steinberg, 1997). In reading class this could be done by pre-teaching materials to struggling readers and helping them to prepare for discussions about the book or topic with a group of strong, enthusiastic, confident readers. Such positive exposure fosters social persuasion and helps develop self-efficacy (McCabe & Margolis, 2001).

Physical and Emotional States. Physical and emotional states also contribute to the development of self-efficacy. People rely on these states to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Stress, worry and despair are often interpreted as indicators of personal weakness. In the physical domain, the lack of power or endurance is seen as a sign of weakness or low self-efficacy. In schools, therefore, it is essential for students to be provided with experiences which will increase self-efficacy in both academic and social situations (Schunk, 2003).

This last category of self-efficacy building, physical and emotional states, is extremely important as it pertains to ESL students, as many language learners come from situations of low socioeconomic status or may be refugees from war-torn countries. These circumstances naturally impact physical and emotional states. For example, in the mid 1970's Hmong refugees from Laos began arriving in the United States. They came after the Vietnam War and continue to emigrate to the United States from refugee camps. The arrival of this population in such great numbers initially caused problems for schools

which were ill-prepared to meet their educational needs. Some issues faced by the first Hmong immigrants included a lack of trained and qualified teachers, placing them in ESL classes and keeping them from entering or participating in mainstream courses even after making sufficient progress. Unfortunately, today many Hmong students still face such problems in schools. Refugees, or other new immigrant students are sometimes isolated by being placed in ESL tracks, meaning they start school in separate ESL courses and continue through their entire school experience excluded from the mainstream and/or college preparation courses. This can create a sense of social and academic isolation (Vang, 2004).

Culture and Language Learning

In addition to individualism and collectivism, two other cultural features which influence the development of self-efficacy, are power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Collectivist cultures tend have higher levels of power distance which is experienced by cultures where there is a large gap between groups who possess power and those who do not (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989). The group without power is also supposed to accept the fact that there is an imbalance in the power structure. Members of cultures who have low rather than high power levels have a greater value for equal sharing of power (Delpit, 2006).

Those in cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance are often worried about new and changing situations. They use avoidance to steer clear of unpredictable situations and also adhere to following the rules rigidly. In addition they have strong convictions about absolute truth. Some characteristics of members of such cultures are that they seek

security, have low acceptance or tolerance levels of others, and are hostile and emotional. In comparison, those with weak uncertainty avoidance tend to be more accepting of others, willing to take risks, and are thought to be more meditative and calm (Oettingen & Zosuls, 2006). Understanding people from various cultures with different belief systems and ways of functioning as societies is becoming increasingly important in regard to meeting the needs of children in our schools. Learning to build self-efficacy in students requires an in depth understanding of how that construct fits with the cultural background of the child. The challenge is to balance the child's belief system and culture with the American school culture. Success of language minority students in schools is reliant upon the school's ability to incorporate the various languages and cultures represented into the school. One way this can be done is by involving and empowering parents of language minority students in both the school and the wider community (Cummins, Chow & Schechter, 2006).

Native language immersion schools embrace the idea that languages and cultures are deeply connected. Because the relationship between language and culture is highly complex, attempting to teach the language in isolation from the culture would not be considered appropriate (Ismail & Cazden, 2005). A general appreciation for the surface level of a culture can occur when holidays, food and special items of clothing from various cultures are included within the school curriculum, but this only creates a surface understanding of the culture and the deeper, richer meanings of the culture and language are diminished (Hermes, as cited in Ismail & Cazden, 2005).

Au (1980) shares an example of a culturally responsive teaching in her talk story research. Au (1980) hypothesized that reading lessons, which use a talk story approach, are similar to a complex Hawaiian story telling/speech experience and could help native Hawaiian children improve in reading. Talk story involves highly complex interactions among the participants. There is often an overlapping in speaking but the group is keenly aware of the roles each person has in the telling of the stories. In this study Au (1980) made every effort to maintain cultural similarity in the reading lessons and the talk story technique. It was believed the lessons used with the native Hawaiian children in the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), closely resembled those with which the children were highly familiar. In this particular culture the idea of equal time for the speakers was not only evident between speakers who were children but also evident between the student and the teacher. This cultural characteristic was represented and honored in the research. The results indicated that the students who had participated in the KEEP program and participated in this type of reading lesson for two or more years scored significantly higher on standardized tests at the end of fourth grade. These scores were higher than those in the control group in this study. This is an example of how teachers might help students make academic progress by incorporating and thoroughly embracing their culture and language.

An example of cultural dissimilarity comes from an ethnographic study by Valdes (1998) who researched ten Mexican immigrant families and discovered they did not understand the need for their children to learn the alphabet. It was meaningless from their perspective because reading instruction in Mexico focused on knowing the sounds of key

syllables rather than on individual letters and their sounds. It seems clear that differing concepts and/or definitions of literacy across various cultures has an impact on children and their learning experiences in the majority culture. These cultural differences can contribute to a child's sense of efficacy in school.

Summary

Self-efficacy is the belief that a person is able to perform a specific task and is formed by influences from family, teachers, and peers as well as experiences in academic areas. All of these influences can build up or tear down an individual's sense of self. In academics, self-efficacy is acquired through modeling, goal setting and self-evaluation. Some students excel with teachers as models while others relate better to student models. Setting goals is essential and reflecting on one's work through self-evaluation is a powerful way to help students develop self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy beliefs can be affected by cultural influences. This psychological concept has been studied exclusively in western, individualist cultures, which promote and support building up of and admiration of strong individuals and therefore strong efficacy beliefs as well. Being culturally aware and sensitive is key to understanding how efficacy may differ in students from various backgrounds. Also, in some areas of the country, English language learners are isolated in school and associate only with others from their own cultural background. This isolation can cause lack of efficacy in all areas, as students in these situations struggle and are caught between two cultures and cultural belief systems.

It is important to remember that first languages are deeply intertwined with students' cultures. Even though students may assimilate into American culture, specifically American school culture, the belief systems of the cultural origin are deeply engrained. This can be a source of internal conflict for children and adolescents. Providing students with opportunities to succeed, while remaining culturally sensitive, can help build efficacy and develop greater success in academics.

The link between self-efficacy and reading is particularly important as it pertains to motivation. Highly motivated readers read more, and reading more translates into stronger literacy skills. The importance of efficacy in academics has been presented in this chapter, as well as the cross-cultural barriers to achievement in U.S. schools. Students can feel isolated and misunderstood within the school system based on cultural differences and expectations. Culturally sensitive teachers and school environments can help students gain efficacy in academics. It is known that specific reading strategies provide scaffolding for comprehension in reading for ESL students, but there is a gap between how second language learners demonstrate efficacy, particularly in reading. This study is designed to explore the efficacy beliefs of ESL students particularly as it relates to reading, and how the reading they see around them influences their self-efficacy. Specifically this study asks:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

The next chapter presents the methods being used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This is a mixed methods study designed to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of fourth-and fifth-grade ESL students regarding reading. This chapter includes an overview of how and why the qualitative research paradigm will be used as well as a description of the specific methodologies used to gather the data. The questions guiding this research study are:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

Research Design

Qualitative studies originated from research done in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Qualitative research is used to study a particular subject on a deep level in great detail. It is conducted through fieldwork in which the researcher is immersed in the real-life setting of the research being conducted. This provides genuine, authentic data rich in detail and descriptions. The data gathered through qualitative research methods involve interviews, discussions, observations and often written documentation in the form of field notes or journals. Data collected can be through both formal and informal interviews and discussions. It is important for the researcher to possess excellent interviewing skills. Often valuable information can also be found through casual conversations with the participants of a study in addition to the more formal interview

situations. The data provide rich, deep, detailed accounts of experiences, beliefs and opinions of those involved. It is essentially research focused on people and their ideas rather than statistics (Patton, 1982; Perry, 2006).

Four key elements are involved when successfully collecting qualitative data. First, the researcher needs to be close enough to the people and the subject of the research to comprehend on a personal level what is being investigated. Second, it is important for the researcher to try and grasp what people really say and what occurs in the interview process. Third, the data must contain detailed descriptions of the interactions with people. Fourth, the data need to include direct quotes from participants. Using these four elements produces rich data about a small number of people (Lofland, 1971). Due to the fact that these studies are generally accomplished with smaller groups of people, the data cannot be easily generalized across the larger population. What this type of information can do is provide a glimpse into the lives of a small segment of the population, a snapshot of their values and beliefs on a given day. This information can then provide the impetus for further research, which may encompass larger numbers of participants and provide information that would be able to be generalized across the greater population. Validity in qualitative research, therefore, relies greatly on the on the ability and skills of the researcher gathering the data rather than the instrument used in the research (Patton, 1982).

In contrast, quantitative studies, which began in the field of psychology, require the data to be measured using some form of standardized testing method. While this type of investigation limits the depth and insights of participants it provides statistical data,

which can be measured, analyzed and generalized over a large group of people. Validity in quantitative data is dependent upon the tools being used and whether or not they are administered consistently in the prescribed manner. It is important to note that while quantitative studies involve the use of statistical data collected using questionnaires and surveys, qualitative studies can also incorporate some statistical information gathered from the results of the particular study. The data can be incorporated into the results segment of the study in the form of tables, graphs and charts (Patton, 1982; Perry, 2006). This study is mixed methods in design, using both a survey and focus groups to gather data.

Case Studies

Case studies are used to gather descriptive data, which examines multifaceted, complex, social issues using the context in which they exist. Case studies examine the factors around the issue, which may also contribute to the responses and interpretation of the data. The interpretation of the data gathered in case studies is often used to build on and expand a particular field's foundation of information. One critical factor in using case study research is knowing that importance is not placed on the quantity or number of participants but rather on the quality of the information provided by the participants in the study (Merriam, 1988). Case studies provide in depth information about a particular situation or question allowing for specific data to be gathered, which may be used to attend to a particular problem (Patton, 1982).

Surveys

Surveys or questionnaires are often used in quantitative research because they provide measureable data. They can also be used in qualitative or mixed-method studies to provide triangulation in data gathered. The information is interpreted and presented as a part of the data for the entire study (Merriam, 1988).

In this study I administered the Reader Self-Perception Scale, (RSPS) which is a survey designed to assess how students view themselves as readers. This reading scale is based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and addresses four different areas: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The survey consists of 33 statements and uses a five point Likert scale for the responses. It is designed for students in fourth through sixth grades. I administered this survey to fourth- and fifth-grade students with permission from its creators, Henk and Melnick (1995).

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a type of interview and are often used because they create comfortable conversational settings, which allow for open discussions of a wide range of opinions and experiences. Focus groups provide a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time. They are a way to conduct efficient interviews in an organized, logical manner yet allow for flexibility in asking final questions and summary questions based on the content of the discussions (Morgan, 1998).

In a focus group a specific series of questions is asked of each group. The series of questions includes an opening question, which is used to introduce group members to

each other and make people feel at ease. Next are the introductory questions, which serve to introduce the general issue to be discussed. These questions also allow the participants to begin to make connections with the topic. Transition questions shift the discussion toward the key questions, which are more in depth than the earlier introductory ones. These questions help the participants to see how other members of the group feel about the topic of discussion. Key questions are the core of the study. Some examples of key questions for this study are: *Would you rather read a story or hear a story? Why? What does a good reader do?* These are the questions, which require the most analysis, and therefore, the most discussion time is dedicated to them. The procedure for focus groups also allows for other activities such as drawings or completing charts. Twice during the focus groups, participants placed stickers on chart paper identifying their favorite reading material and marking how important they believe reading is in school and outside of school. These activities allowed students to be active and engaged in answering questions in a variety of ways. Finally, the ending questions help wrap up the discussion. They allow participants to reflect on their answers and the answers of the other participants. They are also vital to the analysis because they allow for each member of the group to be sure their thoughts and beliefs are clearly stated and understood. Sometimes a summary question is given after a brief summary of the entire discussion. Group members are given the opportunity to give feedback about whether they feel the discussion was summarized adequately (Krueger, 1998). For a complete set of questions for the focus groups see Appendix A.

Data Collection

Participants

The participants in this study were a sample of convenience. Table 3.1 shows the two groups of students in this study. One group consisted of nine fourth grade students four of which were girls. Five of the nine students received ESL services from me in third grade. The other four had a different teacher in third grade and one was a new student to the school. The fifth grade participants were all on my current caseload but of the ten only four had been my students in third grade. Again, only four fifth grade participants were girls and one student was new to the school. The majority of the students were boys. Both groups were comprised mainly of Spanish speakers, the next largest group being Somali speakers. Each of the participants was FES (fluent English speaker) based on the IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test (Dalton, 1991). Table 3.1 shows the list of participants including a number assigned to each student to provide anonymity, gender, grade level and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) score (Beaver, 2006). The DRA is the tool used in this district, which measures accuracy, fluency and comprehension in reading. This score reflects whether the child is below, on, or above grade level in reading. It is important information to include in this study because it can be used to see if efficacy is based on, or influenced by, reading levels.

Setting

This study took place in the elementary school where I am currently employed. My school is in a large suburban district in the Upper Midwest, consisting of 18 elementary schools, six middle schools and five high schools. This school is a magnet

school with a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) focus. It currently has 590 students and 152 of those students are limited in English proficiency. The current teaching model for ESL is parallel teaching. This means, I work with small groups during reading and writing periods within the mainstream classroom, giving language support including listening, speaking, reading, and writing during the student's literacy block time. This district is changing to a more comprehensive collaborative teaching model for instruction.

Procedure

Survey

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995) was administered in two forty-minute sessions, one session for each grade level group. The complete survey is found in Appendices B, C, and D.

Prior to students taking the survey, the answer choices were reviewed in the following way: each answer choice was written out on a large white board with the abbreviated answer choice written above it and a drawing of a face above that to represent the answer. For example, Strongly Agree had SA written above it and an exaggerated happy face drawn above that, while Undecided had a U above it and a neutral face drawn above that. This additional key to the answer choices assisted students by giving them a quick visual reference.

After each student was given a copy of the survey, a privacy folder and a pencil, the practice question was read aloud and completed together as a group. Strips of paper were given to students to use as guides. The guides were moved down the page to assure

the questions and answers were lined up properly and students were answering the correct statement. Students continued through the survey answering all 33 statements.

Some potential problems with the use of a survey, even one which is designed for older elementary age students, is the desire of the students to answer the questions the way they think their teacher would want them to. In addition, with a five-point Likert scale, students may use the Undecided choice as a default answer rather than committing to something more specific. To help avoid these concerns, students were reminded to answer truthfully, to tell what they really thought and not provide answer they believed would be pleasing to the instructor. Also, They were given the opportunity to do the practice question together, which helped in their understanding that there were no wrong answers. The visual reference, or key, on the whiteboard remained available to provide additional support for students, reminding them what the abbreviations for the various answers meant.

Focus Groups

The focus groups were done in two separate sessions, one for the fourth-grade participants and one for the fifth-grade participants. The fourth-grade group consisted of nine members. The fifth-grade group consisted of ten members. Each focus group session took approximately one hour to complete. The students met with me during their regularly scheduled literacy block. As the researcher, I led each focus group discussion and also served as the moderator of the focus groups. In addition, an assistant moderator was present to take notes, make observations and ensure the sessions were being recorded. As the researcher, I led each focus group discussion and also served as the

Table 3.1.
Participants

Student/Gender	Grade	DRA	Language
1/M	4	38	Spanish
1/F	4	28	Somali
3/M	4	20	Spanish
4/M	4	30	Spanish
5/F	4	30	Spanish
6/M	4	30	Spanish
7/F	4	28	Spanish
8/M	4	34	Farsi
9/F	4	30	Vietnamese
10/M	5	34	Spanish
11/F	5	34	Spanish
12/F	5	28	Somali
13/M	5	34	Spanish
14/M	5	28	Somali
15/F	5	40	Spanish
16/M	5	40	Spanish
17/M	5	40	Spanish
18/M	5	40	Spanish
19/M	5	38	Spanish

moderator of the focus groups. In addition, an assistant moderator was present to take notes, make observations and ensure the sessions were being recorded. The notes taken during the fourth-grade session provided an additional question which was discussed. No additional questions were asked in the fifth-grade session. Recording each focus group discussion provided the opportunity to listen to the sessions multiple times, transcribe them and ensure accuracy in analyzing them. Because the students were all designated as FES (fluent English speakers) according to the IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test, their oral language skills in English were strong enough that interpreters were not necessary in this study.

Data Analysis

Survey

The RSPS survey was examined and scored according to the survey requirements. The responses to the statements representing the four categories of reading self-efficacy were scored using a Likert scale of 1 – 5 with the choice strongly agree being a five and strongly disagree being a one. A separate scoring sheet was used for each participant and the scores were totaled in each of the categories: Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback and Physiological States. A General Perception statement was also on the survey but was not included in the four major groups. This statement was: *I think I am a good reader*. It provided an additional source of information about how these individual students perceive themselves overall as readers. The scoring sheets were mounted on large sheets of construction paper along with the student's name, number code and DRA reading level. The focus group data were also added to these posters and data gathered

from the surveys were compared and contrasted with the data gathered from the focus groups. The data were examined closely for patterns within and between the two groups. While data from focus groups provide the range of ideas, thoughts and opinions of a group, individual ideas and thoughts may not be easily identified (Morgan,1998); therefore, the RSPS survey provided a way to verify and cross check answers from each participant. It allowed for more detailed insights into each individual's self-efficacy beliefs in reading.

Focus groups

The data from the focus groups came from the recordings of the focus group sessions. Additional notes were also taken by the assistant moderator during the focus group sessions. Analysis of the information created by the focus groups began with transcribing the recordings of the discussions. The transcripts were then carefully examined using the long table method. In this method copies of the transcripts are spread out on a long surface such as a table or countertop and grouped together based on the patterns discovered upon examination. This allows for great flexibility in interpreting the data based on the patterns and themes, which arise (Krueger, 1998). Copies of the transcripts were cut up and the answers to the questions were pasted on the individual student posters mentioned earlier. This allowed all the information for each student to be easily examined. Recurring patterns were identified and categorized. Groupings of similar information were recorded and spreadsheets created with graphs, to allow for clear visual information and the opportunity for clustering different types of information together. This allowed the data to be checked carefully in a variety of ways. Every

attempt was made to study the data without preconceived ideas interfering in the analysis. Once patterns were discovered they were compared and contrasted within each group and between the groups.

Besides the examination of the transcripts, careful attention was made to note the overall feeling of the focus groups. This required closely observing the behaviors of the participants including how easily they shared information about themselves, their ideas, values, and beliefs with the other members of the group. This is information that would not come through on the transcripts but which is important in understanding the context and overall picture of what transpired during the discussions. These observations were written down during and immediately after the focus group sessions in order to clearly and accurately represent the situation. Although the key questions were the focus of the analysis, the responses to other questions were also studied. The statements by the participants were examined within the context of the discussion. It was necessary to be cognizant of how the comments were made as well as the intent of the words used. Analysis of the words used by participants is an important part of the analysis procedure as well (Krueger, 1998).

Verification of Data

Reliability and validity are important components of both quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative studies the reliability and validity of the studies are based upon assessment tools being used in the research as well as the careful administration of the assessment to the sample. This is determined prior to the research taking place. In qualitative case study research, reliability and validity appear to be less

concrete. These studies rely upon the careful construction of the study but also rely heavily upon the interpretation of the study, including the context and the responses of participants within that context (Kemmis as cited in Merriam, 1988).

The RSPS survey was first administered using 625 students in fourth through sixth grades in two school districts. After initial scoring, changes were made to include questions that focused on personal progress. An additional pilot test was then done with 1,479 students from a variety of schools and settings. The analysis of these scores indicated the assessment was a reliable and valid tool for finding self-efficacy beliefs of fourth through sixth grade students (Henk & Melnick, 1995).

In this study, the quantitative data came from the RSPS survey. This survey was administered according to its specifications in order maintain the validity of the instrument. Students were given adequate time to complete the survey, they were also given visual cues to aid in remembering the meaning of the various choices for answers. The scoring was done using the appropriate scoring tool created for this survey. This scoring sheet showed the raw scores for each category of self-efficacy statements and provided a source of concrete, measurable data about the self-efficacy beliefs of these students.

The qualitative data for this study came from the focus group sessions with each group of students. The questions for the focus group sessions were carefully constructed prior to the sessions and interpretation of this data was done by keeping the context in mind, and by being as unbiased as possible. Using the data from a focus group, another researcher should be able to come to somewhat similar conclusions. However, because

individuals interpret data from their perspectives and based on their experiences, exact conclusions would not be likely to occur (Krueger, 1998; Merriam, 1988). In focus groups the analysis is verifiable when there is enough data to indicate a substantial line of thought around a given subject (Krueger, 1998). The focus groups in this study produced a substantial amount of data around the subject of self-efficacy in reading, therefore producing a verifiable study. Using triangulation while conducting a study aids in keeping the interpretations as genuine as possible (Merriam, 1988).

Ethics

Ethics in qualitative studies are regulated by the federal government, which serves to protect human subjects in the areas of privacy, being informed and agreeing to participation in a study and being protected from untruthful or deceptive practices. This is a difficult task as qualitative research is dependent upon relationships between the researcher, observer or investigator and the subjects participating in the study. Ethical issues in qualitative studies most often occur during collecting the data and in sharing the results of the study (Merriam, 1988). The ethical issues most likely to occur in the type of study I conducted are in the area of confidentiality, both with the data and maintaining anonymity of the participants and in the area of unbiased interpretation of the data (Walker, 1980). Also, asking peers for input regarding research results can aid in providing an ethically valid presentation of the data. It is important as the researcher, to be aware of the possible conflicts or ethical issues that may arise through conducting qualitative research and strive to conduct research in an ethical, conscientious manner (Merriam, 1988). In this study students were assured their answers from the surveys, and

information from the focus groups, would only be used by me for the purpose of this study. This assurance gave them the freedom to answer the questions truthfully. Every attempt was made to conduct this study in an ethical manner.

Summary

Focus groups and surveys are both good ways of gathering data with elementary aged students. The survey was conducted in short forty-minute sessions which were not too long for these students to remain engaged. Focus groups provide a comfortable, relaxed way to discuss any given subject and in this study provided students with the opportunity to examine how they perceive themselves as readers and to think about and discuss how they view the role of reading in their lives. The focus groups also provided a substantial amount of data in a short amount of time. Students were assured their answers from the surveys, and information from the focus groups, would only be used by me for the purpose of this study. This assurance gave them the freedom to answer the questions truthfully. Every attempt was made to conduct this study in an ethical manner. The data were gathered and carefully analyzed. The survey answers were compared and contrasted with the transcribed focus group sessions. The next chapter presents the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA

This chapter presents the data from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) and the focus group sessions, which were used to explore the questions:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

Reader Self-Perception Scale

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is a survey designed to measure self-efficacy beliefs of elementary students in grades four through six. The results of this survey show the self-efficacy beliefs in reading including how students perceive their progress, compare themselves to peers, perceive feedback from others, and how students feel while reading. This is a valuable research instrument because the answers to the questions within the specific categories clearly reveal where students have strong efficacy beliefs and where they lack efficacy. The data provide important feedback, which can guide future instruction and help build efficacy in students.

Progress

The Progress statements on the RSPS survey are those dealing with how students perceive progress being made as readers. Of the four categories, the Progress category showed the greatest similarity in student responses. The majority of the responses for the fourth- and fifth-grade groups were in Strongly Agree or Agree. These positive responses

to the Progress category statements show that students believe they are continuing to make progress as readers. The range of scores for fourth grade students was from 34 to 44 out of a possible 45 points. Fifth-grade scores had a range of 33 to 45. Two students in fifth grade attained these top scores indicating extremely high belief that progress is being made in reading.

Progress Scores and DRA Levels

For the fourth-grade participants the lowest score in Progress also had the lowest Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) score (Beaver, 2006). This DRA score was 20, while their General Perception scores were four out of a possible five points. The General Perception score is the initial statement in the RSPS and was not included in the scoring of any of the categories of statements. The General Perception statement is – *I think I am a good reader*. The two highest scores for fourth-grade were also not the students with the highest reading levels. These scores were both a level 30 and the General Perception responses were four and five. The range of DRA levels for the fourth grade participants is from 20-38. The scores in the twenties are second grade levels and those in the thirties are third grade levels. The category from the RSPS questionnaire, which received the highest total scores from both grade levels combined was Progress. This is important because it shows that even though students are reading at lower levels they believe they are making progress in reading. The General Perception scores do not necessarily align with Progress scores or DRA scores. For example, neither of the fifth grade students who had the highest DRA levels had the highest scores in the General Perception category. Also, one of the fourth-grade students who had the lowest DRA

score had the highest scores in both the Progress category of statements and the General Perception statement. This demonstrates the diverse self-efficacy beliefs of these students. Table 4.1 shows the highest and lowest Progress scores, DRA levels and General Perception responses.

Table 4.1.

Highest and Lowest Progress Scores, DRA Levels and GP Responses

Grade	Progress	DRA	General Perception
4th	34	20	4
	44	28	5
5th	33	34	3
	45	40	3
	45	40	4

The statement that students disagreed with the most was statement number ten. It states: *When I read, I don't have to try as hard as I used to.* This received three responses each in Strongly Agree, Agree and Undecided for fourth grade. Fifth grade students responded with five answers in Strongly Agree, two answers in Agree and Undecided, zero answers in Disagree and one in Strongly Disagree. This is meaningful because although students generally believe they are making progress in reading, they must still continue to work hard to become better readers. Table 4.2 shows the responses to statement ten.

Table 4.2.

Statement 10 responses –When I read I don't have to try as hard as I used to.

Grade	SA	A	U	D	SD
4th	3	3	3	0	0
5th	5	2	2	0	1

Three statements received Disagree responses. These statements were: number 28 – *When I read, I recognize more words than I used to*; number 19 – *I read faster than I could before*; and number 27 – *I read better now than I could before*. There was only one Strongly Disagree response given to statement 10 shown in Table 4.3. Fifth graders also accounted for 11 of the 16 total Undecided responses in the Progress category. Three of the Undecided choices were for statement 23 – *I understand what I read better than I could before*. This reveals uncertainty on the part of some students in regard to comprehension. Of the fourth grade students, seven out of nine scored highest on Progress. Of the fifth grade participants six out of ten scored highest in Progress. In fifth grade the lowest score in this category did not correlate with the lowest DRA level. The lowest DRA level among the fifth graders is 28, but the lowest Progress score was for a student at level 34, in the middle of the possible DRA levels represented by this group. The range of DRA levels for fifth-grade participants is from 28-40. The score of 40 indicating a fourth grade level. Within the DRA system the next level jumps up to 50, which is on grade level for fifth grade. The highest Progress scores did, however,

correlate with two of the students with the highest DRA scores. The scores were 45 out of 45 possible and the two students' reading levels were at a 40. Both of these students missed passing the level 50 DRA assessment by just a few points based on comprehension. Interestingly, these two students rated themselves as a three and a four for the General Perception statement, which is shown in Table 4.1. This shows they believe strongly that they are making progress as readers but one is a bit more uncertain about how she rates as a reader, while the other believes he is a good reader. Table 4.3 shows the Progress totals by question for the fourth and fifth grade participants.

Table 4.3.

Progress Totals by Question

Question	Grade	SA	A	U	D	SD
When I read I don't have to try as hard as I used to.	4th	3	3	3	0	0
	5th	5	2	2	0	1
I am getting better at reading.	4th	6	2	1	0	0
	5th	7	2	1	0	0
When I read I need less help than I used to.	4th	6	3	0	0	0
	5th	6	3	1	0	0
Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	4th	6	3	0	0	0
	5th	5	3	2	0	0
I read faster than I could before.	4th	6	3	0	0	0
	5th	6	2	1	0	0
I understand what I read better than I did before.	4th	2	7	0	0	0
	5th	5	2	3	0	0
I can figure out words better than I could before.	4th	5	4	0	0	0
	5th	7	3	0	0	0
I read better now than I could before.	4th	5	3	0	0	0
	5th	7	2	0	1	0
When I read I recognize more words than I used to.	4th	6	1	1	1	0
	5th	6	3	1	0	0

Physiological States

Physiological States are statements dealing with students perceiving reading as a pleasurable experience for both reading independently and reading aloud. This group of statements received the second highest scores overall for both grade level groups. The statement receiving the most negative responses by far was number 5 – *I like to read aloud*. Four fifth-grade students reacted by strongly disagreeing and three fourth graders disagreed with the statement. In other words, seven students out of 19 expressed a very strong dislike of reading aloud. It is interesting to contrast this with one of the responses to the focus group question, *What does a good reader do?* One student said, *reading aloud* was one thing a good reader does. Others mentioned *reading with expression* as a sign of a good reader. These statements show that some students associate good reading with being able to read well aloud. For ESL students who may be struggling with decoding and/or pronunciation, this could easily be contributing to lack of self-efficacy in reading. Also, the two questions on the RSPS which received Disagree responses for statement 16 – *Reading makes me feel happy inside* – and statement 29 – *Reading makes me feel good* – received the Disagree responses from the same student. This particular fifth grade student was often a reluctant participant in reading group and avoided doing the required work. This information is valuable because it provides insight into why she behaved the way she did. Reading did not make her feel happy or good, therefore her self-efficacy in physiological states was low and she reacted by avoiding the source of discomfort.

In the Physiological States group of statements, the Strongly Agree responses were almost equal in number between the fourth- and fifth-grade students. Strongly Agree responses received the highest number overall. Six fourth-grade students responded with Strongly Agree for statement 25 – *I feel comfortable when I read*. Six fourth-grade students also responded with Strongly Agree for statement 32 – *I enjoy reading*. Five Strongly Agree responses were given for fifth grade students for each of the following four statements: number 8 – *I feel good inside when I read*; number 6 – *Reading makes me feel happy inside*; number 21 – *I feel calm when I read*; and number 26 – *I think reading is relaxing*. It is clear that even though some students struggle with efficacy in some areas of reading they generally feel good while engaging in the reading process. See Table 4.4 for a breakdown of the Strongly Agree and Agree responses for the Physiological States statements.

Observational Comparison

Observational Comparison statements are those dealing with how students compare themselves with their peers in reading. This category of statements received the fewest Strongly Agree or Agree responses and the lowest number of positive responses. Table 4.5 shows the answers broken down by question as well as grade level. The highest number of responses for fourth grade participants were Agree answers, but for the fifth grade participants the majority of the answers were Undecided. Six responses for fourth grade were Disagree and four were Strongly Disagree. Nine responses for fifth grade fell in the Disagree category while one response corresponded with the Strongly Disagree category.

Table 4.4.

Statements Receiving Strongly Agree Responses Physiological States

Statement	Grade	Strongly Agree	Agree
I feel comfortable when I read.	4th	6	2
	5th	4	6
I enjoy reading.	4th	6	2
	5th	4	4
I feel good inside when I read.	4th	2	5
	5th	5	4
Reading makes me feel happy inside.	4th	5	3
	5th	5	3
I feel calm when I read.	4th	4	3
	5th	5	2
I think reading is relaxing.	4th	5	1
	5th	5	4

Statement 20, which states – *I read better than other kids in my class.* elicited the highest number of Undecided responses from the fifth grade group. Fifth graders also expressed their indecision in statement number 22 – *I read more than other kids.* which elicited seven Undecided answers. Statement number 11 – *I seem to know more words than other kids* – shows half of the fifth grade participants in the Undecided category but four responses were in the Agree category. And statement number 14 – *I understand*

what I read better than other kids. has the highest number of fifth grade participants scoring in the Strongly Agree and Agree columns. This seems unusual because comprehension is often quite difficult for non-native speakers of a language and would seem that those scores would be among the lowest. It is clear that students, particularly the fifth grade group, in this study, are unsure about how they compare with their peers in reading. Table 4.5 shows the answers to questions 11, 14, 20, and 22, which illustrate the range of responses.

Table 4.5.

Observational Comparison Breakdown by Question

Question	Grade	SA	A	U	D	SD
I seem to know more words than other kids when I read.	4th	1	4	1	2	1
	5th	0	4	5	1	0
I understand what I read as well as other kids do.	4th	1	4	3	1	0
	5th	3	3	4	0	0
I read better than other kids in my class.	4th	0	4	4	0	1
	5th	0	1	8	1	0
I read more than other kids do.	4th	1	4	2	1	1
	5th	0	2	7	1	0

Table 4.6 shows the DRA reading levels, the Observational Comparison raw scores and General Perception ranking for each participant in this study. The General Perception score shows how students generally perceive themselves as readers. The

Observational Comparison scores illustrate how they compare themselves to classmates and the DRA is the current reading score they have achieved. The data in Table 4.6 is listed in order from lowest to highest on the DRA scores. Because this study is focused on the self-efficacy of students, how they compare themselves with their peers is important as it give insight into the sense of self. DRA scores are regularly used to assess student progress and place students in appropriate reading groups. These scores are included in this table in order to compare a formal assessment with student perception. One example of this comparison is with student #2 in fourth grade. This student is at a DRA level 28 yet her General Perception score is a five and her Observational Comparison score is 25 out of 30 possible points. She is reading far below grade level but has a strong sense of self as a reader. She believes she is a good reader and even feels fairly competent when she compares herself with her peers. In comparison, student #16 in fifth grade reads at a DRA level 40 which is much higher then student #2, yet he ranked himself as a four on the General Perception statement and has only 18 out of 30 points in the Observational Comparison category. Clearly, there are differences between how students perceive their peers in comparison with themselves as readers. For some it greatly affects how they perceive themselves as readers while others have a stronger sense of efficacy and consider themselves good readers regardless of their peers. Table 4.6 is done in order of DRA scores with the fourth grade students listed first. Four out of nineteen total students gave themselves a five for Strongly Agree for the General Perception score. These four had DRA levels of 28, 30, 28 and 40. Two were fourth graders and two were fifth graders. The majority of students chose Agree for the General

Perception statement. Again, the DRA scores varied among these students, the lowest being a 20 and the highest being a 40. No one ranked themselves lower than a three on the General Perception statement. The students who ranked themselves with the highest scores of five for the General Perception statement, also had the highest raw scores for four out of six Observational Comparison statements. Of the two students who had the lowest Observational Comparison scores, one was the lowest DRA level in the fourth grade group and the other one had the lowest DRA levels in fifth grade group. This is significant because no students chose Disagree or Strongly Disagree for the General Perception statement. It also shows that even students who are reading at lower levels can still have high efficacy. They believe they are doing well at that particular at that particular level. Also those students with the highest scores of five on the General Perception statement had higher scores when comparing themselves to their peers, again regardless of their reading levels. This shows that efficacy is related to a specific task or concept of self and ties in as well with the high scores in the Progress category.

Social Feedback

The Social Feedback category of the RSPS includes statements about how students perceive feedback from their peers, their teachers, and their family members. In contrast, the statements about peers in the Observational Comparison category of statements focused on how students compare themselves with peers. Statement 30 says *Other kids think I am a good reader*. The results to this particular question show that seven out of nine fourth grade students answered with Agree and the

Table 4.6.

*Developmental Reading Assessment, General Progress and Observational Comparison
Raw Scores*

Grade/Student	DRA	GP	OC
4-3	20	4	14
4-2	28	5	25
4-6	28	4	17
4-7	28	4	22
4-9	30	4	22
4-4	30	5	27
4-5	30	3	15
4-8	34	4	23
4-1	38	3	16
5-14	28	5	22
5-12	28	3	14
5-11	34	3	17
5-10	34	4	21
5-13	34	4	18
5-18	38	4	16
5-15	40	3	20
5-17	40	4	18
5-16	40	4	18
5-19	40	5	24

remaining two students answered with Undecided. Six out of ten fifth grade students answered with Undecided, three with Agree and one participant marked Disagree.

Number 9 is a similar statement – *My classmates think that I read pretty well*. Fourth graders had a few more positive responses to this statement, however five out of nine students chose Undecided for their answer. The fifth graders were even more unsure of themselves as seven out of ten were Undecided. This group of peer questions, within the Social Feedback category, overall showed the greatest number of Undecided responses in both grade levels. Clearly, these students are unsure about how others in their grade levels perceive them as readers but are highly aware of how they perceive themselves in comparison with their peers.

Table 4.7.

Social Feedback Peer Statements and Responses

Statement	Grade	SA	A	U	D	SD
Other kids think I am a good reader.	4th	0	7	2	0	0
	5th	0	3	6	1	0
My classmates think that I read pretty well.	4th	3	1	5	0	0
	5th	0	2	7	0	1

The responses to the teacher statements within Social Feedback were equally interesting. The majority of the fourth grade responses were in the Strongly Agree and Agree categories, while in the fifth grade group, the majority of the responses were Undecided. One fifth grade response to statement number 17 – *My teacher thinks I am a*

good reader – was even in the Strongly Disagree category. This is a disturbing finding. While it may be more understandable to have fifth grade students, as pre-teens, feel uncertain about how their peers view them, it is disheartening to see their uncertainty about how their teachers perceive them as readers. Equally interesting, is the difference between the two grade levels in how students perceive teacher feedback. Fourth graders feel positive about teacher feedback while fifth graders feel negative about teacher feedback.

Within the Social Feedback category students also responded to statements about the feedback they receive about reading from their family members. Of these three choices, peers, teachers, and family members, family members received the highest scores for providing positive support for them as readers. Teachers received the second highest scores and feedback from peers was rated lowest.

The highest scores overall were in the Undecided category in the grouping of peer feedback statements. Of the thirty-two total responses in the peer group, 13 were from fourth grade participants and 19 from fifth grade participants. The second highest number of totals occurred in the Undecided category in response to the Teacher Feedback statements. The highest number of positive answers was in Strongly Agree in response to the Family Feedback statements.

Focus Group Data

Focus Groups are a type of interview involving groups of participants who discuss a prepared list of questions. This format provides a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time. For this study two separate focus group sessions were held, one for

fourth graders and one for fifth graders. Each session was approximately one hour long. Each of these sessions was recorded and transcribed. The following data is taken from the transcriptions of the focus groups. The first question, or opening question asked the students to introduce themselves, name someone they thought was a good reader, and tell why they thought that person was a good reader. Table 4.8 shows the results of this question broken down by grade level.

Table 4.8.

Who is a Good Reader?

Grade	Student	Teacher	Family Member
4th	6	1	2
5th	2	8	0

Only two students out of 19 total recognized family members as good readers, both were fourth graders. Eight fifth grade students mentioned teachers as examples of good readers, while only one fourth grader mentioned a teacher. Six fourth grade and two fifth grade students said other students they knew were good readers. Some reasons they believed these people were good readers were:

- They stop at periods.
- They use good expression when they read.
- They don't miss words.
- They read chapter books or dictionaries.

- They read long books.
- [They] can pronounce long words.
- [They] can read really fast.

The next table shows the responses to the question, *How important is reading outside of school or at home?* The answers to this question were on a scale from 1-5, with one and two being the lowest scores, meaning they believed reading outside of school was not important, a three is an undecided choice and scores of four and five reflect the idea that reading outside of school was very important. Table 4.9 reflects the totals. This question was one in which students were asked to place stickers on a chart reflecting their choice of answer to the question. This provided an opportunity for an interactive, tactile way to respond to the question being asked.

Table 4.9

How Important is Reading Outside of School?

Grade	Not Important	Undecided	Very Important
4th	0	1	8
5th	3	1	6

Six of the ten fifth grade students ranked reading outside of home as very important (score of 5). However, several reasons given by the fifth-grade students for not reading outside of school did not address the importance of the activity but rather had to do with being disrupted at home, making it difficult to read. One student said, “There is too much work to do at home so there is not time to read.” Another student said, “I like

reading at home because I can read what I want to.” Finally, a fifth grade student mentioned, “ There is too much reading at school so it is not as important to read at home.”

Table 4.10 shows mixed results to the next question asked in the focus group sessions. The question is, *How important is reading at school?* Again, students were asked to place stickers on a chart indicating how important they thought reading was in school. The same scale of 1-5 was used. Table 4.10 shows the responses.

Table 4.10.

How Important is Reading at School?

Grade	Not Important	Undecided	Very Important
4th	0	0	9
5th	1	4	5

All fourth-grade students rated reading as important in school with choices of four or five. Fifth grade students had five total answers for scores of four and five. They also had four students who were undecided about the importance of reading at school and even one student who chose one for the answer indicating a lack of importance for reading at school. Their selections are more varied than those of the fourth grade participants. The fourth-grade students are all in agreement that reading at school is very important. The fifth-grade students disagree about the importance of this activity in school. This is interesting and perhaps ties in with the Observational Comparison and Social Feedback category of the RSPS survey. If fifth grade-students have negative

feelings about reading and perceive negative feedback from others, or are comparing themselves to their peers and feeling inadequate it would account for the high number of undecided responses and one negative one.

- In a follow up discussion, students gave reasons for their responses. Some comments from the fourth graders in response to this question were:
- Reading helps you learn more.
- Without reading you don't have much of an education.
- It is important to read but not all the time.
- Sometimes you need a break from reading.

Fifth grade students' comments were more varied. Some of their comments included:

- Reading is important because you need it to get a job.
- You need to read for math, writing, and spelling.
- If you read at school it isn't so important to read at school.
- It's important to read at school. At school people can help [you].
- At home they might not know the words.

One student realized that reading was important in all academic areas. Two students believed that if they read enough at home it wasn't as important to read at school. Finally, one student recognized the importance of reading at school because he might not get the help he needs at home from his parents due to their limited English levels.

Another question presented to the focus groups asked if students would rather listen to or hear a story or read a story. Table below shows the results for each grade level.

Table 4.11.

Listen to or Read a Story

Grade	Listen to a Story	Read a Story	No Answer	Both
4th	6	0	2	1
5th	5	4	0	0

The fourth-grade group produced a variety of results. No students in the fourth-grade group preferred to read a story and six out of the nine chose to listen to a story. Two did not answer this question and one student could not decide and stated that she liked both. The answers are split evenly among the fifth-grade students with five preferring to read and five preferring to listen to a story.

The comments made in regard to this question were interesting as they showed clearly why students like listening to reading as opposed to reading themselves. Some comments reveal the struggle with knowing the vocabulary and the ability to ask clarifying questions of the reader. Others tied listening to reading as being a source of entertainment or relaxation. The following is a list of reasons fourth graders preferred to listen to or hear a story rather than read a story:

- It is more fun having people tell stories.

- When you're hearing it you're not reading it in your mind, somebody is reading it and everyone can hear it.
- I get bored reading.
- Because sometimes there are words you can't pronounce and they say it for you.
- The fifth grade participants gave the following reasons for preferring to listen to a story:
 - When you read it, it might not make sense. When you hear they use expression so you can understand it.
 - If you read you might not understand a word, but you can ask if someone is telling you a story.
 - Because you don't have to work on reading and pronouncing words. You can just hear it. Enjoy it.
 - When I read I get headaches.
 - Because when you hear a story it is usually funny

Only half of the fifth grade students preferred to read materials on their own instead of listening to someone read. The reasons given for this preference were often academic in nature, as they associated reading on their own with having to accomplish some specific task, such as writing a summary. The following is a list of some comments made by the fifth grade students in regard to reading materials themselves as opposed to listening to someone read:

- If you have to write a summary, it's easier to look back at the book.

- You remember better.
- Maybe you didn't get something, you can go back and figure it out.
- Because you know more for an assignment.

The final question in the focus group data to be examined is: *What does a good reader do?* Only one student out of the nineteen did not provide a response to this question. Both fourth and fifth graders provided clear descriptions about what good readers do. The types of response given reflect the strategies taught in reading groups. For example students knew good readers check for understanding when encountering new vocabulary, use visualization techniques, reread for comprehension, and read books at the appropriate level. The following is a list of the fourth grade responses followed by a list of fifth grade responses to this question.

Fourth Grade:

- Describing good details
- Checks words if they don't understand. Uses a dictionary.
- Describes it. Uses good imagination and write down the interesting stuff.
- Reads chapter books.
- Uses imagination in your head.
- Reads and reads and reads.
- Talk to yourself about what you're reading.
- Reads slowly.

Fifth Grade:

- Write a summary so you can remember.

- Does not skip words.
- Takes a break at a period.
- Stay on track, focused.
- Reading fast, looks back at the question.
- Asks somebody for help.
- Gets a just right book.
- Read aloud. Reread to understand it more.

It is interesting to note that none of the students in either group mentioned making connections with texts or responding to texts as something a good reader does. It is also of interest that no student specifically stated that good readers also read because it is fun.

The fifth grade students made three statements that showed their belief that good readers read for a purpose. Fifth grade comments focused on reading to accomplish something specific such as writing a summary or answering questions. The fifth graders also mentioned specific tasks performed by good readers, such as choosing a book at the appropriate reading level, stopping at periods, and asking for help when needed. Fourth graders suggested good readers use their imagination, which shows a level of interest in the text and possibly suggests enjoyment in reading.

Summary

The RSPS survey, which identifies student self-efficacy beliefs in reading shows a difference between how fourth and fifth grade students view themselves as readers. While fourth graders are more confident and have a sense of making progress, fifth graders are less sure of these beliefs. This was most evident in the responses fifth graders

made when comparing themselves to their peers and perceiving feedback from peers and teachers. Both fourth-and fifth-graders however, have high efficacy in the area of Progress. They believe they are making progress as readers regardless of their reading level. Both groups also showed they received positive feedback and support from their families.

In the discussions with the focus groups, the discrepancies between fourth and fifth grade responses were evident. There appears to be a shift between these two grades when fifth grade students become more aware of themselves in regard to their peers, and more aware of the necessity of reading for academic purposes. Fourth grade students seem to still read for pleasure and enjoyment while fifth grade students read to accomplish a specific academic task. The next chapter discusses the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the findings of this study, which asks:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

This chapter shows areas in reading in which the ESL students have a strong sense of efficacy, and areas where efficacy is lacking. The differences found between the fourth and fifth grade groups of students, particularly as they pertain to the role of reading, will also be discussed. There are three major findings in this study:

- 1) Students feel they are making progress as readers.
- 2) Students are able to define the characteristics of a good reader.
- 3) Students differ between grade levels in terms of how they view themselves as readers.

Each finding is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Findings

Finding 1: Student Progress

The first finding is that students feel they are making progress as readers independent of their reading level. Even though some students struggle in some areas of efficacy the majority of the students believe that progress is being made. This was shown through the positive answers to the Progress category of statements on the Reader Self-

Perception scale (RSPS) compared with the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) reading levels. Most students, even those with lower reading levels, still felt very positive about the progress being made in reading. Of the four categories of statements on the RSPS survey; Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States, Progress received the highest scores overall, from the participants. Another way self-efficacy was shown was through the positive answers to the General Perception statement on the RSPS survey. This statement is: *I think I am a good reader*. The General Perception scores also spanned the range of reading levels and did not correlate with just the higher reading levels. This too, shows a sense of positive self-efficacy in reading. This is encouraging because most students reading at lower levels still have high levels of efficacy in making progress and because of that strong belief, they can persist and show growth in reading.

Finding 2: Defining Characteristics of a Good Reader

The second finding is that both the fourth-and fifth-grade students can clearly define the concept of a good reader. Through the focus group sessions, students supplied lists of qualities of good readers. They know what good readers do. Some of the characteristics mentioned closely align with the reading instruction in this school. Students knew that good readers check for understanding when encountering new vocabulary, use visualization techniques or imagination while reading, reread for comprehension, and read books at the appropriate reading levels. In general, it appears that the fourth-grade responses to this question were more focused on strategies for helping themselves become good or better readers while the fifth-grade responses showed

a more academic focus or drive behind needing to read. The fourth-grade responses included using your imagination, reading slowly, and talking to yourself while reading. Some of these responses also show enjoyment of reading and ways to become better at reading. The fifth-grade responses seem to show the need for reading for specific academic purposes such as answering test questions, writing summaries, and rereading for better understanding. Students also made the connection that there is reading happening around them in the real world noting that they needed reading to use laptops, read maps, read recipes, go shopping, and to eventually get jobs. Students in both groups failed to mention making connections with texts, particularly connections with themselves, which can enforce the idea that reading is only done to accomplish academic goals and has no personal meaning. This is particularly important in light of the research which demonstrates that children who make positive connections with books feel a greater sense of confidence which leads to engagement with texts and aids in building self-efficacy in reading (Henk & Melnick, 1995).

The focus group discussions provided insight into the people students perceived to be good readers. The majority of the students in fourth grade identified a peer as someone they felt was a good reader. Fourth graders also listed one teacher and two family members as examples of good readers. The majority of the fifth-grade students listed teachers as good readers and the remainder were students. No one in fifth grade mentioned a family member as a good reader. This was an interesting finding because the majority of students did not perceive family members as good readers yet in the Social Feedback category of statements most students felt they received positive feedback about

their reading from their family members. They feel encouraged and supported by family but do not necessarily see family members as examples or models of good readers in their lives.

Students had conflicting ideas about the importance of reading at home and the importance of reading in school. Some students made the connection that reading at home was important in order to make progress overall in reading. Others felt it was important to have a break from reading since so much reading was done in school. Some felt it was difficult to read at home due to interruptions and noise levels while others felt the same about reading in school, that it was too noisy and distracting to concentrate. The conflicting views about the best environment for reading were evident. While teachers have high expectations about students reading at home on a daily basis it is clear that completing this task is greatly dependent upon the home environment or culture. It is also clear that students need to have quiet workspaces at school where reading can be accomplished without distractions. Both situations require cultural sensitivity and understanding in order to make the necessary adjustments to help students succeed in reading. One suggestion would be for students to have a quiet reading space available to them at school prior to the school day beginning, or after school, where children could accomplish their daily reading goals.

Finding 3: Differences in Perception

This third finding deals with the differences between how the fourth and fifth grade students view themselves as readers. Based on comments made in the focus group, fourth grade students see their peers as good readers. The feedback they receive from

peers about their reading, as determined by the answers to Observational Comparison statements, reveal they are uncertain about how peers view them as readers. The Observational Comparison statements received the highest number of Undecided answers of any of the categories. The majority of the Undecided responses for both grades were in the peer feedback group, and the second largest number of Undecided responses was in the teacher feedback group of statements. Fourth-grade students showed much higher levels of positive feedback from teachers than did the fifth graders. Social Feedback responses to statements about family feedback received the highest number of positive responses from both grade level groups. The research by Bandura (1986) shows that children initially develop their self-efficacy based upon family input but as children get older their self-efficacy becomes more and more dependent upon feedback and input from their peers. Sometimes peers provide good models for others but they can also provide an acute awareness of differences in abilities and skills (Schunk, 2003). This awareness becomes even greater as the children enter adolescence. This may contribute to the high levels of uncertainty exhibited by the fifth graders. As pre-teens they are more aware of themselves and the influences of their peers. They perhaps realize more keenly that they are reading below grade level and are unable to read the same books as their classmates. While the emphasis of Reader's Workshop in this school has been on choosing a book that is appropriate for the individual - a just right book (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) - the differences in what students can and cannot do may begin to be more obvious and significant to those in fifth grade. If they are not reading at grade level, they may begin to have a greater sense of inadequacy in comparison with their peers. Their

choice of Undecided as a response shows they are unsure about how they feel about themselves as readers when compared with their classmates.

The fifth grade students, with the higher expectations for independence and the pressure on their teachers to have them prepared for middle school, are also perhaps less likely to ask for help when it is needed. It is also possible that there is a stigma attached to not being in the higher reading groups, and receiving ESL services. This feeling may be stronger among fifth-grade students who are more socially aware of differences than the fourth-grade participants. Fourth grade students seem to be a bit more dependent on teachers and perceive they receive greater support from them as well.

Implications

The implications of this study are that the school needs to build positive self-efficacy in reading in ESL students in a variety of ways. Without strong efficacy, the belief in the ability to accomplish a specific task, students will not feel grounded in their reading abilities and other academic pursuits (Walker, 2003). Students currently feel they are making progress in reading regardless of their reading level. This sense of accomplishment needs to continue. Teachers can support this sense of accomplishment by providing positive feedback about real progress being made through genuine effort. Giving false praise or not being specific in the feedback given does not build efficacy and does a disservice to the students who will not have a true sense of their strengths and weaknesses (Schunk, 1991, 2003). This also ties in with the fifth-grade students who were not sure about feedback received from teachers. Teachers need to provide clear and direct feedback to students about specific accomplishments and help them in areas where

they struggle. This could be accomplished through more individual conferencing sessions with students.

Another way to foster efficacy in students is to provide opportunities for students to evaluate their own work. Self-evaluation is important as it give students a chance to reflect on their own work and progress (Schunk, 2003). Using rubrics or other tools such as the RSPS survey could help teachers understand the efficacy beliefs of their students. Teachers could administer the RSPS survey at the beginning of the year to see how students perceive themselves as readers and use that data to drive the instruction based on the areas of need. At the end of the year the survey could be administered again to see if efficacy beliefs improved.

Slowly building up independence in fourth-grade students to better prepare them for the rigors of the fifth grade curriculum and expectations may also be helpful. Reminding fifth grade students about the joys of reading for pleasure may be necessary as well, as these students often feel pressure to read only for academic purposes. Providing low-level but high interest books to students reading at lower levels would help students feel less self-conscious in comparison with their peers. Finally, keeping communication open with parents in regard to reading expectations, as well as possibly providing a quiet room at school for students to complete their required reading assignments may be beneficial as well.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. The small number of participants prevents the results from being generalized to a larger population of fourth-

and fifth-grade ESL students. Another limitation is that the RSPS questionnaire is not normed specifically to English language learners. Also, the use of the standard deviations for the scoring of the RSPS caused the majority of the participants to fall in the average range. While this did show the few students who were extremely low and others who were extremely high, it did not easily provide specific information for the majority of students who fell into the average span of scores. Closer examination of the survey data was necessary including examining the raw scores and figuring out percentages based on those scores in order to attain a more accurate picture of students' perceptions of their efficacy. It is important to note that measuring efficacy is not easily done and the RSPS survey is only an indicator used to show efficacy beliefs particularly of those students who are outliers, or those who do not fall into the average range of scores.

Suggestions for Future Research

In the future it would be beneficial to do a similar study with a larger group of participants. It would also be interesting to have students take the RSPS questionnaire at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the year to compare their responses. It would be equally interesting to hold focus groups both at the start and end of the year to see how students' ideas, thoughts, and perceptions might change. It would be beneficial for the students to have opportunities throughout the school year for self-evaluation. This would give them the opportunity to reflect on their work and see their progress and/or areas of need. These steps would promote self-efficacy in reading with students and would provide a more comprehensive look at the progress students make in their self-efficacy over the span of a year.

Even though the students in this school receive ESL services within a small group setting within the regular classroom, students may still have a sense of being singled out or have feelings of isolation. This can be detrimental as ESL students need to feel included and connected with their classmates and classroom teachers. If these students are feeling isolated they may tend to associate only with students with the same background and language which can lead to greater feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and efficacy. This also deprives everyone of the culture, knowledge, language skills, and abilities ESL students can share with students and teachers of the majority culture (Vang, 2004).

In general it would be beneficial for more research to be conducted regarding ESL students and self-efficacy. It is important to address the needs of all of our students and the growing number of ESL students in our schools demands that educators look for ways to improve their educational experiences. Building self-efficacy in all academic areas is vital for the success of our ESL students.

Professional Growth

Through this study I have learned the importance of building self-efficacy in my students, not only in the academic area of reading, but in all content areas. This can be done through honest, genuine feedback, using rubrics or other concrete forms of evaluation from me and other teachers, and through reflection and time for self-evaluation for the students. I have begun to use rubrics for writing assignments, which gives students the opportunity to evaluate their own work. I then conference with students one-on-one, using the rubrics to discuss their work. Through this, students are given the

chance to reflect on and evaluate their own work and receive specific feedback as well. I have also been more direct and specific when giving praise to students about their work. It is important for students to know why they are receiving praise or encouragement. In addition, I have also been more diligent in stressing the need for students to make connections with what they read. I ask them to stop and think when they have read to bottom of a page or at the end of a chapter and decide if they can make any personal connection with what they have read. I am often quite surprised at the links they are able to make once they begin to engage in reading in this manner. Overall, I have become more deliberate and focused in my interactions with my students.

I have learned that it is important to honor student's families and their cultures and languages while encouraging them to believe in their English language development and reading abilities. It is important as well, to remember to provide an inclusive environment in the school. This fosters a sense of belonging for all students and prevents ESL students from having a label or stigma associated with their need to learn English. I was recently invited to join a professional learning community in my school known as the Equity Team, which strives to create an equitable, safe environment for all students.

It is also necessary to recognize the changes between the students as they grow into pre-teens and become more aware of their peers' performances in the classroom. Building independent students who are prepared for middle school is important, but not at the price of student's loss of efficacy. Taking time to foster efficacy in academics is crucial for students in elementary school as it provides a strong foundation for them as

they continue to grow and develop as students throughout their middle and high school years.

Summary

This study explored the following questions:

- 1) How do ESL students perceive themselves as readers?
- 2) How do ESL students perceive the role of reading?

These questions were answered using the Reader Self-Perception Scale, a survey designed to measure the self-efficacy of fourth through sixth grade students in reading and focus groups, which provided the opportunity for students to discuss a variety of questions about reading. The data revealed that students feel they are good readers and are making progress in reading regardless of their reading level. The data also show students feel unsure about the feedback received from peers and teachers about their reading but feel strongly supported by their family members. Students in both grade levels are also able to define good readers; they know what good readers do. They are uncertain of how their peers perceive them but many students think their classmates are good readers. There is a clear shift between fourth and fifth graders in how they see themselves as compared to other students and how they engage in the act of reading. Exploring these differences would be an area for further study.

APPENDIX A – FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Appendix A – Focus Group Questions

Introduction:

Thank you for coming to talk with me and to each other today. We are going to be talking about reading. I want to know what you think about reading, what makes a good reader and whether or not you think you are a good reader. I want you to tell me how you really feel, not what you think I want to hear, just because I am a teacher. No one except the people in this room will hear your answers. Are there any questions? Let's begin.

Opening Question:

Please tell us your name and one person who you think is a good reader and why you think that.

Activity:

A large sheet of poster paper with different types of reading materials such as, magazines, cartoons, comic books, newspapers, and various genres of books, will be on an easel. Students will be invited to place a dot sticker next to everything they read. They will then be invited to place a star sticker next to their favorite reading material.

Introductory Question:

What are the kinds of things you like to read?

Transition Questions:

Why do you like to read that?

Key Questions:

Have you heard people tell stories? What does a good storyteller do?

Who tells you stories?

What are your favorite kinds of stories?

Would you rather hear a story or read a story? Why?

Students will be invited to look at pictures of people reading various materials in a variety of places.

Where do you see people reading outside of school? What are they reading?

What does a good reader do?

Ending Question and Activity:

Reading is important in school and outside of school. Using a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important write down on a dot sticker how important reading is to you. I will collect the stickers and place them on the chart. Students will be invited to look at the chart and the results of their answers and to comment on the information.

Final Question:

The purpose of our meeting today was to discuss whether or not you think you are a good reader and whether or not reading is important to you and to other people you may know. Is there anything you'd like to add? Thank you so much for doing this today. You will help me understand more about you as readers and help me to become a better teacher.

APPENDIX B – THE READER SELF-PERCEPTION SCALE

Appendix B

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following:

SA = Strongly Agree
 A = Agree
 U = Undecided
 D = Disagree
 SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: **I think pizza with pepperoni is the best.** SA A U D SD

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is best, circle SA (Strongly Agree).

If you *think* that is good but maybe not great, circle A (Agree).

If you *can't decide* whether or not it is best, circle U (undecided).

If you *think* that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, circle D (Disagree).

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not very good, circle SD (Strongly Disagree).

	1. I think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	2. I can tell that my teacher likes to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	3. My teacher thinks that my reading is fine.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	4. I read faster than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	5. I like to read aloud.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	6. When I read, I can figure out words better than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	7. My classmates like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	8. I feel good inside when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	9. My classmates think that I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	10. When I read, I don't have to try as hard as I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	11. I seem to know more words than other kids when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	12. People in my family think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	13. I am getting better at reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	14. I understand what I read as well as other kids do.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	15. When I read, I need less help than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	16. Reading makes me feel happy inside.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	17. My teacher thinks I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	18. Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	19. I read faster than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	20. I read better than other kids in my class.	SA	A	U	D	SD

(continued)

Appendix B, continued

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

[PS]	21. I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	22. I read more than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	23. I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	24. I can figure out words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	25. I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	26. I think reading is relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	27. I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	28. When I read, I recognize more words than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	29. Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	30. Other kids think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	31. People in my family think I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	32. I enjoy reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	33. People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

APPENDIX C – THE READER SELF-PERCEPTION SCALE
DIRECTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION, SCORING, AND INTERPRETATION

Appendix C

The Reader Self-Perception Scale **Directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation**

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is intended to provide an assessment of how children feel about themselves as readers. The scale consists of 33 items that assess self-perceptions along four dimensions of self-efficacy (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Children are asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The information gained from this scale can be used to devise ways to enhance children's self-esteem in reading and, ideally, to increase their motivation to read. The following directions explain specifically what you are to do.

Administration

For the results to be of any use, the children must: (a) understand exactly what they are to do, (b) have sufficient time to complete all items, and (c) respond honestly and thoughtfully. Briefly explain to the children that they are being asked to complete a questionnaire about reading. Emphasize that this is not a *test* and that there are no *right* answers. Tell them that they should be as honest as possible because their responses will be confidential. Ask the children to fill in their names, grade levels, and classrooms as appropriate. Read the directions aloud and work through the example with the students as a group. Discuss the response options and make sure that all children understand the rating scale before moving on. It is important that children know that they may raise their hands to ask questions about any words or ideas they do not understand.

The children should then read each item and circle their response for the item. They should work at their own pace. Remind the children that they should be sure to respond to all items. When all items are completed, the children should stop, put their pencils down, and wait for further instructions. Care should be taken that children who work more slowly are not disturbed by children who have already finished.

Scoring

To score the RSPS, enter the following point values for each response on the RSPS scoring sheet (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) for each item number under the appropriate scale. Sum each column to obtain a raw score for each of the four specific scales.

Interpretation

Each scale is interpreted in relation to its total possible score. For example, because the RSPS uses a 5-point scale and the Progress scale consists of 9 items, the highest total score for Progress is 45 ($9 \times 5 = 45$). Therefore, a score that would fall approximately in the middle of the range (22–23) would indicate a child's somewhat indifferent perception of her or himself as a reader with respect to Progress. Note that each scale has a different possible total raw score (Progress = 45, Observational Comparison = 30, Social Feedback = 45, and Physiological States = 40) and should be interpreted accordingly.

As a further aid to interpretation, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics by grade level for each scale. The raw score of a group or individual can be compared to that of the pilot study group at each grade level.

APPENDIX D – THE READER SELF-PERCEPTION SCALE SCORING SHEET

Appendix D

The Reader Self-Perception Scale scoring sheet

Student name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Scoring key: 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)
 4 = Agree (A)
 3 = Undecided (U)
 2 = Disagree (D)
 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Scales

General Perception	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
1. _____	10. _____	4. _____	2. _____	5. _____
	13. _____	6. _____	3. _____	8. _____
	15. _____	11. _____	7. _____	16. _____
	18. _____	14. _____	9. _____	21. _____
	19. _____	20. _____	12. _____	25. _____
	23. _____	22. _____	17. _____	26. _____
	24. _____		30. _____	29. _____
	27. _____		31. _____	32. _____
	28. _____		33. _____	

Raw score _____ of 45 _____ of 30 _____ of 45 _____ of 40

Score interpretation

High	44+	26+	38+	37+
Average	39	21	33	31
Low	34	16	27	25

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