

PIVOTAL MOMENTS, SILENCING, AND PERSISTENCE:
A CASE OF FOUR STUDENTS IN TRANSITION FROM AN ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

PIVOTAL MOMENTS, SILENCING, AND PERSISTENCE: A case of four students in transition from an English as a Second Language program in an elementary school
(Under the direction of Dr. George Noblit)

Students that have been in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in schools in the United States are systematically and chronically underserved. To date, little is written about “exiting” ESL. This qualitative study of the experiences of four students in transition from ESL in an elementary school in North Carolina found that they experienced an increase in conditions of isolation from bilingual peers, and that the students approached their isolation with self-silencing. This self-silencing, an approach that the students developed through early pivotal experiences at school, had tragic consequences for them. At the same time, the students lifted their silencing at school under conditions in which they were able to escape their isolation, and they were persistent in their intention to escape that isolation. These findings suggest that attention to silencing as well as adjustments to isolation can potentially lead to positive change for students in transition from ESL.

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PREFACE

Remembering ESL, a student that participated in this study wrote, “What wonderful moments. Now got to go back to 2010. Bye.” Karla’s wonderful moments at school had become treasured memories of safe interaction. Her transition from ESL in 2010 brought for Karla new conditions of isolation at school, conditions that she approached with a silencing of herself. This silencing involved tragic emotional consequences for Karla. Despite her emotional distress, she navigated school with a persistent intent to escape isolation from her bilingual peers, and lifted her silencing when she was able to manage that escape. This thesis investigates the experiences of Karla and three of her peers as they transitioned from ESL at an elementary school.

While trying to learn from Karla about her transition, I was also learning from her about my own transition. During the study, I had begun to work through my transition from teacher to researcher, and this involved adjusting my existing teacher identity. In addition, I was constructing an additional new researcher identity. When I began the preparations for this study, I searched for meaning of “researcher”. At first, I approached my new and mysterious role from the familiar and comfortable perspective of “non-teacher”. Normalizing a role that I knew a lot about guided me to make decisions that I thought would help to separate me from my existing teacher identity. I chose clothing combinations that teachers at the site didn’t wear, such as jeans with blazers and uncomfortable shoes. When students investigated my roles with efforts such as discussing

forbidden topics, ordering me out of their personal space, and requesting to be “interviewed” I attempted to respond in a way that was non-teacher. I tried to make familiar teacher discourse strange and minimize my use of it. I entered and exited mid-lesson whenever possible, and pulled up a chair to engage students in unusual whisper conversations. I extracted myself when I became roped into alliances with teachers, and carefully chose my responses to teachers’ calls to me across classrooms and hallways.

After reflecting on my normalizing of teacher, I realize that I was not really working on my identity as researcher by othering researcher from my existing teacher identity. There was a distinct and unexpected moment during the research that kicked in my teacher identity door. Munching on seasoned fries and fried fish sandwiches together in a dark, cramped alcove in an empty classroom, Karla and I discussed her opinions about school. Suddenly, she told me that she was going to tell me a deep secret. She went into great detail about how she was telling me her secret because she knew it would be protected. Virtually in shock, I could hardly remember to breathe as I tried to find responses for this new relationship.

Driving home, emotion swept over me like an incoming tide. In the tide were the voices of every student I had ever taught, and the realization that I as teacher only ever knew but a small part of each of those students. Karla gave me my first lesson on what is “researcher”. I began to sense the ethical responsibilities that come with this role. Later in the conversation, she demanded to know what her pseudonym was and when the book was going to be finished. She seemed to have a handle on the purpose of this research, and certainly a stronger handle on it than I did. She explicitly made sure I knew what the significance of her trust meant, and that she expected me to honor that trust in the writing.

CHAPTER 1

TOPIC, THESIS, AND PEOPLE INVOLVED

Topic

In this paper I will examine data from a study that investigated the experiences of four students in an elementary school that had transitioned out of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Students in North Carolina in ESL programs receive specialized instruction in addition to their classroom instruction and retake an English language test each year. Upon receiving a score above a threshold, a student is no longer in ESL programs (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2007). To date, I have not found a study that directly examines students' experiences of transition from ESL programs. In this thesis, I investigate the experiences of four students that transitioned out of an ESL program at an elementary school. More specifically, I explore how they described what happened with their identities as students during moments or relationships that were pivotal and important for them. I also consider how the students described their negotiation of relationships with people as well as their interactions with institutions within schooling.

Thesis Argument, Related Literature and Paper Map

In this paper, I argue that the students approached the conditions of isolation involved in their transition from ESL with silencing, and that this silencing was an approach with roots in early pivotal experiences at school.

This study was initially informed by literature related to the experiences of Latino/a students, immigrant students, and bilingual students in schools. In my investigation of some of this related literature, I noticed that students that would be transitioning from ESL programs might often be underserved in their schooling. Not all of the literature discussed here directly pertains to students in ESL programs. However, the students involved in this study were Latino/a, so I include some literature related to the experiences of Latino/a students whether or not they were or ever had been in ESL programs. In addition, the students involved in this study were not necessarily immigrant students, but I include some literature related to the experiences of immigrant students because many students in ESL programs are immigrant students. Finally, while not all bilingual students are or have been in ESL programs, I include literature related to the experiences of bilingual or multilingual students because the students involved in this study, like many students in ESL programs, were bilingual. All of these topics informed this study because to my knowledge there is no existing literature to date that pertains directly and exclusively to the experiences of students in transition from ESL programs. For example, I am not aware of existing literature that documents changes in conditions of isolation as students transition from ESL programs. An overview of these related works of literature suggests that students that transition from ESL programs may be part of several groups of students that are consistently underserved in their schooling.

Although the authors of some of the related existing literature presented here used the term “Hispanic” in the work discussed, in this thesis I instead use the term “Latino/a”. “Hispanic” was a term first used by the United States government in what many argue was an attempt to erase ethnic identities. This term includes people of both Latin American and European Spanish heritage. The term “Latino/a” was appropriated in recognition of the common experience of oppression of people in the United States that have Latin American ethnicity (Chomsky, 2007). In this thesis, the term “Hispanic” appears only within comments of original authors or speakers.

Existing work suggests that students transitioning from ESL programs might be underserved in their schooling. This schooling can result in emotional tragedy and/or denial of access to benefits at school. First, students often experience emotional tragedy as a result of alienation, separation, and the eradication of their cultures and/or languages (e.g. Gibson, 1995a; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Often, “Latino youth feel diminished in the eyes of the mainstream culture” (Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003, p. 18). At school, “For the most part, the linguistic and cultural resources that bilingual children bring are suppressed and at best ignored” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 427). Students also often internalize negative societal perceptions of their racial, cultural, or linguistic groups (e.g. Rong, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In addition, children and their families are often positioned as problems or challenges for teachers and schools (e.g. Marx, 2009; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). These experiences deny students opportunities to preserve self-esteem, form support systems, and develop or maintain literacy in their heritage languages (e.g. Conchas, 2001; Gibson, 1995b; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

Furthermore, students are systematically marginalized and denied access to tangible benefits distributed at school from the level of personal interactions to the level of systematic policies. For example, in a study involving over 16,000 students, Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that Latino/a students were disproportionately more often denied high expectations and positive feedback at school and were referred disproportionately often to special education as well as disproportionately seldom to gifted and talented programs. In the United States as a whole, Latino/a students with ethnicities from Spanish-speaking groups are disproportionately less likely than whites or African Americans to be on grade level, be enrolled in college preparatory classes, and graduate from high school (Vásquez, 2007). In North Carolina, while 66% of white students scored at least proficient on all End Of Grade tests for grades 3-8 in 2007-2008, 30.6% of African American students and 36% of “Hispanic” (p. 18) students passed. Only 20% of students in ESL programs that had been in schools in the United States for at least 24 months, students that the state labels as “Limited English Proficient” (p. 60), passed (NCDPI, 2009a). These data indicate that as groups, students in ESL programs as well as Latino/a students suffer from underachievement in North Carolina. Currently in North Carolina, achievement data are neither reported nor collected for students that have transitioned from ESL programs as a distinct group. Latinos/as are underrepresented in college track honors and AP courses, and overrepresented in remedial courses, even when controlling for prior achievement (Ballón, 2008). Latino/a students are asked lower order questions, given more answers rather than asked to figure out solutions on their own, and their interactions with teachers are more often managerial in nature rather than substantive (Oakes, 1985). Latino/a students are systematically more often ignored or

silenced in classrooms and removed from classrooms (Gay, 2000). In addition, some existing work investigates cultural, racial, and linguistic biases involved in standardized testing practices, content, and score use that contribute to students' underachievement (e.g. Abedi, 2002; Huempfner, 2004; Valenzuela, 2005). Finally, other existing work has critiqued ESL policies, such as unjust assessment, placement and segregation (Koyama, 2004; Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Vásquez, 2007).

These trends indicate that students that are transitioning from ESL may be part of several groups that are systematically and chronically denied access to education that they deserve. Some previous work looked at group measures of academic achievement following transition from ESL programs, but this work had the purpose of large-scale evaluation of ESL programs (Abella, 1992; Lesaux, Rupp, & Siegel, 2007). These examples of literature related to inequity for students, paired with personal experience in schools, lead me to begin study of the topic of this paper.

Late in the study design, I decided to add teachers' perspectives to the mix in order to compare the teachers' perspectives on the topic of transition from ESL with the students' perspectives on their own transitions. The body of existing work that has investigated teachers' perspectives has focused on teachers' levels of preparedness and instructional techniques for teaching students that are acquiring an additional language. Teachers often feel unprepared to teach and even express fear of teaching Latino/a students and bilingual students (e.g. Lee, Butler, & Tippins, 2007; Penfield, 1987; Rueda & Garcia, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2008).

Some related literature discussed exciting ways that some Latino/a or immigrant or bilingual students approached their conditions at school (e.g. Gibson, 1995a), and

during the preparations for the study I became very curious to find out how students in an elementary school might approach their transition from ESL programs. Through this research study, I would come to an understanding that the four students involved experienced conditions of increased isolation from their bilingual peers during their transition from ESL, and that they approached those new conditions with a self-silencing. Furthermore, I would find that students developed this approach of self-silencing long before their transition from ESL. However, when students were able to escape their isolation, they lifted their silencing, and they were persistent in their intent to do so.

In this first chapter, I provide some background information related to the people that were involved in this study. The background includes some information about the research site, the research town, and the research participants.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the methodology of the study. First I describe the emergent design paradigm that guided the study procedures. Then I detail the data collection study procedures as well as the data analysis study procedures. Finally, I include the research questions through which I examined the data for this thesis paper.

In Chapter 3, I develop the argument of this paper using some of the findings from this research study. The argument is structured to offer some understanding of first the conditions of isolation that I found the students to experience in their transition from ESL, then the students' approaches of silencing to those conditions. Since silencing was only one approach to a multiplicity of conditions at school, and people often simultaneously use many approaches to their conditions, not all of the data in this section reflects a singular approach of silencing. Although some of the data involves complex approaches that I had difficulty separating, overall the section highlights the approach of

silencing. At that point in the argument, I discuss some early pivotal experiences that seemed to influence students' approaches of silencing long before their transitions from ESL. This portion of the argument culminates in a consideration of the tragic consequences of silencing for the students. The argument then turns to early pivotal experiences that seemed to be safe for students, as well as an exciting section demonstrating instances in which the students lifted their silencing at school. The argument then comes full circle back to conditions that allow for that lifting of silencing, which will involve the students' escape from their own isolation.

Chapter 4, the final chapter of this thesis paper, will consist of a brief discussion of possibilities for moving forward. In other words, I will argue that the lessons learned from these four students can contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of students in transition from ESL and therefore to improving school for students experiencing similar transitions.

People Involved: Research Site

This study took place in a combination 4th/5th grade classroom during the literacy block, including the writing period and the reading period, and during recess and lunch. The data collection took place about two days per week for about six weeks. There were 23 students and one teacher in the classroom. At times, other adults "pushed in" to the classroom, such as a student teacher and a teacher assistant. The classroom teacher, "Ms. Parker", was considered by other adults at the school to be an excellent teacher.

The classroom had ample resources. For example, Ms. Parker had a brand new interactive whiteboard on her wall, involving hardware that costs over \$5,000. In

addition, the classroom had five functioning computers, one of which had a flat screen monitor, as well as shiny matching furniture for all of the students.

In fact, the school in general seemed to have ample resources. The exterior grounds of the school were decorated by rotating seasonal planters of flowers and other annuals, and construction to the school was ongoing. The playground equipment was plentiful and in excellent repair. The students regularly checked out books from the school media center. The books and their real time availability were indexed on a catalogue website, and multiple hardcover editions of contemporary titles with no protective Mylar, damage, repairs, or markings were always available for student use at school and at home. Further, students were permitted to check out several titles at once. These observations were consistent with data on school funding. This district's Per Pupil Expenditure for 2008 was \$9,140.76, which ranked 16th out of 115 districts in North Carolina. A great deal of those funds came from the county's supplemental self-imposed taxation; the local taxation level was ranked 4th out of 115 districts, while the school ranked only 76th and 95th in state and federal funding respectively (NCDPI, 2008).

The school had a greater percentage of teachers with many years of experience than the state average, as well as a lower percentage of beginning teachers (NCDPI, 2009b). Ms. Parker was working on her Masters of Arts in Teaching at a nearby university, and was enrolled in graduate-level evening courses during the study. The principal of the school held a Ph.D. and was addressed by teachers, parents, and students with the formal "Dr." preceding her name.

Local ESL policies, programs, and contexts vary widely (Zehr, 2008). At this school, ESL involved monolingual English instruction. Nieto (2010) distinguished ESL

and bilingual instruction: “When provided in isolation, [ESL] is not bilingual instruction because the child’s native language is not used in instruction” (p. 120). The district’s overview of ESL stated that, “The primary objective of the ESL program is to teach English to the ESL students...designed to help the ESL student acquire English as quickly as possible.” Each of the 32 students in ESL at the school during the study was multilingual in at least Spanish and English. During the study, one student that spoke a language other than Spanish or English qualified for ESL. However, according to the ESL teacher at the school, his parents declined ESL services because they did not want him to attend sessions with a teacher and students that were “Hispanic”.

In 2008-2009, the school met all of its AYP targets, making expected progress and therefore avoiding NCLB sanctions. It was marked as a School of Progress, although not a single school in its district was given the more inferior NCLB labels of Priority, Low Performing, or No Progress (NCDPI, 2009b). The 460 students at the pre K-5th grade school were 55% white, 26% African American, 15% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and less than 1% Asian (NCDPI, 2009b). District records indicated that 53% of students at the school applied for free or reduced meals (Child Nutrition Services, 2008a), although teachers reported that 62% of the students received free or reduced meals due to a second round of form distribution, and this percentage designated the school as a full Title I school. Children qualify for free daily lunch (\$1.50 in this district) and breakfast if earning an annual income below a given threshold, which is currently for a family of four for example, \$27,560 (Child Nutrition Services, 2008b). The school was nestled in a residential area of its rural town, and families arrived on foot, early model

sedan, bike, and skateboard to use the school grounds and adjacent Community Center facilities for recreation and socializing outside of school hours.

People Involved: Research Town

Gibson was an unincorporated town in northern Sutton County, North Carolina. Gibson village grew around a flour mill beside the railroad tracks in the late 1800s, and there were no set geographic lines around the community of around 600 families. Located between two rural hubs in the area, the rural town was close to several major highways. Churches were very important to the community, and the several churches often collaborated for celebration and problem solving. Since it was an unincorporated town, Gibson did not have local officials, and many residents were frustrated with being represented by officials elected by the more populated and wealthy southern Sutton County, which some felt was politically dominated by its university town. For services such as banking, medical treatment, shopping, groceries, legal services, childcare, and dining, Gibson residents had to travel by their own private transportation to nearby areas. Many residents attributed a lack of access to services to Gibson's relatively low political power.

The lone elementary school in Gibson went through a major overhaul in the early 1980s when every septic tank in the area failed. Sewer repairs were never completed due to depletion of the Sutton County government funding, and inadequate sewage and water infrastructure prevented businesses and developers from choosing Gibson as a site for growth. Consequently, most Gibson residents worked outside of Gibson. Some of those residents were commuters to south Sutton County or nearby cities who were attracted to

Gibson by low-cost land in newer housing developments that had been added to the community's clusters of single family homes and trailers. A teacher at the school described these affluent commuters as mainly having jobs in academia and in medicine. Other common jobs held by Gibson residents included jobs in construction, health care, and manufacturing. The town was at least somewhat racially segregated, with many African American and Latino/a families living to the west and many white families living to the east.

Much of this information was drawn from a source that can't be cited due to concerns for confidentiality and anonymity.

People Involved: Research Participants

The participants involved in this research included two 4th grade students and a 5th grade student in a 4th/5th combination classroom and one 5th grade student in another classroom. This was the total population of students in 4th and 5th grades that had transitioned out of ESL programs. The students described either themselves or their parents as from Mexico, and all four students were bilingual in Spanish and English. The two 5th grade students preferred to speak English and the two 4th grade students preferred to speak Spanish. All four students had monolingual literacy in English. The three students in Ms. Parker's combination class were born in the hospital most frequently used by Gibson residents, and the student in Ms. Blue's class was born in Chinchilla, Mexico and moved to the area when she was two or three years old. All four students had spent their entire school careers at Gibson Elementary.

In addition, the students' classroom teachers and the ESL teacher at the school were participants in the research. Ms. Blue, Cindy's teacher, lived in her original hometown of a nearby city and had over 20 years of teaching experience, with 10 of those being at Gibson. Ms. Parker, the teacher of LJ, Karla, and Paola, was from the Midwest United States and in her fourth year of teaching and her third year at Gibson. Ms. Parker was pursuing her Masters of Arts in Teaching at the university in her hometown in south Sutton County in the evenings. Both classroom teachers were white. Ms. Blue was monolingual in English and Ms. Parker was English-dominant and took some Spanish courses in high school. Ms. Blue had been Ms. Parker's mentor since she arrived at Gibson, and the two planned many of their lessons together. The ESL teacher, Ms. Hart, had a position at Gibson that was held by four teachers in the last three years. She taught students for four hours per day and did "community outreach" and translation for two hours per day. She was from Columbia and bilingual in Spanish and English. She preferred to use Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English, and she had a Master's degree in psychology from an institution in Columbia. She was in her second year of teaching, the first of which she was the Spanish teacher (for all students) at Gibson. That position was eliminated at the school, and this was her first year as an ESL teacher.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Paradigm and Paper Approach

This was a qualitative study of the experiences of four elementary school students in transition from ESL. Since the topic of the experiences of students that have transitioned out of ESL has not been the central focus of previous work, there existed no single theoretical perspective to guide a linear study of the experiences of the four students involved in this research. Consequently, this paper involved an emergent design paradigm. In an emergent design paradigm, the researcher adjusts her plans and strategies in response to what she is learning at the research site (Merz, 2002). Specifically, at various points during the research process, I chose to adjust the methodology (including both data collection and data analysis), research questions, and my use of related literature in order to honor the perspectives of the participants and to allow me to move towards some understanding of their experiences.

The accounts of the four student participants in this study are cases that can help contribute to some understanding of the experiences of students that transition from ESL programs. To guide this decision, I have looked to the recommendations of Stake (2006). More specifically, I have chosen to include all four cases because I think all four cases provide opportunities to learn more about the experiences of students as they transition from ESL programs. In addition, the cases are all relevant to the topic of this thesis, and

each case brings diversity to the overall picture of students' experiences. In this thesis, the students' unique stories will shine light on each others', and the teachers' perspectives will offer a way for a reader to see how those stories are played out in the classroom each day. Together, these perspectives will offer a picture of silencing through isolation and early pivotal experiences. While I acknowledge that this picture is only one picture of the experiences of the four students, and the picture itself can only be a partial picture, this is the picture that became my thesis after I looked at these data through the following research questions.

Research Questions

The emerging themes of isolation, silencing, and early pivotal experiences made the development of two of the three initial research questions necessary. One of the research questions I began with asked how the students described the development of the self during the transition out of ESL programs. However, for reasons that I have not fully explored, the data I collected did not inform this question. More specifically, the students did not discuss changes in their identities during the transition from ESL, but rather changes in their identities as students during key pivotal moments that were important to them. Therefore, in this thesis I investigate what may have happened with students' identities as students during these key pivotal moments.

In my investigation of what may have happened with students' identities as students during key pivotal moments at school, I viewed the construct of identities as multiple, fluid senses of self that are constantly constructed through interactions. These interactions can be with another individual or with a group of others that is either specific

or generalized (Mead, 1934). In other words, identities are in part constructed “through the taking of the attitudes of others” (Mead, 1934, p. 250). In addition, this view of identities involves internal interactions with the self. Urrieta (2007), building on Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) as well as Bakhtin (1981), argued that “self-making is part of the internal dialogue by which people make sense of who they are” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 118). In developing my research question related to identities, I therefore aimed to investigate part of what may have happened with students’ multiple and dynamic identities during the key pivotal moments that they described.

My third research question also developed. Originally, I wondered how students’ relationships might have shifted during the transition out of ESL programs. Again, I found that the transition out of ESL programs was not as significant to the participants as the overall organization of interactions at school.

In this paper, I investigate in particular how the school and teachers’ overall organization of interactions between the students and between students and their teachers served to isolate and therefore silence the participants. For the students, this was where the transition from ESL programs was significant. Below are the research questions I will investigate in this thesis.

- What are the experiences of students that have transitioned out of ESL programs?
- What happens with the students’ identities as students during moments or relationships that are pivotal and important for students?
- How do the students describe their negotiation of relationships with people as well as their interactions with institutions within schooling?

Study Procedures: Data Collection Overview

In order to increase validity, the study involved both multiple data collection methods and multiple data sources. Glesne (1999) described the practice of selecting multiple methods and sources of data as triangulation. Triangulation allows for an increase in the confidence of the results of a study. Triangulation for this study involved three interrelated qualitative research methods (interviews, participant observations, and document collection) and two types of data sources (students and teachers).

I collected data through two interviews with each student, one interview with each of their classroom teachers, and one interview with the ESL teacher at the school. I participated in and observed a writing group for the four students that took place during their writing block and I sometimes observed the students in Ms. Parker's class as they worked during their literacy time. During my 19.5 hours of observations, I usually interacted with the students about their work.

Data collection included both interviewing and participant observation. Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) argued that these two techniques are interrelated and that investigators can use both to develop a deeper understanding of a participant's views of a particular topic or experience. In addition, data collection involved some document collection. These documents were produced in the writing group as part of the study. In the writing sessions, each student worked on short writing pieces related to the topic of his or her experience of transition out of an ESL program.

During the research, data collection was one of the elements of the study that emerged. For example, instead of addressing topics according to a schedule, I decided to allow the students to direct the nature and pace of the writing done in the writing group.

These shifts lead me to literature addressing spatiotemporal organization (Wortham & Contreras, 2002). After finding out in this literature that Latino/a students may feel more comfortable working in fluid spatiotemporal organization, I adjusted the methodology to include for example, multiple tasks and conversations occurring simultaneously during the writing group. Similarly, when I noticed that one student preferred to write his responses to my oral questions, I looked to literature that discussed passive bilingualism (Valenzuela, 1999). Since this literature described passive bilingual students as often feeling more comfortable expressing their thinking in text rather than in speech, I adjusted the interview methods to include the option of written responses. Several of the students elected to take this option for portions of the interviews.

Data Collection: Writing and Participant Observation

The writing group brought the student participants together for conversations and writing as a group. Glesne (1999) made the point that children often engage in conversation more easily when they are in a group situation. The writing group setting allowed me to observe interactions between students and allowed for the students to share their work and experiences with each other. In this writing group, I participated to a high degree.

Participant observation that involves a relatively high level of participation, in which the researcher is part of the social setting, can allow for a more accurate interpretation of participants' experiences. For example, participant observers are able to connect participants' interview responses with their actions, to modify interview questions based on participants' actions, to see patterns of behavior, and most importantly

to establish relationships of trust with the participants. Furthermore, choosing to remain on the margins of a social setting can lead to a situation in which the participants perceive the researcher to be exploiting them (Glesne, 1999). Glesne (1999) argued, “The more you participate, the greater your opportunity to learn” (p. 44). The greater opportunity to learn, paired with the potential benefits for the students, led me to choose participant observation methods for this study.

The four students and I met from about 8:30-9:15am in a small alcove inside Ms. Parker’s classroom that served as an individual and small group workspace for students throughout the day as well as an office and storage space for a teacher assistant. I facilitated the writing group, which took place during all students’ regular writing period on Thursdays and Fridays for four weeks. Ms. Parker selected these days for the writing group because these were days on which she did not teach a writing lesson and the students worked on their ongoing writing projects. Ms. Parker and Ms. Blue set the time for the writing group. I believe that Ms. Parker wanted us to work in the alcove with the door open, but the student participants usually got up and closed the door early in the sessions.

The idea for a writing group came about when the principal and I discussed my research interests. It was important to the principal and the teachers involved that the students receive what they saw as potential academic benefit from participation in the study, and writing was an area identified by the principal and the ESL teacher as having the greatest potential benefit for the student participants and for the school. High researcher participation involving writing with students is one approach to qualitative research with young children. For example, Katz and DaSilva Iddings (2009) engaged

with students in a study involving oral and written storytelling in an elementary school. They explained that their high level of participation with the students, which often involved close readings of the students' writing, allowed them to demonstrate to the students their validation of the students' own experiences.

The teacher that was to host the writing group was excited about the writing group element of the study methodology. Ms. Parker was conducting an action research study with her students in math as part of her own coursework, and thought that my being in the classroom during literacy time rather than in the afternoons would prevent her students from being "inundated" with interviewing. My interaction with the students was important to Ms. Parker in particular; she did not want "a creeper" in her classroom.

Ms. Parker was excited about being involved in the research and often wanted to discuss the study design, purpose, and timeline. She was disappointed that she would not be able to have access to the data for her own instructional purposes. In addition, she often described her classroom as a "laboratory" and critiqued classroom visitors that sometimes performed what she described as exploitative actions such as taking photographs of students and shuffling through students' desks. We had candid and explicit conversations on an almost daily basis about my roles in the classroom, and she described our research relationship as a "partnership" and an "eternal bond". Ms. Parker was very interested and involved in the entire study.

Before beginning the study, I observed Ms. Parker's literacy block for about 20 hours, or for about two hours about one day per week. In addition, I attended special events, recess, and lunch with the class. I drafted prompts for the writing group that addressed my research questions and matched the format for personal narrative writing

instruction in Ms. Parker's class. For example, some of my prompts and probes began with language parallel to prompts used in class, such as, "Tell about a specific time when..." Ms. Parker and the principal reviewed my prompts before the study began, and I adjusted the nature and priority order of the prompts according to their suggestions (see Appendix A for the prompts from the writing group).

In the writing group, I provided each student with a composition notebook that I collected at the end of each session as data. I also provided the students with sticky notebooks and pens in case they wanted to add writing to their notebooks outside of the group meeting time. Three of the students added writing with their sticky notebooks, which included endings for pieces that they did not get to finish before the end of the group, thoughts they had about a previous topic between group meetings, or clarifications related to things they wrote during a group meeting. At the end of the study, I had collected about 11 pages of handwritten writing from Paola, 10 pages from LJ, 17 pages from Karla, and 21 pages from Cindy.

The writing was done as quick writes. More specifically, the students wrote a small amount about a common topic related to their transition from ESL. Written pieces ranged in length from one sentence to several pages. In addition, the students wrote small amounts about individual topics in which they became interested, and they sometimes wrote small amounts when I asked them to clarify, explain, or expand upon something from their writing in the writing group. Writing took the form of paragraphs, bulleted lists, and comments inside graphics such as boxes and speech bubbles. Students that chose to draw during the writing group sometimes created drawings related to their written stories or their interview responses. At other times, some students seemed to

draw in their notebooks during group discussions or interviews for enjoyment. For example, Cindy worked on a scene of a horse in a field in one case because she felt she had not had enough time to work on a similar project in art class.

We discussed the topics and the students' ideas about the topics as a group before, during, and/or after the writing. The students decided when to write and when to discuss, how much to write, whether or not they would write about a topic, when to read their writing to the group, as well as when to write on a new topic. During the majority of the writing group time, there were multiple prompts and conversations taking place.

Sometimes the students brought a class assignment to the group to show or to work on. I did not suggest that the students revise or edit any part of their writing. Three of the students included drawings in their writing. The writing was done in about eight colors of ballpoint pen and about seven colors of thin marker. I read their writing during the group if students asked me to read it or if they allowed me to read it after I asked to read it. Most often, they shared their writing and ideas with each other, but in many cases they asked me to read a piece in private after the group or in private during the group.

After each group meeting, I read all of the writing and wrote on a sticky insert back to each student. This allowed me to ask for clarification or expansion on an issue as well as to communicate to the students that I was carefully reading their writing and that I was their audience for the research study. This was also an additional way for me to build a relationship with individual students. For example, after the students agreed that a shared past teacher was excellent because she shared about her personal life, I began to add something about myself to some inserts. In some cases, a student would smile at me, remove it from the notebook, and put it in his or her pocket for another purpose.

On three days, I did not meet with the students as a whole group. In these cases, upon my arrival either Ms. Parker or one or more of the students expressed a need to work individually on class assignments rather than in the writing group. If this was the case, the remaining students worked in the writing group or I observed the students working on their classroom assignments. These classroom interactions allowed for the emergence of multiple roles in my relationships with some of the students. LJ and Karla, in particular, learned to ask for the role that they wanted from me at any given point, whether that was fellow writer interested in hearing ideas for future creative writing projects, gatekeeper with access to assignment conventions that would allow their work to move forward in class, or sounding board for a rare long-lasting discussion about a text.

Data Collection: Interviewing

I interviewed each student individually two times in Ms. Parker's alcove while the classroom was empty. Interviews of Ms. Parker's students took place during recess or lunch. Ms. Parker selected these times in order to minimize the risk of the students missing out on instructional time in the classroom. I interviewed Ms. Blue's student during the regular writing group time on days that the writing group did not take place. Students selected their own interview times and days. I ate lunch with two of the students in the alcove during their interviews because the students requested that we do so. Formal student interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 65 minutes, depending on when the students needed to return to class. Total interview times were 75 minutes for LJ, 70 minutes for Karla, 50 minutes for Paola, and 110 minutes for Cindy. Interviewing each

student twice allowed the students to revise thinking and allowed us to postpone or revisit topics. I informally asked Cindy and Paola a few short questions individually on the playground on the last day of the research in order to clarify a couple of points related to the data analysis. During the student interviews, we discussed topics such as ESL and how it was similar to or distinct from other parts of the school day, the transition from ESL, and school, teachers, and the students themselves in general (see Appendix B for the Student Interview Guide).

Glesne (1999) noted that audio taping can be intimidating and obtrusive for participants. In order to reduce intimidation during the student interviews, I did not use video or audio taping with the student participants. I took handwritten notes during the student interviews. In this paper, I distinguish portions of students' comments that were direct quotations with quotation marks.

I interviewed each teacher individually during her planning time, which was a time during the school day when the teacher was alone. Each teacher selected her own interview day and time. Interview durations were 20 minutes for Ms. Blue, and 40 minutes each for Ms. Parker and Ms. Hart. In order to maintain my full attention on the conversation and to ensure that I accurately documented the teachers' comments, I audio taped the interviews with the teachers and transcribed the interviews. The teachers consented to be taped, and I turned off the audio recorder at Ms. Blue's request during a portion of her interview. During the teacher interviews, we discussed topics such as ESL, the exiting process, and teaching students in transition from ESL (see Appendix C for the Teacher Interview Guide). In this paper, all teacher comments are direct quotations.

Lofland et al. (2006) described intensive interviewing as involving “ordinary conversation and listening during the course of social interaction and semi-structured interviewing involving the use of an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions that direct conversation” (p. 17). I used an interview guide for semi-structured interviews with the students and teachers. Glesne (1999) emphasized that qualitative interviewing does and should involve adjusting the interview schedule during the course of the research. During each interview, I made minor adjustments to the initial interview guides in response to the flow of the conversation, such as adjustment of topic ordering and insertion of additional follow up questions. For guidance on question wording, ordering, and revising, I used the work of Weiss (1994).

Study Procedures: Data Analysis

In addition to the data collection being emergent, the data analysis for this paper was emergent. For example, I used the writing, student interviews, and teacher interviews for triangulation, or validation of findings (Glesne, 1999). For triangulation, I originally planned a grounded theory approach, which Charmaz (1995) described as developing conceptual categories that arise from consistent patterns in qualitative data. Since I was hoping to find these consistent patterns with which to inductively develop grounded theory, late in the study I looked at the students’ accounts as having what I perceived to be holes. In other words, I began to think of the participants as objects that must certainly have thought about the things I wanted them to have thought about. I began to feel very uncomfortable with my calculations about how to “get it out of them” or how to re-examine the data for “it” when “it” was just not there. I felt like I was

inflicting abuse when I would re-visit topics with a student that we both knew we had already covered. I felt the students become either frustrated with my unwillingness to listen to them or threatened by my unwillingness to respect what they were offering. I tried to push each relationship to the relationship I had developed with one student. It took me a while to see that a plurality of relationships between researcher and participant and a plurality of participant experiences is part of the excitement of qualitative research. When I abandoned the grounded theory paradigm in favor of emergent design, I honored the students in trying to make the research fit their experiences rather than trying to make their experiences fit the research.

I collected four types of data:

1. Field notes from the participant observations
2. Interview notes from student interviews
3. Interview transcripts and audio recordings from teacher interviews
4. Students' writing documents from the writing group

I typed field notes and student interview notes immediately after each session, using my handwritten field notes and interview notes as a guide. In the field notes from the writing group, I documented connections between conversations and specific portions of the students' writing. Sometimes I typed the field notes after leaving the site and sometimes I typed the field notes at the site while waiting for an interview. I transcribed the audio recordings of the teacher interviews several days after the interviews.

I qualitatively coded the data and looked for emerging patterns in the data, guided by strategies suggested by Glesne (1999), Lofland et al. (2006), and Weiss (1994). I searched for negative cases and disconfirming evidence in the data. I compared the

themes that emerged in each of the four sources of data to triangulate across the data. I searched for differences in themes in each of the four sources of data.

For this paper, I used multiple case study analysis to analyze the data. Stake (2006) emphasized that triangulation is a researcher's effort to make sure that the interpretations are valid. In this analysis, I have made an effort to triangulate both within and between cases. For example, I often looked for repetition of a finding regarding a case between different types of data such as student interview comments, student writing, and teacher interview comments.

I have chosen to organize the cases around each of the general points in this paper because I think that each general point is informed by major contributions from different cases. In addition, the teachers' perspectives contribute to several of the general points. Through this approach, the cases will offer a general understanding of the experiences of the four students as they transition from ESL programs. Stake (2006) argued that in multiple case study analysis, "Previous studies and interpretations may appear throughout the report without having a special section" (p. 81). In this paper, I will use previous studies and interpretations throughout the analysis of the findings in order to allow for a potentially better understanding of the general points presented.

CHAPTER 3

ARGUMENT AND FINDINGS

I did not realize it at the time, but the students first communicated what was most important to them about the transition from ESL on the first day of the writing group. After analysis of all of the data from this study, those first few comments speak most clearly to me about what they saw as significant about their transition. The writing topic I brought up for this first session was, “What was the best thing about ESL and how is it the same or different for you now?” A conversation struck up right away, and the four of them enthusiastically agreed that the best thing about ESL was being with their friends and cousins. In their transition from ESL programs, the four students had been essentially isolated from those friends and cousins, as well as from each other, and they were not happy about it.

Conditions of Isolation

Isolation was an assumption that evolved during this study through the students’ accounts. Early in the study, I became frustrated when students did not mention what I expected them to mention about the transition from ESL. Instead of discussing academic aspects of school, all four of them were adamant in their assertions that the most significant thing about the transition from ESL was the increased isolation from their bilingual peers. I initially resisted the centering of isolation because I had not expected to

even find it. When I finally began to listen to what the students were saying, the assumption of conditions of isolation became an important part of the analysis. After taking on what the students were telling me about their isolation from each other and from their bilingual peers, I subsequently looked at the data as it may have related to isolation as I was collecting it. Since it was of primary importance to the students, I decided to make isolation of primary importance for the research and for this thesis.

Isolation is a condition that I observed and the participants described both between and within classes. One way in which students were isolated was between classes. Like at many elementary schools, the process of sorting students into the classrooms in which they would spend each day of the year was a local process. A committee of teachers that included one classroom teacher from each grade level sorted students into classroom assignments. The teachers used what they knew about the students as well as sorting guidelines they developed to assign students to classrooms for the year. According to Ms. Parker, the students that were currently and formerly in ESL programs were homogenously grouped according to ESL program status, math and reading standardized test scores, and “behavior”. She further emphasized that in her combination 4th/5th grade classroom, the committee wanted “no extremes”. In other words, the three students that had transitioned out of ESL programs were “clustered” together in Ms. Parker’s classroom. Because students in this school spent the vast majority of their school day in their assigned classrooms, this arrangement isolated students that had transitioned out of ESL from the students currently in ESL that they had been working with in ESL programs.

According to Ms. Parker, Cindy was “separated”, or mistakenly placed in Ms. Blue’s classroom because the committee was not aware that she had ever been in ESL. Consequently, she was the only student that had ever been in ESL in Ms. Blue’s classroom. In this study, this special case of double isolation (from both transitioned peers and peers in ESL) can contribute to an understanding of students’ experiences in transition.

Cindy’s case will offer important insight into the condition of between class isolation. However, the three students in this study that were not isolated between classrooms were nevertheless isolated from each other within the classroom. First of all, the students and teachers described students’ work as individual. For example, Ms. Blue explained that when students transition out of ESL programs, “they are progressing to that point where they can be allowed to do more independent work.” In another comment, Ms. Blue mentioned that “small groups” were a condition that teachers might set up for a student “if it warranted something like that to get the extra help they need.” Paola confirmed the individual nature of class work, writing that she was able to “share more ideas” when she got to work in groups, which she rarely had an opportunity to do in the classroom.

In addition to the individual work contributing to students’ isolation, the students were physically isolated from each other as well. I observed three seating arrangements assigned by Ms. Parker, and in each of the three arrangements of five clusters of about five desks each, LJ, Karla, Paola, and the student currently in ESL (who was placed in Ms. Parker’s classroom because the committee mistakenly thought the student was going to be transitioned out of ESL) were seated at separate table clusters. I did not ask Ms.

Parker about her seating assignments, but my colleague with math expertise calculated that the likelihood of the four bilingual students being isolated by table three arrangements in a row by chance is about six millionths of a percent. Of current and former students of ESL, Ms. Blue reported, “They do seem to flock together. You know, they are pretty well-knit.” She went on to say that since Cindy was the only former or current student of ESL in her classroom that year, “It really has not been a problem at all.” When I asked her to elaborate on this “problem”, she clarified, “We’ve had to at times have to ask them to speak English when they’re, you know, here.” According to Ms. Blue, she had fortunately “absolutely not” had to enforce the English-only policy in her classroom that year and Cindy’s linguistic isolation had been very beneficial for Cindy “because she’s the only one, and because, you know, she doesn’t really have an opportunity to do that within the class.” Ms. Parker did not mention an English-only policy in her classroom, but she stated that Spanish “can’t be avoided” when Karla and her mother, who often visited her younger daughter’s classroom across the hall, “speak Spanish back and forth openly in the hallway.” These comments and observations suggest that bilingual students were not only isolated between classrooms, but within classrooms as well. Further, they suggest that bilingual students may have been isolated from each other at least in part due to their bilingualism.

Approaches of Silencing

In this section, I will describe how students approached their conditions of isolation. Quach, Jo, and Urrieta (2009) conducted a study with nine immigrant and U.S.-born Asian students. Upon entering school in the United States, each was fluent in

his or her heritage language of Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Tagalog, or Korean. Some of the students had been in ESL programs but some had never been in ESL programs. All of the students experienced conditions of racial isolation at school, and all approached that isolation with shifts in their identities. For example, the students “chose whiteness”, which involved choosing white friends, learning Standard English, and changing their appearances in order to “gain access to the dominant culture” (Quach et al., 2009, p. 126). In addition, the students also described shifts towards identities that were dominant at school in terms of social class and gender. All of the students described themselves as having either multiple or hybridized identities. Furthermore, the students’ identity shifts were heavily influenced by messages that the students received from educators and students at the school about race, class, and gender.

The students’ shifts in their identities occurred during periods of transition in that study, and the students experienced isolation at school. In the current study, the students in transition also experienced conditions of isolation. While the study by Quach et al. (2009) focused on the topic of racial identities and indicated that the students approached their isolation during transitions with shifts in their identities, in this study I did not investigate how students’ identities may have evolved during their transition from ESL programs, and I did not investigate students’ racial identities. Instead, I found that the four students involved in the current study seemed to approach their isolation with various types of silencing. There is some existing research related to bilingual students’ approaches of silencing at school. For example, Katz and DaSilva Iddings (2009) found that elementary students learning English were either silent or hesitant to speak English in the classroom because the use of English held high status in the classroom. In the

current study, the students used a similar approach to their conditions, but the conditions that I will demonstrate they were approaching involved isolation.

The students in this study approached their conditions of isolation with silencing. Types of silencing in response to conditions of isolation included students concealing their feelings at school, silencing their oral participation, and silencing their written expression. Furthermore, conditions at the school involved a systematic rewarding of silencing, which further influenced students' silencing.

For Karla, silencing involved keeping secrets about herself from her teachers and peers. The biggest secret that she silenced was that "I don't feel so comfortable in America as in Mexico." She explained that she couldn't talk about her discomfort at school "because they're American. And I don't think they'll want to talk to me anymore." She said of her discomfort, "It's your private secret. You don't tell anybody." Other students seemed to be silent about certain topics at school as well. For example, Cindy enjoyed talking and writing with me about what she perceived to be forbidden topics such as dating, bodily functions, and stealing money.

For LJ, silencing was an approach he took in his writing and speaking, despite his love for communication through writing and telling stories. First, LJ seemed to silence his ideas by way of his classroom writing assignments. For instance, at two separate occasions late in the study he asked me to sit with him for over an hour to listen to him and watch him work on his biographical essay. During our discussions about a text that he was using to research Babe Ruth, he told me orally that Babe Ruth "had trouble in school because the other boys laughed at him" for knowing "little English." We discussed Babe Ruth's German language dominance and immigrant status and how LJ

thought it must have been very difficult for Babe Ruth to attend his boarding school. However, when it came time to record his thoughts onto his assignment, LJ wrote, “He had trouble in school,” eliminating his reasoning for that trouble. This was but one instance in which I observed the students silencing their written work about what they may have perceived to be forbidden topics. In this case, I think his silencing about Babe Ruth’s bilingualism and related “trouble” in his formal writing contributes to an understanding of LJ’s own experiences in transition from ESL programs.

LJ greatly enjoyed writing, but was frustrated with how writing was going for him at school. It seemed to me that LJ was discontent about writing at school because of his approach of silencing his ideas in his writing. On the first day of our writing group, LJ wrote, “Writing is one of my favorite things.” He wrote about how he loved to use his imagination in his writing. Of writing in the classroom that year, he wrote, “What makes it harder now is the essays. They are hard because they are very long. They are long and they are very long to copy and to make changes. Because they can be sloppy on the first draft.” He turned his notebook towards me, his usual signal that he wanted me to silently read what he had written. Following our newly emerged pattern of dialogue, I verbally asked LJ, “How do you know if it’s sloppy?” He continued in his notebook, “You can find out by the teacher.” Again, he slid it around to me, and I followed up once again with, “How do you feel when that happens?” He added and showed me, “When they say that I feel frustrated.” Although he did not articulate to me that his feeling about teachers’ reactions to his writing influenced his silencing, I think that his feeling about their reactions likely reinforced his approach of silencing his ideas.

I observed this feeling of frustration in LJ's written work for the classroom. After receiving Ms. Parker's comments on his class writing, LJ would often erase entire sections in response to an editing comment on something such as the spelling of a single word. For example, in an essay about his aspirations and accomplishments, in which he discussed his goals of going to college so he can "have a good job", LJ erased his entire paragraph due to a note about the spelling of "coledge". When I arrived on one morning, Ms. Parker pointed at his writing and let out a big sigh before lamenting over his conventions such as indentation and spelling. After she left, he added a sentence that demonstrated what was more important to him than conventions, that Babe Ruth, the topic of his essay, "was also important because people respected him because he was kind."

Related to his frustration with writing convention, LJ also wrote that he did not like to read his writing out loud in the classroom. Overnight, I added a sticky message into his notebook that asked, "Dear LJ, How do you feel when you have to read something out loud?" He wrote back the following day, "I feel embarrassed when I read something out loud. That is why I do not read my story in class." Although LJ often preferred to write his responses to my questions in his notebook and seemed to enjoy our unique pattern of dialogue, he sometimes shared his writing out loud with the writing group. Karla knew about his silencing when it came to his writing before I picked up on it, and interjected to protect him from my first request for him to share something. The other writing group members understood his oral brevity as well. In one instance, for example, during a discussion centered on talking with their parents about the study the group had a friendly mutual giggle when LJ contributed with a nod and the single word,

“Good.” This suggests that not only did LJ self-silence in his written communication, but in his oral communication as well.

In addition to silencing in his writing and speaking in class, LJ was also looking to silence himself in the research. LJ and I found a wonderful pattern of verbal questioning, response writing, and non-verbal signaling to communicate with during the writing group. The interview, however, caused LJ extreme anxiety. In the days leading up to the interview, we would discuss as a group the location, time, and format of each student’s interview, which was always a popular topic amongst the three girls. However, LJ would consistently comment, “I’m not ready! I’m not ready!” regarding the interview. When I asked him what he knew about interviews, I found out that he equated them with the oral speaking test administered to him at the end of his ESL program. He even said that the best thing about transitioning from ESL was not having to “do any more of those big tests.” He wrote about this test being a very unpleasant experience for him, and he spent the majority of our first interview facing away from me, his body towards the wall, even as he shared detailed personal stories. Even with my assurances about the interview’s distinction from a test, he did not begin to trust those assurances until late into the study, when he was able to confirm my assertions that no evaluation would occur with his group writing, his comments, or his class work.

Although LJ did not articulate his reasoning for his verbal silencing as clearly as Karla did, he did say that as he was becoming bilingual at school, “It was really hard. Because when I wanted to say something I didn’t really know how to say it.” LJ told me that he really wanted to “explain” his stories during writing time, but did not feel comfortable sharing them out loud. He said that he “could enjoy it more. Tell your

story.” These comments indicate his discontent with his silencing in school; he wanted to share his ideas more often but did not feel comfortable doing so within his conditions.

In fact, all three of the students in Ms. Parker’s class seemed to be relatively silent during class time as compared to their monolingual peers. Over the course of the entire study, I only heard LJ make one offer to a class discussion, which was the single word “to”. When Ms. Parker informed the class that she wanted to hear something from everyone during a test preparation lesson, Paola volunteered within seconds a single letter answer of “F”, which Ms. Parker followed up on by taking over with a lengthy explanation of the text accompanying choice “F” and the reasoning for choosing “F”, otherwise known as, “Learning more about emperor penguins.” The single contribution I noticed Karla make to a whole class lesson took place during a tangent on Louis Pasteur from a read aloud. Ms. Parker asked the class, “Does anyone know of a food or a drink that is pasteurized?” Karla offered, “It means taking the bad stuff out of something.” Ms. Parker responded, “Yeah, but does anyone know a food or a drink that is pasteurized?” Someone else said, “Milk,” and Ms. Parker, satisfied, “Yeah, milk,” went on with the story.

Educators’ comments matched these observations of the students’ silence in class. For example, Ms. Parker’s teacher assistant asked me, “They’re sweet kids, aren’t they?” continuing regarding Paola specifically, “I don’t think I’ve ever heard that girl say a word. She must have an IEP [Individualized Education Plan for students with exceptionalities].” In other words, this educator assessed that Paola’s silencing was so extreme that she must have a “disability”. I found out that in the six months during

which the assistant teacher had worked in Paola's classroom, she had never once heard her say a word or even raise her hand to speak.

Karla shared with me her thought processes while silencing herself in class. During our interview, she was discussing how she and the other 4th graders had debated why they were sorted into the 4th/5th grade combination classroom. The exchange is worth including in its entirety because it contributes an understanding of her reasoning for silencing.

Karla: "I never thought I'd be in" this class. "It's not because we're smart. That's what the 4th graders thought. That's part of it. But we're one of the good students."

Amy: What do you mean by that?

Karla: "I wasn't that good on my grades. But I was one of those nice students."

Amy: "You were?"

Karla: "Sometimes I just get bored." I sit quietly "so they can still think I'm paying attention. That's the problem. I can't get out of it."

Amy: What do you mean by that?

Karla: "Can't get out of my daydreaming." But "I don't have any other choice to do. Sometimes I don't know what to say. But I really do want to talk. But I'm nervous. Sometimes I stay quiet because I'm afraid I'll say the wrong answer."

Karla's comments reveal that her choice to silence herself in the classroom was not one she would have preferred to make. She was very clear that she did not want to silence herself, and she described her silencing as a problem that she could not escape. Furthermore, her comments suggest that her silencing lead her to a state of "daydreaming" in class, a state which I unfortunately did not think to ask her to discuss, but a state that she clearly saw as problematic for her. Later in this paper, I will demonstrate how this choice to silence herself was influenced by her condition of

isolation from her bilingual peers. This influence will become clear when Karla and the ESL teacher describe Karla's approaches when she was able to escape the isolation of the classroom.

Similar to Karla's view of the "nice" student as a silent student, Paola and LJ also seemed to perceive benefits involved with being silent in school. Ms. Parker talked about these two students:

Ms. Parker: "LJ and Paola are just more quiet in general. They're just quieter students...Because they've kind of learned that, I don't know, that staying quiet is just as good in school. Like that's..."

Amy: "What do you mean by that?"

Ms. Parker: "LJ said that other kids can be noisy and if he's quiet that's good. That's a sign of being good."

Amy: "How about Paola?"

Ms. Parker: "She's just rock, I mean she's silent. That's her technique to, she's just silent. Silent."

Paola was the most silent of all the students. She said, "I'm quiet sort of. I don't talk that much. I can, but I sometimes just don't feel like it." Ms. Hart, who knew the three students in Ms. Parker's class, said that Paola was especially quiet. Paola stood out to Ms. Hart in that, "When I was speaking to her in Spanish even, she was saying, 'Yes,' or 'No.' She's to the point with me. She's not open to me. Never. No." Paola was also the most quiet during the research, sometimes turning me away from entire topics.

Ms. Hart, the ESL teacher at the school, said that this silencing was typical of most of the bilingual students that she had worked with at the school. From her perspective, this silencing was due in part to their isolation at school.

Ms. Hart: [I]n the classroom where all the kids speak English, they were *so timid and quiet*...So I'd say they are a little bit insecure when they are in their classrooms. They're *quiet...don't talk*...

Amy: Why do you think they're so quiet? Timid like you said?

Ms. Hart: I think because I'm ELL (laughs), I'm ELL too. Afraid of not saying the right thing. Of being made fun of. So they're afraid of that.

In addition to isolation at school, Ms. Hart also felt that the relationships between bilingual students' families and the school were a factor in students' silencing at school. She argued that legal status affected what happened with the Latino/a students and their parents and schooling, with legal status being connected to fear. She said that this fear was an additional factor in silencing:

My Hispanic families, the majority are not legal. Also they have a fear, you know, so they, if something happened to their kid or to them, they do not say anything. Cause they are afraid of, you know, immigration. So they never say anything. They do not know about their rights... When the kids are being bullied and everything they just say, well, what can they do... I think if their families feel confident and they feel secure here and they feel that they can speak if they have any problems, I think the students will feel that too.

While the reasons for their silencing certainly must have been multiple and complex, these data demonstrate that the students' silencing was at least in part an approach to their conditions of isolation at school.

Tragic Noise

Thus far, I have argued in this paper that the students that transitioned from ESL programs experienced a silencing through their isolation at school. Carola Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) argued that the transition out of bilingual programs can be an experience that is "difficult, disorienting, and anxiety-provoking" for immigrant students (p. 17). In this case, while their transition was from a monolingual ESL program

and they were not necessarily immigrant students, the four students' transition involved similar consequences as a result of their silencing. In this section, I will consider the implications of their silencing through isolation. I employed the term "Tragic" to describe the heading of this section because the students gave overwhelmingly tragic accounts of their own implications. I chose the term "Noise" for the subject of the heading of this section to indicate that the accounts of the students seemed to be easily missed or dismissed but could be heard if someone were to listen. I also intended for the term to convey that although the students were often silenced, they had a great deal to say about their situations. The information that I present in this section is information that I picked up in their written and spoken accounts. However, I am certain that like noise in any situation, I was only able to pick up a small and incomplete part from my singular perspective of what the students had to say about the topics of ESL, school, and transition. For me, "Tragic Noise" captures the sense that the information here is incomplete but at the same time important in its tragic implications for the students.

In addition to arguing that the students experienced tragic implications of their silencing, I will argue that the approach of silencing at school was an approach the students learned through early experiences at school, long before their transition from ESL. These early experiences seemed to operate as a pivot around which students constructed new additional identities as students at school.

Conchas (2001) investigated students' racial isolation at a high school and found that Latino/a students were isolated from each other as they were sorted into distinct programs. At that school, Latino/a students without access to their Latino/a peers experienced alienation and depression, whether in low or high track programs. In her

ethnography of a high school in California, Olsen (1997) found that students learning English felt stigmatized, unwelcomed, and anxious. In the current study, students expressed similar distress in their transition to increased isolation from their bilingual peers, even though each had been a student at the school for his or her entire school career.

The four students seemed to construct an additional identity of silenced student for negotiating Gibson Elementary early in their school careers. Interestingly, this seemed to occur during their transition into schools. Students that are experiencing major transitions often navigate those transitions by constructing new additional identities within their new social contexts. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) argued that children adapt to new contexts with identity shifts. Their work with immigrant students suggested that these identity shifts are the primary way that children adapt successfully to their new surroundings. That work indicated that ethnic identities are the most important identities in this process of adaptation, but I did not explore potential ethnic identity shifts that the students at Gibson may have experienced. Instead, I argue here that the four students acquired at least one additional identity – that of silenced student – in order to successfully adapt to their new surroundings at school. In other words, the students acquired the new approach of silence with which they could successfully navigate schools long before their conditions of isolation increased due to their transition from ESL.

When I listened to the students talking and writing about school, I noticed that they tended to bring up their early school experiences. A look at some of their early experiences will indicate that the students learned early on to approach school with a

silencing. In other words, the silencing with which they approached their increased isolation during their time of transition from ESL was a familiar approach. In the data, I was able to identify certain key pivotal experiences that related to silencing at school.

Karla most clearly described her early pivotal moment after which she decided to navigate school as a silenced student. In her case, the moment was an incident with her pre-school teacher during writing time. Eating fries and fish together, she shared with me “the secret” that she purposefully kept from others at school for the last five years: “The secret that I tell you that I don’t feel so comfortable in America as in Mexico.” When I asked her about keeping this secret, she explained that she does not talk about it at school, “because they’re American. And I don’t think they’ll want to talk to me anymore.” She said she could talk about her secret with her parents, because, “They’re Mexicans,” and they are also not teachers. In her notebook, I found, “I never told this to anybody but my Mom and Dad. This is one secret. I don’t feel good in America as in Mexico.” She described her thinking process when it came to silencing this specific feeling at school:

Karla: “Whenever I tell a teacher they always say, ‘Share it!’ And that’s when I say ‘nnnnn’ (shakes head, looking down).”

Amy: “Have you ever talked to a teacher about it? What happened?”

Karla: “Pre-school. I got all nervous and sweaty.” [She wrote about her feelings, and the teacher asked her to read her writing to the class.] The teacher said, “‘Want me to read it for you?’” I said, “‘Noooo.’ She said, ‘I’m sorry, you have to share it.’”

Amy: What happened then?

Karla: “The phone rang and said she had to go to a school meeting. That’s when I knew how to keep secrets. (with finality)”

Karla still thinks about this pivotal experience and this teacher. In a later conversation, she brought up the same teacher once again, saying, “That’s the one I hate a lot. I hope I never see her.”

In addition to Karla, LJ’s early experiences at school were significant for his identity as a student. In our interview, LJ explained that he has not always feared speaking at school:

Amy: Was there a time when you did not feel shy about telling your stories?

LJ: “In kindergarten. Because I was little. I used to just talk. I didn’t really know English.”

Amy: “What do you like better?”

LJ: “Kindergarten. We used to always share our stories.”

Amy: Have you ever shared your stories this year?

LJ: “This year we don’t really share stories any more.”

In this exchange, LJ reveals that his identity as student pivoted early in his career at the school. Although he did not describe the exact moment when he began silencing as Karla did, he did indicate the general time period, which was his first year at the school. While it is possible that the decrease in opportunity to “share stories” could be due largely in part to LJ’s progression through grade levels, LJ and all of the students described sharing stories in ESL class, which LJ did not have an opportunity to attend “this year”. In any case, I include these comments here not to analyze all possible reasons why LJ developed an additional identity as a silenced student, but rather to suggest that LJ developed an additional identity as a silenced student early in his school career, as evidenced by his account that he “used to just talk”.

Furthermore, his comments, paired with the dejected tone and body language he employed while stating them, indicate that he had likely been tragically discontent regarding sharing stories for four years. LJ's discontent surfaced during discussions of other topics as well. Throughout the course of the study, he repeated the tepid phrase "getting used to it" when he was referring to speaking English at school. Although he was bilingual in Spanish and English, and spoke "a whole bunch of Spanish" at home, he mentioned during an interview, "I used to speak Spanish. That's how I talked in kindergarten." His use of the past tense, along with his comments about speaking and sharing stories at school, indicate that LJ was less than content with his situation of silencing at school.

The silencing that the students took up in response to their isolation was compounded by the rewarding of that silencing at school. Cindy, for example, learned early on that silencing herself paid off at school. She described her first teacher as typical of most teachers: "really mean", defined as yelling a lot and not allowing talking. More specifically, she wrote of a "mean" teacher on a different day, "If you barely whispered to somebody she would say, 'No. Talking!'" Cindy said she dealt with this situation by staying quiet from then on.

This situation involved a systematic rewarding of silence paired with a systematic sanctioning of talking. First, silence in general was systematically rewarded by at least some teachers that the students had had. Cindy, for example, explained that the best thing about her favorite teacher of all time was what could be called a behavior management system that involved tangible rewards for silence. During our interview, she drew out a map of the classroom and demonstrated to me how tables competed for

popsicle sticks, which were tokens that could be exchanged for prizes. When I asked her how the tables acquired the sticks, she responded for “being quiet” and “putting our heads down” on the desks. She ended by proudly declaring that she was really good at getting those sticks. Ms. Parker also rewarded her class for their silence. This was reflected most clearly in a loud comment to me, which seemed to be more for the benefit of the class, as we stood at the side while the class prepared their desks for a lesson: “What an amazing class! Almost *too* quiet!”

The students also described sanctions for talking. Below is an excerpt from an interview with LJ that preceded his account of a pivotal moment in kindergarten when he got “in trouble” for talking.

Amy: “What advice would you have for a brand new teacher that has a student who just graduated from ESL coming into his or her class?”

LJ: “If she was mean?”

Amy: Any teacher.

LJ: “Try to control her temper. Like if you get really mad at somebody.”

Amy: “What kind of things do they get mad about?”

LJ: “Not paying attention or not doing the right things.”

Amy: What do you mean by the right things?

LJ: “Talking...” He details a story about getting in trouble for talking in kindergarten.

These rewards and sanctions demonstrate a systematic rewarding of student silencing. That systematic rewarding of silencing seemed to encourage the students’ approach of silencing at school. In this study, I did not investigate how the systematic rewarding of silencing at school may have impacted monolingual students or students that had never

been in ESL and how those impacts might have compared to the impact for students that were or had been in ESL. I also did not fully investigate the systematic rewarding of silencing at the school beyond the four students' accounts. However, for at least these four students, silencing, which was systematically rewarded, often involved at least emotional tragedy.

Cindy's case allows for some understanding of that tragedy. When I asked her if anything had been hard for her that year, Cindy responded firmly, "The people." When I probed a bit to try to understand what she meant, Cindy would only add, shutting down fast with her arms crossed and head facing down, "I got the bad people." Cindy's classroom teacher did not seem to pick up on Cindy's tragic noise, which may have been disguised by her silencing. Ms. Blue described Cindy as follows: "She's a very friendly person and has friends in the classroom and seems to be generally you know, a happy child. And happy to be in that classroom."

At least some of Cindy's emotional tragedy was due to her linguistic isolation. In a later writing group, Cindy talked about her class last year, mentioning that she and her best friend Adriana had great fun talking in Spanish across their table, until the teacher separated them for doing so. All four students talked about enjoying talking in Spanish in order to protect their conversations from teachers and monolingual peers, but Cindy especially loved to do so at school. That year, she was in isolation as the only Spanish-speaking student in her classroom, and was very down about not having the opportunity to speak Spanish with anyone in her class. When we talked about school for her in general that year, she sadly shrugged her shoulders and said, "It would be funner if somebody else knew it [Spanish]."

This linguistic isolation, which Ms. Blue felt was very beneficial for Cindy, was devastating from Cindy's perspective. When I asked Cindy how she felt when she found out she would not be going to ESL anymore, she said, "Kind of sad because Adriana was still going to go to that but me and Paola weren't." She named about a dozen of "the people" that she wanted to "get out" of her class in exchange for her bilingual peers Adriana and Paola. Cindy's linguistic isolation is a good example of a condition arising from what Gibson (1995b) described as "English only attitudes" within schools. Ms. Blue explained that she enacted an English only policy in her classroom each year. Corson (1993) would argue that Cindy's emotional devastation that resulted from her isolation might unfortunately lead to her disempowerment and mistaken attribution of her lowly status at school to what she perceives to be her innate inferiority. Nieto (2010) argued that an English only attitude contributes to silencing: "When particular languages are prohibited or denigrated, the voices of those who speak them are silenced and rejected as well" (p. 114). In other words, Cindy's voice was silenced by her linguistic isolation.

The students' accounts indicate emotional tragedy that resulted from students' silencing. In addition to emotional tragic noise, there was also some possible academic tragic noise, in this case communicated by the teachers in the study. Although all four students described themselves as academically successful and their teachers also described them as academically successful, their teachers worried that their silence would negatively affect their academic achievement. For example, Ms. Parker had this concern:

But sometimes that kid who's really annoying and noisy, at least you know what his problem is in math because he's going to tell you about it straight out. And LJ being so quiet sometimes scares me because I don't know where his problems are as much. Like until he does some paperwork and then I have to find it [the problem].

Both classroom teachers described their approach to this concern as communicating to students that the students could come to them to ask for academic help. For example,

Ms. Parker said:

[Paola's] been talking more to me in the morning time because she's the only one in here. So we'll talk and we'll get our little bit in. So that's my secret with her. I just have to make sure I'm in here when she gets in here in the morning so that we can have that time.

Although she felt she had successfully communicated this message to Paola, Ms. Parker still worried that the transitioned students' silencing prevented them from seeking academic help from her:

I've learned that I have to ask them, "Are you okay, do you need help with something?" And then they will take me up on that. But they won't come to me proactively and say, "I need help on this."

Ms. Blue, on the other hand, felt that Cindy and the rest of her former students that had transitioned from ESL programs felt comfortable asking her for academic help:

And I think they realize that, I mean you can ask any one of them, they'll tell you what my number one is. And they do have to have that safety net, that feeling that they're accepted and they can come to me for anything.

Interestingly, she described her "safety net" of relationships with students as a structured system of movement management:

It's that relationship building in the very beginning of school. It's the stressing of the fact that my number one is safety with kids. And I'd do everything that I can to ensure that students are safe. And I keep reiterating that throughout the school year. They keep hearing me say it. They keep knowing why I do things is because of their safety. The routine, the scheduling, the way I handle them getting up and down and the way that I handle them lining up and everything has to do with safety. With 26 students, you've got to, you've got to be pretty up on top of that.

These comments indicate that while the two classroom teachers had different perceptions of what encourages transitioning students to feel comfortable asking for academic help,

they both worried that transitioned students' silencing might cause their academic achievement to suffer.

The teachers' worry that former students of ESL may experience academic underachievement is certainly a cause for concern. The underachievement of students that have participated in pull out ESL programs is a chronic problem in the United States. For example, Thomas and Collier (1997) found, in their study of 700,000 students that had received bilingual or ESL education, that students that had been in pull out ESL programs, like the one at this elementary school, graduated high school between the 10th and 18th national percentiles. In a study involving 500 students in Florida, Abella (1992) found that students that were exited from ESL programs performed successfully after their transitions from ESL, especially compared with students still in ESL. However, despite the exited students' above-average grades, their teachers rated the exited students as below average in general aptitude, class work, and expected performance as compared to students that had never received ESL services. The teachers in the current study were concerned that silencing could lead to such academic underachievement, even if that underachievement was what Ms. Parker called "grade level" or "average".

Interestingly, the classroom teachers' comments about students' suffering were limited to academic achievement. Ms. Hart, on the other hand, worried that transitioning students' silencing might contribute to not only academic suffering, but emotional suffering as well. She shared a past experience with a 3rd grade student that was experiencing bullying at school. The student and her mother did not feel comfortable approaching the teacher about the problem. Consequently, according to Ms. Hart, her self esteem plummeted and her grades began to come back as failing because of what Ms.

Hart called a “snowball effect”. According to Ms. Hart, students that were transitioning out of ESL often faced academic underachievement and emotional distress as a direct result of their silencing. Furthermore, she emphasized in her account of the girl’s experience that teachers may not be aware of students’ silencing:

The mother didn’t know how to talk to the teacher. And she didn’t call me, she didn’t contact me. And the kid was hurt in her self esteem and to the point that she is now not doing well in her school and she doesn’t want to come to school for being bullied...When they do the stuff to you, they keep it to themselves. They don’t tell. Like this little girl, she kept it to herself and her mommy until she came to the conference and when she was going so *bad* in her grades, so the mom said, finally said, with tears in her eyes, was, “They are *bothering* her.” And the teacher didn’t have any *idea* about that [emphasis in original].

When I asked Ms. Hart how she thought teachers could help students feel more comfortable talking in class, she described what she saw at the heart of the problem:

You know, because of how works the classroom, they [teachers] *prefer* them to be quiet (laughs). Because they are the ones that keep this table nice, room, and sometimes they prefer the way like that because, “Oh my god, this is my perfect room, they are so quiet!” But they don’t think about, “Okay, yes, they maybe have lots of questions!” (laughs) So yes, and also I don’t know but I think the teachers always, you can ask anyone, they always make a comment, “I *love* the Hispanic kids. They are *so good!*” They sit quiet because maybe in their heads they’re thinking, well, *you* know (points at me) you are processing in the first one and then going to the second one (laughs), going back and forth, so this is a long process to understand...But yeah, teachers say, “They’re good! They’re my angels!” (laughs)

Her comments indicate that Ms. Hart worried about students that were silenced at school, and about teachers investigating the possible reasons for that silencing. Although Ms. Hart speaks of “Hispanic” students and Valenzuela (1999) wrote of immigrant students, Ms. Hart might agree that students’ dispositions of silence, which according to Valenzuela teachers often read as deference, politeness, or respect, are rather a reflection of their historical marginalization. Furthermore, as evidenced by her other comments comparing students’ silencing in the classroom, Ms. Hart, like Valenzuela (1999) viewed

this silence as an approach to schooling rather than as an inherent individual characteristic.

The tragic potential and actual consequences for students' silencing as evidenced by both their early pivotal experiences and the experience of increased isolation as they transition from ESL contributes to an understanding of students' transition from ESL. However, the experiences of students were certainly not all tragic. In the next section, I will investigate experiences that were significant for students in a positive way. These positive experiences seemed to me to be marked by a common theme of safety.

Safe Noise

Thus far, I have discussed early pivotal experiences that influence students' decisions to navigate school as silenced. However, I also talked with the students about early pivotal experiences that influenced students in a very different way. These experiences contribute to the understanding of students' experiences of transition because they present possibilities for students to feel safe and to therefore lift their own silencing. In addition, these safe pivotal experiences occurred with the same students that also described a pivotal experience that influenced silencing, which I argue indicates possibilities for moving forward away from silencing.

Karla and LJ described a similar early pivotal experience that involved a teacher's action of advocacy. On the day that Karla wrote about this pivotal experience, she jumped at my invitation for anyone to share their work at the end of the session, leaning over LJ and calling out, "I do, I do, I do!" Below is the text from her notebook:

First day of school! (Nervous) I wanted to go to ~~school~~ home. But I didn't. After days I felt like my life was a movie! I kept saying, "When is this movie going to

end?” But back to 2004. It started. Boys made fun of me for not knowing Spanish English. But I said in my mind, “Ugly boys,” in Spanish. But Ms. Harris yelled at them. I felt saved. Ms. Harris is the best teacher ever. Now I know that even if I’m big I’ll be her best student.

Karla carried this incident with her through the years, and thought about it when she heard that she would be beginning ESL. She wrote, “I felt excited because I wanted to learn English.” I wrote her back with, “Why were you excited to learn more English?” and she responded on a quick sticky note, “Because I wanted to know because some boys made fun of me.” The incident with Ms. Harris and the boys seemed to have lasting significance for Karla’s approach to school.

In transit between interviews one morning, I crossed paths with Ms. Harris, for whom I had volunteered in the past. Catching up as her students wait for each other to use the restrooms, I asked her how her year was going. Motioning towards her class, she responded, “I have a very diverse class, as you can see. I love it.” She mentioned in particular that she had several bilingual students in her classroom. She said there were many new things the kindergarten team had “taken on”, including some that were great and some that are “not so great”, which she said she dealt with by “just doing it, or just pretending I’m doing it.” She talked about how she had to do what she thought was best for her kids, and we seemed to further connect over our agreement on this point. It occurred to me at this point that Ms. Harris’s account of her own teaching commitments may have guided her role in Karla’s early pivotal experience of advocacy and safety and therefore influenced Karla’s approach to school over the years as well as for years to come.

Like Karla, LJ also had an early pivotal experience of teacher advocacy. According to LJ, “This kid was messing with me...He was making fun of me. Something

bad.” In this case, his first grade teacher approached the student’s teacher, advocating for LJ. In LJ’s words, “She went to tell his teacher and he got in trouble.” Due to this single incident, LJ described her as the best teacher of all time. This singular case of recognizing his distress and working to alleviate it created a feeling of safety for LJ.

Both Karla’s and LJ’s safe early pivotal experiences involved an interaction with a teacher. Valenzuela (1999) found that students’ relationships with teachers determined whether students viewed school as an alienating or a welcoming place. The accounts of Karla and LJ suggest that even a single interaction with a teacher can help students to view school as a welcoming place.

While these two early pivotal experiences each involved an incident of teacher advocacy, Cindy described an early pivotal experience that was a relationship with another student. She pinpointed their first interaction as a turning point in her approach to school. She walked me through her first day of school. Although she lived right beside the school, she was terrified upon arrival: “First day of school I would just sit right there in the corner and do nothing. I was shy.” She described her relief when Ivette asked her to “play blocks”. Ivette became her best friend, and the two were inseparable until Ivette moved to Mexico at the end of that year. Cindy was devastated to lose her best friend, an experience which she dealt with once again mid-study when Adriana, her current best friend that she spent years getting to know in ESL classes, moved to Florida. Cindy was so distressed about this experience that she seemed hardly able to participate in the study during the weeks surrounding the move, other than to write and talk about missing her friend. On the first day of the writing group, she wrote that the best part of ESL was Adriana. During her transition from ESL, Cindy had been upset about her

isolation from Adriana, who was still in ESL. During one writing group session, all Cindy could bring herself to write was, “Adriana left 2 days ago. I am still very sad that she left.” Her reaction to Adriana’s move demonstrates even more clearly the significance of her new isolation in transition. Clearly, relationships with her bilingual peers were very important to her, and those relationships had greatly influenced Cindy’s approaches to her conditions of isolation at school.

Even Paola, who did not share any early pivotal experiences with me, described her earliest school experiences in terms of relationships. When I asked her about when she first came to school, she opened up quite a bit: “Well I felt a little bit nervous, cause there was lots of kids there and I thought they were going to be mean.” She also said that the experience of “sitting with people I don’t want to sit with” was hard for her, “because of how they look...mean face, like mad. Mean.” I am not sure why Paola did not describe an early pivotal experience of safety. Perhaps one has yet to come, or perhaps our relationship was not a safe place for her to share one. In any case, for all four students, early school experiences were significant because of relationships.

Lifting Silencing

Thus far, I have argued that the students approached their conditions of isolation with various types of silencing, and those early pivotal experiences of relationship became important for the approach of silencing. In and of itself, this argument does not directly relate to the topic of transition from ESL programs. An examination of the students’ accounts of instances in which they chose to lift that silencing will contribute to some understanding of the significance of the transition from ESL programs. In this

section and the next, I will present evidence that suggests that students lifted their silencing because they had escaped their isolation. In other words, the students lifted their silencing through safe relationship. This indicates that the transition from ESL programs was significant for students because of the new isolation it involved.

In this study, I found that there were several things that lead to a lifting of silencing for the four students. Most significantly, attending ESL class itself was a situation in which all students lifted their silencing. While the four students began attending ESL at different times, attended different ESL classes, and had many different ESL teachers (four in just the last three years), attending ESL seemed to involve a lifting of silencing for all students. One of the students, Karla, still had an opportunity to occasionally attend ESL classes during the year of the study, although technically prohibited from doing so. I will demonstrate that these brief forays in ESL lead to a lifting of silencing for Karla, and her experience during those forays supports the argument that a lifting of silencing became possible in ESL class. In addition to ESL class, the students also seemed to lift their silencing in other cases in which they escaped isolation from each other and from their other bilingual peers. First, the students reported a lifting of silencing when allowed to work with their Spanish and English bilingual peers within their classrooms. Second, the research process lead to a lifting of silencing for some students. For example, students reported enjoying attending the writing group with each other, and talked and wrote a great deal during the group. In addition, some students shared things they had been silencing at school with me as researcher and with those that they saw to be the audience of my future written analysis. Finally, the students described unique relationships with teachers through which they chose to lift their

silencing. The lifting of silencing occurred in many situations. To me, a common characteristic of these situations in addition to safe relationship was an escape from isolation, which I will address in the next section.

A lifting of silencing was evident in how students talked about ESL. On the first day of the writing group, which involved much quiet watching as the students and I felt each other out, the first topic that students really grabbed and went forward with was a lifting of silencing in ESL. I asked the students how ESL was “different than now.” Cindy quickly responded, “You could just talk,” and Paola was nodding and grinning. The girls waxed on about memories of talking together in Ms. Lee’s class, on topics varying from Ms. Lee’s family history to children’s author Patricia Polacco’s writing craft. Over the course of the study, the students regularly continued to reminisce about interaction in ESL.

I noticed an assertion of enjoying interaction in ESL in their notebooks as well. For example, a favorite activity was putting on plays for each other as part of their curriculum. In a piece entitled, “About Plays,” Karla described feeling relieved on “the final day of the play” when she found out they would be performing only for each other rather than for students that were not in ESL. Of this relief, she wrote, “What a beautiful moment.”

Ms. Hart’s perspective confirmed what the students said about lifting their silencing when they were together in ESL. She said, “When they’re here they talk, you know, all the time.” She said this was especially true for Karla, who she still occasionally invited to ESL with the current ESL students. Ms. Hart, Ms. Parker and Karla had this arrangement, which was against district policy, because they felt that her

high level of participation with the ESL group benefited her both emotionally and academically.

Ms. Parker brought up the topic of silencing when we were discussing how the three students that had transitioned out of ESL were different from the student that was still attending ESL. She said,

I could be completely off, but I feel like once the children exit they're more hesitant to talk about who they are or what they were. It's like, I mean it's like pulling teeth to get some of it out of Paola and LJ...So it's almost like, "Okay, we're exited and we're done. We're not going to talk about that part of our life anymore."

According to Ms. Parker, the transition from ESL involved silencing. Her comments indicate that she saw students' silencing, but may not have viewed that silencing as an approach to their new conditions of isolation. In other words, she attributed their silencing to an internal decision independent of external conditions. In the next section, I will argue that the students' decisions about whether or not to lift their silencing were their approaches to external conditions. Furthermore, the students persisted in their intent to escape external conditions of isolation.

Escaping Isolation

When I asked them on the first day of the writing group to think about what their favorite part about ESL was, Cindy fired up right away: "People that were there." All four agreed on this argument, and talked with each other about friends and family that they had gotten an opportunity to be with in ESL. LJ wrote "being with friends and family" on page one of his notebook, under his title, "Things I liked in ESL." While we were having pizza and chocolate milk together, LJ said the best part about ESL was, "I

got to be with my friends. My old friends. And some of my family. I don't really see my friends anymore." In a story two weeks later, LJ wrote in more detail about the relationship that he talked about on a daily basis:

I was with my cousin Brandon. It was our first time in a same class. It was like our first time meeting. I got to meet my best friend again. I was excited. So was Brandon. Because he is like my best cousin. We play at our houses. We have sleepovers. We got to sit in front of each other.

In our interview, LJ talked more about Brandon, with whom he spends most of his time outside of school, doing things such as riding bikes, playing sports in the backyard, and going to get drinks at the gas station. He explained that he really missed being in ESL with Brandon because they talked together in English and in Spanish. In addition, he enjoyed "getting" to "learn English" together. He mentioned that Brandon was still in ESL, and that Brandon was glad to still be in ESL. The only times at school that LJ and Brandon got to see each other were special events such as grade level field trips and grade level movie viewings. He spent a great deal of time during the writing group working on intricate drawings of the Mexican flag, trying to "get" the "eagle eating the snake". He wrote that he enjoyed working on the drawings because they "remind" him of his time together with Brandon.

On the last day of the study, Paola took a break from playing with her friend at recess to talk to me about her choice not to speak in class. She said that she talked a lot at home and that she only felt comfortable talking at school while working in small groups. In early writing sessions, she wrote in various sections of her notebook, "I like being in groups because we get to share more ideas," "My favorite part of ESL was sharing ideas," and "We got in groups and we got to talk [in ESL]." She explained that she rarely had an opportunity to work in groups in class, and that this year "is a little different

because in ESL we got in groups a lot.” In fact, she wrote a great deal of writing in the writing group related to topics such as not having to raise hands in ESL because the groups were so small and the conversations so open. Her first written piece got right to the point:

My favorite part of ESL was just talking without raising my hand and just talking about things...I loved going to ESL. It was really fun going to ESL. And it is really different from now because we got to talk about our lives more, and in class you really sometimes don't get to talk about us...I felt really good about ESL.

Paola's writing on her feelings about talking, paired with her comments about sharing ideas in groups, clearly demonstrates the connection between lifting silencing and escaping isolation from other bilingual students. The fact that these written and spoken comments are the thoughts and feelings of a student whose teachers had not heard speak one word in class all year indicate the extent of the relationship between conditions of isolation and students' silencing at school.

It was clear that the four students saw ESL as an opportunity to be together with friends and family members. Cindy was livid about being denied her last day of ESL, and brought it up in several conversations. Below is an example from my field notes of an exchange between Cindy and Paola that demonstrates how important being with her peers in ESL was to Cindy:

We get back to the question about finding out that they would not be going to ESL anymore. Cindy says, “Ms. Lee told us. Me and Paola (points to the two of them).” Cindy quietly asks Paola, in a side conversation, “Did you guys have a party?” Paola shakes her head. Cindy asks her a few more questions to see if she can get Paola to think of the party: “Did you go? To the party where everyone was supposed to go?” Paola: “No.” Cindy: “Me neither [louder, shrill – upset]!”

Cindy wrote several pieces about being with her friends in ESL. She wrote, “The best part about ESL was that I was with my friends.” She detailed activities such as reading

books with her best friend and writing and sharing personal narratives about topics normally forbidden in school. She looked back on finding out that she would not be going to ESL anymore and wrote, “I was kind of sad because it was really fun.”

The students’ comments indicate that when they escaped isolation from their bilingual peers they lifted their silencing. Further, it seems that they preferred to escape isolation rather than remain isolated and silent. These findings can be related to what Koyama (2004) found in her ethnography. In that school, some high school students in ESL chose to perform poorly on language placement tests in order to remain in ESL and avoid being separated from their peers. In the current study, the students did not describe an intent to perform poorly on tests in order to remain in ESL, but the students mentioned that they did not know about the purposes of the placement tests until after they had already exited ESL. Also, I did not talk with students currently in ESL. Koyama’s (2004) finding, however, supports this argument that students in transition from ESL programs are persistent in their intent to escape isolation.

Ms. Hart’s comments also support this argument that students’ lifting of their silencing was due to an escape from isolation. When I asked her what she thought the kids liked best about ESL, she responded:

I think it’s the same group of kids... I feel like when they were in the classroom...where all the kids speak English, they were *so timid* and *quiet*. And they’re the opposite when they’re here in my class! (laughs) Yes! They speak *up*. So I’d say they are a little bit insecure when they are in their classrooms. They’re *quiet – don’t talk* [emphasis in original].

Although the students did not discuss whether they spoke English or Spanish with their many ESL teachers, Ms. Hart attributed the lifting of silencing to an escape from linguistic isolation from educators as well:

They know I speak Spanish. They want to speak Spanish also. When I'm going to pick them up, we're speaking Spanish during the hall, and then when we're here we start getting into our lesson we speak English. But yeah, so as you know, they want to speak Spanish. This place, I don't know, I think they feel good about it (laughs).

Ms. Hart reported that Karla in particular enjoyed escaping her isolation from bilingual students:

Ms. Hart: I have here Karla. I'm supposed to go and check on her. But sometimes I go and pick her up with my group. She feels pretty good!

Amy: She likes coming with you?

Ms. Hart: Yes, yes!

Amy: What does she like about it, would you say?

Ms. Hart: The teacher talked to her about coming to my group and she said, "YES!" And she is coming with the other girls and feeling pretty good and participating and everything. I think she's a little bit timid [in her classroom]. That's the only thing.

Valenzuela (1999) argued that when immigrant students are isolated, they are denied the opportunity to share social capital such as knowledge, assistance, language and resources with each other. Furthermore, when immigrant students are not divided at school, the sharing of social capital leads to increased achievement and interdependence. Rong (2006) found that co-national peer solidarity among Chinese immigrant students increased academic achievement, aspirations, and participation in school and in the community. Although the students in the current study and the friends and family that they describe are not necessarily immigrant students, their comments do suggest that escaping isolation allowed them to share their assets and resources with each other. For the four students, the transition from ESL involved an abrupt and unwelcome end to that interdependence.

Summary

For the four students in 4th and 5th grade at Gibson Elementary, the transition from the English as a Second Language program involved increased conditions of isolation from their bilingual peers. The students approached the conditions of isolation involved in their transition from ESL with silencing. This silencing was an approach with roots in early pivotal experiences at school, which occurred long before their transition from ESL and seemed to be based in interactions. Silencing had tragic personal consequences for the students.

However, through other pivotal early experiences, which seemed also to be based in relationships, students experienced safe personal consequences at school. This safe noise was marked by a lifting of silencing. The students' lifting of silencing was an additional approach that they employed at school. Students were persistent in their intent to escape their isolation from their bilingual peers, and when successful in that intent, they lifted their silencing. In the next chapter, I will offer a few possibilities for schools that have a purpose in mind to support transitioning students in this intent.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING FORWARD

These data suggest that the four students in transition from ESL programs experienced an isolation that contributed to their already established approach of silencing in school. This silencing seemed to have left these four students discontent at school. Furthermore, although according to both the students and their teachers, the students were achieving at school, their teachers worried that silencing could lead to underachievement. Fortunately, the students' stories present several points at which these problems could potentially be addressed in schools.

Moving Forward at Gibson

First of all, educators can work to recognize students' silencing. Valenzuela (1999) noted that students' quietness can be mistaken for deference, and that teachers seldom recognize it as students' emotional and psychological withdrawal from school. In this study, Ms. Parker and Ms. Hart recognized students' silencing and sought to explain it. Furthermore, all three teachers perceived silencing to be a problem, and made efforts such as adjusting their availability to include private conferencing time in the mornings and adjusting their methods of informal assessment to include explicitly checking in with students about their academic understanding. Both classroom teachers were very aware that getting help could be a major problem for self-silenced students because it involves

drawing attention to oneself (Valenzuela, 1999). Despite the teachers' concerns with silencing affecting academic achievement, this study presented possible barriers to educators recognizing students' silencing. For example, the data suggested a systematic rewarding of silencing.

The rewarding of silencing, which Valenzuela (1999) also documented, could act as a barrier to educators recognizing silencing because a lifting of silencing could appear dangerous for what could be described as goals of social control when it comes to interaction at school. Herrera and Rodriguez Morales (2009), in their research in junior high classrooms attended by Mexican and Mexican American students whose "cognitive academic language proficiency often was not at a level where full participation in classroom activities was possible" (p. 201), found that teachers were reluctant to adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of their bilingual students because the teachers perceived that doing so would involve a "loss of classroom control" (p. 205). More specifically, the teachers defined classroom control as "a sense of order". Although that particular study did not describe silence as a factor of that sense of order, I argue that the students' comments in the current study indicate that silence was a factor of teachers' perceptions of a sense of order at Gibson.

In addition, even if educators recognize and problematize students' silencing, as the educators did in this study, a privilege of the technical over the personal may lead to the disguise of the emotional tragic noise that students experience, especially when those students have high academic achievement. Happiness of teachers and students, for Noddings (2003), is an aim of education. This aim is both a means and an end for Noddings (2003) and what is done in education should be evaluated according to this

aim. For the students in this study then, consideration of emotional implications of silencing was just as important as consideration of technical implications of silencing. For these four students, their emotional tragic noise about their isolation lead to a self-silencing. Although I did not investigate how that silencing may have influenced their access to academic opportunities, all three teachers in the study expressed this concern. Therefore, the existing status quo of isolation post-transition, the students' emotions, and their approaches at school were all linked. Fortunately, with these things linked, there seem to be many opportunities for change. For example, with reductions of conditions of isolation, students' resulting happiness could lead to a lifting of silencing that might increase their access to academic opportunities. However, a privileging of the technical without a partnership of consideration of the emotional prevents an understanding of students' reasons for silencing. I argue that this prevents change in the status quo.

This is what seemed to be happening for the four students at Gibson. For students in transition from ESL programs, part of the privileging of the technical is involved with their "exiting" ESL, which the teachers in this study discussed as involving a mastery of linguistic skills needed at school. Ms. Blue described students in transition as, "Their skills are really, you know, really good." Ms. Parker mentioned only that students in transition from ESL have difficulties with vocabulary and "turns and phrases", but explained that all of her students have had difficulty with these two areas. Regarding transitioning students, she said, "All of them seem to be, when they fall it's the vocabulary." Ms. Hart would describe a student that is ready to exit ESL in the following way: "He can comprehend English, listening, reading and he can produce writing. In a way, he can be understanding, normal, how do you call that, American? (laughs)" The

comments of all three teachers indicate a mastery of English as defining a student in transition from ESL. Their comments also reflect the dominant viewpoint in schools in the United States that Valenzuela (1999) described as “English as the ultimate panacea” (p. 173). Additionally, these comments reflect a focus on monolingual English literacy mastery, but a discussion around this focus is beyond the scope of this paper.

More generally and important for this paper, from the teachers’ perspectives, the students have mastered the technical. Nieto and Raible (2010) argued that teachers often focus on technical content rather than students’ emotional and social concerns. This research suggests that emotional and social concerns are of primary importance to students in transition from ESL programs, and teachers’ attention to those concerns may be able to improve school for students in transition. Valenzuela (1999) emphasized that the personal (rather than the technical) becomes even more important for immigrant students when they are isolated from their peers, which may present important implications for bilingual students in transition from ESL programs as well.

In addition to recognizing silencing, educators can challenge the conditions of isolation that students will face in their transition from ESL programs. At this school, the teachers debated and considered a great deal how students were sorted into classrooms. This debate and consideration was carried out with the purpose in mind to sort students into arrangements that were most beneficial for the students as well as for their educators. Furthermore, the educators especially sorted bilingual students with this purpose in mind. For example, at least some grade levels “clustered” bilingual students with the most experienced teachers, choosing not to place them in classrooms with first year teachers due to a shared perception that first year teachers would be least prepared to effectively

teach bilingual students. In addition, the school as a whole was committed to clustering students receiving ESL services to allow for the ESL teacher to “push in” rather than “pull out”. Pushing in, for the teachers, increased instructional time for the ESL students, decreased what they perceived as a “stigma” attached to pulling out, and increased collaboration and learning between the ESL and classroom teacher, which would then in their minds improve the quality of the education students received.

With the purpose of improving school for bilingual students and their educators in mind, educators could use findings such as these about students’ approaches to their new isolation in transition from ESL programs to guide their sorting decisions. For example, if educators were to consider the tragic noise resulting from the silencing students experience during the isolation involved in transitioning from ESL programs, as well as the safe noise resulting from their lifting of silencing when they escape their isolation, educators may adjust their sorting policies to create conditions in which students in transition from ESL programs could escape isolation more often. Ms. Parker said, “I just wish we had more information and more fluid information when we were doing all this placement stuff.” While debates about programmatic aspects such as pull out, push in, bilingual education, and between and within class grouping are beyond the scope of this paper, the experiences of students in transition from ESL could provide educators with more information with which to guide their local decisions.

Although not directly related to the transition from ESL programs, educators can also be aware of students’ early pivotal experiences, and anticipate interactions and relationships that may become those early pivotal experiences for students. From Ms. Hart’s perspective, early school experiences for bilingual students become the most

important school experiences for their school careers. Consequently, she plans to leave her position next year and pursue her birth through kindergarten license. She feels she does not know enough about teaching ESL, and laughed when she said, “Zapatero a tus zapatos,” which means, “Stick with what you know.” She explained:

For me, I think that working with little children is more my area. And I’m brand new to ESL and I just don’t want to have, I just don’t want them to have a bad experience with me, to be behind. When I do a job I want to do it right.

The reasons for her feeling that she was not able to do her job “right” range from her high number of responsibilities to problems she had with teacher collaborations to what she perceived to be discriminatory district policies. However, Ms. Hart’s comments nonetheless demonstrate her conviction that students’ earliest experiences at school become their most significant school experiences. Interestingly, even though she seemed to me to have an understanding of students’ silencing as they experience the isolation involved in transition from ESL, Ms. Hart repeatedly apologized to me over the course of our relationship for what she saw as her lack of knowledge about issues related to these topics.

Finally, educators can invite and listen to transitioning students’ interactions with institutions. By interactions with institutions, I mean students’ accounts of and thoughts on general institutions such as schools, teachers, and ESL programs. In Conchas’ (2001) study, the high school students were well aware of how they were institutionally sorted by race, they articulated the negative implications of that sorting for themselves and their racial group, and they questioned and critiqued that sorting. The elementary students in this study also had a few ideas about their own sorting and about their own schooling in general.

Over the course of our conversations, Cindy and Karla elaborately critiqued several institutions, such as medical care, communities, social studies curriculum, scheduling, employment policies, and standardized testing. One institution that came up with several students was teachers. In one instance, Karla explained what teachers would have to do for her to lift her silencing about her feelings:

Karla: “If I ever *do* share [with a teacher], first I’ll have to know their secret before mine comes out.”

Amy: “Tell me about that.”

Karla: “Cause now we’re even. But if later on I found out they lied, I’ll say, ‘No, thanks.’”

Amy: “Do you think teachers lie?”

Karla: “Yeah. They don’t want you to know.”

LJ said that teachers should “be careful” with kids that are “talking”, or to “have reflection.” When I asked him to clarify, he added, “To reflect on what you did.” Cindy and Karla also critiqued teachers when it came to interaction. When I asked Cindy what teachers are like as we walked the track together at recess on our final afternoon, she yelled out, “Demanding!” We had a good laugh, and I asked her to describe what she meant. She clarified, “Like if you just whisper something, ‘Waaa! No talking!’” Karla also said that teachers could make school great for kids if they would “let them whisper.”

Paola suggested improving ESL: “Maybe have a little bit more time.” Karla also critiqued the ESL policies at the school, offering up the idea that kids choose the time of day to go to ESL, especially on days that the ESL testing was taking place. She explained that the students did not appreciate missing out when “something fun was happening” in the classroom.

In addition to the students, Ms. Hart also made suggestions for institutions that according to her would contribute to a lifting of silencing amongst students in transition by improving relationships between schools and families. She commended a nearby school for its efforts and hoped that her school would follow:

They're going to start a committee of Hispanic parents. That way they can talk about all their needs and they have more information about their rights... I think if their families feel confident and they feel secure here and they feel that they can speak if they have any problems, I think the students will feel that too.

Although these issues were of primary importance to the students, they had never discussed the topic of transition with their teachers. Interestingly, however, all three teachers in this study expressed a desire to know more about the experiences of bilingual students and to find ways to improve their own teaching with bilingual students. Ms. Hart and Ms. Parker, in particular, expressed frustration that they did not have opportunities for training. Ms. Parker repeatedly requested access to the study data over the course of the study, and in her interview revealed her feelings of having nowhere to turn for this issue:

I will tell you I don't know a whole lot about what I do to transition students and I feel like no matter where I go to ask for support, no one else can tell me either. Like no one says, "Well, my strong point is actually transitioning ESL students."

Ms. Blue felt that her monolingualism was a problem in her teaching, and said that if she were earlier in her teaching career, she would take on becoming bilingual in order to better communicate with and understand her students. Their desire to learn more about teaching students acquiring an additional language match general trends in teacher education. Villegas and Lucas (2008) summarized that most teachers have had neither professional development or courses related to this topic nor the experiential knowledge that comes with learning an additional language. According to Villegas and Lucas

(2008), as a consequence, most teachers don't feel prepared to teach students that are learning an additional language.

All three teachers expressed a desire to know more about teaching their bilingual students. However, none of the teachers had initiated conversations with students about their transition from ESL. In their interviews, I asked if they had talked with their current or former students in transition. Ms. Blue replied, "I really have not. I really have left that up to the ESL teacher to do that. Um, um, I really haven't. I really haven't." Ms. Parker had not discussed it with either students or their families, and the ESL teacher had not discussed the topic with students or families either.

None of the four students had discussed the transition with educators at the school, and beyond clarity of connection between the intense testing battery and their exiting (a connection that they seemed to hash out during their discussions in the writing group), their comments reflected some confusion about the reasons for the transition itself. For example, regarding the days surrounding the actual transition out of ESL, Karla wrote:

The months passed and it almost end of school day. We did a test with a different woman, not Ms. Lee, the speaking test was with Ms. Lee. The next day we didn't went to ESL no days. She said she was sorry but there's no ESL anymore. I couldn't understand until my mom explained. And I understood. Well not really. A lot of wondering came into my mind when it was time to go. But then my mom talked more about it but I still didn't get it. I tried to make them in order but I couldn't. Then my mom just kept on cooking. My mom spent one hour explaining. It was funny to me. Because it was midnight.

Since there is little existing work on the topic of the experiences of students in transition from ESL programs, schools' very own students are the only resource teachers have. An open dialogue about the transition from ESL may benefit both students and educators at school. Valenzuela (1999) emphasized that youth lack resources and argument skills to

confront educators at school, so their most viable option is to remain silent when it comes to interactions with institutions. If educators at the school were to genuinely engage these four students in a dialogue about their transition from ESL, they could find out a great deal about what they are already looking for. Furthermore, the very involvement of transitioned students in moving forward with their own conditions at school may contribute to a lifting of their silencing.

The students clearly enjoyed going to ESL and were very disappointed with their new conditions of isolation. Karla described the end time of daily sessions by writing, “Bad news came. ‘Time to leave,’ Ms. Lee would say.” She waited until 10:30 each day to go to ESL, and starred this statement in her notebook: “I liked the best was making friends and telling about our life. Remembering ESL, Karla wrote, “What wonderful moments. Now got to go back to 2010. Bye.” Karla’s wonderful moments at school have become memories as she has experienced her silencing in her new conditions of isolation in transition from ESL programs. Karla would have agreed with Paola:

Amy: “What do kids say about ESL?”

Paola: “That it was great being in ESL.”

Amy: “Who?”

Paola: “The people that went to ESL.”

Ms. Parker described the “graduation process” as “really exciting for them.” From the students’ perspectives, however, the transition process seemed to be one of silencing through conditions of isolation.

My Movement Forward

Through my analysis of the experiences of Karla and her peers in transition, I have learned a new way to think about my own transition. I was awed by how Karla and the other students carried their early pivotal relationships and interactions with them, and how persistent they were in their intent to navigate conditions that too often left them silenced and distressed. Looking back at the research process, I realize that it probably was not an accident that I saw the students' isolation and silencing as they navigated their transition. I think I saw some of what I too was feeling in my own transition from teaching to researching. In this way, I suspect my positionality greatly influenced this work. However, I don't think that is necessarily a detriment in this work. In other words, in my emotion I think I could see their emotion.

Early in this paper I discussed how the research design and procedures emerged. My perceptions of this topic emerged over the course of this process as well. I began the research from my teacher identity, expecting to fix the technical problems I expected to find with the students' experiences at school. My teacher identity picked up the technical in the teachers' comments, and at times I felt as if I were interviewing the former teacher in me as I listened to their emphasis on the technical and their passion for helping their students to become more literate in English by means they perceived to be best. Research tends to focus on the technical when it comes to issues related to the topic of language acquisition (Urrieta & Quach, 2000), and my early approach to the topic fell right along those lines.

My shift in perspective on the topic of this study was a result of a greater shift in perspective on my approach to research. I had taught dozens of students that had

transitioned from ESL programs and left schools for research with the purpose of alleviating their tragic noise. Although I had a general sense that there was a great deal of tragic technical noise surrounding their transitions, I ended my expectations at that noise. My relationships with the people involved in this study, which would include my mentors, teachers, and peers, helped me to see that I was ending at tragic noise.

Problematizing my ending at tragic noise stopped me in my tracks, involving a silencing that prevented me from finding a way to move forward in the work. For example, in considering my exploitation of the participants for my own academic gain (Villenas, 1996), I considered abandoning this project.

However, those same relationships also helped me to consider some of the possible reasons for my perspectives ending at tragic noise. For example, someone shared with me that “deficit discourses may surface from the belief systems and thinking of researchers” (Milner, 2007, p. 390). My ending at tragic noise involved a way of thinking about the topic of transition from ESL that was ringing out in my deficit discourse. For example, re-reading Villenas (1996) led me to see my past assumption that the students would share my (and the teachers’) perspective that technical tragic noise was their primary concern, and that this assumption involved arrogance. Only after I accepted the possibilities regarding my own deficit thinking and the relations of power involved in the design of this study could I move forward in the analysis of these data. For example, when I listened to the students describe what was problematic for them about their own lives, I noticed that the tragic noise around their transition from ESL was not technical but personal.

When I began to look for solutions for tragic noise in the lives of the students themselves, I was able to pick up some of what in this paper I called safe noise. The safe noise in their stories pulled me out of the tragic noise and into their processes of lifting silencing and escaping isolation. Karla, LJ, Cindy, and Paola, in their trust, revealed to me that the lessons of change for schools could be learned from the very students in those schools. Never had I considered that I would find the paths for social change in the lives of those that are continually marginalized and silenced in schools. Michael-Luna (2009) argued that research can help position young multilingual learners as “active agents of change” by creating spaces for their “social construction of who they are and what they can do within the confines of the schooling context” (p. 234). With this new perspective, I have been able to reconceptualize “researcher” from savior to witness.

In learning to witness, the relationships around this research pivoted me to think about ways to lift my own silencing. It is my intent to approach my new conditions as these four children did, carrying these research relationships as early pivotal experiences in my own transition. In this work I attempted to begin to reflect on my privileged position of white teacher researcher, from overall conception of the topic to normalizing word use like “regular classroom” in my discourse with the students. I know I am only beginning to learn how to reflect. For example, I still have concerns that this writing takes on a position of an “all-powerful and omniscient observer” (Urrieta & Quach, 2000, p. 27). I have learned that this gradual transition for me will not involve a shift from rejected teacher to knowing researcher, but rather a shift into problematized researcher with problematized teacher along as partner.

Moving Forward in Research

These findings present several opportunities for moving forward in research. First, I would be interested to see how these four students navigate their future schooling. In addition, involving more people in the research that are a part of the students' lives, such as their families, their bilingual peers in ESL, their monolingual peers, and educators other than their classroom teachers with whom they work may allow for a deeper understanding of their experiences at school, especially since the students themselves suggested that relationships were of primary importance to them.

The tragic consequences for students that I found in this study were limited to emotional consequences. In further research on this topic, it would be important to address additional potential tragic consequences that may arise from silencing. For example, an investigation of if and how silencing influences academic achievement and opportunity would greatly contribute to a better understanding of the implications of silencing resulting from isolation. This work would be even more interesting if it involved all students in a classroom or school, or at least all bilingual or multilingual students in a classroom or school. Such research could better situate the potentially distinct experiences of students in transition from ESL.

In addition to research on the implications of silencing, research on the systematic rewarding of silencing would also be an important area for future investigation. For example, it would be interesting to explore transitioning students' silencing in a context in which silencing were not systematically rewarded, or to explore how different groups of students react to the systematic rewarding of silencing in the same classroom or school.

Furthermore, since all four students experienced an increase in isolation during their transitions from ESL and a self-silencing due to that isolation, it would be interesting to investigate this same topic with different students in different contexts such as different schools. Another important area for future research would be schools' or teachers' local efforts to alleviate silencing, especially through creating conditions that aim to prevent or challenge bilingual students' isolation.

The accounts of Karla, LJ, Cindy, and Paola indicate that the research topic of transition from ESL is of primary importance for bilingual students in schools. Elementary schools, in particular, are contexts in which practices of sorting students such as within class and between class isolation may be less transparent than in many middle and high schools. Furthermore, students' early experiences in schools are carried with them throughout their school careers, as evidenced by the early experiences through which these students learned the approach of silencing.

These findings also present hopeful implications. First, many of the decisions that involve sorting students occur at the local level, so this problem is one that schools and even individual educators might be able to relatively easily address. These findings also indicate that there are many situations in which students lift their silencing, and increased opportunities for students to be in any of those situations at school can lead to the potential for positive change. In addition, these data indicate that students develop multiple strategies with which to approach distinct and fluid conditions at school. In any case, an attention to this topic in future work could surely benefit students that will experience transition from ESL, especially since silencing can go so tragically unnoticed.

APPENDIX A: Writing Group Prompts

Prompts are presented here in chronological order and without probes addressed by individual students.

- What was the best thing about ESL and how is it the same or different for you now?
- Tell about when you found out you would not be going to ESL anymore.
- What is ESL and why do they have it at Gibson Elementary?
- Tell about something important to who you are and how it came to be that way.
- Tell about something you think about all the time or care about very much.
- Tell about a hard thing at school and how it was the same or different in the past

APPENDIX B: Student Interview Guide

First I want to ask you some questions about when you were going to ESL last year.

- What does it mean to go to ESL?
- Thinking about going to ESL, what was it like for you?
- What was the best part about ESL? Is there anything that is different about (that aspect) for you now that you are not in ESL anymore? How so?
- What was your least favorite part about ESL? Is there anything that is different about (that aspect) for you now that you are not in ESL anymore? How so?
- What do kids say about ESL?
- Tell me about when you found out that you would not be going to ESL anymore. How do you feel about not going to ESL anymore?
- If a student that was in ESL asked you what it would be like to graduate from ESL, what would you tell the student?
- What advice would you give to a student that was about to graduate from ESL?

Next I'd like to ask you about your friends and your family.

- Tell me a little bit about your friends or your family.
- This might seem like a weird question. How would your friends or your family describe you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- When you meet somebody new, what do you say about yourself? Is there anything you decide not to say?
- If you could sit beside anyone, who would you sit beside? Why?

Now I want to talk a little bit about teachers.

- Who is your favorite teacher of all time? What were/are the best things about him or her? Least favorite of all time?
- What advice would you have for a brand new teacher that has a student who just graduated from ESL coming into his or her class?
- How can teachers help make school great for kids?

APPENDIX C: Teacher Interview Guide

I want to begin by asking you some questions about you and your school.

- How did you come to teach here?
- Can you talk a little bit about the communities that the school serves?
- Can you talk a little bit about ESL at your school?

Next I am going to ask you some questions about the process of exiting from ESL and what that is like for students.

- How would you describe a student that is ready to exit ESL?
- What is the exiting process like for students? What types of changes do students experience when they are exited from ESL? How do you think students feel when they find out they will be exiting ESL? Have you talked with any students about exiting?
- Is there anything about the exiting process that you would change? How so?
- Do you think schools could better serve students that have exited from ESL? How?
- Considering your experience, what advice would you give to a teacher who would have exited students in her class next year?
- What would be some topics that you would hope to discuss with a family whose child was going to be exited? Why do you think those topics are important?

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