“AMERICANS DON’T TAKE ELD”: LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNERS AND STIGMA

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: “Americans Don’t Take ELD”: Long-Term English Learners and Stigma

English learners are a fast-growing population, and the English learner (EL) classification is designed to support students’ academic success who are learning English in school. While there is documented evidence that the EL classification is beneficial, there exist a growing body of research that suggests prolonged classification, more than five to seven years, produces negative consequences. When students are EL classified for more than five to seven years, they become known as Long-term English learners. To date, we know very little about these students’ lived experiences and how prolonged classification may lead to stigma, a consequence described in the literature, yet not examined using a conceptual framework. To address the gap in the literature, I use qualitative ethnographic methods to examine the extent prolonged classification may produce stigma using the Link and Phelan (2001) stigma framework.

I find that the EL classification does produce stigma based on Link and Phelan’s stigma framework. However, prolonged EL classification is not a leading factor in the production of stigma. Indeed, stigma begins as early as kindergarten for students in this study. Furthermore, I find that the ELD class functions as an apparatus that wields power and control over human bodies and is the primary source for the production of stigma.

The findings of this study may help policymakers, academics, and practitioners to find better ways to support the development of the English language for students whose first language is not English.

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CHAPTER I

LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNERS

"… I see that mostly Latinos go there."

- Luna Hernandez, Cholla MS

Introduction

English learners[1] are a fast-growing population, and the English learner (EL) classification is intended to support the academic success of students who are learning English in school (Shin, 2018). According to the most recent data available, in the 2014-15 school year, over 4.8 million English learners were enrolled in U.S. schools and represented nearly 10 percent of the total K-12 student population, with Spanish as the most commonly spoken language (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). While there has been documented evidence that the EL classification is beneficial (Harklau, 1994; Umansky, 2016a), there exists a growing body of research that suggests that prolonged EL classification, more than five to seven years (definitions vary by state), can produce negative consequences and may weaken the purpose of the classification (Dabach, 2014; Menken et al., 2010; Olsen, 2010; Umansky, 2016a; Valenzuela, 1999). When students are EL classified for more than five to seven years, they become known as Long-term English learners (Freeman et al., 2002; Olsen, 2001; Thompson, 2015). Still, despite a growing population, their unique schooling experience has been rarely studied (Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

[1] I use the term English learner instead of emergent bilingual because it is a protected label (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018).

Described unofficially as “The 6 Plusers,” “ESL Lifers,” and “Forever LEP,” this group of students, predominantly Spanish speaking, are enrolled mainly at the secondary level and are characterized by weak academic and language skills in both English and their home languages (Freeman et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015). According to Olsen (2010), the “existence of Long-term ELs is evidence that for many students, the school experience that should have propelled them towards English proficiency and academic success has indeed been an educational dead-end” (p. 7). Long-term ELs are distinctly different from students described as recently arrived (i.e., newcomers), who have various levels of education in their native country and have typically lived in the U.S. for less than five years (Freeman et al., 2002; Menken et al., 2012). Long-term ELs, by comparison, have attended school in the U.S. for many years, and in some cases, their entire lives (Thompson, 2015). Unfortunately, there is no national data on the actual number of Long-term ELs in public schools and how many were born in the U.S. (Olsen, 2010). Part of the difficulty in describing the characteristics of ELs, in general, arises from the fact that there are significant inconsistencies in how states gather and report data on this subgroup. However, despite the inconsistencies, according to Garcia and Kleifgen (2018), ELs account for roughly one out of ten students enrolled in public schools in the U.S., or about 4.9 million, and Hispanics or Latinos make up about 78 percent of the population, followed by Asians at 10 percent. Long-term ELs represent about 25 percent of all ELs, or about 1.2 million.

Over the past two decades, scholars have described Long-term ELs as routinely segregated from their peers (Freeman et al., 2002), increasingly excluded from core and advanced level content (Callahan, 2005; Shin, 2018; Umansky, 2016b), uninformed about

their classification (Olsen, 2010), more likely to experience academic failure (Olsen, 2010), and more likely to drop out from school (Thompson, 2015). In a recent study, Umansky et al. (2021) found that by the time EL classified students reached the secondary level, their experiences were commonly constricted. For example, beginning in middle school, opportunities begin to close, and the student experience becomes a "kind of a sentence" and "the beginning of the end" (p. 275). Furthermore, during middle school, the EL classification becomes stigmatized because students are separated from peers, resulting in isolation and social stigma. A key finding of this study is that the EL classification produces different outcomes depending on grade level, becoming increasingly constrictive as students transition from elementary to middle school.

Despite these findings, we still know very little about these students' unique schooling experiences as described from their perspective, especially at the middle school level, and how prolonged EL classification may produce stigma, a consequence often discussed in the literature (Umansky, 2016a; Umansky et at., 2021; Thompson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). As a result, in this dissertation, I seek to address the gap in the literature by focusing on Spanish-speaking middle school students considered Long-term ELs to examine how prolonged classification may produce stigma, using the "stigma model" framework conceptualized by Link and Phelan (2001).

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. To what extent do Spanish-speaking middle school students considered Long-term English learners experience sigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework?
2. To what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience?

The Process of Labeling Students Learning English

Critical scholars have argued and continue to argue that the use of labels (i.e., classifications) in education may serve as a mechanism by which children are sorted into predetermined educational tracks (Apple, 2013). Indeed, the very idea of labeling has been viewed as the process by which one group of individuals with power makes a value judgment about another group of individuals with less power (Apple, 2013; Link & Phelan, 2013). When framed this way, labels become highly problematic as social constructs that may harm. Furthermore, research indicates that labels come packaged with costs and benefits (Link & Phelan, 2013; Thompson, 2015). Prolonged EL classification is no exception, and research has implied that it may have the potential to limit both academic and social opportunities and produce uncertain outcomes that last a lifetime (Olsen, 2010). Therefore, this study is also about the unintended consequences of prolonged EL classification and how it may lead to harm.

The process of labeling students learning English in the United States has origins in the landmark 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*, which directed educational systems to take affirmative action to teach English to students not yet fluent in the language and to provide access to the general mainstream content curriculum (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The case declared that:

> The failure of the San Francisco school system to provide English language instruction to approximately 1,800 students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak English, or to provide them with other adequate instructional procedures, denies them a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program, and thus violates § 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination

> based ‘on the ground of race, color, or national origin,’ in ‘any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance,’ and the implementing regulations of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Supreme Court Ruling, 1974).

Under Lau, schools were responsible for identifying students who would benefit from English language services and providing them with English language instruction. However, the Court case offered no guidelines for providing instruction, citing only the need to take affirmative steps towards eradicating educational inequities (García, & Kleifgen, 2018). The result was the creation of a group of students labeled “Limited English Proficient,” and schools across the country developed and implemented language programs designed to transition students from a non-English speaking status to English proficient status (Olsen, 2010).

In a subsequent court case, *Castañeda v. Pickard* of 1981, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit established three criteria to determine how language programs would meet the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. The criteria held that (1) language programs must be based on sound educational theory, (2) programs must be implemented with fidelity, and (3) programs must be evaluated for effectiveness (*Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981)*. More recently, Title I and Title III of the revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that schools that receive federal funding must not only identify students who would benefit from English language services but also assess how they perform on English language proficiency and academic assessments annually (García, & Kleifgen, 2018). In addition, up to the present time, changes based on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) require school districts

that receive Title III funds to report the number of ELs who have not achieved English language proficiency within five years of EL classification.

Today, school districts across the country use a combination of information on the home language survey and a formal English language proficiency assessment to identify students in need of English language instruction (García, & Kleifgen, 2018; Shin, 2018; Thompson, 2015). Those that score below a specific criterion are classified as "English learners" and provided with federally-mandated language services (Umansky, 2016a; Thompson, 2015). Students remain classified as ELs until reclassification, a process that involves meeting a specific criterion set by the local school district and typically achieved using a standardized assessment (García, & Kleifgen, 2018; Shin, 2018). Indeed, the route to reclassification can range from four to ten years or more and is generally slower for Spanish-speaking and poor students (Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) note that Spanish-speaking students are reclassified at half the rate compared to students who speak a different language, even after controlling for variables. In other words, Spanish-speaking English learners remain classified for more extended periods. This is problematic considering that Spanish-speaking ELs make up roughly 8.5 million of all ELs. Once a student meets the criteria, the EL classification is lifted, and the student is considered English proficient (Thompson, 2015). In addition, there is tremendous variation in how local school districts across the country identify and reclassify students (García, & Kleifgen, 2018; Thompson, 2015). These issues, while very important, are beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I focus on the perspectives of students who remain classified as ELs in U.S. public schools for more than five to seven

years without being reclassified, thus becoming Long-term ELs (Flores, et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2002; Olsen, 2001; Thompson, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Socially constructed labels carry a set of assumptions, ideologies, policies, and practices (Apple, 2013). As Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) point out, the EL label has been associated with negative connotations, focusing too much on students' lack of English skills rather than their potential as emerging bilinguals. The label places the English language in a position of legitimacy, devalues additional languages, and focuses solely on building "academic language" while ignoring the other rich language skills students possess. Following this logic, I argue that prolonged EL classification also carries similar assumptions and ideologies that ultimately impact student outcomes.

Research to date has revealed that Long-term ELs often experience inconsistent or interrupted language services (Freeman et al., 2002; Menken, 2013; Olsen, 2010), low school attendance (Freeman et al., 2002), significant gaps in background knowledge (Olsen, 2010), and are generally below grade level in reading, writing, and math (Freeman et al., 2002; Menken, 2013; Olsen, 2010). By eighth grade, for instance, only four percent of ELs achieve grade-level proficiency in reading and only six percent in math (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). By eleventh grade, roughly 74 percent are significantly below grade level, less engaged with school, and many drop out (Garcia, 2018). While Long-term ELs tend to earn passing grades, this often gives a false perception of academic ability, which is highlighted when they take standardized assessments and receive low scores. Compared to recently arrived students, they have higher rates of academic failure (Freeman et al., 2002). Olsen (2010) emphasizes that they do not make

normative progress towards English proficiency, which critical scholars associate with subtractive schooling practices (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018; Valenzuela, 1999). Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) suggest that one reason for the low academic performance of this group is that they are assessed in English only, a critical topic beyond the scope of this study.

Literature on the experiences of Long-term ELs suggests that they start to struggle academically in fourth grade and often view themselves as less capable academically (Olsen, 2010). There is evidence that many Long-term ELs are also placed into English-only environments with no opportunity to develop their native language, while others are isolated from their English-speaking peers in separate classrooms and even schools (Umansky, 2016a). As a result, some students express being made fun of because of their accent, while others believe that the dominant group has power (Freeman et al., 2002). This belief may lead to a lack of trust in schools, in general, and possibly a lack of trust in teachers, specifically. Menken (2013) found that some teachers view Long-term ELs as academic failures and still others are hesitant to teach this group of students in the mainstream classroom. In a similar vein, Umansky (2016a) found that teachers may have diminished expectations for ELs in general, and some school administrators, based on this belief, place them in lower track classes, systematically excluding them from core content and advanced level courses, especially at the secondary level (Umansky, 2016b).

Olsen (2010) notes that Long-term ELs typically express interest in college attendance, yet many come to find out that their academic skills and course sequence have not prepared them for a successful transition to higher education. Students, nor their parents, are made aware of what is needed. Moreover, there are cases in which students are never informed about their official EL classification altogether and instances when

they find out at the secondary level after being placed into a language support class. Olsen also points out that some parents of Long-term ELs are never provided with information about achieving reclassification or the implications of a remedial course sequence that generally begins in middle school.

Menken (2013) cautions that secondary language support programs are designed to serve recently arrived students and do not differentiate instruction for Long-term ELs. She also points out that many Long-term ELs are in the same classroom as recently arrived students. Consequently, many Long-term ELs have come to resist and despise their placement in such language support classes (Menken, 2013; Talmy, 2004) and even their official designation as an EL (Menken, 2013). Therefore, some students may view their classification as stigmatizing. This view may have a lot to do with the assumptions of the label itself and how those assumptions manifest in the standard rules, routines, and substance of school life (Talmy, 2004).

Despite the academic failure and overall challenges of Long-term ELs at the secondary level, researchers have focused on ELs at the elementary level in part because of the belief that by the time they transition to middle school, their language skills will be such that they can participate fully with proficient English students (Olsen, 2010). However, the reality is that prolonged EL classification may cause a child to be put into a dead-end placement, with highly problematic implications.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to engage the personal narratives and conversations of middle school students considered Long-term ELs to learn more about how prolonged EL classification may produce stigma as conceptualized by Link and Phelan (2001). It is

also to learn more about what factors contribute to their lived experience as Long-term Els in school. Literature on labeling theory suggests that labels are generally considered a packaged deal, with costs and benefits (Link & Phelan, 2013; Thompson, 2015). To date, we have strong evidence that suggests that prolonged EL classification produces "costs," often at the expense of the benefits. However, as informed from the student perspective, we know less about what it is like to be a Long-term EL at the middle school level. According to Harding (2004), "to the extent that an oppressed groups' situation is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive kinds of knowledge" (p. 7). Due to their standing as individuals who have been ascribed a socially constructed label by the dominant group, Long-term ELs possess unique insight into the larger systems of social order and may provide us with the knowledge that can help improve policies and practices regarding the EL classification. Therefore, as previously noted, I ask the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Spanish-speaking middle school students considered long-term English learners experience sigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework?
2. To what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience?

Why Middle School?

The examination of the schooling experiences of Long-term ELs at the middle school level is essential given that middle school is considered a critical period in students' lives. For instance, we know that in middle school, students generally begin to establish their academic and social identities as well as take a set of academic courses that set into motion a course sequence that continues into high school (Eccles et al., 1991;

Umansky, 2016a). Indeed, the stakes are high in middle school, and the decisions made for students, driven in part by policies and practices, especially for course-taking opportunities, may have grave implications for their educational, career, and even life outcomes (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Umansky, 2016a; Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003). In addition, research on sociocultural development suggests that as students age, especially ELs, they gain a deeper understanding and internalization of their language status. For example, Dabach (2014) found that ELs at the high school level felt stigmatized because of specialized language development classes and viewed their official EL status as an indicator of inferiority. Thus, an important question is whether Long-term ELs in middle school experience similar feelings.

Thompson's (2015) study on the experiences of Long-term ELs at the high school level and examining the costs and benefits associated with the label provides further rationale for why a middle school level is an important place of investigation. Her findings suggest that beginning in middle school, students expressed that their language support class felt stigmatizing, resulting in feelings of inferiority because they were not proficient in English. In contrast, no student mentioned feelings of stigmatization at the elementary level. One possible reason, as Thompson asserts, is that in elementary school, all children are essentially learning English, and it is not uncommon for English learners to receive extra support in the form of language services. This all changes beginning in middle school, where the structure of schooling changes from a single grade-level classroom to multiple classes with different teachers. In middle school, language support services also change, where the focus on learning English is not necessarily school-wide but limited to a single class or two. As a result, students begin to realize their language

differences and experience stigma. Consequently, it is in middle school that prolonged EL classification may have the most impact. Furthermore, given a large number of Spanish-speaking ELs, the language support class may lead to segregation. One important question is whether Thompson's findings, particularly that stigma begins in middle school, parallel the experiences of students this in this study.

Significance of Study

This research is valuable considering the rapidly growing population of Long-term ELs at the middle school level (Flores et al., 2015; Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Menken et al., 2012) and the lack of research that has explicitly focused on how prolonged EL classification may produce stigma. Up to the present, we have evidence to suggest that prolonged EL classification does produce unintended consequences. While the EL classification, in general, was never intended to produce negative consequences, research has suggested that it does, especially starting in middle school and for students who carry the classification for more than five to seven years. An important area of investigation of this study is to examine whether prolonged classification is indeed associated with stigma and what role middle school plays in stigma production, if any. Moreover, the findings of this study can help policymakers, academics, and practitioners respond to essential questions related to how we treat students who speak a language other than English at home. It can also help us identify the factors that shape the everyday school experiences of students and how those factors may stigmatize them.

Summary

To date, there exists a lack of research on Long-term ELs, in general, and specifically how prolonged classification may produce stigma. As a result, I seek to

examine how prolonged EL classification may be linked to stigma production using the "stigma model" conceptualized by Link and Phelan (2001). I focus on the student perspective to make meaning and generate knowledge that will help us better understand how a socially constructed label impacts students in schools today. Before I explain the methods in this study, I review the literature on stigma in the next chapter. Finally, I end the chapter by articulating the conceptual framework that will guide my research study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"I guess that's why they [Americans] don't take ELD."

- Clara Garcia, Cholla MS

Introduction

To investigate how prolonged EL classification may lead to stigma for Spanish-speaking middle school students, I use Link and Phelan's (2001) "stigma model" conceptual framework that integrates the following components: labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. In this chapter, I discuss the concept of stigma broadly, then focus on Link and Phelan's framework. Next, I discuss the growing body of research that has examined the association between stigma and the EL classification. Finally, I restate the research questions that will guide this study.

Contextualizing Stigma

Stigma is an elusive and perplexing concept because of how challenging it is to define, and it is often bound by time and space, culture, and dominant cultural biases regarding what represents normalcy (Ainlay et al., 1986). Indeed, as cultures evolve, so does the conception of stigma, and what is considered stigmatizing in one culture may not be in another (Becker & Arnold, 1986; Stafford & Scott, 1986). Erving Goffman's (1963) seminal book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* provided one of the earliest discussions of stigma in psychology. Goffman argued that society constructs categories and associates said categories with specific attributes, such as

stereotypes, leading to discrimination. He added that the dominant group generally views those stigmatized as inferior, and on this underlying assumption, exercises a range of discrimination that inadvertently impacts life outcomes. Thus, Goffman referred to stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3) and closely linked to a devaluation of social identity and human worth. However, he also clarified that stigma should be viewed as a language of relationships and not solely based on attributes. Put another way, Goffman emphasized that it is the *language* used to describe individuals at the heart of stigma. For example, the words "normal" and "stigmatized" are not people, Goffman argued, but rather perspectives, given that stigma is a social construction. Indeed, no inherent attribute within an individual naturally qualifies them for stigmatization. Instead, stigmatization occurs within a particular context, culture, and historical space, political or social (Becker & Arnold, 1986). Croker et al. (1998) advanced a similar idea that stigma is not entirely located inside the individual but instead influenced by the external context in which society defines the behavior, characteristic, or attribute as undervalued.

Much has been written about stigma since Goffman. Researchers from different disciplines have produced variations in the conceptualization of stigma (see Link et al., 2008), mainly because it has been applied to a multitude of unique conditions and settings and because of different theoretical orientations (Ainlay et al., 1986; Link & Phelan, 2001). As Link and Phelan (2001) note, allowing for different conceptualizations is acceptable if researchers are clear about the definition and how the stigma term is used. Naturally, this has led to a better understanding of stigma, and an extensive literature base, produced extensively by social psychologists, who have studied how people

construct categories and then use those categories to produce stereotype viewpoints (see Crocker et al. 1998 for a comprehensive review).

To date, a body of research from different disciplines suggests that stigma produces numerous outcomes, and the evidence suggests that the outcomes are generally adverse (Goffman, 1963; Gibbons, 1986; Ainlay et al.,1986; Jones et al., 1984). For example, according to Crocker et al. (1998), "a person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity – the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others" (p. 504). Stigmatized individuals, therefore, are often viewed as flawed or less than human and may experience a host of consequences, including but not limited to diminished social relationships, depression, anxiety, avoidance of others, distorted self-image, inappropriate behavior, low self-esteem, and even the hindrance of romantic relationships and employment (Crocker & Lutsky, 1986). As a result, researchers, such as Ainlay et al. (1986), have argued that a stigma is a form of dehumanization.

Not all people that are stigmatized live life without the insight or knowledge that they are stigmatized. Becker and Arnold (1986) point out that many stigmatized individuals quickly become aware of the ways others treat and view them. While face-to-face interactions may reinforce stigma, institutions often remind individuals of their social standing and place within the dominant culture through daily practices, rules, and norms. Consequently, when this happens early in age, the cumulative experience may result in profound outcomes, mainly psychological. However, those stigmatized that gain insight into the stigmatization process may ultimately free themselves from the impact of stigma, primarily through social movements. In contrast, some people do live their lives

without recognizing that they are stigmatized, primarily if the stigma is associated with a non-visible mark society has deemed inferior. Croker and Lutsky (1986) make clear that when people lack the recognition of their stigma, "… then the processes through which a stigma is recognized and defined become important objects of study in their own right" (p. 107).

The concept of stigma has not come without critiques, given the range of conceptualization and measurement. However, two significant issues underlie the critiques (Link & Phelan, 2001). First, researchers who investigate stigma but who do not belong to the stigmatized group often do so from the vantage point of the dominant group and with theories uninformed by the lived experience of the people they investigate. The result is a misunderstanding of the lived experiences of the stigmatized and the maintenance of unsupported assumptions. The second critique is that research on stigma has remained too focused on the individual and not enough on the structural and external forces that may cause stigma (Crocker et al., 1998; Parker & Aggleton, 2003).

Following these critiques, Link and Phelan (2001) proposed a reconceptualization, from a sociological perspective, and based on a set of interrelated concepts that co-occur in situations where power exists, and at the same time shifting the focus of study away from the individual and towards the external factors that may cause stigma. Because this reconceptualization serves as the essential methodological framework of this study, it bears to quote at length:

> In our conceptualization, stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to

> undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them." In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that leads to unequal outcomes (p. 367).

An essential feature of the reconceptualization is that stigma depends on power, which allows for the "identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 367). Thus, it is the power that gives rise and voice to the production of stigma. Indeed, the inclusion of power as an essential feature in the stigma framework has been widely praised by researchers (Green et al., 2005; Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Reutter et al., 2009; Rutledge et al., 2009).

Link and Phelan's stigma conceptualization is considered one of the most articulated frameworks for stigma production (see Lucas & Phelan, 2012; Makowski et al., 2016) and is routinely cited in education literature (Umansky, 2016a; Thompson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, the framework has been used in studies outside of the education field, including the study of gay and lesbian families (Robitaille & Saint-Jacques, 2009), poverty (Reutter et al., 2009), and HIV experiences (Shamos et al., 2009).

Link and Phelan's Stigma Model

Link and Phelan make clear that the stigma process begins with the creation of labels and that all other components are a direct result of the label, as shown in Figure 1. It is essential to note that the concept of power lies at the heart of stigma, a concept that

Link and Phelan argue is often overlooked in stigma research. Indeed, prior research on stigma has focused extensively on attributes that exist inside the person as the leading cause of stigma instead of the broader societal factors (Crocker et al., 1998; Fiske, 1998; Parker & Aggleton, 2003). More attention, therefore, is needed on the structural issues that produce stigma and less on the individual. Similarly, Goffman (1963) also argued that stigma should take into consideration "a language of relationships, not attributes" (p. 3). Therefore, the concept of power is an essential element in the production of stigma.

In this section, I discuss each of the stigma components. I end with a discussion of power. Where appropriate, I discuss literature related to the EL classification in general in each of the components.

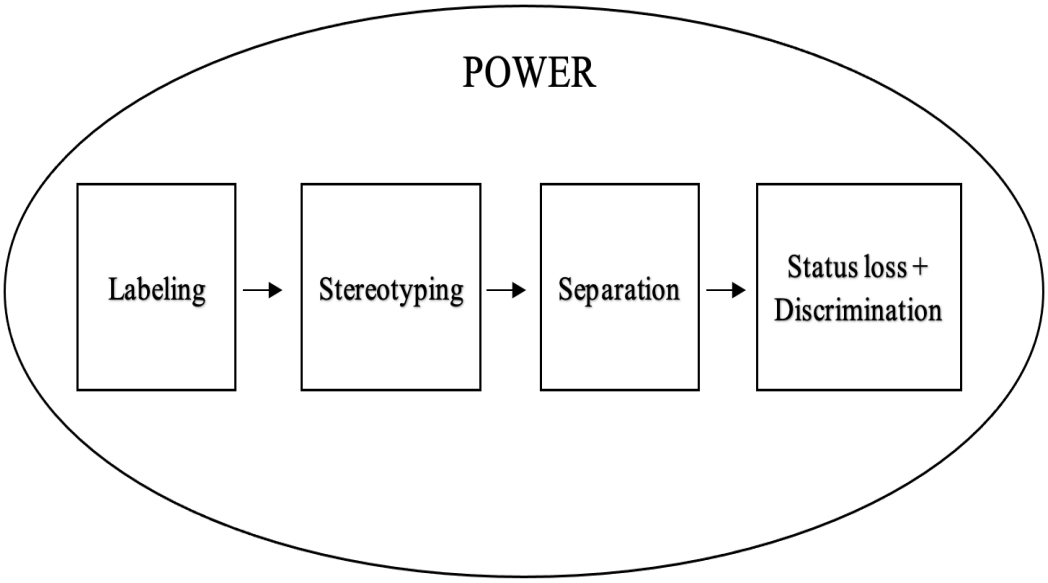


Figure 1. Theoretical stigma model as conceptualized by Link & Phelan (2001).

Component 1: Labeling. The first component of the stigma model is labeling. Labeling theory posits that society creates and assigns labels to individuals whose behavior deviates from the dominant social norm (Goffman, 1963). The use of labels in

our society, however, may be a product of our culture itself. As Mcdermott and Varenne (1995) point out in *Culture as Disability*, a disability is a cultural fabrication and exists only in a society where specific physical differences are observed, acknowledged, and then made consequential. The Learning Disability label (LD), used in special education, for instance, exists only because "it is given life in the organization of tasks, skills, and evaluation in our schools" (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 272). Indeed, the authors argue that the LD label does not exist. Only the tradition of observing, recording, remediating, and describing it. This is no less accurate for other labels used in education, including the EL classification.

Our educational system has "numerous made-to-order general categories for describing children in trouble, for example: deprived, different, disadvantaged, at-risk, and disabled (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 331). The problem with these categories is that we often focus on what is wrong with certain cognitive, linguistic, or social development traits inherent in students. As a result, McDermott and Varenne assert (1995) that labeled children routinely miss out on certain developments and opportunities compared to non-labeled children.

Apple's (2013) arguments on the construction of labels build on McDermott and Varenne's ideas in that the process of classifying individuals in education, specifically, is both a political and moral act and not a neutral helping act, given that the majority of labels are ascribed to poor students and students of color. He points out that:

> The labeling process, thus, tends to function as a form of social control, a "worthy" successor to that long line of mechanisms in schools that sought to homogenize social reality, to eliminate disparate perceptions, and to use

> supposedly therapeutic means to create moral, valuative, and intellectual consensus (p. 43).

Apple's central argument is that in the effort to "help," the dominant group unwittingly employs power and control over others and at the same time produces programs and interventions that end up harming more than helping. By focusing on the student "problem," attention is diverted from the potential shortcomings of schools themselves and the societal conditions that necessitate the use of the label in the first place. Given that categories are institutional abstractions, with "treatments" built into the very fabric of the institution, educators are liberated from the onerous duty of critically examining the institutional and economic conditions that confirm and necessitate the use of labels. Labels, therefore, take on an "essentializing" quality that conditions students' connection to the institution. EL students, for example, may become this and only this in the eyes of the educational institution.

In a similar vein, Domina et al. (2017) caution that category labels are likely to influence self-perception, expectations, and behavior and that these perceptions contribute to identity formation. Under these circumstances, the behavior of others towards students (e.g., teachers, peers, administrators) sends messages about their worth, potential, and academic ability. Thus, chances are, labels are very likely to "define" a student, control their schooling experience, and ultimately produce a self-fulfilling prophecy (Apple, 2013).

Component 2: Stereotyping. The second component of stigma occurs when labels are connected to stereotypes. Goffman (1963) discussed the concept of stereotypes in his seminal work. Since then, it has become a fundamental component of the

conceptualization of stigma, particularly in the psychological literature (Fiske, 1998; Link & Phelan, 2001). Indeed, Link and Phelan (2001) make clear that "stigma involves a label and a stereotype, with the label linking a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that forms the stereotype" (p. 369).

Crocker et al. (1998) argue that once a stereotype is learned, it impacts a person's actions, thoughts, and emotions, even if the stereotype is not believed to be true. Children in the U.S., for example, learn to devalue individuals with dark skin, those with disabilities, and those that are overweight at an early age. This is due, in large part, to stereotypical portrayals in mass media, including movies, books, and television shows. In some instances, stereotypical beliefs about individuals are held so widely in society that they ultimately become known as "facts." As a result, stigmatized individuals may be stereotyped automatically, often through split-second judgments and filtered through a collection of personal beliefs and ideologies (Fiske, 1998).

Crocker et al. (1998) further argue that stigmatized individuals often become aware of the stereotypes people hold about their particular social group. African Americans, for example, are often aware that stereotypes characterize them as intellectually inferior and aggressive, while the overweight person is often characterized as lacking self-control. Of course, these characterizations are not accurate, yet some stigmatized individuals may come to believe they are. The awareness of negative stereotypes associated with an individual's social group has become known as "stereotype threat" (Steele & Aronson, 1995). According to Crocker et al. (1998), stereotype threat takes place when "awareness that one's social identity is devalued directly challenges one's personal and collective self-esteem, by suggesting that oneself

and one's group are lacking in value" (p. 518). An African American student, for example, who answers questions in class may do so with the understanding that any incorrect answer may be interpreted with the stereotype that African Americans are not as smart as Whites. Crocker et al. (1998) are quick to note that stereotype threat is considered a "situational threat." It applies when the stigmatized are aware of the negative stereotype that applies to their social group.

When stereotypes occur inside educational institutions, particularly classrooms, the outcomes may impact students profoundly, as noted by Steele and Aronson's (1995) study, which found that test performance declined for African Americans and women when they were made aware of stereotypes related to low test performance. For ELs, in general, prior research has indicated that the EL label is associated with negative stereotypes, characterizing these students as academically inferior, unmotivated, and passive (Umansky, 2016a). In addition, other research suggests that some ELs develop feelings of inferiority, especially academically (Dabach, 2014; Thompson, 2015). Indeed, when students experience stereotyping, they often believe that a school is a place where they are devalued, resulting in school avoidance (García-Nevarez et al., 2005).

Component 3: Separation. The third component of stigma takes place when labels create a distinction between "us" and "them" (Link & Phelan, 2001). U.S. history offers many examples in which the dominant group labeled, stereotyped, and then excluded certain groups of people, including but not limited to African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants. The connection between labels and stereotypes justifies that those labeled are fundamentally different, and therefore the separation between "us" and "them" becomes warranted (Link and Phelan, 2001). Weber (1982)

clarifies that the distinction of individual or group differences causes stereotyping to occur quickly. Based on this perception, the "us" and "them" aspect of stigma denotes that the labeled group is inferior somehow. In extreme cases, labeled groups are thought of as non-human.

The clearest example of separation for EL students at the secondary level occurs when schools employ an academic tracking system. Callahan (2005) describes tracking as a systematic assignment of students to different coursework and curriculum and content levels. The basic premise of tracking is for low-performing students to access a more fundamental curriculum level to help them "catch up" to grade level. Sometimes, tracking is so extreme that two schools exist within a single school (Gándara & Orfield, 2010). First, the dominant group comprises college-bound students with access to rich curriculum and resources and "better" skilled teachers. And then there is the other school, generally composed of low-income and minority students, often placed into remedial courses with teachers that hold deficit perceptions of non-native languages, lower standards and expectations, and in classrooms with fewer resources. College-bound programs, such as Talented and Gifted, and Advanced Placement (AP), generally have a lower enrollment of ELs and low-income students. Moreover, at the elementary level, the opportunities offered to ELs and students considered low-income can impact access to opportunities in the later years, primarily at the secondary level.

For EL students at the secondary level, tracking looks different than for their native English-speaking peers. Schools generally focus on teaching English to the degree that participation in core classes is delayed until students have reached "enough" English proficiency (Gándara & Aldana, 2014). As a result, ELs frequently lack access to high-

quality instruction and generally “find themselves on the periphery, physically and pedagogically outside the richest academic discourse” (Callahan, 2005, p. 309). The reason behind tracking for EL lies in the belief about linguistics and academic skills. Schools, perhaps unconsciously, make the grave assumption that a lack of English proficiency is associated with limited intelligence (Callahan, 2005). In particular, the result is that Latinos, as one of the largest groups of ELs, remain the most segregated in schools on the West coast (Gándara and Aldana, 2014).

Dabach (2010) suggests that due to academic tracking and exclusion from opportunities, ELs likely experience internalized social stigma, resulting in diminished self-perception of intellectual worth and lower academic motivation. Anecdotal narratives described by teachers have shown that some ELs speak of their inferiority to other students, and their peers mock those that remain classified as ELs. Olsen (2010) comments that their status of full-participating students is diminished the more they remain EL classified.

The segregation of ELs can lead to a host of emotional and psychological consequences, in part because their language is not recognized, valued, or accepted within the dominant milieu of schools and because of separation from their peers (Parra et al., 2014). In some cases, separation from peers can lead to more considerable anxiety and post-traumatic stress, lower self-esteem and negative perception, higher depression, and a negative impact on social functioning.

Component 4: Status Loss and Discrimination. In the final component of stigma, people who are labeled experience status loss and discrimination. Link and Phelan (2001) point out that most stigma models do not include these concepts, yet they

are essential because stigma cannot represent the same meaning without them. When people are labeled and associated with undervalued characteristics, a rationale and justification are formed for rejecting, excluding, and devaluing them. Link and Phelan discuss status loss and discrimination as two separate concepts that co-occur together. Below I describe each more in detail.

Status Loss. Status loss occurs when people either lose or are assigned a low status on a hierarchy, generally due to labeling and stereotyping, resulting from some undervalued characteristics in the eyes of the stigmatizer (Link and Phelan, 2001). Lucas and Phelan (2012) indicate that "status is a position in a group based on esteem and respect" (p. 311). They suggest that group members often form expectations for themselves and others based on cultural constructions of status characteristics such as race, gender, and educational attainment. These expectations have profound consequences for power and prestige. For example, research has shown that mental illness is viewed as less desirable than other illnesses. In addition, individuals with mental illness are viewed as more unpredictable, more likely to make irrational decisions, and less capable (Lucas & Phelan, 2012).

Sociological research focused on social hierarchies, mainly using the "Expectation States" Theory, has found that external statuses, like gender and race, influence status hierarchies within small groups of individuals who do not know each other (Cohen, 1982). For example, Cohen (1982) indicates a pattern of white dominance at the classroom level on intellectual tasks. Racist expectations are reinforced when this happens, particularly for minority students, whose voices may be marginalized. As a result, white men are more likely to attain power and standing in broader society than

black men. This is partly because white men tend to speak more often, their ideas are more widely accepted by society, and they are more likely to gain leadership positions. In addition, traditional educational practices, such as ability grouping (academic tracking), reproduce academic status structure. Link and Phelan (2001) note that "having a status that is devalued in the wider society can lead to very concrete forms of inequality in the context of social interactions within small groups" (p. 371).

Discrimination. Discrimination, as described by Brown (2015), can be understood as "harmful actions toward others because of their ethnicity, nationality, language ability, and accent, or immigration status" (p. 2). The study of discrimination, through the lens of students, is a complex undertaking. When discrimination takes place early, it can have a profound impact on a child's life. Whether welcoming or hostile towards EL students, school climate and culture can play a critical role in mitigating discrimination. Discrimination is generally described in two forms: individual or structural. Individual discrimination can occur in daily interactions with people, while structural discrimination can manifest itself in the institutional practices of the school (Adair, 2015).

At the individual level, discrimination can be direct, such as the experience of racist comments and microaggressions. Alternatively, it can be indirect, such as overhearing a teacher or administrator talking about immigrants, in general, in an opposing view or expressing low expectations for immigrant students. Individuals who experience discrimination may learn that their culture, home language, and customs are not valued. Inside the school walls, students may notice a lack of representation of their culture and language (Adair, 2015).

At the structural level, for example, ELs may attend classes outside of the general building, experience frequent schedule changes, and have access to less-skilled teachers. They may also experience social exclusion from their peers, unfair grading practices, and exclusion from advanced-level courses (Umansky, 2016a). Structural discrimination manifests itself in how a system operates and is mainly influenced by views on multiculturalism and bilingualism. When schools do not value multiculturalism, teachers generally have low academic expectations for ELs. These perceptions shape how teachers treat and view ELs, and many believe that they are not ready for the same intellectual stimulation as their English-only speaking peers. Code-switching from Spanish to English, for instance, is seen as a lack of proficiency in either language rather than a creative and intelligent skill (Adair, 2015).

Brown (2015) suggests that the consequences of discrimination are manifold and can negatively impact identity formation, produce lower self-esteem and life satisfaction, and result in hopelessness, depression, anxiety, delinquency, and aggression. Brown further notes evidence that discrimination can impact cortisol level output (the hormone released in response to stress). Moreover, this may result in worse mental and physical health outcomes over time. However, protective factors can mitigate discrimination, including having a strong ethnic identity, an affinity group, and a robust family support system (Brown, 2015).

Power and Stigma

Link and Phelan contend that stigma is highly dependent on power and that power is required to stigmatize. Power, they argue, while sometimes obvious, has been chiefly overlooked in prior research simply because it is a concept that we take for granted and

because it is perceived as unproblematic. Nevertheless, power is an essential part of the social production of stigma. However, a limitation of Link and Phelan's stigma model is that power is not explicitly defined or conceptualized. For example, the authors only state that power is "entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power" (p. 375) and that one group of people with power socially construct labels and then assign said labels to another group of people. Therefore, building on the association between power and labels, I discuss Apple's (2013) conceptualization of power, which provides a practical critical analysis relevant to educational institutions. Furthermore, I discuss Stigma Power, a concept put forward by Link and Phelan (2014) that may help tease out the type of power they discussed in their 2001 article.

Categories and Labeling. Apple anchors the definition of power on the concept of *hegemony*, an idea developed by the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that a superstructure of ideology permeates the very consciousness of society to such an extent that it informs what constitutes the limit of commonsense. Indeed, hegemony is not merely a set of abstract thoughts or manipulation imposed by one group over another but a deep culture that permeates the core of consciousness that informs how we see and interpret the world. Apple notes that hegemony "refers to an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meaning, values and actions which are lived" (p. 22). He further draws on the work of cultural and social critic Raymond William to add that hegemony is essentially a body of dominant practices and expectations. Thus, it frames a fundamental understanding of the world, the foundation of reality for most people. Such ways of interpreting, seeing, and experiencing the world become known as the dominant culture. And it is the dominant culture that

shapes most people's experiences, the taken-for-granted culture that is often never examined or questioned. Apple argues that the dominant culture is usually passed on as "tradition." And the primary mechanism for transmission is educational institutions. Educational institutions, Apple argues, act as agents of cultural and ideological incubators.

The concept of hegemony becomes vital in understanding how control, domination, and power are grounded in educational institutions' commonsense and everyday practices. Apple emphasizes that power is not always easy to identify, yet it often manifests itself in the forms of "helping" actions. Schools, for example, assign labels to students for a variety of reasons, namely to "help" or to provide a specific service. Apple argues that educators have developed categories to treat students as institutional abstractions with qualities or characteristics that deviate from the dominant norm. For students labeled as ELs, "help" refers to a host of services, including language instruction designed to promote English proficiency. In addition to creating labels and the related "helping" actions, Apple underscores that we have developed and assigned processes and expertise to them. In other words, experts who "employ the supposedly diagnostic and therapeutic terminologies must find (and hence create) individuals who fit the categories, otherwise, the expertise is useless" (Apple, 2013, p. 58). The point is that labels create and justify processes and expertise. Educational institutions, for example, have justified the necessity of and use of the EL classification, and power and authority may exist in the hands of the school and not in the hands of the labeled student. The school trajectory and experiences of labeled students, in many cases, are out of their control and shaped by the daily practices, policies, rules, and regulations of school life.

Apple reminds us that labels are socially constructed and grounded in the dominant hegemonic ideology, and when imposed upon schools, have profound ethical and social implications, primarily when used to sort according to class, race, gender, and language. For example, Apple notes that "… the label and all that goes with it is likely to be used by the individual's peers and his or her custodians to define him or her" (p. 51). Furthermore, the label ends up governing almost all the behavior toward the student in question and eventually ends up producing a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Apple further argues that labels used in education are typically given more to poor and minority students than children from economically advantaged means. Furthermore, education institutions are often, but not always, the only ones that use labels to describe children. This is important to highlight because while a label may define and shape a student's experience inside the school, this is not necessarily the case outside of school. Put another way, broader society does not recognize the EL classification; it only exists within the institution's walls.

Stigma Power. Link and Phelan's (2014) concept of Stigma Power helps tease out the type of power they mentioned in their seminal article conceptualizing stigma. Stigma Power proposes that stigmatizers have motivations to keep people at levels of inferiority, often through processes hidden in commonsense practices and ideology. Specifically, the authors draw on Bourdieu's (1987) conceptualization of symbolic power grounded on three premises. First, there are aspects of culture and worth valued less in society that function as mechanisms of power. For example, a stigma represents a value and worth judgment by those doing the stigmatizing. Second, stigmatized people are routinely influenced and controlled without realizing it or may come to accept their lower

status in society. For instance, the authors argue that acknowledging and accepting a stigma is known as "internalized" or "self" stigma. Third, symbolic power is weaved into the fabric of commonsense practices and ideology, thereby existing in plain sight yet remaining hidden to both the stigmatizer and stigmatized. This last premise is vital because the idea that power remains hidden reinforces the interests of those in power. Finally, symbolic power manifests itself through systems, including and not limited to social policy, laws, and institutional practices. Such systemic factors help keep people at lower levels of inferiority.

Stigma and English Learners

To this point, I have focused on stigma literature, in general, and specifically on Link and Phelan's stigma framework. I now discuss relevant literature focused on the intersection between the EL classification and stigma. It is important to note that stigma has been discussed broadly in education, namely in the field of special education. For example, researchers have examined how the special education classification is considered a deviation from the social norm (Becker, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2013; McDermott, 1993) and how it produces a host of unintentional outcomes (Sullivan & Field, 2013), including stigma (Jones, 1971). This dissertation is concerned with stigma and the EL classification.

A growing body of research focusing on the outcomes of the EL classification has suggested that both the classification itself and the services associated with the classification are stigmatizing (Dabach, 2014; Thompson, 2015; Umansky, 2016a; Valenzuela, 1999; Vollmer, 2000). Moreover, research suggests that students and educators may associate the EL classification with negative stereotypes (Umansky,

2016a; Vollmer, 2000). Furthermore, EL students may internalize stigma and experience feelings of inferiority (Dabach, 2014; Thompson, 2015; Umansky, 2016a; Valenzuela, 1999). Much of the prior research has referenced the Link and Phelan stigma framework (e.g., Thompson, 2015).

Two studies have focused primarily on the intersection between stigma and the EL classification. Dabach (2014), for example, in a qualitative study investigating the interrelation between the EL classification and EL separate programs, argued that the EL classification is the original blemish (i.e., characteristic deemed unfavorable by society according to Goffman's conceptualization of stigma) and that all related imperfections after that ascribed to the EL classification produce stigma. Stigma production, put another way, begins after society has labeled a group of people that exhibit an unfavorable "blemish." In this case, the blemish is English proficiency as determined by white, middle-class norms. Dabach describes how Long-term ELs viewed preposterous the idea that they were not English proficient, given they had been in the U.S. for more than seven years and spoke "sophisticated" verbal English (p. 116). As a result, students inferred that they remained EL classified because they lacked intelligence. Furthermore, Dabach asserts that the longer students remain in EL separate programs, and the more they become English fluent, the more likely they are to make meaning to their placement, such as "I must be stupid if I'm still in these classes" (p. 118). Consequently, until EL students are reclassified, they find themselves "constantly comparing" (p. 120) themselves to other groups of students.

In another study, Thompson (2015) examined the cost and benefits of the EL classification and how prolonged experience was linked to stigma. Using a case study

methodology of three students considered Long-term ELs and Link and Phelan's (2001) stigma framework, Thompson found evidence of each of the four stigma components at work in students' experiences. For example, Thompson describes how the school labeled students based on socially constructed measures of English proficiency (i.e., labeling). Second, students still enrolled in English language development classes were generally considered less intelligent by staff at the middle school level and assigned easier schoolwork (i.e., stereotyping). Third, advanced courses with fewer Long-term ELs became normalized (i.e., separation). Finally, students generally excluded from advanced courses lost opportunities to prepare for post-secondary education (i.e., status loss and discrimination). A critical finding suggests that prolonged EL classification may impact students' self-confidence, aspirations, and the opportunity to participate in rigorous academic courses.

Summary

This chapter discussed a brief history of stigma, broadly and specifically, the Link and Phelan (2001) stigma model, made up of four primary components. I also discussed the concept of power and used Apple (2013) and Link and Phelan (2014) to add a critical analysis relevant to educational institutions. Finally, I discussed two articles that spoke explicitly on the experiences of EL students and stigma. One of those articles, Thomson (2015), used Link and Phelan's (2001) stigma framework. In this next chapter, I discuss the research materials and methods of the current study.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

"... my other classmates were having fun and not me because I was being pulled out for ELD, I didn't want to be pulled out"

- Ricardo Guerrero, Pueblo MS

Introduction

I chose to conduct a qualitative study because of my interest in understanding people's lived experiences and how they understand and navigate their social realities. Specifically, the personal narratives of a group of students who have been ascribed a socially constructed label by the dominant group produce distinctive types of knowledge (Harding, 2004). Therefore, qualitative research serves as a helpful approach because it enables individuals to share personal stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given that this study is concerned with a socially constructed label, a critical perspective becomes essential. Critical research aims to critique and challenge the status quo to bring about change and moves beyond the basic interpretation and understanding of lived experiences towards transformation and empowerment (Carspecken, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is also predicated on the idea that thought is negotiated by socially and historically constructed power relationships. Therefore, critical inquiry aims to confront injustices in society created by power relations (Apple, 2013; Carspecken, 1996; Link & Phelan, 2001; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This perspective becomes vital as

I consider the implications of a classification that research has suggested can produce unintended consequences.

The following sections provide the data sources used to inform the research questions, as outlined in Table 1. I then discuss the district context and the selection of participants, followed by data collection and analysis methods. Next, I provide a brief discussion of my positionality as a researcher. Finally, I discuss issues of validity, limitations, and generalizability.

District Context

A school district located in the Pacific Northwest served as the setting for this study. The local community population is about 156,431, with 83 percent classified as White, 10 percent Hispanic or Latino, 1.6 percent Black, and 4.5 percent Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Roughly 16 percent of families fall below the poverty level, and 27 percent of families qualify for food stamp benefits. During data collection, the district enrolled about 17,404 students with roughly 481 English learners (English Language Development Program, 2019; NCES, 2019). There are four comprehensive high schools, one alternative high school, eight middle schools, nineteen elementary schools, and an online school option.

The district uses the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) definition of "English learner" to identify students for language services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Identification takes place within 30 days at the beginning of the school year or within ten days during the school year using a Language Use Survey developed by the [State] Department of Education. Students who qualify are offered language services.

The district has adopted English Language Development (ELD) as the preferred method for language instruction. In elementary school, students are pulled out of class

daily for ELD instruction during designated intervention times, when possible, not to exclude students from the core content. In middle and high school, students are scheduled into an ELD class instead of one or two elective classes, when possible, not to exclude students from a core content class. At all levels, when possible, students are grouped according to grade and or language proficiency.

Students shed their EL classification after reclassification, a process accomplished in this district by demonstrating English proficiency through the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) assessment and scoring proficient in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students that do not demonstrate proficiency on all domains can still be reclassified using a "Promoting with Evidence" method. This process involves students scoring 4s or 5s in three domains and a comprehensive portfolio with evidence compiled by a team. Students that demonstrate proficiency are made aware, and letters are sent home to parents in English and home languages. Yearly evaluation for reclassification eligibility takes place for all students. Reclassified students do not take ELD and are monitored for four years. While the district does not publish the number of Long-term ELs in middle school, a district report shows approximately 72 students across the eight middle schools described as "ELs identified 5 years or More" (English Language Development Program, 2019).

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources	Analyzed For
RQ # 1: To what extent do Spanish-speaking middle school students considered long-term English learners, experience stigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework?	• Writing exercise • Interviews with students • Documents and artifacts	• Labeling • Self-perception, how others view them (stereotyping) • Academic tracking, exclusion (separation) • Self-perception (status loss) • Value of culture, language, the difference between peers (individual discrimination) • Perception of how the school views their culture and language (structural discrimination)
RQ # 2: To what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience?	• Writing exercise • Interviews with students • Documents and artifacts	• Labeling • Self-perception, how others view them (stereotyping) • Academic tracking, exclusion (separation) • Self-perception (status loss) • Value of culture, language, the difference between peers (individual discrimination) • Perception of how the school views their culture and language (structural discrimination)

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

It is important to note that recruitment and data collection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many public schools across the country had closed and transitioned

to online instruction. The school district where this study was conducted utilized virtual classroom platforms (Google Classroom) and video technologies (Zoom) to provide instruction to all students. Recruitment and data collection took place utilizing these technologies.

I used purposeful sampling, in addition to a criterion-based selection technique to identify and select participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using a list of students that met the criteria (district-provided), I recruited 19 Spanish-speaking middle school students (grades 6-8), considered Long-term ELs, and not dual identified (e.g., also qualified for special education). I use pseudonyms to protect the district and individual anonymity.

The recruitment process involved speaking to a district administrator, middle school principals, and teachers about the research study. Conversations took place over email and phone. Because the district was interested in the findings of this study, they allowed me to recruit students during ELD classes. I completed both the consent and assent processes electronically (see Appendix A). Specifically, I met with students in virtual Zoom breakout rooms during ELD class. I introduced myself, provided the context for the research study, and asked for assent. I had students sign electronically using a Google Form. To adhere to Covid-19 health guidelines, I also obtained Parent/guardian consent using a Google Form. I provided the assent and consent forms in English and Spanish. I provide a list of students on Table 2 and Table 3. Table 2 provides information about birth country, years served in EL, grade level, and school. Table 3 provides information on ELPA21 scores. Students need a score of 4s on all academic categories to achieve proficient status (ODE, 2021).

Table 2

List of Students by Birth Country, Years Served EL, Grade Level, and Middle School

Name	Birth Country	Years Served EL	Grade	School
Luna Hernandez	U.S.	9	8	Cholla
Clara Garcia	U.S.	8	7	Cholla
Alonso Torres	U.S.	7	6	Cholla
Mario Xoco	U.S.	7	6	Cholla
Genesis Flores	U.S.	7	6	Cholla
Alex Quetzalli	U.S.	7	6	Cholla
Sergio Rojas	U.S.	7	6	Cholla
Natalia Estrada	U.S.	8	7	Cholla
Mauricio Castillo	U.S.	7	6	Juniper
Diana Romero	U.S.	7	6	Juniper
Olivia Romero	U.S.	8	7	Juniper
Rafael Rivera	U.S.	7	6	Juniper
Marisa Gomez	U.S.	8	8	Aspen
Alma Moreno	Mexico	8	7	Aspen
Emilio Ortega	U.S.	8	7	Pueblo
Ricardo Guerrero	U.S.	7	6	Pueblo
Sara Cortez	U.S.	8	8	Saguaro
Carla Herrera	U.S.	7	6	Saguaro
Franco Cruz	U.S.	7	6	Saguaro

Note. Years Served EL indicates the years students have been EL classified.

Table 3

List of Students by ELPA21 Scores

	ELPA21 Scores			
Name	**Listening**	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Luna Hernandez	3	3	2	3
Clara Garcia	4	3	3	3
Alonso Torres	5	3	3	3
Mario Xoco	4	3	3	3
Genesis Flores	5	4	3	3
Alex Quetzalli	5	4	3	5
Sergio Rojas	4	3	4	4
Natalia Estrada	4	5	3	3
Mauricio Castillo	5	4	3	3
Diana Romero	3	3	2	3
Olivia Romero	4	3	3	3
Rafael Rivera	5	3	4	4
Marisa Gomez	4	4	3	3
Alma Moreno	5	5	3	4
Emilio Ortega	5	3	4	4
Ricardo Guerrero	4	4	3	3
Sara Cortez	5	5	3	3
Carla Herrera	5	3	4	5
Franco Cruz	5	3	3	4

Note. English proficiency is denoted by achieving a score of 4s in all categories (ODE, 2021).

Data Collection

I used ethnographic research methods to collect data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collection included three primary sources: a narrative writing exercise, semi-structured group or individual interviews, and archival and institutional documents. Multiple data sources are essential to triangulate my findings, protect against bias, and better understand and interpret a theme or perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to note that the writing exercise was intended to act as a precursor to the interviews and not necessarily a primary data source. Consequently, I used the writing exercise data to inform probing interview questions. However, I do use quotes from the writing exercise when appropriate to highlight specific findings. When I do, I note which data comes from the writing exercise or the interviews in the findings chapter.

Narrative Writing Exercise. Narrative writing exercises, or stories, are valuable in qualitative research when combined with additional qualitative methods that situate the stories in a theoretical context (Ceglowski, 1997). Moreover, stories serve as valuable data that provides a first-hand perspective of participants' beliefs, attitudes, and world views (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I had students write a story about their EL experience, completed during their ELD class, as part of a writing assignment led by the classroom teacher. Students wrote directly into a Google Form. All students in the class completed the writing exercise, but only data from students who met the criteria and signed assent and consent were collected. The writing exercise aims to yield data that may map onto the Link and Phelan stigma model. Students choose only one writing prompt from the following choices:

1. *Tell a story about a time that you liked being an English learner in school.*
2. *Tell a story about a time that you did not like being an English learner in school.*

Students were asked to include specific information in their response, including and not limited to the people involved, where the story takes place, how the experience made them feel and why, and any other relevant information. The purpose for requesting specific information is to elicit data that may map onto the Link and Phelan stigma model. Teachers instructed students to write as little or as much as they desired. Still, the story had to be a least one paragraph in length. Students had one class period to complete the exercise. I provided teachers with instructions (see Appendix B).

Interviews. I scheduled individual or group semi-structured interviews with students during ELD class using Zoom breakout rooms following the writing exercise. In general, I attempted to conduct the interviews one week after the writing activity. Given the nature of online school and the unknowns of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted within a span of three weeks after the writing activity. Interviews are "necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). Interviews allowed me to gain insight into the minds of participants to understand their perspectives. Interviews were semi-structured, audio-recorded, and transcribed and lasted approximately 15-25 minutes. Generally, I conducted group interviews for each middle school. In cases where a student was absent during the group interview, I conducted an individual interview.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask all students the same set of questions, yet allowed for the opportunity to ask specific and unique follow-up questions based on responses (Smith, 1995). Given the organic nature of semi-structured

interviews, not all students were asked the same follow-up questions. In Appendix C, I provide the set of basic questions asked to all students. I also provide a list of recurring follow-up questions generated after I had conducted all interviews. The writing activity responses guided basic questions. Moreover, student responses and the Link and Phelan stigma model components guided the probing questions.

I began the interviews with a brief introduction. Next, I asked students about their writing activities. Because interviews were not conducted directly after the writing activity, I had copies of their writing and referenced appropriately. In some cases, I had to re-read what they wrote to engage their memory. Finally, I asked students probing questions based on responses. Group interviews allowed for the opportunity to ask more probing questions compared to individual interviews. For example, during group interviews, students often responded on what was said by others. I facilitated the conversation and generally allowed the students to dictate the topics after the primary question was asked. Interviews took place over Zoom breakout rooms hosted by ELD teachers.

In most cases, students had their videos turned off and audio muted. The muted audio presented some challenges in eliciting responses. I learned that I had to call on students to generate responses instead of waiting for a response. I ended all interviews by thanking them and asking if they had any questions.

Documents. When possible, I reviewed student archival and institutional records to supplement the writing and interview data, including English language assessment levels (ELPA21), grade level, number of years classified as EL, and birth country. In

addition, I used documents to highlight students' characteristics and to aid in the triangulation of data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative and inductive process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began by collecting all the data, organizing it, and creating what Yin (2014) terms the case study database. Next, I downloaded the writing samples and transcribed interviews into pdf documents organized by middle school. For both the writing exercises and interviews, I utilized "The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers," by Saldaña (2009) as my primary resource for data analysis. I followed the codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry. In addition, I also utilized "Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes," by Emerson et al. (2011), particularly the chapters on "jottings," "memo writing," and "Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing." To aid in data analysis, I used coding software (NVivo).

Data Analysis for the Opening Narrative Description. Prior to the presentation of the findings, I write a brief descriptive narrative to help contextualize the students. I used data from the interviews exclusively. I used jottings and memoing (Emerson et al., 2011) as the primary methods of analysis. I used NVivo to memo and hard copies of the writing and interview data for the jottings.

Data Analysis for Research Question One. For the first research question, I asked to what extent do Spanish-speaking middle school students considered Long-term English learners, experience stigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework? For this research question, I used pre-established categories based on the Link and Phelan stigma model components. I began the coding process with hard-copy documents and

conducted preliminary jottings (Emerson et al., 2011) of parent codes "power," "labeling," "stereotyping," "separation," and "status loss and discrimination." I provide examples of jottings in Appendix D. I then transitioned to NVivo, where I completed the second round of coding informed by the jottings. Once I had completed this stage, I referred to the Link and Phelan stigma model and literature to triangulate preliminary findings. I then completed a third and fourth round of focused coding (Emerson et al., 2011). Next, I wrote and linked memos to the parent codes. NVivo has a memo feature that links to parent codes. Memos are theoretical notes used to establish and develop ideas based on codes (Emerson et al., 2011). Specifically, memos included intellectual thoughts on how the literature maps onto the parent codes. During this stage, I reviewed literature and conducted additional literature reviews to support and triangulate the findings. I included literature citations in the memos. Finally, I extracted the codes and memos from NVivo and transferred them into a Word document. I synthesized the data and literature to produce a coherent thematic story (Emerson et al., 2011) for each Link and Phelan stigma component. I provide an example of the NVivo coding process in Appendix E.

Data Analysis for Research Question Two. For the second research question, I asked to what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience? Data analysis for this research question was conducted after the writing of the findings for research question one. I follow this method on purpose, in part to allow time for me to "separate" from the pre-established Link and Phelan categories. Similar to the first research question, I began the coding process with hard-copy documents and conducted preliminary jottings (Emerson et al., 2011). Then, I re-read the data multiple times across

several weeks and continued to conduct jottings and memos. Throughout this process, I made sure to refer back to the research question and prior literature. For example, after several weeks of producing jottings and thinking with the data, I identified the parent codes “power and control,” “unaware,” and “ELD class.” Next, I wrote and linked memos to the parent codes using NVivo. During this stage, like data analysis for the first research question, I reviewed the literature to support and triangulate the findings. I included literature citations in the memos. During this stage, I also attempted to visualize how the ELD apparatus produces the conditions for stigma and other power outcomes. The result was the creation of a visual model, which I include in the findings chapter. Finally, I extracted the codes and memos from NVivo and transferred them into a Word document. I synthesized the data and literature to produce a coherent thematic story.

Role of This Researcher

I came to the United States undocumented from Mexico when I was four years old. When I started kindergarten, I, like many who looked and sounded like me, was pulled out of class once per day for English language development. Thus, I am a former EL student. I am also a former EL and special education teacher and assistant principal, and I am currently a district administrator. These experiences have shaped and molded me into the scholar-practitioner that I am today.

Furthermore, it is essential to mention that Mexico’s history is complicated, given the colonization from Spain and other European countries. Indeed, as a result of colonization, my first language is a European language, Spanish. This fact is important because this study concerns another European language, English, held in higher regard to Spanish in U.S. public schools.

I also consider myself mestizo, part European and part indigenous, from the indigenous peoples of Mexico, particularly the state of Nayarit and surrounding areas. Only recently in adult life have I accepted and embraced the indigenous part of my identity. I approach this research with this new way of seeing and interpreting the world. As a result, my primary role in this study is to listen to the voices that have been intentionally excluded and minimized by the dominant culture.

Validity

I use commonly employed strategies to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, as outlined by Merriam and & Tisdell (2016). To ensure the validity and reliability of my findings, I employed triangulation methods: the use of multiple sources of data and data collection techniques. I also routinely examined my positionality as a researcher by engaging in critical self-reflection regarding my biases, worldviews, and assumptions. I engaged in peer review by discussing with colleagues my research process, emerging findings, and interpretations. I produced an audit trail that documents the methods, procedures, and rationale for decisions made, especially during the analysis process. Finally, I provide a detailed, thick description when writing up my findings.

Generalizability and Limitations

Qualitative research is not designed to generalize (Merrian & Tisdell, 2016). However, I believe that we may still gain profound insight into the lived experiences of middle school students with prolonged EL classification. Ultimately, findings are restricted by which students decided to participate and what information they shared with me. Indeed, student responses were influenced by the level of trust they have in me and their willingness to complete the activities. As a former English learner and proficient

bilingual, my positionality, together with the data collection methods, mainly the group interviews, increased trust.

Another limitation worth mentioning is that I conducted this study, particularly the data collection process, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools had transitioned to remote learning (online) and teachers and staff transitioned to teleworking from home, utilizing technology to teach students. I conducted the data collection primarily through the use of Google platforms and Zoom video technology. There were instances in which students did not show to class, or teachers did not allow me to visit their virtual classrooms, for one reason or another. When I was able to visit classrooms, I was placed into a virtual breakout room with students. Generally, students had their videos off and their audio muted. This presented challenges in eliciting responses. As a result, the findings of this study, while important, are limited in scope and breadth. Furthermore, the overall study is much smaller than I had anticipated or desired given the pandemic and the challenges of accessing students. Indeed, there was a period in which I thought about abandoning the study given the overwhelming obstacles to collect data, and the unknowns of the pandemic. Therefore, I caution against any form of generalization.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

"Uh, it was some kid in first grade told me that I am dumb because I don't know proper, really good English."

- Mauricio Castillo, Juniper MS

Introduction

Before I present the findings for the research questions, I find it appropriate to contextualize the students in this study beyond data points or descriptive statistics on a table. Indeed, the students in this study are real humans. During data collection, they were all participating in online distance learning from home and navigating the uncertainties of COVID-19. The conversations I had with them, while brief, allowed me to peek into their lives. Overwhelmingly, I found the students vibrant, energetic, generally optimistic, and full of aspirations. Yet, like many other middle school students, the students in this study are ordinary with ordinary experiences and aspirations. This brief introductory narrative highlights the snippets of conversations we had before and after the interviews or while we were waiting for students to log into the zoom breakout room.

EL classified students are not so different from non-EL classified students. For example, many students talked about hanging out during recess with friends at the track, near the football field, or by the lockers. Others talked about hanging out in classrooms or upstairs in a sitting area with an oversized giant couch. And like many middle school students, they did not like going to the principal's office, as space most said they try to

avoid. On the topic of friends, many said that they either have a large group of friends or none at all. The group from Aspen Middle School reminded me that drama among friends is a real thing. Students also talked about their favorite and least favorite classes. Math and science came up frequently as classes students do not like, while Spanish, advisory, and language arts are popular.

Students also talked about their current and past teachers. Many liked their teachers because they routinely played board games with them, had prize boxes, held class parties, or brought birthday cakes and candy to class. Others also mentioned field trips to the supermarket when "they were good." Students reminded me that these experiences were when they were in "regular" school and not online. At the end of some interviews, I asked students what they wanted to do after high school. The majority of students I asked this question to said they hoped to attend college. One student informed me that getting good grades in high school is required to attend college. Others said that they wanted to get jobs. One student, in particular, said that he wants to work for his brother's business.

I waited until students virtually transitioned back to their ELD class before logging off at the end of most interviews. Before transitioning back to class, I asked one particular student to tell me about the middle experience during the pandemic. He said, "It's pretty chill," and left the breakout room.

Research Question One: Link and Phelan Stigma Model

The first research question asked to what extent Spanish-speaking middle school students, considered Long-term ELs, experience stigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework. In the following sections, I present the findings for each of the stigma components. Where appropriate, I indicate when quotes come from the writing activity. To preserve student voice authenticity, I do not edit grammar or spelling on the writing activity data. Furthermore, each time I originally reference a student from the study, I will introduce them by first and last name, including grade level and school. Thereafter, I will only refer to them by their first name. In addition, I found it helpful to connect the findings to the literature within each section, weaving discussion throughout where appropriate instead of dedicating a separate section focused on discussion. Finally, I end with a general summary.

Labeling

The first component of the Link and Phelan stigma model is labeling. The labeling process occurs when one group of people with power ascribe a socially constructed label to another group of people with less power (Apple, 2013). Long-term ELs are typically ascribed the EL classification early in their education career, and many have attended schools in the United States for most of their lives (Thompson, 2015). I find a similar pattern across students in this study, with 18 out of 19 born in the United States and 17 students classified as ELs in kindergarten, as shown in Table 2 in the previous chapter. When I asked Luna Hernandez, an eighth-grader from Cholla Middle School, if she remembers being identified as an English learner, she said, "Nope. I really don't." When asked if she knew of or had heard the term English learner, she responded

that “I did, but I don’t know how to say it.” I found a similar theme among six other students at Cholla Middle School. Alex Quetzalli, a sixth-grade student, said that an English learner is “someone that is working on their English.” The rest of the students said they had no idea. Due to the organic format of semi-structured interviews, I did not have the opportunity to ask this specific question to other groups of students at other middle schools. However, the conversation with students at Cholla Middle School supports Olsen’s (2010) argument that many Long-term ELs are generally unaware of their classification.

Overwhelmingly, students associated the EL classification with taking ELD classes. This was a central theme, particularly from the narrative writing activity data. The narrative writing prompt, for instance, asked students to write a story about their experience as English learners. The prompt did not mention the term ELD. Nevertheless, 15 out of 19 students mentioned the ELD class in their writing sample. When I asked students how long they have been in ELD, most of them said since kindergarten. Others, however, were not sure. Marisa Gomez, an eighth-grader from Aspen Middle School, said she has been in ELD since “... second or first grade, I think. I am not sure.” Carla Herrera, a sixth-grader from Saguaro Middle School, also said that she has been in ELD since second grade but was unsure. Sara Cortez, an eighth-grader, and Franco Cruz, a sixth-grader from Saguaro Middle School, also said since second grade. Natalia Estrada, on the other hand, a seventh-grader from Cholla Middle School, said that she has been in ELD “all my life.” Similar comments were made by Diana Romero, a sixth-grader from Juniper Middle School, and Clara Garcia, a seventh-grader from Cholla Middle School.

I also had the opportunity to ask several students questions about their ELD class, specifically about who takes it and who does not. Carla provided an answer:

> For example, if you do not know English or if you just moved here to like the country and you have no idea how to speak it [English], then you go to like ELD class, and they teach you how to do it. Yeah.

Carla was born in the United States and classified as an EL student in kindergarten. She knows how to speak English, so her comment is worth unpacking. Olsen (2010) argues that most ELD classes at the secondary level are not designed for Long-term ELs. Olsen adds that Long-term ELs generally get "stuck" at intermediate levels of English proficiency and end up attending the same ELD class as newcomers. When Long-term ELs spend years in the same class, Olsen calls this phenomenon the "ESL ghetto." Carla, like many other students in this study, attends ELD classes with newcomers. Her response suggests that she attends ELD because she does not "know English."

Other students offered different responses. For example, Cholla Middle School students said that the ELD class is for learning English, more words, and vocabulary. However, Alonso Torres, a sixth-grader, added that he did not know why he took ELD. "I think it is for learning English," but he was not entirely sure. Furthermore, Luna said that ELD is a class for "improving your English." However, she added that "... well, I see that mostly Latinos go there." Luna's response that mostly "Latinos" attend ELD class reinforces the research on ELD classification, given that Spanish is the most commonly spoken language among EL students in the country and in this school district (English Language Development Program, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

The group conversation with Aspen Middle School students shifted from taking ELD class to whether they still need to take ELD class. Alma Moreno, a seventh-grader, said that she does not know whether she still needs to take ELD but that "sometimes I do need help." When I probed for more information, she mentioned that writing is hard. Marisa interjected and said that writing was also hard for her too. Marisa went on to say that "the only thing I need help with in ELD is that [the ELD teacher] helps where to put punctuations in our sentences. That's just one thing I need help with." These findings parallel prior research that suggests Long-term ELs are characterized by weak academic skills (Freeman et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

Long-term ELs are essentially English learners that, for one reason or another, have not been reclassified. Overwhelmingly, I find that students are generally misinformed or, in most cases, unaware of the reclassification process. For example, when the conversation transitioned to reclassification or exiting ELD, as some students came to know it, they spoke about a test or quiz taken once per year. Moreover, if they pass, they *may* get out of ELD. Some know the test is called "ELPA," but others had never heard the name before.

The group of students at Aspen Middle School spoke about a quiz at the end of the year. Marisa said that you "... have to do a quiz at the end. I am not really sure." She is not the only one unsure about the quiz. Alma added that "you do like this quiz and if you know everything, then you can get out. I guess." She also went on to say that you need "fours, like reading, writing and two others, I don't remember." As middle school students, who have been taking ELD since kindergarten, both Marisa and Alma are still not sure how to shed the EL classification.

The Juniper, Pueblo, and Saguaro Middle School students also expressed similar comments about the exit process. For example, Rafael Rivera, a sixth-grader at Juniper Middle School, said that a student needs to pass the ELPA test to exit. When I asked him if this is the only way to exit ELD, he said:

> You can also take a break from ELD class. Like if you want to be in another class, you can take [it] and not be in ELD for the whole year. But you have to go back. You ask the teacher if you can have a break, and then they [ELD teacher] discuss with the parents.

I asked Rafael if you have to return to ELD after one year. He said, "no, it can be two years." Marisa was also unclear about the exit process and shared:

> I know there is other ways to get out of it [ELD class]. Like for example, if your parents or guardians or whatever say like, "oh she knows English so why is she still in that class," right, then they can like pull you out.

Marisa is correct in that a parent or guardian can waive EL services at any point. On the other hand, Rafael believes that a student can break from EL services for up to two years but must return to the ELD classroom. Of course, this is not true. Rafael's comment reinforces the idea that students in this study are uninformed about the reclassification process.

The notion of being unaware of the reclassification process was also a salient theme for the students at Cholla Middle School. Natalia said that she had no idea how to exit ELD. When I asked if her ELD teacher had talked to her about the exit process, she said, "no, I don't think so." I then asked the rest of the students, all of them said that their

ELD teacher has never talked to them about the exit process. I then asked students if they were ready to exit ELD. Every single student said yes without hesitation.

In summary, I find that the labeling process began early for most students in this study. Indeed, most were born in the U.S. and classified as EL early in their education career, supporting prior research (Thompson, 2015). I find that students, by and large, associate the EL classification (label) with taking ELD classes. Furthermore, I find variations on the purpose of the ELD class itself and who or who does not take it. Generally, students view ELD class as a space to learn English, vocabulary words, or receive academic help, like writing. Still, others had no idea why they were enrolled in ELD class. I also find that students do not fully understand the EL classification itself and the reclassification process. This is a salient finding given that all 19 students have carried the EL classification for over seven years.

Stereotyping

The second component of the Link and Phelan (2001) stigma model is stereotyping. Link and Phelan note that stigma is associated with "... a label and a stereotype, with the label linking a person to a set of undesirable characteristics that forms the stereotype" (p. 369). They add that stereotypes based on socially constructed categories or labels are generally used to make preconscious automatic split-second judgments. Individuals can also internalize negative stereotypes affiliated with unique characteristics.

I found one example of split-second judgments. Mauricio Castillo, a sixth-grader from Juniper Middle School, shared in his writing activity that "one time… a long time ago," he was treated differently compared to other students because he went to the ELD

class. When asked during the interview to tell more, he said, “Uh, it was some kid in first grade told me that I am dumb because I don’t know proper, really good English.” When asked if he has experienced something similar in middle school, he said no. Mauricio did not have a further recollection of the incident.

Stigma involves the failure to possess desirable attributes that society deems normal. Often conditioned by the dominant societal norms, children internalize specific attributes as unfavorable (Becker & Arnold, 1986). For example, the split-second decision made by the other student toward Mauricio associates the lack of “really good English” skills with an undesirable trait and a negative stereotype. In this case, the other student equates a lack of “proper” English speaking skills with being “dumb.”

Mauricio wrote and spoke about this incident that took place over five years ago. It highlights the impact it had on him. Adiar (2015) suggests that children begin to develop their identity at a very early age. Therefore, the school environment and what takes place inside can profoundly affect students’ well-being and development.

I found one example where students spoke about internalized negative stereotypes. I asked students from Cholla Middle School to speak about English learners in general. The conversation organically transitioned into talking about who speaks “good” English. Alonso led the conversation. He commented that Mr. [Johnson], a teacher at Cholla, spoke “good” English. I asked him to tell me more. Alonso said that Mr. [Johnson] speaks “good” English “because he is American.” I asked Alonso if you have to be an American to speak good English. “In my opinion, yeah,” he said. Clara agreed and said:

> Yeah, also because I hear a lot of them [Americans] say. Because I don't know some words. Well, I do know some words. I can understand the words. I just don't know what it means. And mostly comes from Americans. That's like. I always ask, like, what does that mean? Yeah, I understand what they are saying. I just don't know the meaning behind it. The words. And I feel like they just know better.

Clara paused and continued:

> I don't even know. Basically, if like, isn't that like the only language you learn when you are growing up? Like, I was learning Spanish because my mom was Spanish. She doesn't know English. Well, she does know a little bit. Like I said, I only grew up with Spanish, so.

Sergio Rojas, a seventh-grader, and Genesis Flores, a sixth-grader, agreed with Clara. Genesis added that it came down to knowing more vocabulary. I asked her to explain. "Yes, Americans know more vocabulary." Alonso interjected and said that, in his opinion, Americans know more vocabulary "because [they] grow up all [their] life… speaking English." Clara agreed and commented, "I guess that's why they [Americans] don't take ELD." I asked Clara to explain further. "Not specific people. I've seen that a lot of Americans don't take ELD."

I argue that students have internalized the idea that they do not speak "good" English because they are not "American." While not explicitly stated, I deduce that because all participating students are Spanish-speaking, "American" refers to White, English-speaking people. Following this logic, I theorize that because students do not see themselves as "American," they may never speak "good" English. The opposite of

"good" English is, of course, "bad" English. Reclassification, therefore, may not become possible in the minds of students when framed in this context. Link and Phelan (2001) argue that people can internalize negative stereotypes related to specific characteristics. Students at Cholla Middle School have internalized the negative stereotype associated with a specific characteristic: only White, English-speaking people can speak "good" English. This negative stereotype is supported by the fact that they have never seen an "American" take an ELD class.

Further, Crocker et al. (1998) argue that stigmatized groups maintain social threats to self-worth and identity through social comparisons with other people. Thus, social identities are relational and comparative, and they function to distinguish sameness or difference, and better or worse than other groups. Framed within this context, students at Cholla Middle School make the social comparison of their group, Spanish-speaking students who take ELD class, to White, English-speaking "Americans" who do not need to take ELD class. Determining who counts as "American" and who does not is beyond the scope of this study. Yet, this is a fascinating finding, and I am interested to learn whether other students feel this way. The idea that students at Cholla Middle School do not see themselves as "American," given that they were born in the U.S., is problematic.

In summary, I found one example where a stereotype was used to make a pre-conscious decision, and four students spoke about internalized stereotypes. While the findings on this component are limited, research suggests that Long-term ELs experience stereotyping (Thompson, 2015). A limitation of this study is the methods used, including and not limited to the lack of interview questions focused on the stereotyping construct. Much more research is needed, explicitly focusing on the stereotype construct.

Separation & Status Loss

This section combines the findings for the Link and Phelan stigma model components of separation and status loss. I found that as students spoke about separation, they also spoke about status loss. Thus, separation seemingly led to a status loss. In this section, I also include block quotes taken directly from the writing activity samples. To preserve student voice authenticity, I have not edited or revised the quotes.

The third component of the Link and Phelan stigma model is separation. Separation takes place when there is a division between "us" and "them." The distinction between "us" and "them" signals that the labeled group is somehow inferior. Link and Phelan note that the association between the label and the stereotype justifies the separation. The fourth component of the Link and Phelan stigma model is status loss and discrimination. I focus on status loss in this section. Status loss occurs when people are assigned a lower hierarchical status due to being labeled, stereotyped, and separated based on an undervalued characteristic.

Students described numerous instances in which they were pulled out of a class to attend ELD, primarily in elementary school. For example, Marisa explained that she was taken out of her regular class for ELD in elementary school. "It's like in the middle of class. Like, we would go to this other classroom," she said. Clara and Franco described something similar. Clara said, "I don't remember how I felt, but I remember that I did. I was taken out."

While most students spoke in neutral terms about being taken out of class, others shared the emotional impact it caused. For example, Carla described her experience this way in her writing activity:

> There's been multiple times when I didn't liked being on English class, but one I will always remember was when I was in 5th grade and we had butterflies in our class, and they we're already ready to be released from there little cage, but then my teacher at the time had to come and picked me, [Franco], [Sara] and many other people up, I was pretty upset because I really wanted to see the butterflies being released but whatever I guess.

Franco expressed in his writing activity that he generally did not mind getting pulled out for ELD class, but he remembers one time when he did:

> When I was in [elementary school] we we're at PE and we we're doing arrows and it look so fun. I was waiting in line for my turn well everyone was it looked so fun. In till my ELD teacher came and got us. I didn't like getting pulled out of my main class for ELD.

Carla and Franco are not the only ones that expressed negative emotions about being pulled out of class. Ricardo Guerrero, a sixth-grader at Pueblo MS, stated in his writing activity that his ELD teacher was not a "bad" person for pulling him out of class, but "... it was the fact that my other classmates were having fun and not me because I was being pulled out for ELD, I didn't want to be pulled out." Rafael, expressed in his writing activity that "in 5th grade, they pulled me out of class, but we were playing Kahoot! And it was really sad because I couldn't play." He added that "I couldn't play anymore because we have to do a math test, and we have to go to ELD for it." Mario also commented in his writing activity that he was always getting pulled out of class when something fun was taking place. He said, "...something fun happens, so you get pulled out. This happened in elementary school."

While most students spoke about separation at the elementary level, several students highlighted the juncture between elementary and middle school. For example, Marisa said that "... I don't think so because it's usually ELD before another class," when asked if she had ever been pulled out for ELD class. Students from Juniper Middle School commented similarly. For example, Mauricio said that "I don't have social studies because of ELD." Three other students said the same.

Students from Saguaro Middle School also commented about being excluded from classes to take ELD. For example, Carla led the conversation. She said:

> Um, all of the students in middle school have to take PE at least one trimester, all of us. But you can pick two that you wanna do, right? So they give you a list of what they have, like, the fun classes, they call them. Like art, PE, band, whatever, right? So they give you a list, and you pick two. And then, instead of ELD class, as we have it, um, they give you, like, another class. Like if I pick art and PE, I'll only get one because I am like ELD class, but if you don't get an ELD class, you get two.

I asked the group if taking ELD meant being excluded from a fun class to clarify what I had heard. Carla and the group of students said yes without hesitation. I remained quiet to gauge whether the students would give more insight into how they felt about this. None of the students offered a follow-up response.

In summary, multiple students shared parallel stories of being taken out of class for ELD instruction in elementary school. While not all students spoke about the impact of being separated, several did and made it clear that they did not like it. Notably, they spoke about being separated during moments of "fun." In these examples, the act of

separation led to a status loss. Put another way, the students who did not get separated continued to have "fun," while the students who did not speak English to the level deemed appropriate by the dominant culture were excluded. While this is a critical perspective, the students acknowledged that being separated produced strong emotions.

Students did not speak about being separated in middle school. This is due to the structural difference between elementary and middle school. Students are pulled out for interventions in elementary, given they are generally in the same classroom all day. However, in middle school, students have multiple classes, and the intervention now becomes a class of its own. Indeed, students do not notice the separation as referenced by Marisa. Nevertheless, they continue to be excluded. Research suggests that Long-term ELs are routinely excluded from core classes at the secondary level (Callahan, 2005; Shin, 2018; Umansky, 2016b). Four students spoke exclusively about not taking social studies because of ELD class.

Like the elementary experiences, students in middle school spoke about exclusion in taking only one "fun" class because of ELD. Here, the production of exclusion is seemingly status loss. The ability to take two "fun" classes is predicated on how well the English language is spoken. Exclusion and segregation resulting from the EL classification are well-documented in the literature (Freeman et al., 2002; Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

Discrimination

The fourth component of the Link and Phelan stigma model is status loss and discrimination. In this section, I focus on discrimination. Brown (2015) defines discrimination as a harmful action towards a person due to various characteristics,

including language ability. Link and Phelan note that discrimination takes place in two forms: individual and structural. Individual discrimination occurs in interactions with people, while structural discrimination is produced with institutional practices.

Research suggests that EL students experience discrimination in schools (Thompson, 2015; Umansky, 2016a; Gandara et al., 2008). I found two examples where students spoke specifically about discrimination due to language ability. Luna, said she had an experience in elementary school. I asked her to explain:

> Well, I remember the last time I got, um, that was in 5th grade. That one time I was at ELD, and someone was saying that I didn't know English that much, and I was like, at least, I was like, I just needed help with it cause I was struggling a lot.

In this example, it was another EL student that commented. Dabach (2010) has described instances in which peers made fun of students that remain classified as EL.

In the "Stereotyping" section, I wrote about Mauricio, who talked about being made fun of because he spoke English. To summarize, he said in his writing activity that "when I was 6, I was made fun of the way I talk." During our interview, I asked him to tell more about this incident. He said that "it was some kid in first grade. Told me that I am dumb because I don't know proper, really good English." I asked him if this has ever happened again. He said no and did not provide any further details. I argue that in addition to stereotyping, this example also speaks to language discrimination.

In the previous section (separation and status loss), I provided examples in which students spoke about separation and status loss. In this section, I argue that some of those examples are forms of discrimination. To summarize, students spoke about being pulled out of class during elementary school for language instruction. Many of those instances

occurred during “fun” times, and several students spoke about the impact. Students also spoke about being excluded from the core curriculum (social studies) and having only one “fun” class at the middle school level. I argued that these instances produced a status loss.

Link and Phelan contend that status loss is also a mechanism for the production of discrimination. For example, they argue that a lower hierarchical position (status loss) can result in a lack of opportunities. Put another way, status loss becomes the foundation for discrimination because it diminishes opportunities. Situated within students’ experiences, I argue that separation and exclusion, which leads to status loss and diminished opportunities, is structural discrimination. Because discrimination often takes place without considering the label, it becomes easy to dismiss whether the label itself had anything to do with it. Indeed, Apple (2013) and Link and Phelan (2001) argue that labels can become common sense or just the way things are, which is why it makes it difficult to make the connection. Based on conversations with students, the method for providing English language instruction at the elementary level, and the seemingly exclusionary method at the middle school level, both produce status loss, which leads to structural discrimination. In summary, two students spoke about language discrimination, specifically, and I argued that acts of separation and status loss are examples of structural discrimination.

Summary

For the first research question, I set out to understand how prolonged EL classification may produce stigma based on Link and Phelan’s stigma framework. Specifically, I asked to what extent Spanish-speaking middle school students considered

the Long-term EL experience stigmatizing based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework. Findings for this research question build on prior work related to outcomes associated with prolonged EL classification. In this summary, I review the significant findings for each of the stigma components.

Consistent with prior research (Thompson, 2015), I find that most students in this study were born in the United States and classified EL very early in their educational careers. Furthermore, in line with Olsen's (2010) prior work on outcomes and experiences of Long-term ELs in California schools, I find that students are generally unaware of their EL classification and unsure about the purpose of the ELD class. Finally, concerning reclassification, I find that students are generally unaware of the process.

Link and Phelan (2001) make clear that stereotypes are used to make unconscious split-second judgments. I find one instance in which a student was made fun of because of their English language speaking skills. Prior research suggests that negative stereotypes are grounded on behavior the dominant society deems unfavorable (Becker & Arnold, 1986). In this case, the behavior concerns language and what the dominant culture views as "correct" English. I also find instances where a group of students experienced internalized negative stereotypes due to how they speak the English language. Prior research suggests that internalized negative stereotypes are linked to unfavorable characteristics (Link & Phelan, 2001), and stigmatized groups tend to make social comparisons with other groups of people (Crocker et al., 1998).

Prior research suggests that EL students are often excluded from core classes (Callahan, 2005; Shin, 2018; Umansky, 2016b) and routinely separated from peers due to

language ability (Freeman et al., 2002; Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015). I find similar patterns with students in this study. In elementary school, students spoke about being pulled out of class for language instruction and its impact. In middle school, students spoke about being excluded from both core content and elective classes. In line with Link and Phelan's (2001) stigma framework, I find that separation and exclusion seemingly lead to status loss.

Findings for this component align with prior research that suggests EL students experience discrimination (Dabach, 2010; Gandara et al., 2008; Thompson, 2015; Umansky, 2016a). I find instances in which students spoke specifically about language discrimination. In particular, I discuss two examples in which students were told that they did not know English. In addition, I argue that status loss is a form of discrimination. Specifically, I discuss how separation and exclusion from opportunities seemingly lead to status loss, which leads to discrimination. I cite Link and Phelan (2001) and Apple (2013) to make this argument.

Research Question Two: Power

The Link and Phelan stigma framework is grounded on the idea that power is essential for stigma production. Therefore, the second research question I ask is to what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience? This section presents the findings for two primary themes: the ELD apparatus and the withholding of knowledge. Like findings for the previous research question, I found it helpful to connect the findings to the literature within each section and discuss throughout where appropriate. It is important to note that I will reference findings from the first research question when appropriate as not to duplicate student quotes. Finally, I end this section with a general summary.

The ELD Apparatus

Power is required for the social production of stigma. Link and Phelan note that power is the critical element that allows stigma to shape the real-life experiences of groups of stigmatized people. It allows the stigmatizer to control the structures in society that create the conditions for labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. In some instances, the role of power is prominent, yet in others, it is overlooked because power differences are taken for granted (Apple, 2013; Link & Phelan, 2001; Link & Phelan, 2014). Earlier I discussed how power, as conceptualized by Apple (2013), is informed by the concept of hegemony, a superstructure of ideology that informs the dominant culture and lays the foundation for what is considered commonsense. Indeed, the dominant culture shapes most people's experiences. And it is the taken-for-granted culture that is often never questioned or examined. For example, in education, Apple (2013) argues that power is generally overlooked because it is

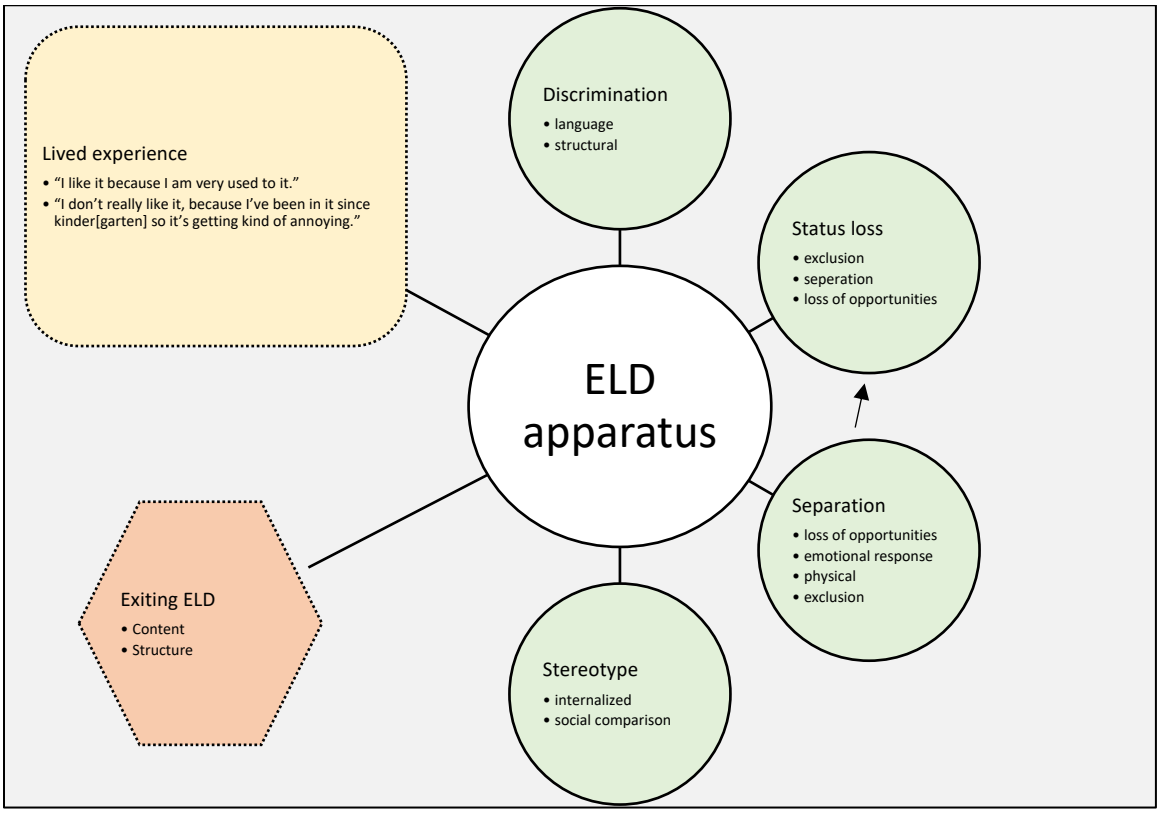
manifested through “helping” labels (e.g., special education) which have become commonplace. For EL students, the act of “helping” refers to the English learner classification and the related services it provides.

Overwhelmingly, I find that the ELD class significantly shapes students’ experiences in this study. Indeed, I argue that the ELD class is not static but functions as an apparatus that wields power and control over human bodies through the daily practices and policies that govern the intervention. Apple (2013) suggests that labels used in education serve as primary mechanisms for sorting children into different academic tracks. However, in the education context, labels themselves are generally meaningless unless associated with intervention or action. Consequently, it is the intervention, I argue, that does the work of the label. This argument builds on Menken and Kleyn’s (2010) assertion that low academic outcomes for EL students do not lie with the label but on the educational barriers. That said, it is important to highlight that while I argue that it is the intervention that does the work of the label, I do not suggest that the label is meaningless or irrelevant. Indeed, as Link and Phelan note, the label is crucial for the production of stigma. Determining whether or not ELD as a method for English instruction is effective or not is beyond the scope of this study. However, the ELD class serves as the primary intervention for English language instruction for students in this study. Therefore, I focus on how the ELD class serves as an apparatus of power. Figure 2 provides a visual model for how the ELD apparatus shapes the schooling experience of students. This visual model also includes how the ELD apparatus produces elements of stigma based on Link and Phelan’s stigma framework.

First, I center the ELD apparatus because it is the primary mechanism for the production of power and control. Each of the green-colored bubbles represents the stigma components that correspond to the Link and Phelan stigma framework. The arrow that goes from the "separation" bubble to the "status loss" bubble is by design, given that I find that separation seemingly leads to a status loss. The light red hexagon is the "fuel" that powers the ELD apparatus's engine. It includes the structure and content that drive how the ELD class operates. The yellow rectangle denotes the lived experience, which is the accumulation of all the power elements of the ELD apparatus.

Figure 2

Visual Model of the ELD Apparatus



Separation. While schools are generally structured to produce a certain level of control over all students (e.g., routines and practices, bell schedules, transitions), I find

that students spoke of an additional layer of control due to the ELD class. Students described two forms of control: physical and exclusionary. The clearest example of physical control as described by students took place during elementary school. Earlier, I discussed how students were generally pulled out of class in elementary school for English language instruction. While some students spoke neutrally about this experience, others in their writing activity expressed discontent and even anger, citing "... I was pretty upset…but whatever, I guess" (Carla), "... my other classmates were having fun and not me because I was being pulled out for ELD, I didn't want to be pulled out" (Ricardo), "... I didn't like being pulled out of my main class for ELD" (Franco), and "... something fun happens, so you get pulled out" (Mario). Indeed, students spoke about someone physically taking them out of class, and usually during a moment when they were having "fun." Furthermore, while students did not discuss refusing to leave the classroom for English language instruction, they were generally not happy. Thus, in these examples, the school district's method to "help" students learn English seemingly functioned as a form of social control enacted through the actual physical removal of their bodies from one space into another. Physical control seemingly led to emotional responses and loss of opportunities.

The ELD apparatus does not wield power and control at the elementary level without adults' help and complicit participation. Indeed, students cited the ELD teacher as the primary adult that took them out of class. Apple (2013) and Link and Phelan (2014) argue that when labels and their related interventions become commonsense, or just the way things are, it becomes challenging to identify power and even more challenging to identify how an individual is complicit in reproducing the said power. The

hidden nature of power is one reason why interventions used in schools are so difficult to question.

In contrast, at the secondary level, the ELD apparatus wields control over physical bodies in the form of exclusion, resulting in the loss of opportunities. Apple (2013) also suggests that socially constructed labels are used as sorting mechanisms. Prior research has highlighted that EL students are overwhelmingly academically tracked and excluded from core content at the secondary level (Callahan, 2010; Shin, 2018). I find similar patterns of exclusion in this study. For example, I discussed how a group of students from Juniper Middle School spoke about being excluded from social studies due to ELD class. Furthermore, a group of students from Saguaro Middle School spoke about taking only one "fun" class due to ELD. In these examples, power is manifested through seemingly exclusionary practices inherently built into the school system. However, because these exclusionary practices have become commonplace in schools, they are often overlooked as mechanisms of power that result in the control and sorting of students based on language ability. Thus, again, at the middle school level, ELD class is part of the institutional norms and practices.

Stereotype. Link and Phelan note that labels generally link people to undesirable characteristics that form a stereotype. Earlier, I discussed one instance in which a student was treated differently because he went to ELD class. The experience took place in first grade, yet it must have made a profound impact, given he shared this experience many years later. In another example, I discussed how a group of students indicated that they had never seen an "American" take ELD. Indeed, one student reinforced this notion citing that "I only see Latinos go there."

Crocker et al. (1998) argue that once a stereotype has been learned, it can shape one's actions, thoughts, and emotions, even if the stereotype in question is not true. Furthermore, the authors say that stereotypes are often learned early and heavily influenced by mass media, including books and television shows. And when stereotypes are held deeply, they often become known as facts or commonsense. The awareness of one's association with a negative stereotype is known as a stereotype threat. Stereotype threat takes place when one becomes aware that some aspect of their identity is devalued. I argue that the ELD apparatus produces the conditions in which some students experience stereotype threat. For example, Latinos, not Americans, take ELD classes because they do not speak "good" English. Indeed, the stereotype in question is that some Latinos speak "bad" English. This, of course, is not true. Yet, some students in this study have never seen an "American" take an ELD class.

Status loss. Link and Phelan make clear that separation coupled with a negative stereotype leads to a status loss. I spoke earlier about the extent to which students in elementary school were physically pulled out of one class into another for language instruction. At middle school, I spoke about how power and control manifested themselves in the form of exclusion. Both the physical control and exclusion produce a loss of opportunities, which leads to a status loss. In the model above, I show a line moving from the "Separation" bubble to the "Status loss" bubble. This arrow is intentional. As students spoke about separation, the loss of opportunities, and the resulting emotional responses, produced a status loss. Prior research has suggested that EL classified students are routinely separated due to language ability, especially Long-

term ELs, and especially starting in middle school (Freeman et al., 2002; Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015).

Discrimination. Earlier, I argued that a status loss is a form of discrimination. I cited Link and Phelan (2001), Apple (2013), Brown (2015), and one student experience to support this argument. Indeed, the ELD apparatus produced a discriminatory experience for one student. However, claiming that the ELD apparatus indeed produces discriminatory experiences for EL classified students, in general, is beyond the scope of this limited study. More research focused explicitly on this construct is needed. However, the logic of Link and Phelan's argument that separation leads to status loss, which leads to discrimination, gives rise to the idea that much more discrimination due to the ELD apparatus may exist.

The Lived Experience. Through the use of power and control, the ELD apparatus also shapes lived experiences. For example, students in this study seemingly do not know what it is like to experience school without taking ELD. Earlier, I discussed how students described their ELD class experience. By way of example, when asked whether he liked the ELD class, Alonso said yes, "I like it because I am very used to it." In contrast, Clara said, "I don't really like it, because I've been in it since kinder[garten] so it's getting kind of annoying." Similarly, when asked whether she would take another class instead of ELD, Olivia said, "No, because I've been here in [ELD] for a long time. So, I don't think I need to." These examples illustrate that students have become accustomed to taking ELD. Being an EL student is all that they have experienced, whether they know it or not. And the ELD class has shaped their schooling experience up to this point.

Exiting ELD. For most students in this study, EL classification took place in kindergarten. To date, no student has been able to reclassify. Like prior research connotes, Long-term ELs seemingly get "stuck" at intermediate levels of English proficiency (Olsen, 2010). The central question is why? Why are students still "stuck" at intermediate levels of English proficiency? A better question, however, is whether the ELD class has anything to do with it. Earlier, I mentioned that it was beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the ELD method for language instruction is effective or not. I still believe it is beyond the scope. Yet, I wonder if it has anything to do with the structure or the content of the ELD class itself. Unfortunately, the answer to this question did not surface based on the data for this study. However, this is clear: for one reason or another, the ELD class has yet to catapult students in this study from EL classified to reclassified status. As a result, I argue that the ELD apparatus not only produces unintentional consequences but seemingly labors to keep students within its control.

The Holders of Knowledge?

Earlier, I argued that the ELD class is the primary apparatus that shapes the students' schooling experience. I described how the ELD class wields power and control over physical bodies. In this section, I focus on a different type of power: withholding knowledge and information by one group in power over another. In the literature review chapter, I discussed the concept of stigma power and symbolic power, as conceptualized by Link and Phelan (2014). Briefly, I discussed how symbolic power often remains hidden to both the stigmatized and the stigmatizer. Indeed, it is beyond the scope of this study to make claims whether staff who work in the schools where students in this study attend are aware of the constrictive nature of the EL classification. And it is beyond the

scope to assume, reasonably, that they have anything to do with stigma production. Still, Link and Phelan's (2014) stigma and symbolic power serve as a helpful framework to analyze the argument that students, seemingly stigmatized, are unaware. This section discusses how students are left in the dark from knowing about the EL classification, in general, and specifically about the constrictive nature.

Olsen (2010) has suggested that some students are unaware of their EL status. Indeed, some find out that they are EL classified at the secondary level when placed into a language support class. Not knowing about their EL classification means that they may have gone through their entire elementary schooling experience without knowing they are classified as EL. Of course, this argument assumes that they were classified as EL in kindergarten. I find similar patterns from students in this study. As mentioned previously, I discussed how students described not knowing the purpose of ELD class, the EL classification itself, and the reclassification process. In addition, I even found examples where some students had no idea why they were in ELD in the first place. The very idea of withholding important information from students is a form of power.

One limitation of this study is that I did not interview staff. Therefore, it is impossible to make the argument that staff did indeed withhold information from students. Nonetheless, it is clear from the student perspective that information about the EL classification itself, the purpose of the ELD class, and the reclassification process is nebulous. Ladson-Billings (1995), in her seminal work on Culturally Relevant Teaching, urges teachers to help students identify and understand the social inequities in society. A critical element to this premise is that teachers themselves must have the ability to recognize the social inequities and their causes to teach them to students. This is known

as critical consciousness, a concept put forward by education theorist Paolo Friere (Friere, 1993). Critical consciousness is the ability to achieve an in-depth understanding of the world, see its contradictions, and take action against oppressive elements in life. In thinking with Ladson-Billings and Paulo Freire, I find that students in this study, collectively, do not have the critical consciousness to recognize that the EL classification, and by extension, the ELD class, has impacted their lived experiences in school.

Summary

In summary, I have argued that the most prominent form of power that shapes the schooling experience, as described by students, is the ELD apparatus. While the EL classification serves as the label, the ELD class serves as the intervention that does the actual work of the label and sets into motion the conditions for stigma production and the lived experience. Generally, I find that the act of separation in elementary school seemingly leads to a lack of opportunities, emotional responses, and status loss. While students did talk about their experiences in middle school, I find that it is in elementary school that the ELD apparatus is more dominant and visible. In contrast, at the middle school level, the ELD apparatus takes the form of a class, seemingly etching itself into the fabric of the master schedule. At this level, it becomes much less visible and prominent.

Nonetheless, while the ELD apparatus may be less visible in middle school, research suggests that the exclusionary power it wields sets into motion a host of unintentional consequences beyond stigma (Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Shin, 2018; Thompson, 2015; Umansky, 2016b). I also find that students, by and large, do not have the insight to recognize the inequities caused by the EL classification. Indeed, their entire

schooling experience has been shaped by a socially constructed label. Furthermore, a salient theme emerged: a group of people with power, whether intentionally or not, has withheld critical information from students about the EL classification, the reclassification process, and the myriad outcomes associated with the said classification.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

"I don't really like it, because I've been in it since kinder[garten] so it's getting kind of annoying."

- Clara Garcia, Cholla MS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the extent to which Long-term EL students experience stigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework and to learn more about their schooling experience as informed by their perspective. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Spanish-speaking middle school students considered Long-term English learners experience sigma based on Link and Phelan's stigma framework?
2. To what extent does the role of power shape the student schooling experience?

Overall, findings from this study suggest that students experience stigma as conceptualized by the Link and Phelan (2001) stigma framework. The conclusions for research question number one build on prior work examining the relationship between the EL classification and stigma (Thompson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, the primary attribute that shapes their schooling experience is the ELD class, which functions as an apparatus that yields power and control over their physical bodies. The conclusions for research question number two build on prior research on students' lived experiences

with prolonged EL classification (Olsen, 2010; Thompson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). It is important to note that the results of this study reflect one school district in the Pacific Northwest, and I caution against any generalization for other groups of students in other school districts. This chapter discusses the significant findings, followed by the implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

Summary of Significant Findings

I set out to learn more about how prolonged EL classification may produce stigma as conceptualized by Link and Phelan (2010). This study confirms prior research suggesting that the EL classification produces stigma (Umansky, 2016a; Umansky et al., 2021; Thompson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). However, prolonged classification (i.e., Long-term EL) may not be a leading factor that produces stigma. Put another way, the amount of time a student remains EL classified (i.e., more than six to seven years) does not necessarily result in stigma. Instead, I find that stigma begins early in elementary school for students in this study. This finding differs from prior research (Thompson, 2015) that suggests stigma begins at the secondary level and is associated with prolonged EL classification. Furthermore, I find that the primary apparatus for stigma production is not the EL classification, per se, but the language support class. It is important to note that while I argue that it is the intervention that does the work of the label, I do not suggest that the label is irrelevant. Indeed, the label is crucial to produce outcomes. Put another way, without the label, the intervention itself may not exist.

Link and Phelan Stigma Components. Stigma is a complex construct often bounded by time, space, and culture and generally occurs within a particular context (Becker & Arnold, 1986). Indeed, Crocker et al. (1998) argue that stigma is not

something inside the human body but influenced by the external context. In thinking with Crocker et al. and Link and Phelan's stigma model, I find that factors inside the school produce the conditions for stigma as outlined by the Link and Phelan stigma framework. While no one student experienced all the components of the stigma framework, collectively, the group did. For example, findings for the separation and status loss components align with the growing body of research that suggests EL students are routinely excluded from opportunities (Callahan, 2005; Shin, 2018; Umansky, 2016b), leading to a status loss (Link and Phelan, 2001). In addition, findings for the stereotype component align with Garica and Kleifgen's (2018) argument that the EL classification (working through the ELD class) places the English language in a position of legitimacy. Finally, findings for the discrimination component parallel prior research that suggests EL students experience language discrimination (Becker & Arnold, 1986; Freeman et al., 2002). I did not include the labeling component because all students are already EL classified.

Are Students Stigmatized? Having argued that students in this study experienced stigma based on the Link and Phelan stigma framework, I now shift to another significant finding: stigmatized versus stigmatizer. In this study, those stigmatized are the students, while the educational institution (i.e., the school) is the stigmatizer. Stigma occurs when one group of people with power labels another group with less power based on some unfavorable characteristic in society. I argued that the characteristic in question is English language ability. Nevertheless, for a person to experience stigma, it needs to be recognized by them. Put another way, Croker and Lutsky (1986) argue that some people live life without knowing that they are stigmatized,

primarily because the characteristics in question are less visible compared to a physical disability, for example. I have argued that students in this study experienced stigma. However, this argument is made from the vantage point of the researcher. The students themselves may not know that they are stigmatized. Indeed, I have outlined the many ways in which the conditions for stigma occur in students' daily schooling experience. Yet, I contend that they do not have the insight to recognize that those experiences, collectively, produce stigma. Prior research (Thompson, 2015) suggests that Long-term ELs do recognize how the EL classification produces stigma, especially working through their language support class. I did not find similar results in this study. And I did not find that students had the insight to make this significant connection. Therefore, through the eyes of the researcher, students in this study experienced stigma. Yet, from the students' perspective, this may not be the case. This finding is particularly important in part because prior research has suggested that the EL classification produces stigma. But through whose eyes? Whose standpoint? And are students explicitly using the term stigma?

ELD Apparatus. The ELD class is the primary factor that shapes the students' schooling experience. I argued that the ELD class, not the EL classification, produces the conditions for stigma. As discussed earlier, I do not suggest that the EL classification is irrelevant. Indeed, the EL classification is the primary catalysis that sets into motion the necessity for the intervention itself. The EL classification, the label, as Link and Phelan argue, is first stage of stigma production. I asserted that the ELD class is not static but functions as a living and breathing apparatus that wields power and control over human bodies. And, this begins early in elementary school and continues well into middle

school. Link and Phelan argue that power is necessary for the production of stigma. They add that power, while necessary, is often overlooked and taken for granted. Apple (2013) adds context to the thinking of Link and Phelan by arguing that power often manifests itself in the form of "helping" actions. In schools, "helping" actions are often visible through academic interventions. Thus, the ELD class serves as an academic intervention. And it is the intervention, not the EL classification, that produces the conditions for stigma and other forms of power and control over students' bodies.

Apple (2013) reminds us that labels, and by extension, the interventions used to do the work of labels, are socially constructed, grounded in dominant ideology, and can have profound implications, primarily when used to sort students according to language. While not designed to harm students, the ELD class harms, and this can and does have implications. The students in this study primarily chose to write and talk about their elementary experience, and the ELD class produced many of those experiences.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I discuss the implications for practice that emerged based on the findings. It is important to note that I am a district administrator with teaching experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Thus, the implications put forward are not only informed by this study, the literature, but by my own lived experience working in a public school setting, with recent district-level experience. I draw on the institutional knowledge and the innerworkings of the school district to put forward practical implications for practice.

Dissemination of Information. Findings from this study suggest that the EL classification, and by extension, the ELD class, produces stigma. I also found evidence to

suggest that students are generally unaware of their EL classification, its purpose, the purpose of the ELD class, and the reclassification process. Thus, there is a moral and ethical obligation to communicate with key stakeholders about the unintentional outcomes of the EL classification, in general, and especially the long-term side effects that it produces, many of which were discussed in this study. State agencies should report this information to school districts, school districts to schools, and schools to students and families. While the EL classification was never intended to produce harmful outcomes, there continues to be a growing body of research that suggests otherwise. Therefore, state agencies must get a hold of this information and disseminate it appropriately. Academies of higher education, and by extension, researchers and research organizations that focus on the lived experiences of EL classified students also have a moral and ethical obligation to disseminate their findings beyond academic journals (which often require a subscription to view) and national conferences (which usually, but not always, attract researchers and academics). Local conferences instead of national conferences are potentially the best way to communicate with practicing educational leaders.

Olsen's (2010) report was produced over ten years ago. In it, she discussed the many ways prolonged classification produces unintentional outcomes. To date, a rapidly growing body of research, both quantitative and qualitative, suggests the EL classification, in general, and significantly prolonged EL classification produces a host of unintentional outcomes. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that school districts become aware of this knowledge.

The ELD Dilemma. One of the most important findings of this study suggests that the ELD class serves as the primary mechanism for the production of stigma. Based

on what students had to say, how language instruction is structured and carried out in elementary and middle school is flawed. Although it may require significant resources, one practical solution is to require all elementary teachers to be English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsed. Many teaching programs today have an ESOL component built into their program, but many others do not. In addition to ESOL endorsement, the elementary classroom teacher should be paired up with an ELD teacher and use a co-teaching model, especially during reading and writing instruction. The co-teaching model eliminates using the "removal" method and reduces the conditions for stigma production. The co-teaching model assumes that students are EL classified early in their educational career and not newcomers. The implications for supporting newcomers are beyond the scope of this study.

A secondary option is to provide educational assistants with ESOL teaching strategies and pair them with the classroom teacher. This option is significantly more viable considering that the educational assistants would help support the classroom teacher rather than co-teach. School districts must create an ESOL workshop and ongoing staff training in conjunction with universities or local educational service agencies. There is funding at the state level for supporting EL classified students. School districts should seek out the resources to create such opportunities for staff.

All teachers who offer English Language Arts (ELA) credit should be ESOL endorsed at the middle school level. This helps in two ways. First, the teacher could offer ELA credit to EL classified students while also providing language support services. Generally, EL classified students that attend an ELD class do not receive ELA credit unless the ELD teacher is ELA certified. Furthermore, teachers could be paired with EL

teachers and use a co-teaching model like the elementary level. This would also require the class scheduler or counselor to cluster students based on ability, if possible.

Reclassification. There is a growing body of research on reclassification and the outcomes when reclassification does not occur (see Umansky & Reardon, 2014, for example). School districts should review reclassification patterns routinely, but at least once per year, paying particular attention to students nearing the sixth to the seventh year of EL classification. At a minimum, school districts should meet with EL students and their families once per year, similar to special education law, review progress, and produce a plan for support and reclassification. Research suggests that students get "stuck" at intermediate levels of English proficiency. Schools' plan should address what support the student will require to move beyond the intermediate level. One suggestion for support is to offer summer intensive programs that focus exclusively on language development and the ELPA21 assessment. Eliminating the ELPA21 assessment is generally beyond the control of schools. Whether good, bad, or indifferent, this assessment is a gatekeeper that generally holds students EL classified. There are numerous funding mechanisms at the state level for supporting students' academic development during the summer. Another suggestion is to offer students language instruction before or after school and paired with the co-teaching model during the regular school day. Furthermore, many local colleges or organizations offer English courses for adults. Partnering with them to create additional opportunities for students is another viable solution.

The students in this study can also reclassify based on a portfolio model by showing proficiency in academic domains and a portfolio with evidence instead of

passing the ELPA21 assessment. School districts with similar reclassification options are encouraged to explore whether this is a better method for students, especially as they approach the sixth to the seventh year of EL classification.

Areas For Future Research

While I learned many things in this study, primarily how a socially constructed label, through the use of an intervention, produces many unintentional outcomes, I still have many unanswered questions and lines of inquiry. The students in this study talked about many topics, including the power dynamics of an intervention designed to help them learn English. I have experienced the power of academic interventions myself. I can attest that they do indeed leave a profound impact on the psyche. I am also left with an increasing urge to continue the exploration of the EL classification and how power shapes the schooling experience daily.

One area for future research is to examine the intersection between the EL classification and the Link and Phelan stigma framework through an ethnographic study. Overwhelmingly, I found that students had a lot to say about their schooling experience. One limitation, however, is that I did not have enough time and access to their physical schooling environment. The power construct manifested itself in multiple ways, as described by students. Yet, I am curious to examine other ways power may shape the schooling experience due to the EL classification, both at the elementary and secondary levels. One of the most important findings of this study is that students are unaware of many things about the EL classification. Therefore, one subsection of the ethnographic study should focus on the factors that produce the conditions in which students are

unaware. The staff, the school itself, and the EL classification process are all critical topics to examine.

Another area for future research is the examination of the ELPA21 assessment. This study did not include a literature review on this topic. Yet, I am curious to examine how the ELPA21 was created and normed. Prior research suggests that EL classified students get "stuck" at intermediate levels of English proficiency (citations). I am interested in finding out what precisely the ELPA21 assessment requires to advance past the intermediate level. This is a topic of concern, considering that many standardized assessments are historically rooted in racist foundations and ideology. Indeed, the English language has been used in U.S. history as a mechanism to dehumanize. One only needs to read about Native Americans and boarding schools (see Child, 2014).

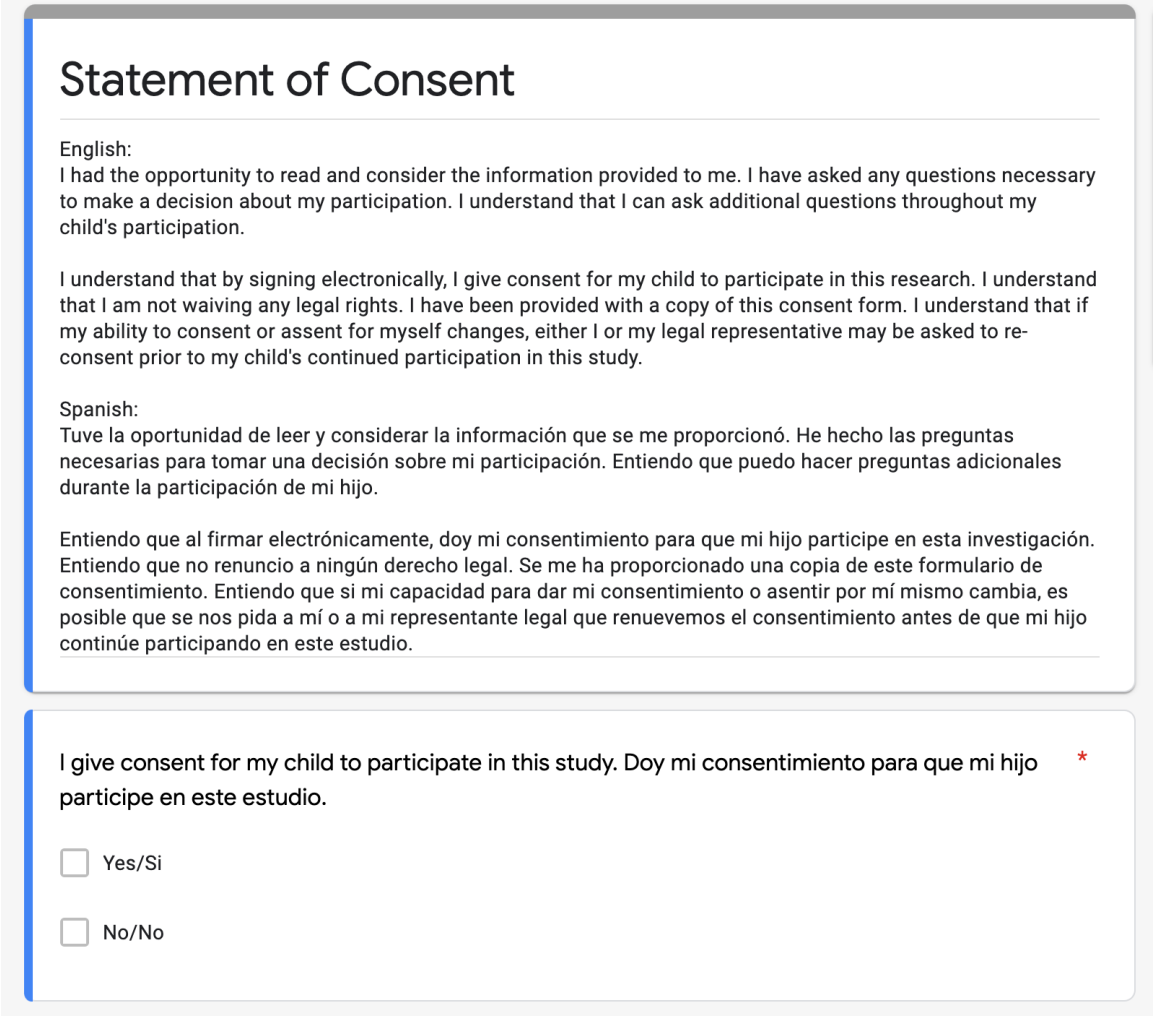
Summary

The EL classification was never intended to produce adverse outcomes. Yet, there is a growing body of research that suggests it does. This study adds to the gap in the literature that examines the intersection between the EL classification, in general, and especially prolonged EL classification and stigma. I find that stigma begins early and only amplifies as students advance grade levels. The findings of this study, while limited, may help policymakers, academics, and practitioners to find better ways to support the development of English language proficiency while not producing stigma.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Consent



Statement of Consent

English:
I had the opportunity to read and consider the information provided to me. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my child's participation.

I understand that by signing electronically, I give consent for my child to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent or assent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my child's continued participation in this study.

Spanish:
Tuve la oportunidad de leer y considerar la información que se me proporcionó. He hecho las preguntas necesarias para tomar una decisión sobre mi participación. Entiendo que puedo hacer preguntas adicionales durante la participación de mi hijo.

Entiendo que al firmar electrónicamente, doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo participe en esta investigación. Entiendo que no renuncio a ningún derecho legal. Se me ha proporcionado una copia de este formulario de consentimiento. Entiendo que si mi capacidad para dar mi consentimiento o asentir por mí mismo cambia, es posible que se nos pida a mí o a mi representante legal que renuevemos el consentimiento antes de que mi hijo continúe participando en este estudio.

I give consent for my child to participate in this study. Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo participe en este estudio. *

- [ ] Yes/Si
- [ ] No/No

Please provide your electronic signature (type your name) and date (type date). Proporcione su firma electrónica (escriba su nombre) y la fecha (escriba la fecha). *

Short answer text

As described in the consent, your child will be audio recorded while performing the activities described in the consent. Recordings will be used for data analysis only. I give consent to the use of audio as described. Como se describe en el consentimiento, su hijo será grabado en audio mientras realiza las actividades descritas en el consentimiento. Las grabaciones se utilizarán únicamente para el análisis de datos. Doy mi consentimiento para el uso de audio como se describe. *

- Yes/Si
- No/No

Assent

Child Assent for Participation in Research Study

University of Oregon - Child Assent for Participation in Research Study.

I give consent to participate in this study as described on the assent form. *

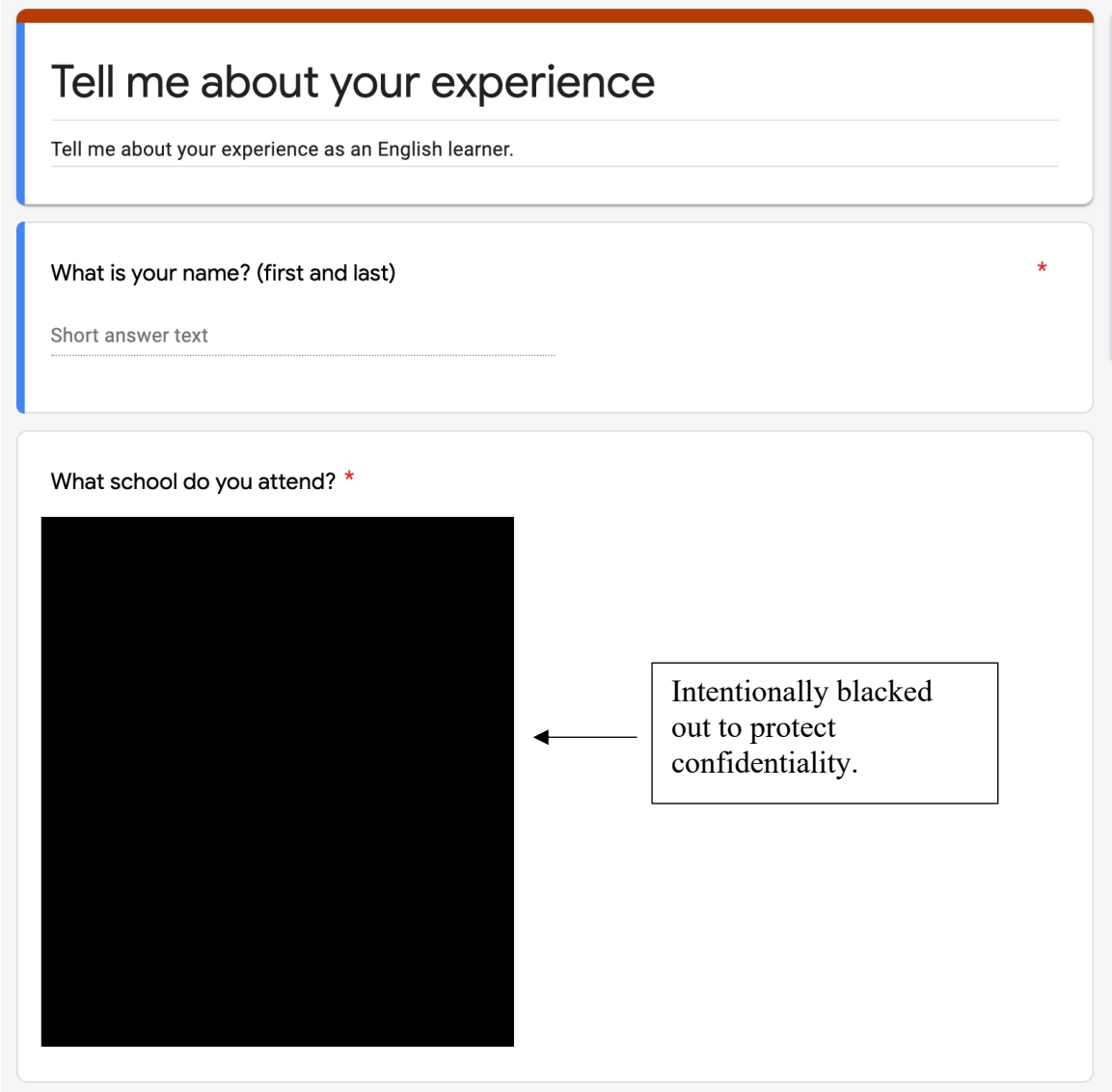
- Yes
- No

Please provide your electronic signature (type your name) and date (type date). *

Short answer text

APPENDIX B

WRITING SAMPLE PROTOCOL



Instructions

Today, you are going to write a true story about your experience as an English learner. You can write as little or as much as you want, but your story must be at least one paragraph long. Remember, a good story includes details. Please include any of the following:

- Was there anyone else involved? If so, who?
- Where does the story take place?
- How did you feel? What made you feel this way?
- Please add any other information.

Please choose ONE of the writing prompts below. You only need to do one.

(#1) Tell a true story about a time that you liked being an English learner in school.

Long answer text

(#2) Tell a true story about a time that you did not like being an English learner in school.

Long answer text

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol for Students

You wrote a story about a time that you liked or did not like being an English learner.

1. Tell me more about the story that you wrote:

    - Why did you decide to write this story?
    - Tell me about the people that were part of your story.
    - In your story, you talked about how you felt. Tell me more about how you felt and what made you feel this way.
    - Do you still feel this way? Why or why not?

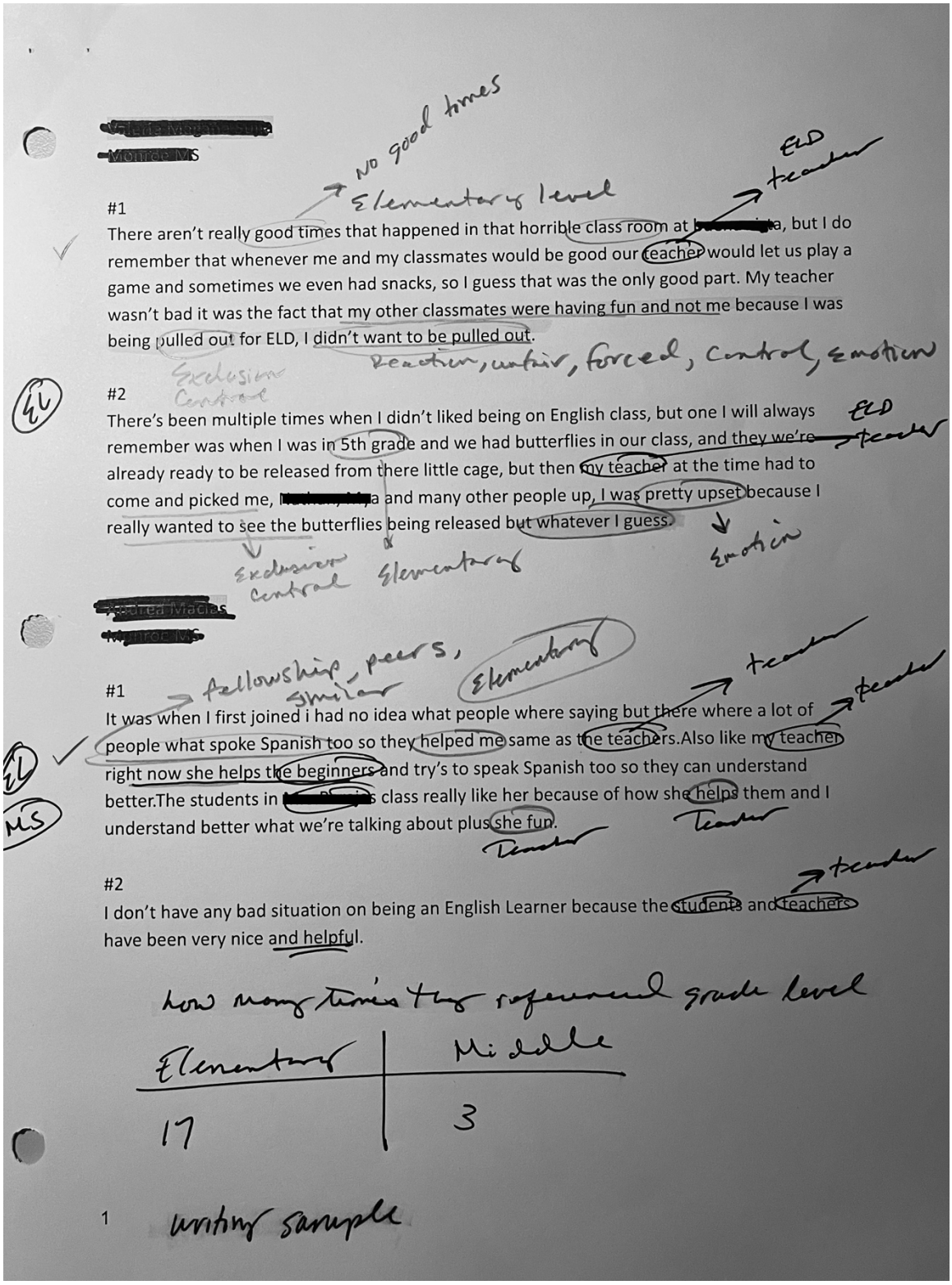
2. What advice would you give to next year's middle school English learners and why?

Probing questions (based on recurring themes):

1. How many years have you been in ELD?
2. Can you tell me about your ELD class?
3. Do you like your ELD class?
    - Why or why not?
4. Have any other of you been treated differently because you go to ELD class?
    - If so, how did this make you feel?
5. Who else has been pulled out of class for ELD class?
6. Do you know how to exit ELD?
7. Do all students in middle school take the same classes?
    - If so, which ones? If not, what is the difference?

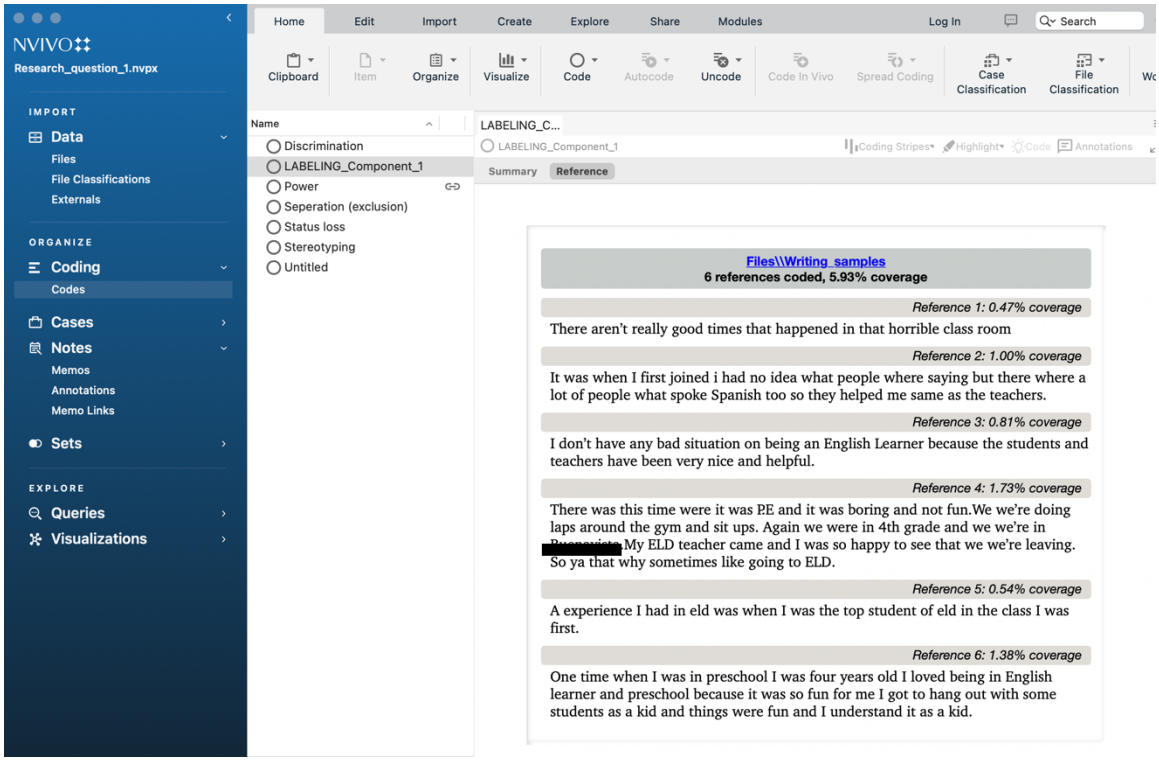
APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF JOTTINGS



APPENDIX E

EXAMPLE OF NVIVO CODING



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