

## **Project Description**

My dissertation is a classroom-based qualitative study that examines an instructional unit on writing testimonios, narratives of testimony, with predominantly Latinx students at a high-needs secondary school in an urban center in the US Southwest. I am interested in understanding how writing about self through testimonio shapes the writing practices of ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations, specifically Latinx urban youth, within a formal English Language Arts curriculum.

Using sociocultural theory (Prior, 2006), my dissertation study examines writing as a socially grounded practice connected to the practices of school and teaching. As a writing researcher within the field of English Education, I am also committed to research and writing instruction within a social justice framework. I draw from Lat Crit scholars (Calderon, Malagon, Huber, Velez & Bernal; 2015; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002) who establish a framework for working with Latinx students to provide more equitable educational experiences.

In the past twenty-five years, the focus of English Language Arts instruction has centered around the teaching of reading more than writing. Furthermore, the language of No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards (CCCRS, 2010) has focused K-12 writing instruction on non-personal forms of writing such as argument, test preparation, and literary analysis. As a result, the teaching of narrative and personal forms of writing have increasingly been removed from writing curriculum and instruction, particularly at the secondary levels (Applebee, 2009; Saidy, 2013; Kinloch & Burkhardt, 2016). Nonfiction structured arguments are often thought of as a more rigorous or academically valuable form of writing than personal narrative or memoir (Early 2019). Additionally, the writing students are expected to produce for standardized tests is often formulaic, argumentative, and timed (Wiley, 2000; Early & Acosta, 2012). Because of standardization and high-stakes assessment, writing instruction in secondary classrooms focuses mainly on making arguments, comparing and contrasting ideas, and relying on evidence that does not take the self into account.

I am interested in the ways testimonio as a written genre form may create space for personal memoir writing within the ELA curriculum. I also examine how this space may provide ethnically and linguistically diverse secondary students opportunities to share their own stories, to understand that writing about lived experiences and understandings are valued within the school setting, and to learn how academic writing may include the stories from their lived experiences, cultures, languages, and values.

This study will take place in one eleventh grade English course. Students will be engaged in a five-week writing unit that will focus on the testimonio genre as defined by Perez-Huber & Cueva (2012), as a memoir that includes resistance, social action, and community and personal solidarity. As part of this unit, students will also participate in a writing task that will ask them to reflect upon themselves as writers and to tell their personal writing history. I will collect all writing samples, administer an opening and closing questionnaire, and complete interviews with a subsection (3-4 students) of the participants.

Through this study I hope to create a model of how secondary English language arts teachers and teacher educators within the field of English Education may create curricular and instructional writing opportunities for ethnically and linguistically diverse students that honor their lived experiences, provide agency and voice through writing, and work against deficit and

racist approaches to teaching that have traditionally silenced students. Through an examination of this teaching unit within my own classroom community, I will have a greater understanding of how the teaching of writing may allow Latinx students to see themselves as valuable creators of knowledge and to see themselves reflected in the writing they produce.

### **Future Implications**

As a first generation college graduate and a Chicana scholar, I approach my research from a position as an outsider in much of my literacy learning experiences. As the focus of English Language Arts teaching, teacher training, and curriculum has shifted to look toward college and career readiness, I am committed to working toward more equitable literacy opportunities for students like myself, who are too often underrepresented in college. I am also committed to examining what it means to be college ready to these underrepresented groups. Studies like this can help teachers working with ethnically and linguistically diverse students to provide better pathways of access to college, the work place, and community through literacy instruction. It is imperative that English language arts teachers and researchers work to better support first-generation college bound students without sacrificing their connection to identity, community, and shared history. Additionally, research on testimonio not only allows for unrepresented student voices to be heard, but invites more Chicana researchers such as myself, who have also been unrepresented in the field of English Education, to enter the conversation and strengthens both the field and existing knowledge on how to best support underserved student populations.

### **Dissertation Outline**

The following represents the outline of my dissertation chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2: Research Methods and Study Participants

Chapter 3: Testimonio as a Written Genre

Chapter 4: Students' Reactions to Writing Testimonio

Chapter 5: Testimonio Writing to Celebrate

Chapter 6: Testimonio Made Public

Chapter 7: Findings and Future Implications

### Timeline

I did not receive funding or a TA/RA position for this program and have needed to work full-time while attending school full-time to support my family. I have worked as a secondary English teacher the entire time I have been a full-time Doctoral student here at Arizona State University. I am applying for this dissertation completion grant for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Please find my proposed timeline outlined below.

Time Period	Activity	Actionable Steps
September-December	Data Collection	Complete the unit of study and all interviews.
January-February	Initial Analysis Coding Textual Analysis	Complete 1. Exploratory Coding 2. Emotion Coding 3. Thematic Coding
March	Constant comparison method	Categorize and finalize evidence choices for findings
April	Write and submit Chapter 3	Chapter 3: Testimonio as a Written Genre
May	Revisions	Revise and refine Chapters 1, 2 and 3.
August-September	Write and submit chapter 4	Students' Reactions to Writing Testimonio
October-November	Write and Submit Chapter 5	Testimonio Writing to Celebrate
December	Write and submit Chapter 6	Chapter 6: Testimonio Made Public
January	Write and submit Chapter 7	Findings and Future Implications
February-March	Revisions	Revise and finalize complete dissertation. Submit final dissertation to Committee for review

April	Defend disselation	Defend dissertation in early April
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