

Testimonio En Nepantla
Personal Narrative in the Secondary ELA Classroom
by
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative classroom-based study investigates the writing practices, choices and reflections of Latinx high school students during an instructional unit on writing testimonio. The study is grounded in a sociocultural theory of writing and draws from LatCrit and Testimonio to understand how writing about self as testimonio shapes the writing practices of ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations, specifically Latinx, urban youth. The study took place in the researcher's eleventh grade class at an urban charter school in a major urban center in the southwest. Data collection included collection of writing samples, interviews of a subsection of the students within the class, and participant observer memos and field notes. Analysis was conducted through a testimonio and narrative analysis lens and afforded the opportunity for researcher and participant to co-construct the knowledge gained from the data corpus. Findings focus on the ways participants interacted with the unit of study, how participants used navigational capital to navigate the in-between spaces in their lives, including between cultures, school and home, and linguistic situations. Further, these findings reveal the purposes for which participants wrote their testimonios and on the ways the participants found agency as writers, pride in their writing, and ownership of the narratives of their communities.

DEDICATION

This dissertation study has been both a saving grace and a true labor of love for my community, my family, and my ancestors. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to the people in my life who helped carry me through some of the darker moments when imposter syndrome crept in and I truly felt I could not finish this.

Family connects me to this work and is the reason I even began this journey in the first place. Dad, I miss you. From the moment you took me to the Library of Congress and shared the wonder of escaping into the written word, I knew that my life's work would be held somewhere between the pages of a book. You taught me to always use my voice, to never back down, and to give everyone hell. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to believe in myself. To my mama, whose strength leaves me in awe. You, more than anyone taught me what it is like to walk this world as a woman. Facing every obstacle with grace and dignity. I see Gram in your eyes. I see her resilience and intelligence. I hear Papo in your voice. Thank you for always saying, "yes you can" when I thought I could not. To my sisters, Sara and Madelaine, and to my brother, Wayne; thank you for keeping me humble and reminding me why family is so important. I love you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES..... | viii |
| LIST OF IMAGES..... | ix |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| My Testimonio..... | 1 |
| Purpose of the Study | 5 |
| Theoretical Framework | 7 |
| Key Terms | 11 |
| 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 14 |
| Testimonio as Genre | 14 |
| Testimonio as Methodology | 16 |
| Personal Narrative in the High School Classroom | 17 |
| Research Questions | 20 |
| 3 METHODS | 21 |
| Setting | 21 |
| Participants..... | 24 |
| Researcher Positionality | 29 |

| CHAPTER | Page |
|---|------|
| Instructional Design..... | 30 |
| Data Collection..... | 42 |
| Data Analysis..... | 45 |
| 4 FINDINGS..... | 59 |
| Testimonio Multigenre Projects..... | 59 |
| Writing to Navigate Nepantla..... | 60 |
| Writing to Define Home..... | 69 |
| Writing to Celebrate Culture and Ancestors..... | 76 |
| Taking Ownership of Story..... | 82 |
| Moving Toward Confidence in Writing..... | 91 |
| Taking Risks in Writing and Presenting..... | 97 |
| 5 DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS..... | 104 |
| Implications: Connection to Theory..... | 105 |
| Implications, for Research & English Education..... | 108 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 113 |
| Conclusions..... | 115 |
| REFERENCES..... | 117 |
| APPENDIX | |
| A TESTIMONIO ASSIGNMENT..... | 124 |
| B INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS..... | 126 |

APPENDIX

Page

| | |
|--|-----|
| C IRB APPROVAL, INFORMED CONSENT | 130 |
| D RECRUITMENT SCRIPT | 143 |
| E GENRE RUBRIC..... | 145 |
| F TESTIMONIO WRITING REFLECTION | 147 |
| G DATA ANALYSIS COVER SHEET..... | 150 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| 3.1 Participants..... | 25 |
| 3.2 Lesson Calendar..... | 31 |
| 3.3 Mentor Texts and Reading Materials..... | 33 |
| 3.4 Written Assignment Data Collection by Participant | 43 |
| 4.1 Inclusion Criteria for Themes | 56 |

LIST OF IMAGES

| Image | Page |
|--|------|
| 3.1 Analytic Memos Table of Contents | 55 |
| 4.1 Christine's Neighborhood Map..... | 63 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The seed is something pure, something scared. For our people the seed is something significant - Rigoberta Menchú

Rigoberta Menchú's (1984) autobiography, *I Rigoberta Menchu* is the first recorded *testimonio*, or memoir translated to affect social change for a community (Pérez-Huber, 2013). When I think about the themes of that text that tie to her traditional beliefs, planting seeds, ancestor knowledge, and bringing the injustices the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala suffered to light; I am struck with the knowledge that the *testimonio* I am about to give is rooted in a tradition of struggle, hope, and resistance. I am a first-generation college going student whose life's trajectory has led me to this point. I am a Chicana teacher who came from a tiny rural town in the middle of New Mexico, in the South Western United States. I explored the world through books but never read a book by an author who looked like me until I was a sophomore in college. I am a scholar whose very existence is possible because of the resistance and struggle of those who came before her. Like Rigoberta, the ancestors of my flesh and the ancestors of academia planted the seeds for me to grow. My grandmother's education did not go past the eighth grade, yet she was the most intelligent woman I have ever known and the first scholar in my life. My mother's life has been marked by struggle, but her sacrifices made my education possible. My father took me to the Library of Congress when I was fourteen. He never let me forget my origins or from whom I come. But there is also, Gloria Anzaldúa, whose words of resistance were the first I read and who, like me, struggled with Spanish. Her *Wild Tongue* could not be tamed. There is Paulo Freire who

wrote of liberty and resistance through literacy. There are the powerful Chicana educators, Cara, Virginia, and Arlene, from whom I learned to teach and who encouraged me to pursue more advanced degrees. Finally, I cannot forget Doctoras Dolores Delgado Bernal, Flores Carmona, Huber Pérez, and the Latina Feminist Group whose work in testimonio in education laid the foundation for this study. These voices echo through this study, they are the seeds of this testimonio.

It was 1999, I had just dropped my three-month-old twin girls and my two and half year-old son with their grandfather so I could attend my first graduate seminar in language, literacy and social cultural studies at the University of New Mexico. Our assigned reading was “Sonrisas” by Pat Mora and *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* by Gloria Anzaldua. I was buzzing with anticipation; I knew I was going to sit in the classroom for three hours and I could not be more excited. My texts were so heavily annotated that I was sure my professor could see the exclamation points from the front of the class. As Dr. Ortiz began to talk, my first thought was, “Wow, not only were my texts by Chicanas but my professor had just announced that he too defined himself as Chicano.” This moment is where my path in academia was decided. Though, it did take me almost twenty years to continue, this is where my academic life began. This was the place where my identity had been affirmed. This is where, as a second-year teacher, I began to see myself in the curriculum and where I began to see that I was perpetuating a curriculum that erased my students’ lived experiences. It is also where I decided that I would be the teacher, like those who came before me, who would teach from my students’ lives.

I first entered the field of English education as a teacher in a rural school district in New Mexico that served an ethnically and linguistically diverse student population.

During my undergraduate training and subsequent masters level graduate work, I learned to teach writing through a student-centered and workshop lens based on the work of Nancy Attwell (1998), Donald Graves (1983/2003), and Linda Christensen (1998, 2017). Additionally, during my graduate level studies, the terms “cultural relevance” and “multiculturalism” were just coming to the forefront, and I was asked to read theory from Paulo Freire (1972), bell hooks (1994), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1990). These great thinkers reminded me that the students in my classroom came to me with rich cultural backgrounds and experiences and that writing, and the teaching of writing are not a neutral act but acts that can help correct injustice. Freire and Macedo (1998) argue that the teaching of reading and writing cannot be done in isolation from the reader’s world and discuss the idea that “language and reality are dynamically interconnected” (p.3). They further argue that the teaching of writing is inherently a “political act,” (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 4) and one that should be co-constructed with the student rather than one that is akin to pouring knowledge into an empty vessel. Anzaldúa (1987) discusses the idea of cultural intuition where Chicanas are able to draw on their own experiences with microaggressions enacted upon them in their own education to inform how they approach research and analysis.

As a young Chicana teacher who was interested in equity and student-centered education, I taught from the perspective that students’ lives belonged in the classroom. Despite never having seen my own life reflected in what I read or in what I wrote about, I somehow knew, instinctively, that writing about their lived experiences would make my students stronger writers. Anzaldúa (1987) calls this “mestiza consciousness” where the mestiza— one who is of mixed culture—academic has an instinctual connection to both

what she studies and how she teaches. Because I had never had the opportunity to tell my own story, I very much felt the need to connect students' stories of home to my classroom. I looked for every opportunity to show my students that their stories mattered. Stories have always been part of my teaching and academic career, however, in recent years, I have witnessed a change in how ELA is taught. This change led me to this study.

In recent years, I have found myself working in a teaching world that looks nothing like the one in which I began twenty years ago. With the advent of first No Child Left Behind (2002) and then the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards (CCCRS) (2010), the teaching of writing has increasingly become removed from student's lives (Applebee and Langer, 2009; Saily, 2013; Kinloch & Burkhardt, 2016). Argument and literary analysis dominate the writing landscape. Students' ability to write nonfiction structured arguments is often thought of as a more rigorous or academically valuable form of writing than personal narrative or memoir (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Early 2019; Saily, 2013). Additionally, the writing students are expected to produce for standardized tests is often formulaic, argumentative, and timed (Newkirk; 2016; Early & Acosta, 2012). Standardized tests at the district, state, and national level, create a focus for writing instruction in K-12 schools.

In the past 10 years, this focus has moved away from personal narrative and writing about lived experiences and, instead, focuses on making arguments, comparing ideas, and relying on evidence that does not take the self into account. In this study, I want to understand more about the role and influence of teaching written genre forms in the secondary ELA classroom that invite students to write about their lived experiences.

After examining the educational system where I found myself and thinking about how I could reach a larger audience, I decided that to create real and systemic change, I would need to research, and take an active role in changing the perspective of knowledge creation in the academic community. I came to this study and research lens because I had already seen how valuing students' cultures, histories, stories, and home spaces impacted those students who came through my classroom. In a Chicano Temporalities class, I read about how testimonios on the UC Davis campus changed the trajectory and treatment of Chicana students on that campus and had a moment of clarity. This is what I wanted to research. Testimonio is where I wanted the trajectory of my academic body of work to go. I want to co-construct the knowledge I bring into this world with students. To not only tell their stories, but to also experience the process that they follow to get those stories out into the world. This study is just the first step of that academic journey for me.

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation study examines how testimonio may be used in the ELA classroom as a syncretic (Gutierrez, 2008) written text, meaning a text created in community, for community, with feedback from peers and instructors, and made public. The study examines what happens when Latinx students take part in this kind of writing within the formal ELA curriculum. More specifically, I am interested in the ways testimonio, as a written genre, creates space for a culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) form of personal memoir within the ELA curriculum to provide Latinx students the opportunity to share their own lived experiences and stories.

The study serves as a counter narrative (Ladson-Billings, 2009; DeNicolo, Morales, Romani, 2015) to the systemic erasure of student's lived experiences, home

languages, stories, and the stories of their communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) in classroom spaces. I come to this study as a first-generation Chicana, English educator, and qualitative researcher working to counteract an education where my culture and lived experiences were never reflected in my formal literacy learning. The study examines how a testimonio (Latina Feminist group, 2001) project serves as a student-driven approach to teaching writing and as counter to the test-driven, formulaic, and impersonal writing forms that currently dominate writing instruction in secondary schools (Applebee, 2009, Graham & Perin, 2007, Saidy, 2013, Early, 2019). Testimonio is an example of culturally proactive and sustaining (Paris, 2012) practice of teaching and learning to write that invites students into the classroom writing space as community members—in their own right—beyond the norms and expectations of the dominant culture (Yosso, 2005; Kinloch & Burhardt, 2016; DeNicolo et. al, 2015).

While there is much research into teaching narrative writing in secondary schools (Wiley, 2000; Campano, 2007; Radcliff, 2012; Williams, 2018), Latinx student achievement (Guitérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002) and testimonio as a methodology (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2016; DeNicolo et al, 2015; Pérez Huber, 2009), there are few studies that examine the teaching of testimonio as a written genre in the secondary English Language classroom with high school age Latinx students. This study offers a theoretical, methodological, and curricular approach of hope, change making, and empowerment to work against formulaic, remediated, and deficit approaches to teaching writing.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to understand writing as a social process grounded in social settings, for social purposes. Under the wider umbrella of sociocultural theory (Prior, 2006), I draw from two intersecting theories: LatCrit theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002,) and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). The remainder of this chapter outlines the ways I combine these theories to inform the methodology of the study. This study examined how testimonio writing can be used in the Secondary ELA classroom to support the writing practices of ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations, specifically Latinx urban youth who have been an under-researched group in the field of writing research (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Valdéz, 1996).

Socio-Cultural Theory in Writing

Sociocultural theorists view learning to write as a communal process grounded in social context and produced for social purposes (Prior, 2006). Writing is always situated in context and in the social interactions found in the learning space (Bazerman et al., 2017; Early 2017). This framework allows for an examination of a community of writers that situates the learning space in its own historical, cultural and political background (Bahktin, 1986). Additionally, a sociocultural perspective comes from research that seeks to understand writing as “a mode of social action not just a means of communication” (Prior, 2006, p. 58). It is this idea of writing as a social action as well as a means to express public identity, membership in a community, interests, and accomplishments (Alvermann, 2010; Bazerman, 2017) that informed this study.

A sociocultural view of literacy research adheres to the premise that “language

needs to be viewed in relation to its functions in social and family life” (Mhann & John-Steiner, 2005, p. 79). Further, this lens allows for consideration of the ways to bridge gaps in research and achievement for ethnically and linguistically diverse students, their social contexts, ways of living (Kinloch, 2017), and the historical and political background in which they have been educated. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which writing can create shareable meanings to build connections to self and others and to bring about social change (Bazerman, 2017).

LatCrit Theory

Building upon the framework afforded by sociocultural theory, I draw from the lens of Lat Crit scholars who argue that teaching and learning is situated in the experiential knowledge of students of color, a consideration for social justice, and a challenge to the dominant ideology (Gándara, 1995, Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Lat Crit theorists acknowledge that ethnically and linguistically diverse students have their own epistemologies, defined by Delgado Bernal (2002) as being more than just a way of knowing. A Lat Crit epistemology is a system of knowing. Further, Lat crit scholars in education and literacy studies (Calderon, Malagón, Huber, Velez & Bernal, 2015) examine the schooling experiences of Latinx students in order to understand how those experiences shape their achievement, agency, and access to equitable education. Moreover, Lat Crit theory is grounded in the ways that Latinx students can bring their own histories, lives, and cultural experiences into the secondary language arts classroom. Even more specifically, Lat crit scholarship demands a “shifting of the value placed on these cultural ways of knowing and calls for a counter narrative to be introduced” (DeNicolo, González, Morales & Romani., 2015, p.230).

The concept of counter narrative draws from Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2009), originating with legal scholars of color who sought to make race an explicit part of discussions of understanding legal structures of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009; DeNicolo et al., 2015). A Critical Race lens acknowledges the inherent racism and classism that exists in structures like public schools and provides a basis on which to see how these biases have traditionally placed barriers to achievement for linguistically and ethnically diverse students. One of the arguments of LatCrit scholars in education works aligns with the body of literacy research working toward creating learning environments that are welcoming spaces for ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations (Early, 2017; Bell, 2010; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Rose, 1995). This body of research requires that spaces and learning activities themselves be situated in understanding students' cultural and historical contexts (Guitérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gandara, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Lat Crit scholarship distinguishes itself from other critical scholars in two ways. The first is in the knowledge that writing, and scholarship comes from not just the mind but the body. Specifically, it examines how the historical subjugation of brown bodies means that what we write is interconnected to not only our individual mental functions but also to our spirit and physical bodies (Rendón, 2009, DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2019; Anzaldua, 1990). Second, Lat Crit scholarship examines the concept of *nepantla*; a Nahuatl word that means the “in between space” (Keating, 2006, p. 9). Anzaldua (1987/2007) conceptualized this as an existence that resides in two worlds. DeNicolo and Gonzales (2015) offer a description of *nepantla* as a means to, “reflect on the ways that those living in the margins shift between liminal spaces, ideologies, and cultures”

(p.112). Further, Anzaldúa (1987) sees the result of this juggling or straddling of cultures as assisting in the formation of an alternative identity that learns to develop a tolerance for the inconsistencies, ambiguity, and contradictions that Chicanas and Mexican American women encounter in daily life. Anzaldúa (1987/1999) named this alternative hybrid identity a mestiza identity:

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in a Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality. She operates in a pluralistic mode . . . not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (p. 101)

This idea of existing in the in-between or in a state of transformation and ambiguity helps LatCrit scholars of literacy to examine how writing can have transformative power for both the individual and the community toward consciousness of self and the role self plays in moving toward social action (Elenes, 2013). It also provides a space to examine and invite the plurality of identities that Latinx students bring with them into the classroom.

Community Cultural Wealth

Along with LatCrit theory and the concept of the counter narrative, this study also draws from Tara Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth. This concept challenges the notion that the only cultural standard that has value, or as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) termed it, cultural capital, are the norms set by the white middle class. The community cultural wealth model posits that students of color, and the communities from which they come, hold intrinsic value. Additionally, these communities provide a

foundation on which educators can build a curriculum that is reflective and inclusive of their students, their languages, their cultures and their communities. The model includes a discussion of six types of cultural capital: 1) aspirational capital; 2.) familial capital; 3.) social capital; 4.) navigational capital, 5.) resistant capital; and 6.) linguistic capital.

This study is specifically interested in familial capital, which includes the rich communal family and community experiences from which Latinx students can draw for support; navigational capital, which affords Latinx the ability to move through often hostile environments; and resistant capital, which gives Latinx students the experience with and the support of communities that have historically engaged in collective action for change. These sources of cultural wealth provide ways for educators and educational institutions to view ethnically and linguistically diverse students from a more inclusive lens. Additionally, these areas of wealth provide the means for students of color to begin to own their own stories as narratives of their own lived experiences.

Key Terms

Genre Study: Genre is a French term that refers to style or sort. In this study the term is used to describe the process through which students examine models of a certain writing genre in order to incorporate the styles into their own writing.

MultiGenre Project: A multigenre project is identified by Romano (2009) to describe a written project that has a unifying theme but is written in two or more different genres.

Nepantla: Nepantla is a Nahuatl word that refers to the concept of existing in an in between space. Gloria Anzaldua (1987/1999) used the word to describe how Chicana academics often exist in a space that is in between many different spaces. The concept is

used in this dissertation to describe how Latinx students often must navigate between many different existing spaces in their lives.

Personal Narrative Writing. Personal narrative writing in this study refers to writing that tells about a specific life experience or moment in time that had a significant impact on the writer's identity.

Syncretic Testimonio. A hybrid autobiographical text that is created in community, told orally, and one that becomes part of the social context in which it is written. (Gutiérrez, 2008, Pérez Huber, 2009)

Testimonio. Refers to the concept of telling one's lived experience in a public in order to illicit change and voice silenced histories (Latina Feminist Group, 2001)

Testimony. In this study, the word testimony was defined by students as a way to tell one's truth. It was used as a starting point in the writing unit to begin to talk about giving one's testimonio.

Testimonio MultiGenre Projects. In order to clarify the findings in this study, it is important to understand how the testimonio multigenre projects were compiled. During instructional weeks 1-4, each participant received instruction in writing a neighborhood map, an "I am From" Poem, a "Remember" poem, and finally a personal narrative. For their final projects, students combined their work into one cohesive piece that was shared orally in class and as part of a community storytelling event. For their final project, students were asked to create a multigenre piece of writing that combined one form of testimonio that was required, a personal narrative with two other genres of testimonio which included poetry, recipes, letters to self, and or journals. The findings in this study include references to the entire writing unit so I discuss students' Neighborhood maps, I

am from poems, Remember poems, personal narrative drafts and their final testimonio multigenre project. I discuss the entire body of work because this unit on testimonio was as much about the participants' writing process as it was about their final products.

Writers' Conferences. Writing conferences, in the context of this study, were conversations between myself and one student about his/her/their writing. These were one way for the testimonios that students wrote to become hybrid texts, (Gutierrez, 2008) or texts that are individual, personal stories, but stories that are also written in community.

Writing Workshop. Writing workshop in this study was modeled after Nancy Atwell's (1998) description of workshop writing. I gave mini lessons for students on different aspects of the writing process such as prewriting, drafting, revision, polishing, and publication.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Testimonio as Genre

Testimonio is a written genre connected to influencing movement and action to produce positive social change. Testimonio draws from the oral tradition of expression in Latin American countries, as a genre that exposes brutality, disrupts silencing, and builds solidarity among women of color (Anzaldúa, 1990). While testimonio does have its origins in the oral testimonies given by women in Latin America in response to brutalities and as a means for liberation (Burgos-Debray, 2009), more recent U.S. based research in Chicana studies includes a shared experience among people regardless of gender identification (Cruz, 2009) Particularly in the United states, scholars have increasingly defined testimonio as a reflexive narration of lived experience related to the history of a community, shared to bring awareness to conditions faced by oppressed peoples (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2016; DeNicolo et al, 2015).

While similar to memoir, testimonio is different from personal narrative and autobiography because it involves critical reflection on the personal experiences of the “testimoniolista/o” (the person sharing experiences) to elicit social action. Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) offer this definition, “this type of writing entails a first person or oral written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness” (p. 526). Additionally, the main feature of a testimonio text is that it is constructed as a discourse of solidarity. It serves as more than a retelling of events or of moments in one’s

life, it is a genre that is influenced by Paulo Freire's (1973) practice of *concientizacion*, "where communities construct political consciousness through self-reflection toward disrupting silenced histories" (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p.3). As such, testimonio is a practical genre that invites the reader to understand and establish a sense of solidarity with the *testmonialista* (the one who gives testimony). This solidarity takes the first step toward social change (Anzalúda 1990, Delgado Bernal et. al, 2016, Pérez Huber, 2012). The testimonio project that I am proposing ties in closely with this idea of creating a sense of solidarity with community and working with a personal narrative that acts as an agent of change.

While testimonio is a way for students to tell their own stories, it is the focus on community cultural wealth, specifically resistant, familial, and social capital (Yosso, 2005; DeNicolo & González, 2015) that sets it apart from simple autobiography. The testimonio originates in the oral history tradition and has taken many forms in its U.S. iterations. Testimonios can be narrative memoirs, *corridos* (Mexican narrative ballads), spoken word poems, editorial articles, journals, and speeches (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). The earliest documented discussion of testimonio in social science research comes from the field of Latin American studies and the testimonio of Rigoberta Menchú. It is a genre that is written not just for the self but in solidarity with a community. It is clear that the genre of testimonio is more than a single written genre. As such, it can be best understood as both a written and oral genre that is meant to be shared and made public.

A testimonio approach to teaching writing gives ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations, specifically Latinx students, the opportunity to see

themselves as valuable creators of knowledge. Testimonio more than anything else, is a genre of writing that invites ethnically and linguistically diverse students to illustrate and highlight their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages (DeNicolo & González, 2015). The memoir unit in this study was created from a testimonio viewpoint and is aimed at giving students from linguistically and ethnically diverse backgrounds the space to voice, through writing, their silenced histories. Students will be asked to write their testimonios speaking to not only their own historical experiences but also to any injustices they might have experienced. Should any student not feel he or she has experienced injustice, then the opportunity arises for that student to give testimony that celebrates the value of his or her community. Additionally, through a community storytelling event, students will use these writings to express solidarity with their cultural, historical, linguistic, and community identities.

Testimonio as Methodology

Testimonio scholarship has grown within the field of education. It focuses on the experiences of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in the United States and has mostly been written by Chicanas (Delgado-Bernal et al 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001) Delgado Bernal et al. (2016) describes Testimonio as, “both a product and a process” (p.3). Testimonio as a research methodology can be understood as a methodology that centers the participant or the *testimonilista/o* as the holder of knowledge and makes the research process a collaborative experience. As such, it opens scholarship that views knowledge creation as collaborative and invites multiple epistemologies into the learning communities (Perez-Huber, 2012; Delgado-Bernal et al., 2009). This allows for a less traditional view of scholarship surrounding who might be “considered a producer of

knowledge” (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012). Further, Anzaldúa (1987/1999) discusses the idea of cultural intuition where Chicanas draw on their own experiences with microaggressions enacted upon them in their own education to inform how they approach research and analysis. It is a activist approach to research and pays tribute to a long history of Chicana feminist epistemologies (Delgado-Bernal, 2002) and the tradition within this way of knowing that seeks to give voice to the silences and hold witness to both injustice and social change (Delgado-Bernal et al, 2009). Additionally, testimonio as a methodology seeks to build a reciprocal relationship between the participants and the researcher as co-creators of knowledge (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado et al., 2012).

Personal Narrative in the High School Classroom

With the advent of first No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and then the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards (CCCRS, 2010), the teaching of writing has grown more detached from students’ lives (Applebee and Langer, 2009; Saidy, 2013; Kinloch & Burkhardt, 2016). Argument and literary analysis dominate the writing landscape and have created a distance between the teacher and students where students’ ability to write nonfiction, structured arguments in what is often thought of as being a more rigorous or academically valuable form of writing, is often valued above more personal narrative approaches to writing instruction (Early, 2019; Radcliff, 2012).

Further, the approach to teaching writing for many students in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms has become an insular practice. In that audiences are not authentic and getting back to basics or remedial instruction is valued above a more actively engaging approach that values students' lived experiences and writing

experiences that allow students to engage in civic action (Early, 2010; Wiley, 2000). Additionally, the writing students are expected to produce for standardized tests is often formulaic (Newkirk; 2016; Bell, 2010; Applebee & Langer, 2009). Further, the way the writing is assessed places value on white middle class epistemologies above the knowledge of communities of color (Yosso, 2005; Paris, 2012). In the midst of this educational landscape that is formulaic and standardized, I pose that the teaching of writing does not have to be static and that personal narrative, in the tradition of testimonio, is an important genre of writing that can be ways into critical thinking, empowering, and relevant for ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations.

Literacy scholars argue that there is value in students writing about their own lives (Gillespie, 1991; Moffett, 1982; Newkirk, 1997; Radcliffe, 2012). Additionally, for ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations who are often marginalized by a schooling system that is largely concerned with assimilation (Paris, 2012), having the ability to engage with their own lived experience is a valuable way to enter into the discourse of writing. Moreover, Early (2019) argues that the elimination of personal narrative genres of writing has been a disservice to students entering college. She explains that the elimination of personal, identity and biography driven writing genres at the secondary level has made students entering college unfamiliar with how to synthesize their own knowledge and experiences as valuable repositories of writing capital. She goes on to call on secondary teachers to encourage their students to write in ways that value their lived experiences, issues they care about, and their identities.

Further examination of scholarship in the area of personal narrative writing solidifies the transformative power of identity and biography-driven genres of writing in

the secondary ELA classroom. Williams (2018) and Campano (2007) discuss how writing about personal literacy histories helps students to begin to formulate identities as writers, scholars and as part of a larger community of learners. According to Martinez-Roldán & Malave (2011) for Chicano/a student populations, personal narratives are often co-constructed with family. Which can be ways to continue to build upon the familial capital that Yosso (2005) explains as having the support of *familia* (family) to build connections to memory, culture, and history, which then allows for a stable foundation to build upon in future writings.

Personal narrative forms of writing genres, especially those, like testimonio, that are tied to social and civic action are important to the secondary ELA classroom because of the possibility to use such forms as building blocks for other genres of writing. Bell (2010) Discusses the need for counter storytelling that provides spaces for “marginalized youth to find pockets of hope, to engage in social action and to actively resist racism” (p. 29). To this end, arguing for testimonio in the form of memoir or memoir in the tradition of testimonio in the secondary English Language Arts classroom is an argument for inviting secondary students to engage in social action through owning their own narratives.

Additionally, to eliminate such identity driven writing genres is an approach to writing that is couched in deficit thinking and creates power dynamics within the classroom that privileges the dominant culture's way of communicating and definition of who gets to be a writer. support culturally proactive and sustaining practices of writing and find ways to invite students into the writing space as community members, in their

own right, beyond the norms and expectations of the dominant culture. (Yosso, 2005; Kinloch & Burhardt, 2016; DeNicolo et. al, 2015).

Research Questions

Given the theoretical framework, purpose, and review of previous literature, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1.) For what purposes solidarity, celebration, voicing injustice, or call to actions do students write within a unit on testimonio?
- 2.) In what ways does a testimonio unit provide secondary students with a sense of agency and voice as writers?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This classroom based qualitative study utilized writing, interviews, reflections, and fieldnotes to parse out the answers to my research questions. While there is a body of research established on how testimonio affects college age Latina students (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, Flores-Carmona, 2012), there is a need for research on how this writing genre can shape the learning of high school age Latinx students.

What follows is a thorough account of the research design for this qualitative study. It begins by explaining the context of the study as well as my positionality as a Chicana researcher who approached this study from the lens of a participant observer (Spradley, 2013). This chapter outlines the instructional design of the testimonio writing unit and data collection. Additionally, I outline the data analysis detailing how I refined my codes and came to develop the themes I found in my data. The final section of this chapter ties my methodology to the theoretical framework from which I derived the study approach.

Setting

School. This study took place at an urban charter high school, located in the central Southwest. The high school serves a diverse population of students with 76% qualifying for free and reduced breakfast, lunch and dinner. The general population is 73% Latino 14% African American and 13% other. This charter houses grades k-12 in its building with the high school population being 420 students (AZ School Report Cards).

The schools' mission is to provide opportunities for students to take college level courses in their senior (12th grade) year of high school (DeAlba, 2019).

The school, whose mission was to create college going students, was in crisis. Central College Prep worked in partnership with the local University as a high school that was once a flagship school of innovation, research, and teaching excellence. In the years leading up to this study, the school had changed leadership four times in two years and was fighting to stay open. The building lease had come into question, enrollment and standardized testing scores had dropped dramatically in the preceding two years, and teacher turnover was a constant problem. The previous year had seen dramatic cuts to staffing and moved much of the high school to an online curriculum. This shift to virtual learning came without prior warning to all students who went from having five to six different teachers to spending most of their day in large computer labs, completing work online. For the eleventh grade, English was the only in person class taught by a live teacher.

Class. I conducted this study during an eleventh grade third period ELA class in the fall semester of 2019, which was a year of transition and turmoil at the school. There were three sections of English eleven. This high school had an untracked curriculum, so all levels of the course were the same in terms of curricular focus. The course focused on writing in preparation for success in college, career, and beyond. Students spent the year studying and learning to write in various genres. The year began with personal genres of writing including, identity poetry and memoir. Then, students take part in investigative journalism and culminate the semester in argumentative essays such as opinion editorials, speeches, and letters of advocacy. Each of the primary genres studied are based upon

student interest and built upon the premise that to be a successful writer, writing instruction must be real world and relevant to students' lives. As the teacher of record for this course, I co-created this curriculum with a former colleague at the school. My administration gave me curricular freedom to teach the kinds of writing I wanted to teach as long as what we did fit overall objectives of the course.

I selected the third hour class to work with for this study. I chose this class because it contained a sample of students who were representative of the school student body as a whole. It contained a mixture of genders, ethnicities, and ability levels. The class began just after lunch and was my last teaching hour of the day. The class met every school day and was eighty-nine minutes long. The classroom seating arrangement contributed to a talkative environment in this class. e Students were seated in four person pods within the classroom space, and they asked constantly to talk to their neighbors about assignments, readings, and to share thoughts. This large class took up every desk in the classroom and three students also had to sit at a round table at the front of the class. It was a crowded, lively classroom. Colorful posters with quotes from various authors covered most of the walls that did not host bookshelves. One entire wall was dedicated to student work and displayed "self-portraits" of the students along with hand-written "artist statements." One corner housed a reading nook, where large cushions and pillows as well as a bean bag sat underneath a bookshelf that housed class sets of memoirs by authors from a myriad of backgrounds, particularly authors from marginalized groups.

The socio-political context of this space is also important to understanding the events. During the time of this study, the National political rhetoric was anti-immigrant, families were being separated at the near southern border, asylum seeking children were

being caged, and people of Mexican and Central American descent were being vilified. DACA Protections offered by a previous national administration were being threatened. Locally, there was an on-going legal battle being waged to overturn a racist and linguistically prejudiced law passed in the past ten years. This law had made the teaching of ethnic classes, including Mexican American and African American studies, literature, and history forbidden in the K-12 classroom. This law was being challenged in the courts and students were aware of the ongoing legal battle and conversations. This hostile social-political landscape affected the context of this study because, as a school that served mostly Latinx and other students of color, the participants' narrative was constantly being defined for them.

Participants

I recruited students from one section of an eleventh grade ELA course held at Central College Preparatory Academy. The students were between 15 and 17 years old. The inclusion criteria for the study included: 1) Students were enrolled in 11th Grade English at Central College Prep, 2) Students were enrolled in my 3rd hour class, 3) Students agreed to participate in the study and signed permission forms before data collection. All students who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study regardless of GPA, attendance, and overall grades in the unit or course. Twenty-nine students were enrolled in the course and nineteen participated in the study. Of those who agreed to participate in the study, five of them identified as male and fourteen identified as female. Two of male students identified as Hispanic, one as Asian or Pacific Islander, one as African American, and one as Mexican American. Of the fifteen female students, one identified as White, one as Asian-American, nine of the female as Mexican-

American, one as Hispanic, two as African-American, and one as Diné (see Table 3.1).

All participation was voluntary.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

*Highlighted names are the subset of students interviewed.

| Pseudonym | Age | Ethnicity Self-Identified | Gender | Primary Language Spoken at Home |
|------------------|------------|----------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Yaria | 16 | Mexican American | Female | English |
| Valerie | 16 | Mexican American | Female | English |
| Gregory | 16 | Filipino | Male | English |
| Isaiah | 16 | Hispanic | Male | English |
| Sally | 15 | African American | Female | English |
| June | 16 | Mexican American | Female | English |
| Christine | 16 | Mexican American | Female | Spanish |
| Maya | 17 | Mexican American | Female | English |
| Chris | 16 | African American | Male | English |
| Elena | 16 | Mexican American | Female | English |
| Amalia | 16 | Mexican American | Female | Spanish |
| Autumn | 16 | Asian American | Female | English |
| Amanda | 16 | African American | Female | English |
| Aliya | 16 | White | Female | English |
| Stephanie | 16 | Hispanic | Female | English |
| Sandra | 16 | Diné | Female | Both Diné and English |
| Julio | 16 | Hispanic | Male | English |
| Andrea | 16 | Mexican American | Female | Spanish |
| Santiago | 16 | Mexican American | Male | Spanish |

All required university research approvals for conducting research with human subjects were obtained through Arizona State University's Institutional Review Board prior to the start of data collection. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the study. Additionally, as each participant was a minor at the time of data collection, parental consent was also obtained before the start of the study (see Appendix C). All names used within this study are pseudonyms.

I selected six of the enrolled participants to interview as a way to more closely understand the experience of students, and to offer a more in-depth description of their responses to testimonio. The six interview participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1.) Students self-identified as resistant to writing or calling themselves writers; 2.) Students who did not participate frequently in class; and 3.) Students who self-identified as Hispanic, Latinx or Mexican American. I chose students who did not see themselves as writers because I wanted to see if writing about themselves and giving their testimonio shaped their agency as writers and this directly connects to my second research question. Additionally, because testimonio is a genre based on the writing or testimony being made public, I wanted to see how a genre whose standard characteristic is to give voice to silencing, would affect students who are otherwise silent in class. As a Chicana first generation college student, I found myself drawn to students who, like me did not find themselves represented in the curriculum that was presented to them in high school.

Christine. Christine is quick witted and sarcastic. She is a second-generation Mexican immigrant with Mexican Indigenous roots. She is trilingual. Her father's side of the family is indigenous to Central Mexico and speaks both Spanish and Nahuatl; she

speaks English, Spanish, and some Nahuatl. She revealed her knowledge of Nahuatl after I introduced the title of the publication from which one of our readings for this unit was taken. Christine sports a trendy hair cut with bold streaks of royal blue throughout, her infectious smile and deep throated laugh help to hide some of the insecurities that come out in her writing. She is a studious young woman and a voracious reader. She is a first-generation college bound student who will need scholarships to cover her tuition. She does not identify as a writer and is reluctant to share personal parts of herself.

Amalia. Amalia is a quiet, sweet young woman. She is categorized by the school as an intermediate English language learner which means that had she been at any other school, she would have had a four-hour block English language arts course that consisted of one hour of grammar instruction, one hour of reading instruction, one hour of writing instruction, and one hour of speaking/listening instruction. In this school, however, students sign a waiver to this course of English language instruction, and it becomes the responsibility of their English Language Arts teacher to ensure language learning is scaffolded into the regular curriculum. Amalia struggled with both health and self-esteem issues. She has had multiple heart surgeries throughout her young life. Her father takes primary care of her and her two sisters. He speaks only Spanish and strives to be involved in his daughters' lives. As the eldest daughter, much of the household responsibilities and care of her younger siblings falls to Amalia.

Maya. Maya has a quiet determination to her persona. She is highly intelligent and can seem unapproachable. She is often absent, though professes to love this class. Her absences are explained by an anxiety that often overwhelms her and interferes with her schooling. She is on an individual educational plan which directs teachers to be

cognizant of her anxiety, to never call on her in class, and to give her extra time on assignments. Despite this challenge, Maya is bright, personable, and very proud of her Mexican American heritage and her feminist ideals. She carries a hydro flask covered in stickers that represent this pride. From a brown power fist to a stylized representation of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, her water bottle speaks volumes about who she wants to be. She also struggles with writing.

Andrea. Andrea is a spunky self-described Mexicana. Her entire persona lights up a room. She is bright, insightful, and self-assured, outside of class. While Andrea is bright and insightful, she does not identify as a writer in English. Despite being born in the United States, her primary education happened in Mexico and she is most comfortable writing in Spanish. Andrea is one of the top students in her graduating class but admits to being very shy about her English skills. She is bilingual in English and Spanish and participated in an internship that allowed her to teach elementary students Spanish while this study took place. Andrea is very proud of her Mexican American heritage but discusses her struggle with the images she sees that portray Mexico, Mexican culture, and Mexican people as less than. She often speaks of going to dreamer rallies and, while she is an American Citizen, she laments the treatment of Mexican immigrants because her father was deported because of a traffic ticket when she was a young child, prompting a move to Mexico.

Santiago. Santiago is an enigma of a student. He is quiet, soft spoken, and came to Central College Preparatory academy after being expelled from his former high school. He is a student who attends school every day but rarely completes his work. He came to the class with some clear gaps in his education and struggled with writing throughout the

school year. Despite his struggle with school and writing, he had an earnest desire to improve and often commented on how important education was to his family and him. Santiago's biological father had been incarcerated, and he was being raised by his mother and more recently a stepfather. He had two younger siblings who he provided care afterschool and before his night job in an automotive shop.

Julio. Julio is a social young man, who could be seen constantly joking in the halls of the school, but often stayed quiet in the classroom. He comes from a mixed cultural background. His mother is Puerto Rican, and his father is Guatemalan. Julio is often absent from school because of a heart condition. Julio has returned to Central College prep this year, after attending his local public high school for his sophomore year, because his parents were unsatisfied with the level of education he was receiving at his local school. He reported being ignored in class most of the time. Julio struggles with writing and finds it difficult to complete a writing task. He stated that he does not see himself as a writer because he writes for school only but wants to be a sports broadcaster as his future career.

Researcher Positionality

I came to this work as a Chicana researcher. As the teacher of record for the course, I also entered the study as a participant observer (Spradley, 2013). As my research is positioned in a Lat Crit theoretical lens and is central to my own identity as a Chicana and first-generation college graduate, I am an insider to the community I am researching. Therefore, I have made every effort to analyze and evaluate the findings as objectively as possible. However, as is made clear by other Chicana researchers (Anzaldúa 1989; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Rendón, 2015;

Pérez Huber, 2015), separating my own lived experiences and epistemology from this work is not completely possible nor does it fit my theoretical framework or a testimonio methodology.

Instructional Design

Students participated in a five-week writing unit focused on the personal narrative testimonio genre, which I defined as a memoir that includes resistance, social action, as well as community and personal solidarity (Pérez-Huber & Cueva, 2012). Students received instruction in multiple written genre forms including a personal narrative and other forms of personal writing. The other forms of personal writing included letters to self, poetry, and recipe writing. This was part of their regular instruction within the ELA classroom during a testimonio writing unit, “Stories of Self Stories of Us: Writing our Testimonios” (Appendix A).

The six-week writing unit took place five days a week in class for eighty seven minutes and followed a writer’s workshop (Atwell, 1998) format (See Table 3.2). Two weeks consisted of genre studies of the testimonio genre and the different forms it can take, these excerpts are listed in (Table 3.3) along with an example of a genre study rubric and worksheet that we used to examine the text features of the narrative genre. One week focused on pre-writing lessons. Two weeks were devoted to drafting and revisions. An oral presentation/storytelling celebration concluded the unit. We invited members of our school and larger community to our storytelling event at a local bilingual bookstore. I was required to show how this curricular unit tied to State required 11-12 ELA Standards (k12 standards.az.gov). Though testimonios can take many forms, such as spoken word poetry, speeches, blog posts and even *corridos*, this school requirement led me to make a

personal narrative memoir one requirement for this project as it fit with the State ELA Standards, writing standard W.3, “write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences”(p.98).

Table 3.2

Lesson Calendar

| Instructional week | Day | Lesson Topic and Focus |
|---------------------------|------------|--|
| Week 1 | Mon | Book Club Selection |
| | Tues/Wed | Neighborhood walks |
| | Thurs/Fri | I am From Poetry |
| Week 2 | Mon | I Remember Poetry Genre Study |
| | Tues/Wed | I Remember Poetry Writing |
| | Thursday | Testimonio Definition: <i>How To Tame a Wild Tongue</i> Anzaldua |
| | Friday | Testimonio Criteria: Assignment connections to definition and Narrowing to Topic |
| Week 3 | Mon | Testimonio/Personal Narrative Genre Study: The Distance Between Us |
| | Tues/Wed | Personal Narrative Writing and Genre Study time Excerpt from the Distance Between <u>Us</u> |
| | Thurs/Fri | Personal Narrative/Testimonio Genre Study: Excerpt from First they <i>Killed My Father</i> and <i>Always Running</i> : Setting a Scene |
| | | |
| Week 4 | Mon | Personal Narrative work time drafting: Description writing Distance Between Us |
| | Tues/Wed | Personal narrative writing groups Genre Models <i>Hair</i> and <i>Single Story</i> |
| | Thurs | Personal Narrative Revision: Excerpt from <i>Living To Tell</i> |
| | Friday | Personal Narrative multi genre segment, Spoken word |
| | | |

| | | |
|--------|-----------|---|
| Week 5 | Mon | Personal Narrative Multigenre : <i>Remembering Lobo</i> |
| | Tues/Wed | Personal Narrative Multigenre work: <i>Dreamers</i> completion time |
| | Thurs | Personal Narrative Testimonio Presentation Rehearsal |
| | Friday | Presentations |
| Week 6 | Wednesday | Storytelling Event |
| | Thursday | Writing Reflections |

Week 1:

During week one of the unit, instruction focused on substantive poetry writing and brainstorming activities designed to provide rigorous opportunities for students to begin thinking about what and how they should write about their lives and give their testimonios. The instruction began with the selection of an independent book club memoir to read. This genre form was selected in order to ask students to think about the place of personal narrative in the ELA classroom as a nonfiction form of literature. The selections for memoirs for the book club are included in table 3.3 Mentor Texts and Reading Materials. This week is also when students created neighborhood maps (Christenson, 2017; Cintron, 1997). Neighborhood maps were physical maps drawn of either their current neighborhood or a neighborhood from their memories where students felt most comfortable. Students also wrote *I am from* poems, which is a poetic form of personal writing that originated with George Ella Lyon and is described by Linda Christensen (2017) in her curriculum text as writing that enables students to write from their home experiences. These two pieces of writing were both designed to guide students toward building connections between their home lives, communities, and writing topics.

Ultimately, these first week activities would serve as the foundation for the rest of the instructional unit.

Table 3.3

Mentor Texts and Reading Materials

| Text | Author | Genre | Use of Text |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| <i>The Distance Between Us</i> | Reyna Grande | Memoir | Genre Study Mentor Text Whole class read |
| <i>The Glass Castle</i> | Jeannette Walls | Memoir | Book Club Memoir Choice |
| <i>First they Killed My Father</i> | Luong Ung | Memoir | Book Club Memoir Choice |
| <i>When I was Puerto Rican</i> | Esmeralda Santiago | Memoir | Book Club Memoir Choice |
| <i>A Long Way Gone</i> | Ishmael Beah | Memoir | Book Club Memoir Choice |
| <i>The Other Wes Moore</i> | Wes Moore | Memoir | Book Club Memoir Choice |
| <i>Accents</i> | Denise Forhman | Spoken Word Poetry | Prewriting/g enre model |
| <i>Home</i> | Sister Outsider Poetry | Spoken Word Poetry | Prewriting/g enre model |
| Remember | Joy Harjo | Poetry | Prewriting/g enre model |
| <i>Sonrisas</i> | Pat Mora | Poetry | Prewriting/g enre model |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <i>I Am From</i> | George Ella Lyon | Poetry | Prewriting/g enre model |
| <i>Harlem</i> | Walter Dean Meyers | Children’s book/poetry | Prewriting/ Write into the day model |
| <i>Dreamers</i> | Yuyi Morales | Children’s book | Write into the day model |
| <i>Remembering Lobo</i> | Pat Mora | Testimonio/ Personal Essay | Genre Model |
| <i>You Speak Spanish Because you are Jewish</i> | Rina Benmayor In <i>Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios.</i> | Testimonio/Personal Essay | Genre Model |
| <i>Always Running (Excerpts)</i> | Luis Rodriguez | Memoir | Genre Model |
| <i>Hair and A Single Story</i> | Deion Guice, Uriah Boyd (In Reading Writing and Rising Up by Linda Christenson) | Student Sample Testimonio/Personal Essay | Genre Model |
| <i>How to Tame a Wild Tongue</i> | Gloria Anzaldua | Testimonio/Personal Essay | Genre Model |

Week 2

The instructional focus of week two was on a genre study (Fliescher & Andrew-Vaughn, 2009; Romano, 2009) which is an approach to writing teaching that invites students to investigate the common elements of a particular genre of writing, such as audience and purpose and expected features to develop their own rubric for writing. Week two focused on genre study of personal narratives and defining testimonio. The first assignment was to read Joy Harjo’s “Remember” poem and to participate in a lesson

that guided students through studying this mentor text to use as a model for writing their own poem of remembrance. This activity was framed to focus specifically on using memory to give testimony as to what is important to remember. This writing took two class periods. Students read and annotated Joy Harjo's poem and were asked to take careful consideration to respond and have conversations in the margins with lines that they were particularly drawn to in the poem. I define annotation as ways for students to have a conversation with the texts as genre models. Students highlighted words and lines that stood out, and also the ways the writer used language. The purpose of the annotations was to find lines, constructions, and language to emulate in their own writing. We read the poem four times 1.) Teacher read aloud; 2.) A student volunteer read aloud; 3.) YouTube recorded reading; and 4.) Students read silently. After reading and sharing their annotations with one another, students were asked to write memories down and then proceeded to enact a speed dating process, where students shared their memories out loud with one another. The next step in the process was a series of quick writes that allowed students to recall the memory they chose as most important in more detail. Quick writes are a series of short writing activities, ranging from three to five minutes that help students to narrow to a topic and as ways to describe moments. Students write continuously for the specified time, choosing lines or "sparks" to begin their next quick write. Finally, students wrote drafts of a poem using Harjo's poem as a model. The prompt asked them to echo Harjo's poem and then write what they believed their communities, ancestors, and families taught them. These could be important lessons, events, or feelings that they knew were important to hold onto and remember.

After writing drafts of their *Remember* poems, students were led through an activity that was intended to help them to define testimonio. This was done through small group and large class discussion. Each student group was given two large index cards, one with the word “testimony” written on it and one with the word “testimonio” written on it. Each group was first asked to write down an agreed upon definition of testimony on their cards and to tape it to the whiteboard at the front of the class. I chose to ask students about testimony first for two reasons. 1.) Students are in their ELA class and the expectation is that all instruction will be given in English. 2.) I wanted to compare the two words and build upon students’ prior knowledge about language. Each group was tasked with defending their definitions. They defended their words by choosing one person in the group to describe why they believed their definition was correct, and to explain how they came to their shared definition. Students were able to use all resources they had available to them, to look up the definitions, and to also discuss the roots or etymology of the word.

This whole class discussion led to a class definition of testimony which was “to tell your own truth about events in order to change perceptions or in support of someone or something important.” For testimonio, students came up with a similar definition, but those who were fluent in Spanish, and those who had found scholarly research references to testimonio, convincingly added the idea that testimonio is a little different because it's not really just an individual truth but one that can also represent, “like your people, your family”. Students compared testimony to participating as a witness in a court case where testimonio was more comparable to being a witness at a protest or in church.

Students were given the assignment “Stories of Self Stories of Us: Writing our Testimonios” (Appendix A) and asked to annotate the assignment and decide how the assignment might fit with their definition of testimonio. Annotating a prompt or an assignment is a practice that asks students to read carefully, pull out key words, and make notes about how they understand the assignment.

The third lesson of week three was to read “How to Tame a Wild Tongue ” by Gloria Anzaldua as a genre model of a written testimonio. Students examined the text for style elements including, word choice, tone, purpose, audience, and structure and created posters to highlight these elements to present to the larger class. Anzaldua’s piece fits the genre of testimonio as it serves to highlight her struggle with language and her feeling of being silenced as a Chicana. The purpose of this activity was for students to begin to find common elements of testimonio for their own use once they began the drafting process. Upon deciding on our class definition of testimony, students then engaged in a closing writing, which is writing done in the closing minutes of class that is reflective of the learning for the day. The closing prompt for this lesson asked students to think about the class definition of testimonio and their own beliefs and definitions of giving testimonio.

Week 3

The instructional focus of week three combined further genre study with a writing workshop dedicated to drafting personal narratives. One of the workshop tasks this week was to complete the personal narrative student created rubric (Appendix E). Students read a series of three personal narratives that also served as models for testimonio. I led students through the first set of readings which were student models “Hair” “by Uriah Boyd and “A Single Story” by Deon Guice. These two narratives highlighted the injustice

of racism that permeated the young lives of the authors. Their themes fit as a genre model for testimonio because they each gave voice to an injustice; they each experienced and wrote in solidarity with their communities. Students found the common elements of personal narratives for these models. Students annotated, took note of how the writers structured their narratives, and also of the elements of writing they would like to use in their own writing.

After reading these, students were tasked with beginning their own narratives, writing side by side with these student models. The first step in drafting was for students to choose a moment to focus their narrative. Students also made decisions about the audience and purpose for their writing. In their writing notebooks, students spent time reflecting on the poetry writing and neighborhood maps we had done in the previous two weeks, their definition of testimonio and the moments to which they felt most drawn. Then they participated in a guided imagery and series of writing sprints to begin telling their stories.

Throughout this first drafting process, students came back to their self-created rubrics, the genre models, and the writing we had done in previous weeks. Each day of this week had a dedicated hour to writing where students could choose to sit where they felt most comfortable, listen to music, and spend time sharing ideas with their peers. Students brought pillows from home and often sprawled on the floor to write. Since we had one to one technology, each student had his or her own computer. Some chose to write their drafts on the computer, some chose to hand write and type later. Week three led us into the fall break at our campus. Students had a two week span of time during which I asked them to spend time working on their drafts.

Week 4

During week four, our class engaged in a rigorous revision workshop (Early & Saily, 2014). Following a series of revision techniques, and processes, students took their drafts and added sensory details; fleshed out the names of places and things; and added dialogue to their narratives. Revision workshop was conducted in station rotations that allowed students to choose which activity to work on for the day. Stations included, genre study where students read the genre models to look for specific ways the writers used language and structured their narratives; revision technique ideas, where students followed a self-paced guide that led them to add sensory details and dialogue to their narrative; more time to write, where students continued to draft; and writers conferences, where students had a conversation about their work with their teacher. Writers' conferences were required and asked students to make an appointment with the teacher to discuss their draft. Students were asked to come to the conference with three specific questions about their writing. Then a 5-6 minute conversation took place between the teacher and student about what was most important about their writing.

Week 5

Week five of the unit was focused on perfecting and polishing the final narratives and choosing the second and third pieces of writing that students wanted to include in their testimonio multigenre (Romano, 2009) project presentation. Students spent some time revisiting rough drafts of the poetry they wrote at the beginning of the unit and chose which pieces they wanted to include in their final multigenre project. Additionally, students chose which piece they would ultimately share at the community storytelling event. One of the elements of testimonio as a genre is that the work be made public

(Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Students had a choice about which part of their work they would make public. They could choose one of their poetry pieces to share aloud in class, share a portion of their personal narrative, or write a new piece to share. The new piece could be a letter to self in the moment that their personal narrative happened, a recipe for moving through the moment they wrote about, a corrido or ballad celebrating a character in their personal narrative, or a blog post in the form of a journal entry reflecting upon the moment.

Students combined their work into one cohesive piece that was shared in class presentations. Some students also prepared to share at the culminating storytelling event. As a model of a multigenre text, students revisited and dissected the elements they found in “Remembering Lobo” by Pat Mora. This text combines the elements found in personal narrative, informational essay, and poetry into a work of testimonio that remembers a significant person in the author’s life, her aunt Lobo. The purpose of this final step in creating and solidifying their projects was to reiterate that testimonio as a genre moves beyond just retelling their personal stories. It is also a genre that is voiced in solidarity to their communities.

Week 6

Week six was not a writing or instructional week. Instead, students volunteered to participate in a storytelling event after school at a local bilingual bookstore. Scheduling and holding the event in a space outside of school broadened the audience and allowed for inviting and hosting the community. Six weeks prior to the event (during the first week of instruction) I reached out to the bookstore owner to discuss the possibility of holding our storytelling event in her space. The owner promptly responded and quoted a

rental cost of \$150.00 for the time and set up. Upon finding out that this was an unfunded event that was part of this study and an opportunity for students to gain public speaking experience, the bookstore owner decided to waive the fee and only asked that we arrive early to set up the space ourselves and stay after to clean up and tear down the space as well. This generous offer made the event possible.

Students who were going to participate in the event, came to “rehearsal” times at lunch and carefully selected the portions of their multigenre projects that they would share at the event. They also designed invitations for their families and posted flyers in the school. In addition, the bookstore posted the invitation on their social media so that the community could also be aware that students were presenting in an open mic style storytelling event. I also sent invitations to my University community and other community members who I felt might be interested in the event.

The open mic was open to all students in all sections of the course and was voluntary. We created flyers in the third hour and invited our family members. Most students who volunteered to speak at the event were in the third hour study group. All but one of the girls that I interviewed in the study decided to present. None of the young men who were part of the study decided to participate. Over all, eleven students participated in the event. Five of the young women were participants in the study.

The bookstore is situated along a stretch of road that used to be home to numerous strip clubs and novelty stores and many bars and nightclubs. However, in recent years the bookstore owner and those who share the space have begun to transform the area into a more urban gathering center. The bookstore sells books and other items that highlight and promote BIPOC authors and artists. It hosts an 18 and older open mic event the 2nd

Sunday of every month. This open mic, at which the researcher has performed numerous times, is what gave the researcher the idea to host such an event as part of the study. The bookstore is a comfortable community space with plush seating areas. There are hints of incense circling in the air and vintage posters decorate the wall space that is not covered in books and bookshelves. This was the first time any of the participants had ever shared their writing in front of a group of people so there was a palpable undercurrent of nerves and anticipation in the air.

Data Collection

Writing Samples

Because this is primarily a study of writing instruction, my data collection included writing samples taken throughout the unit. I collected 4 samples of writing from the participants in the study. On average I collected 16 samples of writing as not every student completed each writing activity due to attendance issues that were an endemic difficulty at Central College Prep (See Table 3.4). As part of the testimonio unit, students participated in two poetry writing activities and a neighborhood mapping activity. To find ideas for writing about moments that defined their lives, students first created a neighborhood map and wrote a series of quick writes about their neighborhoods, the people in their neighborhoods, and important events of landmarks in their neighborhoods. These were a series of informal writing activities meant to prompt students to think about their communities and the stories they could bring from them. The poetry writing activities *Where I'm From* poems and *Remember* Poems. Each of these activities, outlined in the instructional unit section, were initially assigned as informal writing

activities designed to lead students to a final topic choice for the personal narrative writing. Later in the unit, as testimonio writing is not limited to the personal narrative genre, students could choose one of these poems to revise for their final testimonio multigenre project.

Table 3.4

Written Assignment Data Collection by Participant

| Pseudo nym | Neighborhood Map | I am from Poem | Remember Poem | Rough Drafts PN | Final PN | Writing Reflection | Storytelling Event |
|------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Yaria | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No |
| Valerie | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Gregory | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Isaiah | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Sally | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| June | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Christine | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Maya | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Chris | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Elena | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Amalia | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Autumn | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| Amanda | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Aliya | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Stephanie | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Sandra | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Julio | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Andrea | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Santiago | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

Neighborhood Maps. The first set of prewriting samples I collected were drafts of students’ neighborhood mapping (Cintron, 1997; Christensen, 2017). These are detailed neighborhood maps of places and spaces where students felt the most at home. Immediately after students submitted their maps, I copied each, added their names and dates to the back of the copy and set them in a file marked, neighborhood maps.

I Am From Poems. Students wrote “I am from” poems (Christensen, 2017) about where they come from in their lives in terms of language, culture, geography, food, and stories.

Remember Poems. I collected samples of students’ “Remember” poems. These poems were created using Joy Harjo’s poem “Remember” as a model. This assignment served as an informal writing activity designed to help students write about special events, cultural and social lessons, and people from their lives. I also copied the brainstorm lists, reflections, and drafts of the I remember poems, I labeled them similarly to how I labeled the I am from poetry and placed them in a file marked “Remember poetry”.

Personal Narrative. The next writing assignment I collected during this unit of study was the final draft of the personal narrative Students wrote multiple drafts of their multigenre projects. I collected their rough drafts as a means to see how students initially wrote about their lives. However, not every participant completed every step of the

personal narrative assignment. I also collected personal narrative rough drafts. I labeled each of these files according to the drafts and put them into separate folders.

Testimonio MultiGenre Projects. The last writing assignment I collected was the final testimonio multigenre project. For their final project, students were asked to create a multigenre piece of writing that combined one form of testimonio that was required, a personal narrative with two other genres of testimonio which included poetry, recipes, letters to self, and or reflective journals. After writing conferences and revision I collected final multigenre projects to determine how their testimonio choices evolved into project inclusions. I labeled each of these files according to the drafts and put them into separate folders.

Reflections

Participants wrote a reflection about their writing process and their views on writing testimonio. This piece was in a survey form (see Appendix F) answered after the entire writing unit was completed, presentations were given, and the storytelling event was held.

Field Notes

I took detailed field notes during and after introducing each assignment, during writing conferences and during the storytelling event. I used comments from willing participants in my analysis of the data. I employed an ethnographic approach to observations and fieldnotes. Careful field notes that describe and map (Cintron, 1997) the context helped me choose which case to examine as well as to situate the case in its natural context (Yin, 2006; Dyson & Ginishi, 2005). During class, I kept running notes as part of my normal formative assessment regarding the actions and writing students do in

class. Immediately after each class, I wrote reflective participant observer memos (Spradley, 2016) and gave my quick running notes more substance. I used a paper notebook for the handwritten field notes. I typed the more detailed field notes. They were stored in a file in my password protected computer.

Interviews

I conducted 3 semi-structured interviews with a subsection of 6 students from the class. Except for the demographic information, interviews consisted of open-ended questions. In his approach, Seidman (2013) advocates an interview that is a general gathering of life information of a phenomena as it is lived. The first interview had six original questions and gave me the opportunity to know the backgrounds of the students, such as grade, ethnic identification, number of schools attended for secondary school, age, and feelings about school and writing. Furthermore, it helped to situate the context from which these students wrote during their testimonio activities.

The second interview was approximately 7 minutes in length and was designed to ask the interviewee to explain the phenomenon as it occurred. This interview consisted of nine open-ended questions and was important to examine how the students' lived experience evolved as they were participating in the testimonio unit of instruction. Additionally, this interview occurred just before students were preparing to complete their final testimonio multi- genre project so this interview had a dual purpose, to view the phenomenon as it occurred and to co-construct the knowledge that was emerging from the data.

The third interview was a reflection interview that consisted of four questions all asked to find out how the student felt after the teaching unit as well as after they gave

their testimonio at the storytelling event. This ten-minute interview served an additional purpose in my study design. It was designed to co-construct knowledge with my participants. Participant reflections after the testimonio is given is advocated by testimonio researchers as a way to confirm the patterns that the researcher is finding in the data is also the way participants are seeing the patterns. While most testimonios have been done with adult participants and co-constructing done in focus groups, it was important for me, working with minors, to do this confirmation in a one-on-one manner. I employed a semi-structured interview technique specifically because it helped me answer how the teaching approach and genre of testimonio shaped student agency in the context of this Secondary ELA classroom (Appendix B) and was open ended enough that I had space within the interview to confirm some of the patterns that were already emerging from the rest of the data.

Data Analysis

I utilized a testimonio inquiry (Calderón et.al, 2012, Pérez-Huber, 2012) approach to analyze the data. As a researcher approaching this study as a participant observer (Spradley, 2013), my primary goals were to amplify the participant voices and to understand their stories, writing process, and identities as writers. I situated my study in the context of their lived experiences (Perez-Huber, 2019), while also recognizing how my own experiences as a Chicana woman, teacher, and scholar influence how I respond to and make sense of the the stories students write (Anzaldúa, 2002; Delgado-Bernal, 2012). Testimonio analysis (Perez-Huber, 2009) is a type of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Reissman, 2008; Bazeley, 2013) that takes a Lat Crit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado-Bernal, 2002) stance and allows the researcher to open the space

for participants to tell their stories. Further, a testimonio analysis allows the researcher to enter into the how and why the stories are told and offer a way to co-construct knowledge with the participants (Pérez-Huber, 2012)

The testimonio approach to analysis is advocated by scholars Pérez-Huber (2009) and Delgado-Bernal et. al (2002) who discuss analyzing testimonios from their cultural, historical, and socio-political standpoint. The approach to analyzing testimonio is not grounded in Eurocentric epistemology but the epistemology of the marginalized (Delgado-Bernal, 2004; Pérez-Huber, 2012). In a traditional approach to analyzing the data, the researcher decides what the data shows and reveals without the input of participants. The knowledge is centered on a way of knowing that is an outsider looking in at a community of participants. In a testimonio approach to analysis, the participants are equal partners in knowledge creation. It is the job of the researcher to confirm findings with the participants. This is a key approach to a study of testimonio. A Chicana researcher who is using a testimonio approach to analysis cannot separate her “mestiza knowledge” (Anzaldúa, 2001) or knowledge that has been intuitively aligned as an insider to the community, from this research method. Scholars argue that testimonio as a research method requires the researcher to situate herself in concert with a collective experience influenced by marginalization and resistance (Calderón et.al, 2012, Pérez-Huber, 2012). Testimonio as an analysis approach “invites connection and entices collectivity—it is social justice scholarship in education.” It requires the researcher to also invite the participants into the construction of knowledge. Using this methodological approach, data analysis took place using a systematic and recursive coding process. The four cycles of data analysis included: 1) an initial reading and pre-coding of the data

corpus; 2) a first coding cycle; 3.) a second coding cycle; 4.) and a final coding cycle. I also explain how I used analytic memos throughout the analysis process. The following details how I approached data analysis.

Organizing the Data

I started by taking inventory of the data. I began organizing the data set by type and assignment to see how each assignment was received and completed by each student. Next, I created a spreadsheet, which included each writing sample listed by name, interview transcripts listed by student writer or speaker. conference noted. This spreadsheet also served as a way to track the codes that I developed as I analyzed the data. I collected four kinds of writing samples, conducted three interviews with a subset of six participants, so eighteen interviews total, and had each of the interviews transcribed using trint.com. I also created field notes and analytic memos after the introduction of each assignment and after writing conferences. I wrote these after teaching these class sessions. Each of these forms of data analysis are detailed below.

Initial Reading and Pre-coding

I conducted my first read through of the data as I collected the writing samples, created the field notes, and conducted the first and second interviews of the subset of six student participants. I collected everything and read it in chronological order as it took place. It was during this initial read through of the data that I reorganized each writing sample, field note, and interview transcript chronologically and by participant using physical paper files and manila folders. Every document was labeled with participant names, dates, and assignment type.

As I sorted and organized the data, I also read and coded. I followed a process outlined by Saldaña (2016) called “pre-coding” that allowed me to begin to find commonalities across the texts, transcripts, and fieldnotes before I assigned codes. Saldaña (2016) defines patterns as “repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice” (p. 5). To do this, I came up with a color-coded highlighting system that gave me a quick way to view commonalities and patterns in the data set. I used orange for information that was related to ethnic and cultural identity. I used blue to indicate emotion. Purple signified items related to writing identity. Finally, I used yellow to indicate something of interest that I should come back to review later. During this initial data analysis, I noticed that when participants talked of their writing identity, they used words that had negative connotations, like “I dislike writing” or writing is “boring and basic”. However, when students talked about their cultural and ethnic identities, they often referred to things with positive emotions, using words like, “love” and “comfort” or “care”.

After this first read through, I chose to narrow my data set to the six participants I interviewed. I made a conscious choice to narrow the focus of my analysis from nineteen to six students specifically to align my analysis with testimonio methodology. I did this for two reasons: 1.) Narrowing the focus of my analysis and findings served as a way to have a more nuanced and detailed sense of what took place, during this instructional unit, for a subset of writers. 2.) Typically, in testimonio methodology, the researcher holds a focus group to confirm findings before final analysis of the data. Because I was working with younger students, I did not conduct a focus group for this step of the analysis. Instead, I conducted a final interview with a subset of six student participants and utilized

those interviews as an individual analysis cycle. This served to co-construct knowledge with my participants and to confirm the patterns and codes I was seeing in the first two rounds of analysis. A co-construction of knowledge is a key requirement in testimonio methodology.

At this stage of analysis, I created six manila folders marked with participant names and pseudonyms. I arranged the hard copy data set belonging to each participant within its corresponding folder chronologically. I also created a cover sheet for each participant that I attached to the inside front cover of each manila folder (See Appendix G). I used this cover sheet to keep track of codes, and any observations I had regarding the data for each participant.

First Coding Cycle

After I pre-coded the data corpus, I met with participants individually to confirm the patterns I saw in the initial read through of the data. As a testimonio approach to analysis requires that knowledge be co-constructed with the participants, I utilized final interviews to confirm that the preliminary codes and commonalities I saw in the data were confirmed by my participants. Final reflection interviews were conducted after my first initial review of the data. I designed the final interview protocol as a reflective process for both myself and the participants (see Appendix B). Additionally, before the final interview took place, I noted anything I wanted to confirm with students regarding what I was seeing in the initial analysis cycle. For example, I noted that one participant felt “negatively about writing personal stories” in the beginning of the unit but that, in the end, “her testimonio was deeply personal.” In her third interview, I asked her specifically about that finding. Her response helped me to confirm that while she did begin with a

negative view of personal writing, once she began writing about her culture she stopped “feeling bad about telling a personal story.” The *In vivo* (Saldaña, 2016) codes that emerged from these reflective interviews helped guide the coding that followed and helped to create a more nuanced and detailed sense of what the data was revealing. I repeated this process with the six students I interviewed.

I used *In vivo* codes simultaneously with descriptive codes when evaluating student writing samples and interview transcripts. *In vivo* codes are codes that are exact quotes of what a participant said or wrote and use the terminology that participants use rather than researcher derived codes. (Saldana 2016). Because I used a testimonio narrative analysis approach to analyzing this data set, the *In vivo* codes were important to my understanding. For example, coding interview transcripts from interview number one with *In vivo* resulted in over 15 codes including, “I have a love hate relationship with writing,” “I don’t think my writing is where it should be,” “I’m not as descriptive in my writing as I want to be,” and “I don’t feel comfortable writing about myself,” “we don’t write about our heritage and culture in school” In interview number three I confirmed that these codes were in fact the meanings students wanted to convey. Asking such questions as, “what did you mean when?” as well as specific questions tied to what I was already seeing in the data like, “It seems that you wrote because you wanted to celebrate your culture is this the purpose for which you wrote your testimonio?” and “What made you choose to give your oral testimonio?”

The *In vivo* codes that emerged from this interview included phrases like “I wrote to remember and celebrate my Godmother”, “I think my purpose was to show a different side of what people see as Mexico,” and “I felt like the story I told needed to be shared

with people.” This second analysis phase was important to both begin to see patterns emerge for my research questions and also to stay true to the centering of participants’ voices that is central to a testimonio methodology of analysis (Pérez-Huber, 2015).

Second Coding Cycle

I continued to code the data throughout the data collection, so this cycle of coding came as a cyclical and iterative process (Saldaña, 2016). This coding cycle came after my third interview with participants. I used descriptive codes during this stage of analyzing my analytic memos, fieldnotes, and student writing samples. For example, using descriptive codes to analyze students’ *I remember* poems resulted in codes that included, “writing that celebrates cultural foods”, “community solidarity”, and “connections to family and culture.”

Additionally, I took the *In vivo* codes that came from the second analysis step and began to add descriptive codes to them as well. An example of this is, during the third interview an *In vivo* code, “Words used at home not regular essay words,” had the descriptive code, “home language vs school language.” added. This way of adding descriptive codes to an *In vivo* code helped me to begin to build toward categories that held answers to my research questions.

The next step in this third coding process was to re-evaluate how students felt about their writing. Understanding what they thought and felt about their writing and themselves as writers helped me to answer my second research question, how does a testimonio writing unit shape students’ agency as a writer? I looked to see if I could add emotion codes to the *In vivo* and descriptive codes. Emotion codes refer to codes that assign an emotion or feeling to the data (Saldaña, 2016). This set of codes added from three to five additional

codes to each data set. For example, during a writing conference, Maya discussed the writing as being “healing in a way.” I coded this exchange with the emotion code “emotional healing.” Other emotion codes I assigned were, “feeling inadequate,” and “feelings of comfort.” I looked at these emotion codes as a way to help answer my question about student agency in writing because it allowed me to see how students’ emotions and feelings entered into this testimonio unit. I wanted to see if writing about the self and community brought with it more positive feelings about writing and agency as writers. This cycle of coding was the most detailed part of my analytical process. I began to see where codes could be combined toward final categories.

Analytic Memos

I wrote memos about fieldnotes, interviews, after the storytelling event, and regarding particular codes that appeared especially important. Each of these memos were critical to my understanding and questioning of the data. For example, after reviewing my field notes from a writing conference day and deciding if the descriptive code “revision and investment” was accurate, I wrote in an analytic memo:

Both Maya and Andrea talked about how revising this work seemed easier than other pieces of writing because they were more invested in the writing. Andrea noted, ‘I really love writing this paper because it’s helping me sort out my mind.’ I see them gaining agency, question 2. I am wondering if I should add an emotion code to this; pride in writing, investment in writing?’

I ultimately wrote two emotion codes, “confidence in writing,” and “feelings of investment in writing.” from this memo. This approach to my analysis proved useful in narrowing my codes. It helped me center participants’ voices in this work. In the same

analytic memo, I talk about the struggle one of the male participants in my study was having with writing. “Santiago is really having a hard time with getting his story out. He said in his writing conference, ‘I’m not good at talking about me, that I believe essay about my dad was as close as I’m gonna get miss.’” The memos kept me grounded in testimonio methodology because they were my words in conversation with the words of my participants.

To access my analytic memos quickly and to connect them back to the codes and data they were written for, I added a row in my data collection table and hyperlinked them. This served as a table of contents. Each memo was titled for the code or data it represented. I also housed each of them in a single folder in my google drive marked, analytic memos testimonio (Image 3.1).

Image 3.1

Screenshot of Analytic Memos Table of Contents

| | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X |
|----|-------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Post Project Reflection | Writing Conferenc | Story Telling Event | Analytic Memos | | | | |
| 2 | | Yes | | Poetry | | | | |
| 3 | | Yes | | Storytelling event | | | | |
| 4 | | | | Writing Conferences | | | | |
| 5 | | | | Testimonio Intro | | | | |
| 6 | | Yes | Yes | Category memd | | | | |
| 7 | | Yes | | | | | | |
| 8 | Yes | Yes Fieldnotes | Yes | | | | | |
| 9 | Yes | Yes Fieldnotes | Yes | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | Yes | Yes Field Notes | Yes | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | Yes | Yes | | | | | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | | Yes | | | | | | |
| 18 | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | Yes | Yes: Field notes | No (Was signed up missed because of mom's work and no ride | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | | |
| 21 | | | | | | | | |
| 22 | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | | | | | | | | |

Final Cycle of Analysis

After reading the entirety of the corpus once more to ensure that I had given equal weight to what was said and that I was representing the voice of my participants accurately, I began to condense and focus the codes into specific categories. Categorizing codes helped me group ideas together to create a more focused code that summarized the data and came closer to overall themes (Charmaz, 2010, Creswell, 2013, Saldaña, 2016). After the second coding cycle I had 26 codes, 15 *In vivo* codes, 6 descriptive codes, and 5 emotion codes. As I continued to collapse and condense the data, I combined categories into 6 themes.

The six final themes that emerged from the data set were: 1.) Writing to Navigate Nepantla (the in between); 2.) Writing to Define Home; 3.) Writing to Celebrate Culture and Ancestors; 4.) Taking Ownership of Story; 5.) Moving Toward Confidence in Writing, and 6.) Taking Risks in Writing and Presenting. In the next chapter I describe these findings and how they relate to my research questions. Table 4.1 describes the inclusion criteria for each.

Table 4.1

Theme Inclusion Criteria

| <p>Question #1: For what purposes; solidarity, celebration, voicing injustice, call to actions do students write?</p> | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Theme | Inclusion Criteria | Examples | Literature |
| Writing to Navigate Nepantla (The in between) | The writing that the girls did to navigate feeling caught between spaces, between home | “I feel I’m equally Mexican as I am American but other people don’t see that.” -Maya | Community Cultural wealth. Navigational Capital. |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | language, home culture, and the dominant often hostile community of school | <p>“We don’t talk about our culture or heritage in school. It’s a touchy subject for some.”</p> <p>-Maya</p> <p>“I struggle with talking about and writing about my roots. Going to Cuernavaca, Mexico with my parents and then thinking about what it’s like here [in the US] is like whole different worlds.”</p> <p>-Christine</p> | <p>Yosso (2005)</p> <p>Nepantla Anzaldúa (2002)</p> <p>Testimonio as Counter Narratives, (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009)</p> |
| Writing to Define Home | The writing that the participants did to define what home truly meant to them. | <p>Andrea: Writing Conference, Interview #2 “Umm Hmm...wait mauve I need to define what home means. Like where home is. Is it a place or is it people? Because having my Family with me that’s how I identify what’s important.”</p> <p>Christine: I am from poem. Personal Narrative. Food as a definition for home.</p> <p>Maya writes about how her aunt was home to her.</p> <p>I am From Poems</p> | <p>Testimonio: Latina Feminist Group (2001)</p> <p>DeNicolo (2015)</p> |
| Writing To Celebrate Culture | The writing the girls did in celebration of | Miya Writing about her loved one Personal | Gutierrez and Rogoff |

| | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| and Ancestors | their culture, as a counter narrative to dominant thinking of the dominant society. | narrative Christine: Writing about the food and traditional preparations Amalia writes about her father’s loving care when she was ill and his quest to make life better for his daughters. Remember Poems | (2013) Familial and Social Capital (Yosso, 2005) Testimonio as Counter Narratives, (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009) |
|---------------|---|---|---|

Question #2
In what ways does a testimonio unit provide secondary students with a sense of agency and voice as writers?

| Themes | Definition | Examples | Literature |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Taking Ownership of Story | When the participants made decisions that shaped their own stories. Also instances where students were protective of their stories. | “I mean I want to show that my identity isn’t tied to where I live...You know? Because I’m still who I am if I’m living in Mexicali, or in Calexico or in Phoenix. But my ties are family ties.” Andrea | Testimonio as a hybrid text (Gutierrez, 2012) Testimonio in solidarity with community. (Perez-Huber, 2012) |
| Moving toward confidence in writing | When students spoke of confidence about their writing. Feeling Pride and passion in | “I feel proud of what I did in this project” Maya | Personal Narrative in the secondary |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | <p>their writing and also in oral storytelling</p> | <p>“I felt so proud you know? Like wow I wrote that and someone saw it was good and listened to me and I really did it.” Christine</p> <p>“I’m not really good at starting but I think I can do this one because I really care about the subject.” Santiago</p> | <p>ELA classroom (Early, 2019)</p> <p>Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado-Bernal, 2004)</p> |
| <p>Taking Risks in Writing and Presenting</p> | <p>Where participants experimented with unfamiliar genres, language, and presented their writing at an oral storytelling event.</p> <p>Male participants were less likely to take the risks in their writing. Neither gave their testimonio.</p> | <p>“I tried really hard to make it unique, to use more “thick description” like you say in how I described my mother’s home.” Christine</p> <p>I’ve never wrote like that before. Like poetry, and a letter and that story, especially in English” Amalia</p> | <p>Giving voice to silenced histories and experiences. (Latina Feminist Group, 2001)</p> |

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter outlines my findings, which resulted from a rigorous and recursive process of data analysis using a testimonio narrative approach. My recursive process of reading, coding, and collapsing codes, led to six final themes: 1) Writing to Navigate Nepantla, 2) Writing to Celebrate Culture and Ancestors, 3) Writing to Define Home, 4) Taking Ownership in Story, 5) Moving Toward Confidence in Writing, and 6) Taking Risks in Writing. The following shares my findings and tells the story of a group of six young people who took part in this study of writing testimonio.

Testimonio Multigenre Projects

Each participant in this study was tasked with creating a Testimonio Multigenre project that combined the writing they did in the unit. Participants made choices regarding topic, theme, and which genres they included in their projects. Below I outline each participant's, topic, theme, and genre selection in their final testimonio multigenre project.

Amalia. Amalia's topic was one of the many surgeries she had when she was a younger child. Her theme was the importance of family care in recovering from surgery. Her multigenre testimonio project included a Remember poem, a Personal Narrative, and a Letter to herself.

Andrea. Andrea's topic was her move from Mexico to the United States with her mother. Her theme was that family and people who she cares about shape her identity.

She included, a letter to self, a personal narrative, and a journal entry as her testimonio genre selections.

Christine. Christine's topic was her visit to her mother's homeland in Central Mexico. Her themes were food and family. She included an "Ode to Chicken" poem, a personal narrative and a reflective journal entry as her testimonio genre selections.

Santiago. Santiago's topic was moving to a new school. His theme was that changing your educational environment can open your eyes to injustices. His testimonio project was incomplete and while he intended to include both his personal narrative and a reflective journal entry, his ultimate genre selection was limited to his personal narrative.

Julio. Julio's topic was a surgery he had during his freshman year of high school. His theme was even when you face hardships, family helps you to see hope. His testimonio project was also incomplete and included his personal narrative and a draft of an "I am From" poem.

Writing to Navigate Nepantla

The first theme in my findings, which I found through analysis of all writing samples and interviews, focuses on how students writing expressed the way they were navigating between two different worlds. Out of the six participants in my case study, the writing of all six shared this plurality. Students wrote about navigating between two cultural worlds, two contexts, two languages, and/or two borders. Some wrote about moments where they navigated between home and school. Others wrote about navigating between struggle and hope. Students also wrote about navigating between cultures and borders.

The data revealed that the participants' writing and discussions about their writing illustrate the concept of *Nepantla* or *Nepantilism* described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) as being “torn between ways” (p.100). Further, she describes a state of being that allows one to hold ideas and ways of knowing with flexibility. I saw this pattern of thinking reflected in my participants' writings and in their discussions of their writing. For example, in the opening of her personal narrative, which was one part of her larger *testimonio* project, Christine wrote, “There are times I catch myself looking at the sky. To some it means nothing, to me it means everything. It holds my dreams, my hopes, my fears.” This opening line sets up a journey for Christine. She writes about traveling to central Mexico, describing it as her “mother’s motherland” and connects this idea of how looking at a sky in two different places showed her something about her identity where she wrote, “I felt that everywhere the sky covered, the blue sky was all the same until I went to the roots of my origin, Mexico.” This navigation between borders and places is a recurring theme in Christine’s *testimonio* project.

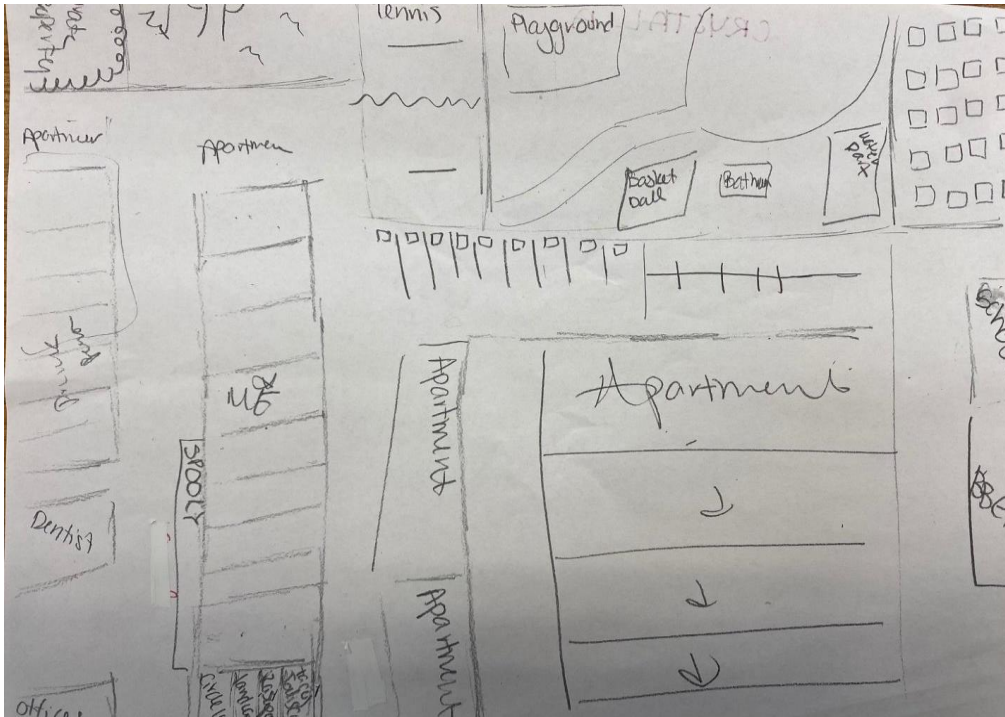
Christine shared her ideas about navigating three distinct identities: one of the quirky scholar; one of an American teenager; and one of the *mestiza* who found wonder in her ancestral home. For example, Christine focused on her home in the US in her *Neighborhood Map* assignment early in the unit. However, later in the unit, for the personal narrative assignment, she wrote about her visit to her mother’s ancestral home in central Mexico. She made her neighborhood map of her U.S home flat with no color at all, and she labeled it sparsely with little description (see Image 4.1). She created row after row of boxes labeled “apartment” and included a large empty area labeled “park”. She included places to purchase food, such as a Circle K and a Tacos Jalisco, at each end of a strip mall that also houses a pawnshop and a smoke shop. Her written description included one of a park that is “both

beautiful and dangerous. During the night it is the last place to be predators at every corner ready to strike and eat their prey.” This map and description of neighborhood in the US stood in stark contrast to her description of her mother’s ancestral home in Central Mexico, Cuernavaca Morelos, where she visited with her family when she was younger:

My mother’s motherland. It is like nothing before, left and right where people are selling, yelling, and laughing, it was so much to take in yet became a magical time. The smell of nature lingering in the air. The air hugging you, welcoming you with its wind. The birds singing the foreign language. It became a land of wonders that were meant to be discovered yet are left undiscovered.

In this description, Christine remembers the moment she looked at the land of her origins and ancestors.

Image 4.1 *Christine’s Neighborhood Map*



Christine grapples with the in-between of a world that she finds “undiscovered” and filled with “foreign language” [not Spanish but an indigenous language Nahuatl], but is also a place that speaks to her ancestry. There was such a contrast in her depiction of her home neighborhood in the United States and this description. I chose to follow up on this during our 2nd interview.

PI: Did you talk about culture and your heritage in your personal narrative?

C: I did surprisingly like how it's all connected to food like I grew up differently because of food. Maybe it's not my heritage but yeah maybe it is because my taste buds are different.

PI: I know you started with your neighborhood map and thinking about the dangers in the park, but that wasn't what you wrote about.

C: Because, yes I grew up in and I live in But it was that trip that told me who my mom was and who I am. I am like Mexican and it's more natural there but I'm also American, but I couldn't yet tell that. Well, I can find it you know? Like in food, food makes the connections, I guess? Like between Mexico and here because food is to celebrate yeah, yeah like I'm straddling both places.

Christine describes not really understanding or knowing her Mexican heritage until she went to Mexico. Going to Mexico helped her navigate and make sense of her identity. She made the connection between her two worlds and the present and the past with food. Christine's words reveal a struggle between what she sees clearly as her heritage and identity and what she brings with her to school. She sees being American with Mexican

Indigenous as her heritage, but when she's in school and working through academics, it's like she has to "straddle both places."

Maya navigated between school and home as well as her two ethnic identities as Mexican and American. During our first interview, I asked Maya how she identified. She responded with "I feel I'm equally Mexican as I am American but other people don't see that." She also communicated how she was not given a space or opportunity to explore or even talk about her navigation of these identities within the school space. For example, in the same interview, I asked Maya if she had ever written about her cultural identity in school before this class. She hesitated before answering, "We don't talk about our culture or heritage in school. It's a touchy subject for some. I struggle with talking about and writing about my heritage and culture because I feel like I'm not supposed to."

Maya made it clear that being open about or trying to make sense of her cultural identity and heritage were not things she felt safe sharing in school spaces and that they were unallowable. "This also helped explain the purpose for her choice in writing her personal narrative about her godmother. She wrote, "I really am so glad I got to write about this. At first I didn't think I could do it" [meaning she didn't know if she was allowed to]. Maya wasn't certain if she would be allowed to write about her family background or history or anything personal. However, she used the personal narrative to write about her godmother who had died six months before. This topic represented a new kind of risk or vulnerability for her as a writer and person at school. Christine and Maya both talked about navigating through divergent cultural environments or identities.

In contrast, Santiago shared navigating between realities of his home and school communities through his personal narrative. Although he wrote two drafts of the personal

narrative, Santiago had difficulty settling on a topic. His first draft was about learning to drive and his second draft was about the anger he felt for students who complained at school about the quality of the school food. He was resentful and angry at students for expressing their disdain for this food when he suffered from food insecurity at home. Although Santiago completed these two divergent drafts of the personal narrative, which was one part of the whole testimonio project, he struggled with participation and did not complete most of his writing assignments in the unit. Even though he did not complete assignments, he was in school every day. When he wrote, he struggled with the physicality of putting pen or pencil to the page. He never turned in his writer's notebook and did not want me to see his handwriting. He used the computer to write everything he turned in. He struggled with keyboarding on the computer. He was very verbal and could talk about his ideas clearly. In his interview, I asked him about his topic for his testimonio project topic.

PI. Tell me a little about your testimonio topic.

S. I'm writing about, because you know I'm not done right now, but how certain environments affect your education.

PI. Why did you choose this topic? I see others choosing to write about past experience but you're comparing past to present, why?

S. Well because when I see these kids over here complaining about the food I know like how the food was in my old environment, like I get triggered.

PI. Why does that trigger you?

S. Because you know like they don't know how good they have it. We are really struggling out here and I know friends who struggle to eat at home, and I bet

most of these kids don't have to you know?

Santiago shares what it is like to struggle with food insecurity and his anger with those who have the privilege to show or feel disdain toward a free school lunch. In the personal narrative portion of his testimonio project, Santiago wrote about the two school environments he has experienced. One of those environments was what he described as “ghetto” meaning that the resources were more limited, the school lunch was of low quality, and students had less access to basic necessities. The other environment he wrote about had access to one-to-one technology, free higher quality school lunch, and students had (in his perception) more economic means. He writes about this contrast and asserts that despite being in a different school environment, his identity shows in his connection to his home environment. In the final draft of the personal narrative portion of his testimonio he wrote

This defines my personality because even though I'm in a better school, my clothing and the way I dress and my knowledge represent where I'm from. The way I speak and the way I represent myself is basically the school I came from. Santiago describes how he perceives his identity in relationship to the school environment he is currently experiencing. He talks about ways that he connects to his home environment, through dress and speech patterns, even as he is navigating a school environment that he sees as “better” than the home school environment he left.

For Julio, the navigation through the in-between is evident in how he defines his identity. In his first interview, Julio discusses his ethnic identity. Unlike most of the other Latinx participants in this study, Julio is not of Mexican descent.

P. How do you identify your own ethnic identity?

J. Do you mean like my race or nationality?

PI. I'm asking about your culture or ethnicity.

J. Oh ok, I tell people I'm *Guatemalan and Puerto Rican* [!]

PI. Ok, you are very specific about this, why?

J. Because if I just say I'm like Hispanic, people assume I'm Mexican.

I'm not Mexican, and being from Puerto Rico, my mom reminds me to be always proud of that because she's from there and is American.

I added the emphasis and exclamation point to illustrate how adamantly he talked about his roots in Guatemala and Puerto Rico. He is declaring his stance that he is not ok with the fact that his ethnicity is often assumed because of his origins. He makes that connection and alliance with his mother and her Puerto Rican origins. His assertion, "I am not Mexican," speaks to the political climate in which this study was conducted. The rhetoric of the time was perpetuating the stereotype that Mexican immigrants were not desirable in the United States. For Julio, he felt it was important that people understood that he did not fall under the assumption that all Hispanic peoples are from Mexico. He wanted people to know and understand that he is an American citizen.

In addition to navigating between his cultural heritages and the perception of others, the personal narrative portion of Julio's personal narrative illustrates his navigation between being someone who has a serious heart condition and his desire to be a student athlete. When I asked his purpose for writing about his surgery he said, "I wrote to like have or show people to have hope, that they can struggle through hard times but can still be successful." This idea that from struggle comes success, was a unique way to show his navigation between two worlds, the world of having a debilitating illness and

the world of succeeding in sports. The end of his personal narrative solidifies this concept.

At first, I was hesitant to have the surgery. It would mean three weeks away from Basketball. I couldn't imagine being away for that long. I might lose my skills. I knew I had to do the surgery, so I went ahead with it. Eventually I healed and started playing again but now I had to work harder to play at the high level I was at before. I proved I could do it.

Though Julio wrote very little in his testimonio project, and missed more days of instruction than he attended, what he did write showed me how he was navigating the spaces in which he lived. Julio's heart condition caused him to miss many days of school. His learning disability and health became other in-between spaces that he struggled to move out from.

Another example of students experiencing nepantla, or navigating between two spaces, was between languages. Amalia, Andrea, and Santiago were all fluent in both Spanish and English. Christine spoke fluent Spanish, English, and also spoke some Nahuatl. Amalia and I discussed the language in which she was most comfortable communicating. She responded, "Uh, Spanish, Spanish takes precedence. That means it is my first language and I'm used to like more words and I can interact more with people who speak Spanish too." The state where this study took place labels students, like Amalia whose first and preferred language is not English, English Language Learners and sets an Individualized learning plan in place for language acquisition. This navigation between languages is echoed in her answer about a time when she wrote about something personal. She said that she had written in English about her surgery before, "but I didn't

really like it because I didn't write good in English, I want to write about it again because I didn't express myself right before but I'm better at English now." She was looking forward to writing a "better" story because she felt she now had a better grasp of English. I followed up by asking her if she felt she could write it more descriptively in Spanish. She said, "Yes of course, but this is English class so I'm going to be sure to write in English and get better." She did not believe she was allowed to use another language to express herself and tell her story in her English class. She also did not feel like she was a good writer because she was still navigating an in-between space linguistically between proficiency in her home language and gaining proficiency in the language valued by school.

This navigation in the in-between spaces was a recurring theme in many of the testimonios students wrote. Students wrote and talked about navigating between borders, linguistically, and between home and school expectations. While this discussion is limited to the six focus participants in this study, the rest of the corpus also reveals instances where students must move between two or more worlds and navigate disparate spaces.

Writing to Define Home

A second theme that emerged from my analysis was the way students used the writing of testimonios to define home. They used food and their connections to family and people they care about to define home. One example of this comes in Andrea's writing conference, which I recorded. She realizes that defining home should be her purpose in her writing:

UMMM HMMM....Wait! Maybe I need to define what home means, like where home is. Is it a place? Or is it people? Because having my family with me that's how I identify with what's important. Oh! This is good! Thanks. Yeah it's really good. Ha! That's why we talk it through huh? Thanks Ms.!

This Ah-Ha moment for Andrea, was where she realized the focus of her writing and her commitment to showcasing her definition of home. For Andrea, her family defined home. This example from the closing of the personal narrative portion of her Testimonio project illustrates Andrea's path to finding home:

As time went by, I finally realized that home is not the city you live in or the house you have but the people around you, the people who love and always look after you no matter what, that is home. I consider Mexicali my hometown, however it is not my home; my home is me being around my family and friends. My home is getting to connect with my loved ones and creating memories with them even if they are far from me. I guess it took me the hard way to realize this but I'm very glad I did because I can now go live my life and enjoy the people around me as much as I can because they're the place I truly belong to, they are my home.

In this excerpt, Andrea is coming to terms with and moving toward her own final definition of home. She sees home as not only being tied to a physical place but also connected to the people she cares most about.

Julio's experience with defining home was different than Andrea's. For Julio, basketball and playing basketball was the most important aspect of his identity. In the personal narrative portion of his testimonio project, he wrote "I had to recover enough to

play basketball, the court is where I am most at home.” His identity and home were threatened by a surgery that might have kept him off the court for a season. He also talked about this during one of our interviews. When I asked him how important basketball was to him, he said, “Basketball is everything.” For Julio, home was on the court playing the sport he loved the best.

One informal writing activity students completed was an “I Am From” Poem (Christensen, 2017), which is a narrative poem describing the place or things or people who are the makeup of the writer’s roots or past. The writing samples from this assignment revealed a connection between how home, food, and celebration defined the participants’ sense of belonging to place and home. For Christine the idea that home is connected to food and celebration comes through in her “I am From” poem.

“I Am From”

I am from the park

where the Paletero and the Elotero

Gather to bring happiness

And smiles to our face

I am from the cup of corn and

Juice of raspados

The sweetness and saltiness that

Connects to the roots.

This connection between food and home is woven throughout Christine's testimonio project.

Christine's choice to write an additional poem about food for her testimonio project, and to share at the storytelling event, reveals how integral food and celebration were to her definition of home. When I asked, in her third interview, why she chose to share this particular poem in the storytelling event and whether she felt it was connected to her community and culture she said, "We always have like when we have a party or celebration, there's chicken dorado, or mole, or some type of chicken prepared in a traditional way. Like I said, food and celebration is always a thing." She used this theme as a thread pulling the three genres she chose for the final project together. Below is an excerpt from her Ode to Chicken poem that shows her unique take on an ordinary comfort food and what it means to her. The themes of food as healer, as well as bridge between cultures are evident in this final version.

Ode to Chicken

Oh! the smell it gives

Oh! the feeling it builds in your stomach

Oh! the way it warms you up

Oh! the way it makes you feel

Oh! how chicken makes you feel

The way it warms your soul

Heals your loneliness

Maybe it's pasta covered in alfredo sauce

Or dipped in oil making it crispy and golden

Chopped into smaller pieces making a mountain of glory and mystery

To make a flautas or tacos dorados

To everybody's all-time favorite
Chicken nuggets dipped in ketchup or ranch
With fries on the side...mmmm hmmm!
Making you lose all common sense, distracting you
Making life better
Oh! it's more than food.
Oh! it's a gift, celebration, and love!

This poem has such joy in its composition. This tone of joy and humor runs throughout Christine's testimonio multigenre project as well as her informal pieces of writing.

Maya also made food the centerpiece of her "I Am From" Poem. Below is an excerpt:

"I Am From"
I am from a family strong
About our faith
From big ollas full of
red/green chile ready to be shared
From coffee dates at Tres Leches
And Sunday breakfast with Family.

These two participants described food in more depth than the models I had shared with them. Food and the description of food became a way for each of them to discuss a connection to home.

Another way that the data revealed how food and a definition of home are intertwined for these testimonios is in the way students wrote about food as a healing

agent. Maya's testimonio project began with a "Five Step Recipe to Cure Your Sadness". Though not about food, this recipe about emotional healing, "Won't cure your sadness nor will take it away, this recipe is to simply mix all these ingredients to mend the loss of a loved one." Step four in her recipe calls for the grief stricken to "try to eat something. I know you may not feel hungry but trust me, your body is." This reminder to eat, is a connection to her mother who "always reminded me to eat, even when I was sad," which she revealed to me in her third interview. In the context of this study, participants defined home as family, food, and receiving care from their communities.

Amalia echoed this sentiment in her personal narrative about healing after surgery and comparing her last meal before, "which was made with love I could tell" and the bland food of the hospital "I didn't like it but my dad would tell me, 'eat it because it will make you strong'." These descriptions of parents and family reminded students that eating and being fed is a kind of self or familial care, which created a sense of home and a loving community. These young ladies were not alone in their use of food to define home.

Not all of the descriptions of the relationship between home and food were positive. Other participants discussed injustice and the desire to bring change to their communities. For example, Santiago seemed to have a different relationship with food and his definition of home. For Santiago, the issue of struggle and injustice prevailed in his descriptions of home. His personal narrative and interviews told of food insecurity and about how watching those who he believed were more privileged complain about school food contributed to his feelings of injustice:

[We] would be clowning on these kids for complaining about the food. Like they really are complaining about the spicy chickens and pizza and like good food like that over my old school, we ate beans with carrots. grilled cheese sandwiches with Tapatio. As the food culture is different but my old school's food quality is like a lower class than the school I go to now. I bet you anything that any kid in my school would prefer food from [Central College] prep any day.

When I asked him, in his third interview, about why he wrote about food and struggle, Santiago said:

Because I was hearing all of these students complain about food from here and like I'm trying these American foods because I'm in this environment. But because I really feel like I know people in my old school who really struggle to eat at home and like these kids complain and should not complain because people only eat like two times a day maybe where I'm from.

Santiago defined his home and where he is from not through celebrations surrounding food, but through pointing out injustices and struggle in connection to food. Some of purposes of writing and sharing testimonio are to call attention to these injustices, to create solidarity with a community, and to also bring social awareness and change to an unjust situation. Santiago advocates for change for his community through his personal narrative but he is not placing himself in solidarity with the struggle. Instead, he is calling attention to and voicing his frustration with, "kids [who] complain and should not complain." He wrote as one who wants to protect his community and called for action for his community.

Though each participant wrote to define home from differing perspectives, their testimonios illustrate a connection to the strengths of their communities. For Christine and Maya, that strength was centered on celebration, food, and the sharing of memories. For Andrea, understanding the family and the people who care about her helped her to shape her identity. Then Santiago used his connection to his community to give voice to an injustice that he saw in the food insecurity that his community faced. He saw an injustice and voiced it to drive change and bring awareness to an issue that he felt was important to his home and the people who represent his home and where he was from.

Celebrating Culture and Ancestors

The fourth theme that emerged from the data corpus was celebrating culture and ancestors. Participants wrote to commemorate particular family members, cultural experiences, and lessons learned from ancestors. All of the girls in this study wrote about people and ancestors in their lives who made an impact on them. The boys wrote about their triumphs over adversity or about injustices they saw reflected in their communities. An example of one of the girls who wrote about ancestors comes in Andrea's "I am From" poem. Andrea wrote about the "beautiful culture and incredible traditions" of her ancestors. She also wrote in the language of her home, the poem has Spanish sprinkled throughout. Below is the full text of the poem which is titled, "Where I'm From":

"Where I'm From"

I am from the year-long heat

From the city that catches the sun.

I'm from Taquerias on every corner.

I am from the neighborhood where kids play

With each other and are happy.

I am from parents and grandparents who

Look after you everyday.

From the “ten cuidado” and the “portate bien”

Words from my mother’s mouth and from the mother before her

I am from a beautiful culture

From delicious food, and incredible traditions.

The family and city that saw me grow

I am from my home.

The pride with which she wrote about her home language and culture in her poem, speaks to the value she places on lessons she learned from ancestors.

Similarly, Christine wrote to celebrate the culture of her mother’s homeland.

When I asked Christine about her choice of topic and whether she felt her identity and culture influenced her testimonio.

PI. I know we talked about this in your second interview, but let’s confirm. Did your ethnic identity influence your testimonio or what you wrote about?

C. Oh! Yeah, totally! I realized that I added a whole bunch of Mexican dishes. I also blended in American dishes too. I said earlier it surprised me but I think I really showed how much I add up to being both Mexican and American.

The way she describes how food she loves and prepares “adds up” to make her identity, shows her thinking critically about how her two cultures intertwine. She sees both of her cultures, Mexican and American, as combining to make her identity.

This celebration of culture and lessons learned from ancestors is also reflected in the personal narrative portion of Christine’s testimonio project. She writes in a reverent tone and with detail to describe the way that her aunt used “heaven’s gift” to prepare food.

Along with his convenience store, he had a station where my aunt Hilda would use heaven’s gift to make the best *torta de milanesa de pollo* in the world. Though I had my fair share of tortas de milanesa de pollo back home, this was nothing like before in taste, sensation, and smell. It threw over any five-star restaurant, nothing could compete with the deliciousness. The *telera* was put on the stove to make the outside gold and crispy leaving the inside nice and toasty. While the *telera* heated my *tia* Hilda would dip the chicken breast into egg then cover it with breadcrumbs. Making sure that it's completely covered not missing a single spot, then dipping it in oil and letting it do its magic.

Christine celebrates the cooking technique of her aunt. She compares it to the best foods she’s had before and declares that “nothing can compete with the deliciousness.” The pure joy she feels for her *tia*’s cooking and the attention to detail she placed in this description shows a celebration of her culture and her *tia*’s skill.

A further example of the celebration of culture and lessons from ancestors comes with Amalia’s discussion of how her heritage language plays into her understanding of the world. Amalia had been labeled as an English Language Learner and stated that she is most comfortable communicating in Spanish. When I followed up further with her regarding how she felt about herself as a writer, she talked about how she keeps a diary, but that it is in Spanish, because that is the language that “I feel in.”

PI: And what about writing? What do you think about writing or how do you feel about writing and what it means to be a writer?

A: Um, I like writing, but it's not like my passion, but like I can describe things and like I said before, I used to have a diary, I write things that I feel and stuff there. It was in Spanish, because I could like write what I feel. I like get deep into it.

Spanish is the way I feel and English is how I write in school.

For Amalia, her heritage language is where her emotions lie, and English is where the communication has to be more removed from emotion. She described a pride being and celebrating being Mexican American. In her first interview, I asked her about how she identifies ethnically, she responded,

I am Hispanic, well Mexican American because my parents come from Mexico. I used to not like to say that because people assume, we are illegal, but really my dad sacrificed so much for me to come to the United States to make a better life, and to change my life because of the surgery that I talk about.

Here Amalia shares her pride in her family and their sacrifices they made for her. Her topic in the personal narrative portion of her testimonio multigenre project was her

surgery, but the pride in her family's sacrifices is the lesson that she wants her readers to take away. This excerpt of her personal narrative also illustrates this pride in her family

My parents Fidel and Elsa were both sitting down and when they heard I would have to have a metal bar inserted in my body, they immediately looked at each other so worried and stood up. My father asked "Really, my daughter will have that inside her for five years? Dr. Lisa said, yes, that's the plan. I know it sounds very painful but it's necessary. I could feel the pain inside my mom and dad when they looked at me. They had brought me here to get this surgery, but they were afraid.

When the surgery day arrived, I was nervous, I felt butterflies in my stomach. Luckily my mom and dad were there to encourage me and tell me "don't worry, everything will be great." They had left everything behind for me to get this surgery, so I had to be brave.

Amalia drew strength to "be brave" from her parents and their words. She also thought of what they sacrificed to get the best care for her.

Maya's testimonio was very specific in its topic and theme. She wrote to commemorate and remember a loved one. Maya's Godmother had passed away earlier in the school year and her entire testimonio project was written in tribute to her Godmother. In this excerpt from the personal narrative portion of her project, we can see what her Godmother meant to her.

According to the dictionary, Helen means shining light. I couldn't agree more because my Godmother was the shining light in my life. She died in early January

from cancer. Even though I don't know the details of her illness, that's not what I want to remember anyway. I would rather remember her smile, her laugh and how she touched my life.

This excerpt finds Maya writing through grief about losing someone who was the "shining light" in her life. She wrote in her testimonio reflection that she gave her testimonio to "remember her Godmother and to celebrate her life." This tribute celebrates a person important to Maya and helped her to move through the grief of her passing. Maya says later in one of our interviews that she was glad she got to tell her Godmother's story, even if it was just a little taste of who her Godmother was.

While Santiago and Julio did not write specifically about their ancestors, or culture in their personal narratives, each expressed pride in their heritage and communities in their interviews. For example, in his third interview, Julio mentioned that if it wasn't for his family, "I would never have played basketball and I wouldn't have gotten the physical therapy to get back on the court. My dad is proud of me playing basketball." Julio speaks with pride about basketball, and also comments on his father's pride in him, this gives some insight into what he believes is his community. For Julio, his sport is his community and his pride in it is tied to his father's view of him as well. Additionally, Julio's "I am from poem" hints at the pride he has for his family as well.

"I am From"

I am from the park and family pictures

I am from footballs, and basketballs

From Grandpa Efrain and Grandma Gloria

And my dad's words to strive.

Julio mentions again his dad and the words he uses “to strive,” he writes about being from “footballs and basketballs” and his ancestors who remind him of home.

In Santiago’s case, he values his community and sees his role in his community as defender. He writes to defend his community against an injustice. In his third interview he says, “people need to know that we struggle out here.” While he doesn’t say that he is proud of his community directly, he is showing a connection and a need to protect his community from outsider narratives. In his third interview he also talks about his father and how, if he were able to do this project over or if he would be able to choose his own topic again he would, “write about my pops, because he did a lot for our community and our family.”

While there was contrast between how the girls and boys showed pride in their cultures and communities, the data revealed an aspect of celebrating their culture and ancestors in some form. Whether it was writing to remember and commemorate a loved one, or in voicing pride for the way an ancestor completed a task, each participant had a point of pride to write about.

Taking Ownership of Stories

The fourth theme that emerged through my analysis was the importance for students of taking ownership of their own stories and voice through writing. Students made different decisions regarding their writing topics, genre, and purpose throughout the testimonio project to hold on to the way they wanted to represent themselves and to share their stories of self. The choices they made, as revealed by the data, show how they moved toward agency and ownership of the story. For example, in her writing conference, Andrea shared:

I want my writing to show that my identity isn't tied to where I live...You know?
Because I'm still who I am if I'm living in Mexicali or in Calexico or in Phoenix.
But my ties are family ties. I have to decide how to do this or where to do this.

This exchange, along with one in her second interview, show Andrea thinking critically about her purpose and her need to control the narrative in her own story. Before this point in her writing process, she had made “a bunch of lists, and [was] trying to decide on a topic but nothing seemed to be working.” She really struggled to focus on a topic until she talked about it and made the statement, “I want my writing to show that my identity isn't tied to where I live.” Ultimately, her agency in choosing to write in opposition to the idea that identity is tied to place, led her to write a personal narrative that defined who she was for herself and gave homage to the ancestors and family from whom she came. She wrote, “It wasn't until about two weeks after we moved that I started to get homesick and realized all my life had been left behind in Mexico.” In writing this, she is setting up the narrative that her home was tied to place, however, later in the text, she makes a shift in her writing to the realization that people, not place, defined her narrative. She concluded “As time went by, I finally realized that home is not the city you live in or the house you have but the people around you.”

A similar agency in choice can be found in how Christine chose to think about the need for a solid opening line in her personal narrative. In her revision notes during her writing conference, she wrote, “make it unique” and kept this note at the top of her draft until she completed the final testimonio project. In her second interview and preparation for giving her oral testimonio in the storytelling event, she discussed what she meant by unique. “I wanted to share something different, like it's not an “I am from poem” or a

“Remember” poem like you taught us to write. My “Ode to Chicken” poem is unique to me and shows me.” Making the choice to deviate from the genre that was taught, to create something new, shows her taking ownership of how her story would be told.

Christine’s testimonio revealed another shift in thinking about agency and ownership of story. In her first interview, Christine was reluctant to share “personal stuff” because she felt like it did not “really belong in school.” She had internalized a separation from what belonged in school and what belonged to home. Again, the change in her thinking came when she made a decision as to how she would present a personal narrative about visiting her ancestral home in Mexico. She had been taught that personal stories do not “belong” in the school setting, yet she wrote about a personal journey to discover her identity.

Christine’s testimonio multigenre project was about food. When I asked her, during our third interview about why she chose to write so specifically about food she said, “I thought that is something that was relatable to people and I wanted people to know how I felt towards this.” Making choices about the audience and the people for whom she is going to write helped Christine begin to take ownership of her own story and how she shared it with the world. It also led her to think differently about what it means to be a writer:

I guess everybody can be a writer as long as they're really passionate about sharing their thoughts and what they feel like or their imagination. I just feel that it's a lot of work for someone to just dedicate themselves as a writer, so you have to really want to tell that story.

At the beginning of the unit, her definition of a writer was someone who “wrote novels,” in this current definition she is saying that a writer can be anyone as long as he, she, or they care about his, her, or their story and dedicate themselves to the telling of that story.

This definition of what it means to be a writer as someone who is passionate about your story and takes agency in how you tell your story, is echoed by other participants. Take for instance, Maya’s discussion in her first interview about why she did not feel satisfied with her writing and did not define herself as a writer.

PI. What do you think it means to be a writer?

M. I feel like being a writer means to be...I don't know to enjoy it and I don't know to feel comfortable with what you are writing and putting the writing out into the world and I don't know like being that person who writes and likes what they write and how they write.

She viewed those who were writers as those who felt “comfortable” with the stories they told and wrote about. Those who were writers, in Maya’s view, owned their own stories and how they told those stories. She did not, at the beginning of the testimonio unit see herself included in this definition of writer.

PI. What about you? Do you view yourself as a writer?

M. I’d like to be.

PI. You’d like to be?

M. I mean, I Feel like I don't call myself a writer because I’m not at the stage where I want to be like. I mean like creatively and like I don’t know the way I write is not the way I want to write.

This conversation is important to understanding how Maya’s thinking changed and shifted over the course of the unit. She took ownership of how the story of her Godmother would be told. Most notably is her choice to change the poem that she included in her final testimonio project. Not only did she choose to write a new poem, but she also wrote a poem that showed sophistication in modeling and in pulling pieces, lines, and ideas from pieces she had already drafted to create something new. She modeled her poem after Pat Mora’s poem about her aunt in *Remembering Lobo* and she also pulled lines from both her poem “Remember” and her “I am from poem.” Here is the final version of the poem portion of her testimonio project.

“Promise”

Promise to tell me everything when we meet again

Tell me about your journey leaving earth behind

To be with the moon and its stars

Was it everything we talked about?

Is the view amazing?

Because down here the moon seems so far away

And all that’s left of you is a memory

That won’t fade away

I want to know everything

But everything has to wait

Until then I’ll have to live this thing we call life.

This poem is nothing like the genre examples we learned about in class. However, it tied in closely with her purpose, discussed before as writing to celebrate culture and

ancestors. She, like Christine, made a clear choice to change the poem genre and structure, to own the story she wanted to tell in the way she wanted to tell it.

Testimonios can come in many different genres and are created to tell a story of community and struggle, but they are also a way to gain agency and ownership for one's own story in connection to that community and struggle. For Maya, telling the story of her Godmother was something that helped her find that comfort and to begin to see that ownership and passion for a story. It also led her toward more agency as a writer.

PI. Did participation in this unit of study change your view about writing?

M. Yes, because before I would always think writing was so boring, I don't know, just straight like writing in general didn't really intrigued me. But like this, you showed me what writing can do and how I don't know. It changed me, you just changed me, I didn't know, like writing could be exciting, you know in this way.

PI. Do you think you do feel differently about what it means to be a writer after doing all of this, sharing it and writing it and being excited by it?

M. Yeah, kind of feels like how they [professional writers] feel about their own novels and stuff. Like how it can actually be something I am able to enjoy, to do. My writing is different.

This discussion in her third interview showed a Maya who had been changed by her experience in giving her testimonio. She found herself “excited” by the ownership in her story and in the story that she told. This ownership led her to think that writing could be something that was transformative.

Another example of how participants made choices about their writing that showed ownership of their own story can be found in a more subtle way in Santiago's

personal narrative. He felt that writing in general was not something that he could do well, and he struggled with completing his writing tasks. Take for example the fact that he did not complete any of the informal writing assignments to a degree that he wanted to show them to me. When it came time to turn in his work, he often “lost his notebook, forgot his notebook, or wasn’t finished yet.” I discussed this reluctance with him after reading a very unfinished rough draft of his narrative that seemed really disconnected and not something he really cared about. I have included a portion of this draft, which was a total of one paragraph after the first week of drafting.

The day my mom handed me the keys to her car was the day I was going to learn how to drive. The first car I’ve ever driven was a 2014 Ford Fusion and it was on my way to my uncle's trailer park. My mom made me drive to my uncle’s house.

During a writing conference I asked him about the moment and why he wanted to share this experience. His answer had me thinking about how the boys’ responses to this writing unit were different from those of the girls: “I don’t know Miss. I guess it is easy to tell you about that stuff. Learning to drive and stuff it’s easier than talking about my life for real.” He had warned me that writing about his personal life was not something he was excited to do when we met during our first interview.

PI. How do you feel about writing about personal things?

S. It depends on the subject. Like writing like I did for the “I believe” speech When I was writing about my dad, like that is ok because I showed pride for my pops. But other things that happened, yeah no not really I don’t want to remember some things.

Despite his reservations and the first attempt at writing a testimonio, Santiago ultimately found a topic that made him feel good about his writing. He wrote about his experience in changing schools and how being in this new environment made the injustices in his old educational environment clearer to him. This line from his personal narrative shows clearly why his topic was important to him, “I see this as something personal for me because kids here don’t appreciate what the school has given them and my old school, we had to struggle to even get Chromebooks.” Ultimately, he found some measure of success and felt like this was a piece he would have shared at the testimonio event, if his home responsibilities would have allowed.

PI. You didn't share at the storytelling Testimonio event. Why do you think you decided not to go?

S. I couldn't go.

PI. You couldn't go. Would you have if you could have?

S. Yeah, probably. Most likely just to show my story, you know, show people like where I'm from, where I was from, where I was raised and how I was raised, comparing them to like this lavish lifestyle, to that lifestyle, you know, to different lifestyles. I liked what I wrote and so yeah, if I could have, I would have gone.

Santiago found that his story was important and that his testimonio was valuable. His response at the end of his third interview to being asked if he felt that his story was important to share illustrates how this experience of being able give testimonio to an injustice in his community was important to him:

Oh, definitely so kids realize, like, not everything is handed to you, like, um, in life because here, they go hand it to you. And like in my neighborhood environment, nothing really gets handed to the like, you know.

Despite feeling like he struggled as a writer, Santiago took ownership of his own narrative and made the decision to point out injustices for the purpose of helping other students to find more empathy and understanding of his home community, was a step toward taking agency in his writing.

For Julio, the progression toward ownership of story is a more subtle process, which is evident in his struggle to write and complete the writing tasks asked of him. In the personal narrative portion of his testimonio portfolio, Julio recounts a moment in his life that helped him to see that there was a hope for the future. He wrote about having a series of surgeries in his life to correct a hole in his heart. We discussed his choices about the topic and purpose of his writing:

PI. Tell me about your topic for your testimonio.

J. I wrote about my surgery and how it almost kept me out of basketball.

PI. Why did you choose this topic why tell this story?

J. Because it is a big part of my life and I wanted to show people they could have hope.

PI. Hope? How?

J. I want people to know you can come back from anything if you work hard enough.

In this portion of our conversation, we see that Julio is clear about his purpose for writing the personal narrative portion of his testimonio and how, for him, the testimonio remained tied to his personal identity. I followed up with this idea and asked him about how his community or heritage factored into his personal narrative.

I didn't really write about it, I don't think, because like I wanted to talk about how I worked to get back into basketball, for me because it was important to me. His topic remained individualized and not connected to an identity outside of basketball. However, he is showing agency in the choices he is making about telling the story he wanted to tell, in the way he wanted to tell it. He took ownership of his story.

The data made clear that the ability to make choices in topic as well as choices about genre and presentation in their testimonios opened the space for students to take ownership of their stories and the stories of their communities. Participants made choices to be as personal as they were comfortable with in their subjects while still showcasing their writing abilities. Additionally, each showed agency in calling for change in how the larger society views them and their communities. This ownership brought them closer to agency in writing.

Moving Toward Confidence in Writing

The data revealed that writing about topics that matter to them and writing from personal experience helped give students more confidence in their writing. All six of the case study participants expressed pride in what they accomplished in their writing. While each participant expressed their pride and confidence in writing differently, each felt like this writing unit and experience was the best writing experience they had during their secondary ELA educational experience.

At the beginning of this project, Maya reported having very little confidence in her writing. During her first interview, when I asked her about how she felt about herself as a writer she said her writing was not where she “wanted it to be” to really call herself a writer. I asked her what she meant by that statement. She responded

Most of my last years of writing where we wrote like about others’ narratives or to answer questions about a book or something. Yeah, I for sure couldn’t enjoy writing about it. I didn’t really feel passionate about it.”

We went on to talk about why she felt that being passionate about what she is writing is important to how she feels about writing:

PI. So, you feel you need to feel passionate about something to write well about it?

M. Yeah because otherwise it's dull and I don't really enjoy writing so that's why it stays basic.

Though Maya began the unit feeling like her writing was basic and that she did not feel confident in calling herself a writer, by the end of the unit, Maya’s outlook changed. During her final reflection interview, Maya expressed pride in her writing and her experience with giving her oral testimonio.

PI. So did it change the way you think about yourself as a writer?

M. Yeah. Because. I know I would have never read something I wrote at a storytelling event unless I did this unit, so it was really exciting, and it got me motivated to do. I just felt so like when I was writing it, I felt passionate about it. So, like I felt it needed to be read.

At the end of this unit, feeling passionate about her subject, helped Maya to overcome her anxiety and deficit view of her own writing enough to feel compelled to participate in an oral testimonio event that she would have “never” done without this writing unit. It also shows that she is moving toward confidence in her writing because she felt “excited” and “motivated” to speak in front of her community. I noted in my description of Maya that she had social anxiety and in my field notes about the testimonio event that she had a difficult time deciding if she was going to participate in the storytelling event. She overcame that anxiety and, in the end, found the confidence to participate. Her declaration that her piece “needed to be read” showcases this newfound confidence.

Similarly, Christine expressed both pride and passion for her writing after participating in the oral testimonio event. Before delivering her testimonio, she expressed that she thought the only way she was going to be able to present was by turning her back to the audience. This was her first time ever presenting aloud, live, outside of a classroom. However, during the event, her natural humor and ability to entertain (one she did not know she had) came through in her reading of “Ode to Chicken”. This humorous Ode was something she felt compelled to share and after was so proud that she had. In her third interview she was very animated and spoke with a huge smile on her face.

After I finished telling my testimonio like two people came up to me like, ‘oh, I loved your chicken poem.’ And it felt like some sense of, like, greatness and pride, like, oh, my God, I wrote this piece that it made me feel a sense of joy! Well, I mean, I faced my fear like I mean, I thought I was going to turn around and stutter so bad, like I have, like, anxiety, but I didn't. I was confident because it

was something I really wanted to share. For me it was a really great experience. Maybe one day I'll do it again.

Like Maya, Christine felt a sense of pride in both writing something that her audience enjoyed and in having the confidence to share her testimonio. It was something she “really wanted to share.” This experience for Christine, who was reluctant at first to write about something personal, resulted in a writing that was filled with vibrant descriptions of her home and an Ode that made traditional foods come to life. Christine’s personal narrative and Ode to Chicken story went through many revisions before she settled on her final version. We talked about her choices and the storytelling event and how she constructed and shared her final pieces.

PI. Tell me about your final pieces, the three pieces that you wrote for your testimonio final project.

C. Well, they all have something in common, which was food, obviously. And I felt that was easier than actually just writing about myself writing about myself since I had something that I do appreciate, shows my identity, I could write well. So that for me was easier for me to get that done and do so a project I was proud of.

PI. And did you share one of your writing pieces in this testimonio project at the storytelling event?

C. Yes, I did. I shared my “Ode to Chicken” that I wrote from pieces of my remember poem and I am from. I was happy because I combined what we learned.

She felt “happy” and “proud” of her final writing pieces because she met the challenge of a multi genre piece and wove the theme of food throughout her personal narrative.

Amalia’s pride in her work also came from sharing her work at the testimonio storytelling event. Amalia was one of two students who chose to share the personal narrative portion of her testimonio, while most of the other students read poems. For her, her story was important to share and she felt it was the “best writing in English [she] had ever done.” When we talked about why she decided to share her personal narrative at the event she said:

I didn’t think I could do it and almost threw up before, but I want my friends and others to know my story and the story of my family, it was important to me and I felt I wrote well. It was the best writing I have ever done well in English anyway and so I felt proud to share.

Amalia was typically a very quiet student and not confident in her English skills. She second guessed choices in her writing, up until she began to prepare for the final reading event. After she read her work at the final event, the pride in her accomplishment was written all over her face. She beamed.

For Santiago and Julio, this pride in writing was less evident. Both young men in this study struggled with completing the written assignment, neither chose to participate in the final story telling event. Santiago felt his writing and topic were important, but he “couldn’t” participate in the storytelling event because he could not get off work. He also said that, “Writing is not something that I think I would choose to do if it wasn’t for school. I would choose to fix a car or work with my dad or something.” While he did not show pride in his actual writing, he did show pride in the subject and felt that “this

assignment I can do because I think it is important to tell this story, so I'll finish it." He did ultimately finish the personal narrative portion of this testimonio multigenre project. I do not see this reluctance to complete the tasks as assigned as defiant, I see it as an act of self-preservation. Santiago has pride in his community and his family, what he lacks is confidence in his own writing abilities.

Julio also completed the personal narrative portion of his testimonio multigenre project, but he never shared pride or confidence in his writing. He, like Santiago, expressed pride in his subject, though for different reasons. Julio wrote about a surgery he had recovered from enough to continue to play on his high school basketball team. Julio's identity was guided by his love for basketball, and he found that the triumph over illness contributed to a sense of pride and hope for him. He noted that he was, "writing to show that even if you have a setback, if you work hard you can overcome that and still represent yourself." Julio's pride was in his story and in fighting to come back from adversity. This narrative of working hard and making a comeback after adversity is emic of a larger narrative about Latinx boys, and their role in society. Though these findings are focused on the subset of students who I interviewed. This idea is represented across the other three boy's testimonios as well.

While the girls in this study shared their pride and an increased confidence in their writing through this project and the culminating event, across the corpus, the boys felt pride and connection to their topics and not necessarily in their writing skills. The girls took pride in the composition of their pieces and in their final products and in writing their testimonios. For the boys, this pride manifested in an individual pride in their topics and themes of either protecting their communities or in projecting their own success.

Taking Risks in Writing and Presenting

Testimonio is a writing form that often speaks for an individual, but also in solidarity with a community. Additionally, this genre is written to give voice to the silenced and the oppressed. These two characteristics of testimonio create vulnerability for the *testimonialista/o* or writer. It is one thing to tell your own individual story, but to also tell the story and make a connection in solidarity to a larger community is a larger responsibility. Historically, in giving voice to these stories, the *testimonialista/o* did so in protest and, for some, at great consequence. While the stakes were not as high in this study, the responsibility of taking on this risk proved more difficult for some. The girls in this study show their willingness to take risks in writing unfamiliar genres, experimenting with language, and in giving oral testimonios. In contrast, the boys in this study, refused to take risks or make themselves vulnerable in exploring unfamiliar genres, experimenting with language, or in giving oral testimonios.

Amalia's decision to give her testimonio at the storytelling event was not easily made. She spoke to me the day before the event and asked me if I felt her personal narrative, (the piece she chose to share) was "interesting enough and was written ok." This question is one that Amalia often asked about her writing in English. I responded by telling her to look at her story and decide if this was the way she wanted to talk about her surgery and the support her family gave her in healing. "There isn't really good or bad in this," I told her. She smiled and said, "I know Miss, it's just hard to put myself out there in English." I saw in Amalia a desire to show her proficiency and the gains she had made in writing in English, I also saw the anxiety she was feeling in taking the risk to share her testimonio. After her fears were calmed a bit, I had her practice her reading a few times

and gave her some positive feedback. The next evening, Amalia gave her testimonio. She read the entire personal narrative portion of her testimonio project at the final event in front of an audience.

For Maya, the risk-taking in presentation was even more pronounced. Maya had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder that led to her missing school. She was on an IEP that outlined this for her teachers. She talked about this anxiety and her struggles with it in connection to writing during her first interview.

PI. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about school or writing or this assignment?

M. Yeah, I feel like writing growing up was very challenging because I was diagnosed with being dyslexic so I had all these Ideas and thoughts and things I wanted to write about but I didn't get to because I had this problem with words. I really loved reading other people's writing but I didn't ever get to express my own self in writing because I felt I was stopped.

Despite her experience with school, presenting, and writing, Maya took risks throughout this entire unit. Her willingness to present at the final storytelling event shows some of the risk she was willing to take. Maya shared her "Promise" poem at the event. I asked her about why she felt it was important to tell the story of her aunt despite her anxiety.

The story I told included my family and my community. It was about how my family shapes me and my self-identity. About how important my Godmother was to me, it was important to share that story and for people to hear it.

So even though she was very nervous and never really had “never felt comfortable” in an English classroom, Maya found a story that “was important to share” she felt that people should hear the story of her Godmother’s importance.

Both Christine and Andrea took risks in unfamiliar genres, and in language. The personal narrative portion of Christine’s testimonio project was filled with imagery, figurative language, and something we called “thick description.” During one of our mini lessons, we talked about adding a description that was layered thickly enough so that the audience could see a clear picture of the place or moment. She mentioned this term and also how it felt to experiment with language in her personal narrative during one of our interviews.

Oh man! The words and the figurative language and the thick description I used I felt like free writing that way. Like I was running away with the language. I had never written like that before. It was cool.

Taking risks with language was freeing for Christine, she had never written in such a descriptive way before and this risk seemed to pay off for how she felt about her writing.

In Andrea’s case, she took risks in the genre selection. While I mentioned and gave a few models of a reflective journal and letter to self, we did not spend much time with these two genres. Despite, not having in-depth instruction on journaling or on writing letters, Andrea decided to go for it and wrote a letter to the world and a reflective journal. Combining unfamiliar genres together into a cohesive project that had a common theme showed a willingness in Andrea to experiment in her writing. In this excerpt, from her reflective journal, she shows a willingness to be vulnerable in looking back at an experience that changed her outlook in life.

Almost two weeks ago, I celebrated my first year living in [the US]! Let me tell you something, it's been a great experience so far. I've made really great friends here and I am overall happy with my life, right now. Going back to 2018, when I moved to the US, it didn't feel so great. I felt weird. I didn't feel like me. I guess I was frustrated because I thought moving to the US would be better than it was, and I really missed Mexico. I just had to say to myself, "*Look [Andrea], you really need to stop complaining about this, it's just stupid, you wanted to move here so bad and now that you did, you want to go back to Mexico? You just gotta stop!*" After, I talked to myself and changed my mindset, I started to see things clearer and so stopped complaining. I realized I was being selfish because my mom had made the sacrifice of leaving her life behind to give me something better.

Choosing to reflect on an experience and moment that was challenging for her and to also be willing to share her reflection in a public way demonstrates that Andrea was ready to take a risk in her writing and presenting. During a lunch hour rehearsal she said, "I can't wait to read my journal entry, I think it really represents me and my change in mindset about home." Though life circumstances got in her way and she was not ultimately able to attend the storytelling event, she was ready and willing to share her story with the community.

For the boys in this study, it was more difficult to connect or to take risks in their writing and presenting in the same ways that the girls did. Even though these findings are focused in on two of the boy participants, the same statement is true across the general corpus of data. The boys tended to not take risks in unfamiliar genres and wrote very basic retellings of events, they more commonly wrote about individual triumphs and did not make clear connections to community, and often polished only the poetry we wrote in class, wrote straight journal entries, or did not complete the multigenre project at all. I asked Julio why he was not going to participate in the storytelling event. He responded by wondering if it would be graded, “I have basketball practice, I think. I can’t go, it’s not required or for a grade, right? I don’t like to speak in front of people.” Julio was wondering about how the storytelling event would affect his personal grade and his basketball practice. It would have been hard for him to choose basketball over presenting his work unless there was a grade connected. I also asked Julian what other genres he was going to include in his multigenre project. He said, “probably one of the poems we already wrote, I think I have one in my notebook I can just spell check it and get it in there.” Writing was already difficult for Julio and taking the risk to experiment with something unfamiliar was not something he was willing to try. He did include a four line “I am from” poem and his testimonio multigenre project submission.

In Santiago’s case the reluctance to take risks was more evident in his writing choices. When I asked him what he was going to include as his other genres in his project, he asked “which one is the easiest?” I told him that I did not think one was easier than the others. “I think I’ll do a recipe or journal or something. I didn’t write the poems

before because I can't write poetry." Ultimately, Santiago did not write either a recipe or journal and did not participate in the storytelling event.

For the girls in this testimonio project, taking risks and writing in solidarity with their community came with the responsibility they felt in representing their communities and the stories of their communities well. Out of the ten students who participated in the storytelling event, seven of them were girls. They experimented with language and genre because it fit with the stories they wanted to tell. They took risks in being willing to share their testimonios in the final storytelling event because they felt their stories were important to share. The boys saw their testimonios differently and did not make the same connection to community and did not take the same risks as the girls. For the boys in this context, exposing their emotions and vulnerability was not something they were willing to do, as discussed in the previous section, their agency came into play, not in their taking a risk but in pulling away from a risk that may have threatened the image they were projecting to the world.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

When I undertook this journey and began this study, I wanted to explore the writing practices of Latinx students. I also wanted to examine the choices they would make in writing from their personal lives and whether those choices would shape their agency in writing. I wanted to know what telling their own stories, giving their testimonios, would look like in practice. What I found were not simple answers to research questions. Instead, I saw how complex it is to teach personal writing, specifically testimonio, in a high school classroom with Latinx teenagers. Not only was this study complex because of the participants' ages and ethnic identities, but also the context of the study added to the complexity. While students were writing to navigate nepantla, they were doing so in a hostile social-political landscape and in a school in turmoil. Further, these participants were voicing stories that have often been silenced and celebrating histories that have often been defined by a school system that is not reflective of who they are. The data revealed a struggle with telling personal stories that resulted in writing that was nuanced and unexpected. The main categories in my findings 1.) Writing to Navigate Nepantla (the in between); 2.) Writing To Celebrate Culture and Ancestors; 3.) Writing to Define Home; 4.) Taking Ownership of Story; 5.) Moving Toward Confidence in Writing, and 6.) Taking Risks in Writing, showcased complex relationships with writing and what it means to be a writer.

My participants wrote to give voice to silenced histories and to counter deficit narratives of them and their communities. They wrote about loss and to commemorate

loved ones. They wrote to explain the struggle that navigating in the in between spaces of culture, school, borders, and language. Finally, they wrote to define home. All these purposes for writing were interwoven with the participants' moves toward agency in their writing. The choices of topic, considerations of audience and purpose, as well as the risks students took in their writing, gave a larger picture of how a testimonio writing unit, that is syncretic and created in a safe environment, can have long lasting effects on Latinx students and their views of what it means to be a writer. The findings point to the girls in this study finding pride in their writing and taking risks through experimenting with language and exploring new and unfamiliar genres of writing. For the boys in this study, agency came in a different way, however, they too took ownership of story and wrote about instances in their experiences that brought them pride.

The voices in this dissertation are voices that need to be heard. In the rest of this chapter, I outline the implications of these findings. I discuss connections to theory, implications for the field of English Education, a plan for future research, and limitations of the study. Despite struggle and loss, these participants gave me hope and I felt honored to write their stories alongside them.

Implications

Connections to Theory

The findings in this study connect directly to a sociocultural (Bazerman & Prior, 2006; Prior, 2006; Bahktin, 1986) and LatCrit (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2004) theoretical framework. Students wrote in connection to their own socio political, cultural and historical backgrounds. They honored their home

ways of knowing and wrote in ways that controlled the narrative of their own communities. As they wrote and presented their testimonios, participants were doing so in a hostile educational and political climate that existed outside the walls of this study's setting. Additionally, the approach to writing instruction was centered on students' own lived experiences and invited students to bring the entirety of their social, political, and historical identities into the classroom space.

Participants wove navigational, social, familial, and resistance capital into their stories and they celebrated their community cultural wealth in every way with their testimonios. In her theory of Community Cultural Wealth, Yosso (2005), offers an alternative view of cultural wealth and exposes the power dynamics in an educational landscape that assumes Latinx students come to us with a deficit of knowledge and "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). She posits that Latinx students come to the classroom with an abundance of wealth that can be built upon toward success in education. This success, according to Yosso and other Lat crit scholars, is not measured by the same norms of the white middle class. Instead, it looks to the communities that Latinx students come from as holders and wealth and success. In this study, students used their cultural wealth to celebrate all that defines them and did so while moving toward agency in their writing.

Because power and politics are at the center of all teaching and learning, "the application of household knowledge to situations outside of the home becomes a creative process that interrupts the transmission of 'official knowledge' and dominant ideologies" (Delgado Bernal, 2001 p.624). My participants' stories drew on their communities and ancestral knowledge and served as disruptions to the dominant narratives of their

communities as having nothing to offer in terms of education. They celebrated the people in their lives, the food and connection to care and celebration as well as struggle that is central to their many identities. They celebrated and brought forth discussions of how to define home. Navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) is evident throughout each of their experiences with this writing unit. Students navigate between worlds and expectation constantly and they do this with success despite that navigation often being a hostile path filled with struggle and obstacles. Resistance capital and the history of struggle that students and their communities have faced is evident in how they made choices in what was important to tell in their stories as well as how to tell their stories. For Santiago, specifically, protecting his community and telling a story that addressed injustice, illustrated an ability to write about his community and their struggles from the perspective of a community protector.

Students wrote to give voice to silenced histories (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Pérez Huber, 2008). None of the participants had ever written in the manner or for the purposes that they did for this writing unit. Their experience with writing about their personal lives had been limited to simple autobiographies or superficial descriptions of family members. In this assignment, they dug deeper and wrote to make change. Further, students' testimonios were, by definition, a syncretic testimonio (Pérez Huber, 2015; Gutierrez, 2013). They were created in community as a hybrid text that took into account discussions with and feedback from the instructor and was written to be told orally. They wrote their own stories, and owned their own stories, however, their testimonios were also written with a specific purpose in mind and in solidarity with their communities.

Testimonio as a methodology, as a genre, and as a pedagogical tool is embedded Chicana Feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Pèrez Huber, 2009). The findings support this lens in that this approach to teaching and writing showed that a testimonio writing unit largely benefited the girl participants very specifically. They wrote in solidarity with their communities, took risks in their writing, and overall moved toward more agency in giving voice to their stories. This confirms the foundational research into testimonio which has mostly been done with college aged adult female participants or with transgender LGTBQ + youth (Cruz, 2012). In contrast, the findings point out that testimonio as a genre of writing did not work as well for the boys in the study. While they did express agency in their choices and owned the stories they told, they largely wrote from either an individualistic point of view that showcased them as the hero rising-up from adversity toward individual success or as the hero and protector of their community. This contrast then brings questions about how and if this frame can be used to support the writing instruction of Latinx boys.

Implications for Research

This study points to the value and importance of participant observer research. I came to this research as a part of the learning community. I was the teacher in the unit, as well as the researcher. Taking specific consideration of the methodology of testimonio, the role of the researcher as participant is even more critical. As a Chicana researcher, my role as participant observer and insider to the community gave me a specific lens and a perspective that could not be replicated by someone who is an outsider to this community. In her discussion of testimonio methodology, Pèrez Huber (2015) cautions against researchers who are not part of the Latinx community taking up testimonio as a

“tool to ‘diversify’ their research agendas or document their own personal stories”(650). Testimonio is a powerful tool for critical research in education where every step is informed by LatCrit thinking, which is often in direct contradiction to the more standard stance of the academy, which is to remove oneself as a participant and try to observe or study more objectively.

Taking a LatCrit lens to educational research is of paramount importance to the future of studies on BIPOC communities and students. For the last twenty years, educational researchers have taken up the call to apply a critical theoretical lens to analyze the “role of race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression” in the educational experiences of BIPOC students (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 643). This study of testimonio takes up this call and exposes some of the oppressions that students faced when their lives, experiences, and histories were erased from the curriculum. For the Latinx students in this study, issues of linguistic, cultural, and political oppression had created, for them, a system where they did not feel comfortable or safe to express pride in their communities, heritages or histories.

Future Study

This study of testimonio in the English Language Arts classroom leaves me with three lingering questions. 1.) How can a writing unit in testimonio draw more fully on the oral histories of families, and invite families into the English Language Arts classroom as participants? This first question has me envisioning creating a writing teaching unit room unit that combines Oral History with Testimonio towards having students and families co-create a storytelling unit within a secondary ELA classroom. 2.) How can focused writing groups influence the writing process in a testimonio writing unit? In this study, I

would focus more closely on the idea of syncretic testimonio as a community hybrid genre of writing as defined and discussed by Gutierrez (2015) in relation to her theory of third space. This study would also focus on the idea of peer review and building a writing community in the ELA classroom. It would be a more specific way to move toward creating a community of writers that is based in testimonio methodology.

Implications for English Education and Teachers

Secondary English Language Arts teachers are often under pressure from outside spaces to teach formulaic writing that is not reflective of their students' lives. They feel compelled to spend time preparing students for standardized tests and, quite frankly, knowing too much about student's lives can be a daunting prospect. However, after seeing what this study's data corpus revealed about student agency, I argue that giving Latinx students the opportunity to write from their own lived experiences is necessary. While for boys this agency came in a different form from the girls, I believe that there is still value in asking Latinx boys to write about themselves and their communities. Looking for the strengths that come from students and their communities who instead of the deficits, can have a transformative effect on a classroom community.

I would also, however, like to reflect specifically on testimonio and its unique place in the secondary ELA classroom. I entered this journey with my students as an insider in their community. I am a Chicana, and I shared some of my own navigations en nepantla with my students. However, I still had to do the work of acknowledging my own privileges and proximity to whiteness that the color of my skin affords me before I could enter into this work. Testimonio is not a genre of writing or a pedagogy that should be entered into lightly. There are inherent risks and vulnerabilities for students writing and

giving their testimonios. Teachers taking up this work should have already created a classroom environment that is safe for students to enter into writing about their lives and communities. Further, teachers should also be prepared for those students who will still, because of factors not in the teachers' control, not feel safe enough to talk about or write about their lives. One of the criticisms of personal narrative in the secondary ELA classrooms is that it can become performative with students telling about their traumas to satisfy the gaze of their teacher. Where a teacher becomes somewhat of a voyeur into their students' lives. This is not to say that teachers of ELA should shy away from having students write about their lives and their communities, it is merely a caution that going into this work must not be taken up as just another check in the equity box, nor should it be entered in before a teacher has done the internal work of understanding that this is not just another narrative assignment created to satisfy a standard. Rather, is important work that should be taken up with an understanding of context, audience, and a teachers' ultimate purpose. Testimonio may not work for every student or teacher in every context. Nor should it be taken up by every teacher in every context. However, the internal work of understanding who your students are and that their lived experiences are valuable, is necessary if we are going to move secondary writing instruction toward true equity. Further, understanding the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that comes with your BIPOC students into the classroom and welcoming that wealth, is paramount for an ELA classroom that is student centered.

The context of a classroom, a school, even a particular state should be the most important

consideration for a teacher before taking up testimonio in the classroom. I am an experienced teacher who has come to this work after years of honing my craft and understanding the need for student centered instruction. However, had I taken up this work in even my first few years at Central College prep, it would have not been taken up in quite the same way. In the context of the study, the ELA classroom was the safest place for students during their school day and was the place where they knew who they were as humans was valued. While the political climate was increasingly volatile against their communities and their school was a place that had also become a hostile environment, they could come into a classroom where who they are and where they came from was celebrated, embraced, and centered. I had built not only capital and the ability to have total autonomy in the curriculum of the school, but I had also built a solid foundation and community of support. I had the support of my administration, I had total control of my curriculum, and I had built a community of supportive likeminded teachers with whom I commiserate and found strength. I took this work up in solidarity with my own cultural, historical, and sociopolitical background, and in solidarity with my teaching community. I see this as key to doing work with testimonio in schools, it is done in solidarity with the communities of students, self, and like-minded educators.

Finally, I would like to address the implications of a curriculum that is based upon collective community and its potential benefits for creating a writing pedagogy that is truly culturally sustaining. The ELA cannon and curriculum is entrenched in an individualistic reach for success. The western ideal of the hero journey permeates the stories we read and even the stories we write in the English Language Arts classroom. Testimonio is a genre that is grounded in community and writing in solidarity with

community, the stories we read, in this study, as genre examples are celebrations of ancestors, family, food, and community. The stories students wrote echoed these themes and brought to the classroom a sense of collective camaraderie. Maya said in an interview

When I'm hearing my classmates' stories, I feel like I'm growing in connection with them and learning where they come from and so I can understand them more and can feel like we are part of a strong community. Before I never wanted to share myself or my thoughts, but this is really something I like about this class. We can talk about those things that are important to us and the stories. I've never had that before in school.

This is an important thought for an ELA classroom teacher because of the possibilities for building a classroom writing community that is one where students are drawn into one another's stories and use that connection to build empathy and draw strength from their classmates. This is missing from our current ELA curriculum and state of schooling. Teaching writing has become a means how students can make individual arguments rather than a place where they can learn in community from one another. Learning from one another, writing in community, and engaging with others' stories can change English Education.

Limitations of the Study

Though the study has positive implications for the implementation of approaches to writing instruction that centers the lives of students as well as for the writing agency of Latinx girls, the findings showed that the process of testimonio, in this writing classroom, did not have as positive an effect on the male Latinx participants of the study. This contrast then brings questions about how and if testimonio can be used effectively to

support the writing instruction of Latinx boys. These findings leave me with a few lingering questions. I wonder if testimonio is so gendered that it does not invite boys to full participation? What implications then, does that have for its use in the secondary ELA classroom and for writing instruction for Latinx boys? Do we say that, because Latinx boys were reluctant to engage in this type of personal writing, we never ask them to bring their lived experiences into the English Language Arts Classroom? I wonder how scholarship on masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009) could inform this work for future research and bring boys more fully into this discussion? These questions are not a critique of testimonio as a valid research method or as a genre. They do, however, call for more careful consideration of the intersections (Crenshaw, 1991) of gender, feminist studies, masculinity studies, and the social political histories of marginalized communities. An example of this limitation is found in the fact that Santiago never showed or turned in his informal writing by hand. While I suspect that he struggled with handwriting, I am only speculating as I do not have the data to show this. If I were to recreate this study, in the future, and had a participant who was this reluctant to show me his writing, I will have him tell me the story orally and type it as he told it. I would take this step because, when we talked about his story and his ideas in the interviews and during writing conferences, Santiago was much more forthcoming. I mention this here, because I see a limitation of this study being intertwined with feeling safe to expose vulnerabilities. For the boys they did not venture into this space of vulnerability and despite saying that they “trusted” the researcher, even in their final writing, they remained blocked and only gave enough of the story to fulfill basic writing requirements. They never moved beyond tentative participation to fully engage with the writing space.

Additionally, this study was done with one classroom in one urban charter high school where I was given the opportunity to have autonomy in curriculum design and instructional choices. As it is small in scale it is not generalizable. In order to replicate this study, in a larger, public high school, many factors would have to be considered as far as curriculum design and development, including school board and administrative curriculum approval.

Conclusion

The introduction to this study began with my own testimonio. I told my own story of silenced history and feeling erased from the curriculum. Researchers come to a study with questions, positionality, and theoretical lenses that guide choices, methodology, and analysis of the data. My positionality as a Chicana, a teacher, and a participant observer drove my interest in testimonio. I wanted to learn about how writing from self and in solidarity with the community would shape how my students saw themselves as writers. I wanted to learn what it meant to give a testimonio in a classroom, to make writing public, and to celebrate the lives of my students. I never envisioned that what I ultimately learned would be even more valuable. As a researcher with a LatCrit theoretical frame, my methodology is tied to my Chicana identity. I learned that I had to use my own navigational capital to navigate spaces where I was often the only Chicana working with and writing in a Chicana Feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I learned that the methodology and theoretical lens that I took up in this study were counter to the traditional objective lens of the academy, but that they were also pivotal for my understanding of how research into testimonio works and how it can be taken up to drive change in the field of English Education.

This research is representative of the kind of work that comes through an emic perspective and stance and points to the value and need for more Latinx researchers to take up research in and with Latinx communities. This extends beyond Latinx communities and offers that the work of research in education must begin to look more like the students it is researching. My own experiences led me to this research space and guided the final conclusions that this study brought. I learned alongside my students, their voices are centered in this research, we created the knowledge that came out of this research together, as a community.

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APPENDIX A
TESTIMONIO ASSIGMENT

Stories of Self Stories of Us: Writing our Testimonios

A testimonio is a genre of personal writing that shows the reader a specific **memory, experience or situation that also connects us to our communities**. For this writing assignment, you will be focusing on a relationship and significant moment(s) in your life that have been important in helping you shape your identity and connection to community. This testimonio is more than an autobiography. It invites you to examine your life up to now and find moments where you felt special connections to who you are and where you come from and the communities of which you are part. Alternatively, you can write about moments where you felt solidarity with those who helped to shape your identity.

You will be creating a multigenre **Testimonio** centered around **a narrative, and 2 other genres of your choosing**, that create a vivid glimpse into this relationship/moment in different ways. **The testimonio you create for this project will be showcased in three different formats.**

- *A personal narrative (REQUIRED, AZCCSW.3)*
- Choose two other genres from below:**
- A poem
 - A letter or journal entry
 - A speech that helps to showcase your significant moment
 - A song that you write and set to music that helps highlight your moment

As a Final publishing opportunity, you will have the choice to perform your testimonio at a public storytelling event. This opportunity can serve as an honor's credit publishing opportunity.

You will be receiving grades for both individual pieces and for the project as a whole. Regardless of what genres you choose, your testimonio will be assessed according to the rubric we create together in the next few days.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview 1

Background and perceptions of self as a writer

- What grade are you in?
- How old are you?
- Tell me about how you identify ethnically and explain the reasons you have chosen this identity.
- In what language do you feel most comfortable communicating?
- How do you feel about school in general?
- What do you think it means to be a writer?
- Tell me a little about how you feel about yourself as a writer. Do you see yourself as a writer?
- Tell me about a past writing experience that you felt good about.
- Tell me about a past writing experience that you did not feel so great about.
- Have you been asked to write about yourself before this class? Tell me about one or two of those writing assignments.
- How do you feel about sharing personal stories in your writing?
- How much of your identity/culture/heritage/home language have you seen reflected in your schooling?

Interview 2 Questions

The Phenomena as it is happening

- Tell me about your testimonio topic.

- How did you come up with your idea for your topic?
- We studied many different examples of testimonios before we began writing. Which of those helped you choose your topic?
- Do you talk about your identity, culture, home language or community in your testimonio?
- Which genres are you considering writing for your testimonio project?
- Why did you choose those genres?
- How do you feel about your writing for this project so far?
- What difficulties or concerns do you have about this writing project so far?
- How is this project different from anything you've written before in school? How is it the same?

Interview 3 Questions

Reflection Interview: After the Unit

- Tell me about your final pieces.
- Did you share one of your writing pieces in this testimonio project at the storytelling event?
 - Explain your reasons for not sharing
 - Explain why you felt it important to share
- Was your final topic completely personal or did it include your family or community?
- Did participation in this unit of study change your view about writing? Elaborate about this.

- After writing and sharing your testimonio, do you feel any differently about what it means to be a writer? Elaborate.
- What about yourself as a writer? Did it alter how you feel about yourself as a writer?
- Did your ethnic identity influence your testimonio or what you wrote about? Explain. How or why do you think it did/did not?

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

**SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL INSTRUCTIONS AND
TEMPLATE**

| NUMBER | DATE | PAGE |
|----------|-----------|--------|
| HRP-503a | 2/18/2018 | 1 of 4 |

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Instructions and Notes:

- Depending on the nature of what you are doing, some sections may not be applicable to your research. If so, mark as “NA”. ● When you write a protocol, keep an electronic copy. You will need a copy if it is necessary to make changes.

1 Protocol Title

Using Personal Narrative in the Secondary ELA Classroom

2 Background and Objectives

the scientific or scholarly background, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.

- Describe the purpose of the study.
- Describe any relevant preliminary data or case studies.
- Describe any past studies that are in conjunction to this study.

In the postscript of his book, *Holding on to Good Ideas in the Time of Bad Ones*, Thomas Newkirk writes, “The CCSS present us with a ‘map’ of writing types that is fundamentally flawed—because it treats ‘narrative’ as a type of discourse, distinguished from ‘informational’ and ‘argumentative’ writing. In doing so, they fail to acknowledge the central role narrative and creative genres play in all writing” (3). Recently, a significant focus has been placed on teaching formulaic and impersonal writing in the ELA curriculum. These practices are accentuated by a pervasive belief that formulaic and impersonal forms of writing are more serious or rigorous and what “count” as college and academic writing (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Saïdy, 2013; Early, 2019) Further, the way the writing is assessed places value on white middle class epistemologies above the knowledges of communities of color (Yosso, 2005; Paris and Alim, 2017).

In the midst of this educational landscape that is formulaic and standardized, the researcher poses that the teaching of writing does not have to be stagnant and that memoir and the personal narrative are important genres of writing that can be ways into critical thinking, empowering, and relevant for ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations.

This study will examine how memoir and other personal forms of writing can be used in the Secondary ELA classroom to examine how writing about self shapes the writing practices and writing self efficacy of ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations.

3 Data Use

Describe how the data will be used. Examples include:

- Dissertation, Thesis, Undergraduate honors project
 - Results released to participants/parents
 - Results released to employer or school
- Publication/journal article, conferences/presentations
 - Other (describe)
- Results released to agency or organization

- This study will be used in research presentations at conferences and in professional publications (journal articles and possible book manuscript).

- This study will be used in research presentations at conferences and in professional publications (journal articles and possible book manuscript).

SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL INSTRUCTIONS AND TEMPLATE

| NUMBER | DATE | PAGE |
|----------|-----------|--------|
| HRP-503a | 2/18/2018 | 2 of 4 |

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4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample. If you are conducting data analysis only describe what is included in the dataset you propose to use.

- Indicate specifically whether you will target or exclude each of the following special populations:

- Minors (individuals who are under the age of 18)

The participants in this study will be recruited from students in a secondary ELA Classroom at ASU Preparatory Academy's Phoenix Campus who attend during both the 2018/2019 and the 2019/ 2020 school years. The students ages are between 15 and 17 years old.

5 Number of Participants

Indicate the total number of participants to be recruited and enrolled:

20-32 Secondary Students ages 15-17

6 Recruitment Methods

- Describe who will be doing the recruitment of participants.
- Describe when, where, and how potential participants will be identified and recruited.
- Describe and attach materials that will be used to recruit participants (attach documents or recruitment script with the application).

The Research Assistant will be leading the teaching unit and will recruit participants using the attached recruitment script.

7 Procedures Involved

Describe all research procedures being performed, who will facilitate the procedures, and when they will be performed. Describe procedures including:

- The duration of time participants will spend in each research activity.
- The period or span of time for the collection of data, and any long term follow up.
- Surveys or questionnaires that will be administered (Attach all surveys, interview questions, scripts, data collection forms, and instructions for participants to the online application).
- Interventions and sessions (Attach supplemental materials to the online application).
- Lab procedures and tests and related instructions to participants.
- Video or audio recordings of participants.
- Previously collected data sets that will be analyzed and identify the data source (Attach data use agreement(s) to the online application).

1. On the first day of the study the research assistant will explain the study and obtain assent from each of the willing participants as well as consent from their legal guardians..

2. Students will participate in an opening writing activity that will ask them to reflect upon themselves as writers and to tell their personal writing history. This is part of the regular ELA instruction in the classroom. The "Writer's Autobiography" activity is attached.

3. Students will spend one to two quarters(9-16 weeks) in the research study and receive instruction in multiple writing genre studies including a personal narrative study and other forms of personal writing. This will be part of their regular instruction with in the ELA classroom. This writing activity, "Moments that Shaped you" is attached.

4. During the instruction period, participants will engage in a variety of writing activities and writing samples from the willing participants will be copied and retained by the PI. This will include: Pre-writing or brainstorming, drafts, reflections, email and personal communication with me regarding the curriculum, and notes during writing conferences.

- 5. This will also be part of the regular ELA instruction in the classroom and are all brainstorming activities from the moments that shaped you assignment.

| | NUMBER | DATE | PAGE |
|---|----------|-----------|--------|
| | HRP-503a | 2/18/2018 | 3 of 4 |
| <p>6. Field Note Observations: The PI will take detailed field notes during the instructional period and will use comments from willing participants in her analysis of the data.</p> <p>7. Closing reflection: Willing participants will complete a closing reflective writing designed to find out what they gained through the instructional period as well as re-evaluate their thoughts on writing and views about themselves as writers. Only those who participate in the study will be asked to complete this activity, closing reflection is attached.</p> <p>8. Interviews: Three Semi-structured interviews of 30 minutes each will be conducted with a subsection of 3-4 participants at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the study. These interviews will be audio recorded using the research assistant's secure laptop's internal microphone.</p> <p>8 Compensation or Credit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants. • Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants • Justify that the amount given to participants is reasonable. • If participants are receiving course credit for participating in research, alternative assignments need to be put in place to avoid coercion. | | | |
| <p>There will be no compensation for participants.</p> <p>9 Risk to Participants</p> <p>List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research. Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.</p> | | | |
| <p>There are no foreseeable direct risks to the participants. To protect the identity of the participants in publications and presentations, pseudonyms will be used when describing participants and responses. All names and identifying information will be stripped from writing samples and field note recordings. Pseudonyms will be used.</p> <p>10 Potential Benefits to Participants</p> <p>Realistically describe the potential benefits that individual participants may experience from taking part in the research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do not include benefits to society or others.</p> | | | |
| | | | |

Participants will participate in writing instruction focused on teaching needed skills beyond the secondary school setting.

11 Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects' privacy interests. "Privacy interest" refers to a person's desire to place limits on with whom they interact or to whom they provide personal information. Click here for additional guidance on [ASU Data Storage Guidelines](#).

Describe the following measures to ensure the confidentiality of data:

- Who will have access to the data?
 - Where and how data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets, etc.)? ● How long the data will be stored?
 - Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data during storage, use, and transmission. (e.g., training, authorization of access, password protection, encryption, physical controls, certificates of confidentiality, and separation of identifiers and data, etc.).
 - If applicable, how will audio or video recordings will be managed and secured. Add the duration of time these recordings will be kept.
- If applicable, how will the consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data. Add the duration of time these forms will be kept.

1 Training

Provide the date(s) the members of the research team have completed the CITI training for human participants. This training must be taken within the last 4 years. Additional information can be found at: [Training](#).

Jessica Early (PI) completed CITI training on July 15, 2015

Monica Baldonado-Ruiz (Research Assistant, PhD Student) completed CITI training on September 13, 2016



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Jessica Early
English
480/965-0742
Jessica.Early@asu.edu

Dear Jessica Early:

On 3/11/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Type of Review: | Initial Study |
| Title: | Using Personal Narrative in the Secondary ELA Classroom |
| Investigator: | Jessica Early |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00009658 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of Moments that Shaped You (1).pdf, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • Permission Letter from ASU Preparatory Academy, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Permission Letter from ASU Preparatory Academy, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Writing Reflection_Testimonio Unit (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • narrative_script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Writers History Autobiography Writing Prompt, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Personal Narrative Secondary ELA, Category: IRB Protocol; |

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation Certification form, Category: Consent Form; • Translated Parental consent, Category: Consent Form; • Using Personal Narrative in a Secondary English Language Arts Classroom (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form; |
|---|

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings on 3/11/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Monica Baldonado-Ruiz

Using Personal Narrative in a Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jessica Early in the Department English Education at Arizona State University research study to study how narrative and other forms of personal narrative shape your student's view of him or herself as a writer as well as how these types of writing shape your student's achievement in writing. Your student will be asked to write about how he or she feels about themselves as a writer, their experiences with writing instruction up until this year. He or she will also be asked to write a personal memoir in class that shares about moments that have shaped his or her life experiences. Your student will experience writing lessons that lead them toward completing this class assignment. Additionally, some students will be asked to give three 30 minute interviews about their views on writing, their experiences in the lesson unit, as well as how their views on writing might have changed after the unit. Finally, I will ask students to write a reflection after the memoir lessons are completed. While all students will get the same instruction in class, only those who choose to participate in the study will have their writing collected for me to analyze.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve up to two quarters of instructional time or 16 weeks worth of targeted writing instruction. Your child will not have to spend any time outside of class to participate in this study. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty (it will not

affect your child's grade, treatment/care, etc). Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is higher achievement in writing . There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

Every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations or publications but your child's name will not be used. All data will be stored and kept by the researcher in a password protected google file, including all audio recordings of interviews, and all copied documents will be kept in private folder to which only the researcher and her doctoral advisor will have access. Additionally all identifying information will be stripped of the data and Pseudonyms will be used. The master list of these pseudonyms, attaching participants to their pseudonyms, will be stored on the Principal examiner's or research assistant's password protected computer. The master list will be destroyed after analysis and all the other data collected will be destroyed after two years.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me (or Dr. Jessica Early at (602)496-5430.

Sincerely,

Monica Baldonado-Ruiz

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (Child's name) to participate in the above study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

En Español

Uso de la narrativa personal en un aula de artes de lenguaje en inglés secundaria

CARTA DE PERSIMISO PARTERNO

Querido padre de familia:

Actualmente soy una estudiante de posgrado bajo la dirección de la profesora Jessica Early del Departamento de Educación en el sector de inglés en la Universidad Estatal de Arizona y estoy conduciendo una investigación. El enfoque de la investigación es para estudiar como la narrativa y otras formas de narración personal dan forma a la opinión de su alumno y de sí mismo como escritor entender su punto de vista, al igual para así entender como estos tipos de escritura cambian la forma y logro de sus estudiantes enfocándose principalmente en la escritura.

Se le pedirá a su estudiante que escriba cómo él o ella se sienten sobre sí mismos como escritor, sus experiencias con instrucción de escritura hasta este año. También se le pedirá que escriba una memoria personal en clase

que comparta sobre los momentos que les han dado forma a sus experiencias de la vida.

Su estudiante experimentará escribiendo lecciones que los guiarán para así

completar esta tarea de clase. Finalmente, les pediré a los estudiantes que escriban una reflexión después de completar las lecciones de la memoria personal.

Mientras todos los estudiantes obtendrán la misma instrucción en clase, solo colectaré para analizar los trabajos escritos de aquellos estudiantes que quieran participar en el estudio.

Estoy invitando a la participación de su hijo, que involucrará hasta dos cuartos de tiempo de instrucción o 16 semanas de instrucción de escritura dirigida.

Su hijo no tendrá que pasar ningún tiempo fuera de la clase para participar en este estudio y así mismo es importante recordar que la participación de su hijo en este estudio es voluntariamente.

Si elige que su hijo/a no participe o decide retirar a su hijo del estudio en cualquier momento, no habrá ninguna penalización contra la calificación de él o ella no (no afectará el grado de su hijo, el tratamiento / cuidado, etc.). De igual manera, si su hijo/a elige no participar o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento, no habrá penalización.

Los resultados del estudio de investigación pueden ser publicados, pero no se usará el nombre él o ella. A pesar de que no vaya a ver un beneficio directo para su hijo, el posible beneficio que obtendrá la participación de su hijo o hija es el mejoramiento de su escritura. No hay previsible riesgos o incomodidades en la participación de su hijo.

Se hará todo lo posible para limitar el uso y divulgación de su información personal incluyendo información de los registros de estudios de investigación, a las personas que necesiten revisar esta información.

Aunque es importante saber que no podemos prometer el secreto completo.

Los resultados de este estudio pueden utilizarse en informes, presentaciones o publicaciones, pero el nombre de su hijo no será utilizado. Todos los datos serán almacenados y guardados por el investigador por medio de una contraseña en archivo protegido por Google y todos los documentos copiados se guardarán en una carpeta privada donde solo tendrán acceso la investigadora y su asesor doctoral. Adicionalmente, toda la información de identificación se eliminará de los datos y se utilizarán seudónimos. La lista maestra de estos seudónimos, donde se relacionan los participantes a sus seudónimos, se almacenarán en la computadora protegida por contraseña del examinador principal o asistente de investigación. La lista maestra de estos seudónimos será destruida después del análisis y todos los demás datos recopilados serán destruidos después de dos años.

Si tiene alguna pregunta relacionada con el estudio de investigación o con la participación de su hijo en este estudio, por favor llámeme (o a la Dra. Jessica Early al (602) 496-5430).

Sinceramente,

Monica Baldonado-Ruiz

Al firmar a continuación, está dando su consentimiento para su hijo _____ (no mbre) participe en el estudio anterior.

Firma _____

impresa nombre

_____ Fecha _____

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre usted o los derechos de su hijo como sujeto / participante en esta investigación, o si cree que usted o su hijo han sido puestos en riesgo, puede contactar al Presidente de la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Sujetos Humanos, a través de la Oficina de Integridad y Garantía de Investigación, al (480) 965--6788.

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jessica Early in the English Education Doctoral program at Arizona State University. During our English Language Arts class and our study of Testimonio, I will be conducting a research study to find out about the writing practices of ethnically and linguistically diverse students who attend school in this city and state.

I am recruiting individuals who will allow me to interview them, see and copy all of the writing they produce, complete reflection questionnaires and to take detailed field notes on their conversation and class discussions that will take place during the regular instructional time in our classroom. I am also looking for students who are willing to participate in an oral storytelling event to share their stories with the community.

All participation is voluntary and will have no affect on your grades. If you have any question during the research study, please call me at (602) 496-3090.

APPENDIX E
STUDENT CREATED WRITING RUBRIC

Creating Our Own Writing Rubric. After listing the common elements you found in your investigations of this genre, you'll begin to write your own rubric. List the elements that would get you an A*/A in this genre.

Genre: _____

| A02 Rhetorical Analysis | Genre Features/Elements What does it look like for this genre? | A03 Writing for Various Purposes | Genre Features/Elements What does it look like for this genre? |
|--|--|---|--|
| Organization - the internal structure of the piece | | Ideas - the main message | |
| Voice - the tone and flavor of the author's message | | Word Choice - the vocabulary the author chooses | |
| Presentation - how the writing looks on the page | | Sentence Fluency - the rhythm and flow of the language | |
| Audience - who's going to read or hear it? | | Conventions - spelling, grammar, clarity, etc. | |

APPENDIX F

TESTIMONIO WRITING REFLECTION

NAME

DATE

Testimonio WRITING REFLECTION

At the beginning of this school year I asked you to tell me about how you felt about writing. I would like for you to now reflect upon all of the writing projects that we have worked on together in this unit to see how and if your thoughts about writing might have changed.

Please answer the following questions as completely and honestly as possible.

1. What was your topic/moment that you chose to write about for your personal narrative (Testimonio)? Why did you choose this topic/moment?

2. For what purpose did you write? Why did you choose this purpose?
To give testimony to either celebrate something or someone.
or
give hope after an injustice is experienced.
or
To show solidarity with a community.

3. Has anything changed about the way you feel about writing and/or yourself as a writer? Explain your answer.

4. Was there a writing prompt/activity that we did in this testimonio unit that was enjoyable for you? Explain your answer.

5. What was the writing task(s) that we did in this unit that felt the most difficult or painful to write? Explain your answer.

6. What is something new you learned in the process of writing this testimonio project? (It can be something you learned about your topic, about writing in general, or about yourself.)

APPENDIX G

DATA ANALYSIS COVER SHEET

| Name | Pseudonym | Age | Ethnicity |
|------|-----------|-----|-----------|
| | | | |

Initial Highlighting Notes:

Initial Codes related to this participant:

Interview Three Confirmation Notes: