

Podcasting as a Pedagogical Tool to Create Latinx Youth Counterstories

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Abstract

The Summer Podcast Workshop (SPW) used podcasting as a pedagogical tool to have Latinx youth create counterstories. The learning objectives, program themes, and lesson plans are shared in this article. In the workshop, students learned technical podcasting skills to articulate their lived experiences as Latinx youth. Students reflected on the politics of storytelling and listening throughout the workshop. The student voices focused on three themes including (1) learning the technical skills of podcasting, (2) building community with their peers, and (3) centering their lived experiences. The workshop demonstrates that podcasting can be a powerful pedagogical tool in centering the counterstories of Latinx youth through the production process and sharing of their stories.

Keywords: Latinx youth, podcasting, storytelling, and summer programs

Introduction

With a grant from United Way of Dane County, the Friends of Sánchez Scholars (FoSS) Board of Directors established the Summer Podcast Workshop (SPW) as an opportunity to teach Latinx youth about podcasting and to share their voices. Gerardo Mancilla is on the Board of Directors for FoSS and helped coordinate the summer program. He has a podcasting background as the host of the *Educators and Immigration* podcast. Anjuli Brekke developed and taught the workshops. Her interest in audio storytelling began during her graduate work in Seattle. As part of her dissertation, she led several podcasting workshops with community members of all ages discussing experiences of racism and strategies for resistance. As an Assistant Professor at University of Wisconsin-Parkside, she teaches a community-based learning course in podcasting. She has been honored to listen to hundreds of stories and help give community members the tools to record, edit, and share their voices (Brekke, 2021; Brekke et al., 2021). Luz Rodriguez Camacho was a participant in the program.

Podcasting as a Pedagogical Tool

Given that the students in the SPW program were all Latinx, we used LatCrit to guide the program's development and focus. LatCrit scholars contextualize the lived experiences of Latinx participants

by providing a multidimensional lens that incorporates language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2006). One important aspect of LatCrit is the creation of counterstories that center the narratives of marginalized communities (Delgado, 1989). Yosso (2006) argues that counterstories can help build community among those at the margins and can challenge the perceived wisdom of those in society's center. Mancilla's (2018) study demonstrates how Latinx youth counterstories can validate their lived experiences and share their knowledge.

Numerous scholars have documented the potential of digital media to offer marginalized communities a means of counter-storytelling. Alemán and Alemán (2016) focus on critical race media projects as a means to create counter-storytelling spaces for Latinx students. They explore how the production process of these projects "Cultivate the voices of resistance and reclamation in the Latina/o communities" (p. 289). Additionally, Becerra and Cáraves (2023) discuss their podcast which focuses on *platicás* for first-generation, queer Latinax in academia. They explain how the process of creating their podcast allowed them to build a counterspace—a pocket of resistance that centers queer and Latinx identities. Vrikki and Malik (2019) similarly argue that podcasts are an "emergent space" for marginalized communities "to mobilize as a counterpublic against the grain of dominant racialized representations and narratives produced by mainstream media" (p. 274). Heise and Hassan (2023) provided an example of how resettled refugee youth created the *Now You Hear Us* podcast as a counter-storytelling practice to include their voices and stories as they experienced the conflict-to-peace spectrum.

Podcasting can be used as a pedagogical tool to facilitate counter-storytelling among Latinx students and to create a counter-space in the production process. Benmayor (2012) explains how digital *testimonios* can be used to create these counter-storytelling spaces: "We understood our stories to be *testimonios* because they were the result of an oral process of telling, recording, and bearing witness to each other's life stories" (p. 507). They further explain that digital *testimonios* differentiate themselves within digital storytelling in that they tie the personal to the collective and involve a collaborative process of production and creation. Through creating their digital narratives, students in Benmayor's Latina Life Stories project learned cultural knowledge, theorized about their own lived experiences, and collectively discussed their new contextualized and historized understanding. This project gave students the tools to "tell their truths and be heard" (p. 521). Similarly, through the SPW project, our students worked collaboratively to create counterstories through their podcasts that spoke to their embodied knowledge and how their experiences reverberated through their wider communities.

Program Learning Objectives

The SPW took place during the 2022 summer. Ten Sánchez Scholars participated in the four-week hybrid program. The FoSS board worked with the Madison Public Library's Bubbler program to secure meeting space and equipment for the program. The Bubbler is a maker space program from the library to engage youth in learning opportunities through creating, making, designing, and exploring arts (Bubbler, 2023). The goal of the workshop was for each participant to interview someone, edit their interview, and create a podcast from the interview. Similar to the work Benmayor (2012) did with the Latina Life Stories, we encouraged students to draw connections between how their lived experiences and those of their potential interview partners might speak

to wider themes of identity and challenges faced by their communities. Conversations and *pláticas* took place throughout the process. Knecht and Aviña (2023) define *pláticas* as conversations that are “informal, vulnerable, and based on a sense of confianza (confidence), trust (respeto), and personalismo (mutual holistic sharing) between the researcher and the contributors” (p. 94). A strength of the SPW program was the trust that was built among the students and between the students and their mentors through this informal sharing. This trust gave participants confidence in articulating their narratives and developing technical skills. The process of recording, editing, and sharing personal narratives can be daunting. Crafting personal podcasts among trusted friends and mentors enabled the Sánchez Scholars students to explore topics they may otherwise have shied away from, such as the mental health impacts of the pandemic on their communities or the challenges faced by undocumented students applying for college.

Although students discussed challenges facing their community in their podcasts, we could have incorporated a greater focus on helping students envision pathways for change through their podcasts. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects provide students with a framework to enact liberatory change (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Tintiangco-Cubales et al. further explain that “YPAR provides students the opportunity to use their education and lived experiences to address problems in their school and community” (p. 115). In the process, both students and teachers respond to community needs. Additionally, Benmayor (2012) also mentions that “strong testimonios... ‘write back’ to difficult experiences that are common to Latin@ youth and ‘write for’ their peers and younger generations” (p. 515). Although students were encouraged to make connections between their lived experiences and wider issues faced by their communities, we could have engaged the students in a more explicit discussion regarding how their podcasts might also address modes of resistance.

The SPW project sought to provide spaces for students to learn about and enact counter-storytelling through the process of making a podcast. As such, the SPW program had two sets of Learning Objectives:

Podcasting Skills Learning Objectives:

- Understand storytelling basics
- Build community connections through researching and interviewing friends, mentors, and loved ones
- Learn the essentials of quality sound and podcast production and design
- Edit, mix, and export original podcasts

Cultural Identity Learning Objectives:

- Focus on students’ bilingual and bicultural identity
- Focus on identity, language, and heritage through stories
- Integrate family and community members into the projects

Program Themes

Luz and another student presented their *testimonio* about their participation in the program at a conference. As we reflected on what they had shared, we identified three common themes. The first theme was related to the technical skills of learning a podcast. The second theme focused on

building community among the scholars. The final theme related to issues impacting the Latinx community and identity.

Theme 1: Learning Technical Podcasting Skills

- Students had limited previous knowledge of podcasts and podcasting.
- Students emphasized transferable podcasting skills they developed through the workshop (interviewing, editing, and speaking skills).
- Students learned about the maker space at the public library which had many technology resources including a sound booth for recording music and software for editing sound and video.
- In selecting an interview partner for their podcasts, students emphasized the importance of choosing peers who had similar intersectional identities to discuss sensitive topics.

Theme 2: Building Community Among the Sánchez Scholars

- The workshop provided a space to build community among the Sánchez Scholars members.
- Students were in different schools and grades. The workshop provided a space for them to share advice about school and educational resources.
- Hearing others' stories made them more comfortable in sharing their own stories.
- Post-covid reconnecting opportunity (focusing on being physically with each other and learning together).
- The workshop facilitated open and organic conversation with friends.

Theme 3: Issues impacting the Latinx community and Identity

- Some students interviewed family members and were able to learn more about their family's history.
- Topics focused on daily challenges and experiences of students (e.g. COVID-19, mental health); The struggles of undocumented youth; and first-generation college experiences and transitioning to college.
- Students discussed the importance of connecting with people in their community whom they chose to interview.
- The workshop provided a space to conduct and create a podcast in Spanish.

Lesson Plans

Nine lesson plans were developed for the program. Lesson 1 focused on welcoming the students and introductions. Then, Lessons 2 and 3 focused on storytelling basics. Lessons 4 and 5 focused on interviewing methods. Lessons 6, 7, and 8 focused on the editing process. Finally, Lesson 9 focused on sharing the final projects. The following section will outline each of the lesson plans.

Lesson 1: Community Building & Introductions

The first lesson focused on an introduction to the SPW. Due to COVID, the scholars had not worked together much so they were also getting to know each other.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Ask students about their favorite Podcast. This allows for a conversation about podcasts and what they know. Students may also mention additional platforms that they use (YouTube, TikTok, and Stitcher). Students can discuss what information they receive from these platforms.
- Step 2: Icebreaker 1: If you could have any superpower, what superpower would you have and why? Discuss the podcast episode "[*Portrait Of: Gabby Rivera*](#)" which discusses Rivera's creation of a queer Latina superhero for Marvel Comics. Icebreaker 2: What are important issues you see within your community? How would you cover this issue in a podcast?
- Step 3: Discuss the workshop and learning objectives.
- Step 4: Have students brainstorm who they could interview for their podcast and why.

Lesson 2: What is Storytelling

This lesson provides background information about storytelling and podcasting. In order to align with Ethnic Studies Pedagogy, this lesson should also include information on how storytelling has been used by communities of color. Zavala (2018) explains that Ethnic Studies (1) challenges the historical neglect of communities of color and (2) reclaims students' cultural identities. Providing a grounding in Ethnic Studies is needed for students to understand how oppressed peoples have used storytelling as a form of resistance.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Discuss what is a podcast and provide historical information on podcasting, radio, and broadcasting. For ideas, draw from [*Tools for Podcasting*](#) Chapter 1
- Step 2: Discuss how storytelling broadly and podcasting in particular have been used by Latinx communities as a form of resistance. Discuss how the podcast industry as a whole still centers whiteness and needs to become more culturally and linguistically diverse.
- Step 3: Discuss various podcast formats. Provide students with a podcast template. Students can modify it as needed.
- Recommended model for students: Start with a "hook" (between 30 seconds to one minute) to grab the audience's attention. Then, the middle segment has the interview or information that is being shared (suggested length of 10-20 minutes). Lastly, there is a conclusion (30 seconds to one minute) where the host can summarize the main points from the episode and reiterate the importance of the program.

Lesson 3: Interviews, Storytelling and Counter-storytelling

This lesson introduces students to the concept of counter-storytelling. As mentioned earlier, counterstories are one aspect of both LatCrit and Ethnic Studies Pedagogies. Zavala (2018) explains that "a pedagogy is futile if it does not center colonized peoples' survival and recovery, and if it doesn't create spaces for students to critically reframe their lives in ways that counter the neocolonial situations that limits their rehumanization" (p. 53). LatCrit and Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledge the historical and contemporary realities of race, racism, and white privilege (Yosso, 2006) and serve as a tool to deconstruct whiteness, privilege, and oppression. Yosso (2005)

further explains that *testimonios* and counter-storytelling can be tools to further unpack people's lived experience through a CRT lens.

Delgado (1989) used the term counter-storytelling to describe how people tell stories and experiences of communities that are usually marginalized. Zavala (2018) further explains that "counter-storytelling is a medium for challenging the dominant/master narrative in our society" (p. 62). In the process, students can counter the deficit thinking and challenge dominant narratives and critically reflect and analyze issues impacting their communities. This necessitates providing culturally relevant curriculum and helping students draw connections between theories and their lived experiences. Zavala stresses the importance of healing as part of decolonizing pedagogies. Through the collective and collaborative process of counter-storytelling, students enact spaces of healing that validate their lived experiences. This lesson provides students with a theoretical framework to understand counter-storytelling and concrete examples of this theory in practice. It explores whose stories are currently missing from the media, and why representation matters.

This lesson also addresses intended audiences and who students feel comfortable entrusting with their stories. The tensions of digital storytelling regarding issues of privacy and control over youth narratives in online spaces are important to explore. Digital storytelling, especially for minoritized youth, runs the risk of reaching unintended audiences. This point is critical in thinking about the limits of digital storytelling: under what circumstances of circulation can marginalized youth feel empowered to expose their personal stories? For digital storytelling to be a form of empowerment, the needs of represented communities must be centered throughout the processes of production and dissemination. By the end of the lesson, students will pitch a story idea, brainstorm multiple potential interview subjects, and consider their intended audience.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Have students discuss issues in their community. Define counter-storytelling for students and ask them to consider why it is important to hear stories from the lived experiences and truths of marginalized communities.
- Step 2: Play a story from the [StoryCorps Historias online archive](#)
- Step 3: Using this archive, focus the discussion on Latinx stories and when/how students have seen/heard Latinx stories.
- Step 4: Have students brainstorm potential interview partners.
- Step 5: Have students discuss the intended audience for their podcasts and how it will shape their podcast. Discuss students' comfort with sharing their stories within the workshop and/or online. Emphasize that students are not required to share their completed podcasts.

Lesson 4: Interviewing techniques

In this lesson, students will learn how to set up a pre-interview, interview best practices, where to conduct an interview, and the technology available to them. Also, check in with students about their potential interview subject and if they have contacted them to set up an interview.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Start by checking in with the students. Ask who they would like to interview and if they have contacted them. Discuss setting a date for a pre-interview. Have them brainstorm a backup plan if their intended interview subject falls through.
- Step 2: Discuss available technology for recording including microphones, headphones, and recording devices. Cell phone technology provides students with easy-to-use recording equipment that may lessen some of their interview anxiety. Provide students with an overview of available tech resources they could use for future projects. Draw from Chapter three in *Tools for Podcasting* to give this overview.
- Step 3: Discuss recording tips. First, focus on the recording space and sound. Have students find a small space with deadening materials (like carpets, drapes, and foam boards) to prevent reverb. Avoid recording in places with hard surfaces. Set the recorder up about six inches from the interviewee's mouth. Place on a stand or stack of books to reduce handling noise. Always record a backup on a secondary device. Students should also set their smartphones to airplane mode so that they are not interrupted during the recording.
- Step 4: Teach students how to use their voice recording application on their phone. Have students practice recording on their phones.
- Step 5: Have students think about what they would like to get out of the interview. Who do they want to interview and what aspect of that person's narrative do they want to highlight?
- Step 6: Focus on the art of interviewing. Students listen actively and pivot the conversation if needed. Start the interview with easy questions to ease into the conversation. They should end with "big picture" questions to highlight why the interview is important.
- Step 7: Discuss interviewing best practices. Have students send their interview questions ahead of the interview and arrive early to the interview to set up the technology. They should also have a backup recording device. After the interview, they should follow up and thank the interviewee for their time.

Lesson 5: Asking Questions and Interviewing Practice

This lesson focuses on giving students practice coming up with compelling interview questions and practice conducting interviews.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Go over the process of asking open-ended questions. The questions can focus on stories and events. The questions can also highlight the interviewee's feelings and emotional context. The interviewer can begin by sharing their own lived experience. The interviewer should avoid asking multiple questions packed into one.
- Step 2: Listen to [How Maria Hinojosa Learned To Fluff Her Feathers](#) and discuss what they noticed.
- Step 3: Have the students work in pairs to consider what kind of story they would like to focus on in their interview questions.
- Step 4: Go over the three-act structure in storytelling. Act 1 focuses on setting the scene. Student questions should orient the audience to their topic and their interviewee. Act 2 focuses on flushing out the vivid details of the interviewee's story. Have students consider how to ask questions that will allow for vivid storytelling. Lastly, Act 3 focuses on wrapping up the story. Have students consider the larger "why" questions to provide a conclusion

for the audience. The students need to know that the interview may not have a clear ending as the interviewee is telling their story.

- Step 5: Have students practice interviewing each other with their phones. Give them time to come up with three interview questions and time to conduct the interviews. Give them an optional prompt to focus on in their practice interviews, such as “Tell me about a mentor who has made a big impact on your life.”
- Step 6: Debrief the practice and answer questions that may come up. Have students reflect on interviewing challenges and successful strategies.

Lesson 6: Introduction to the Editing Process

This lesson introduces students to sound editing software, including how editing impacts podcast listening. Students will listen to podcasts and discuss the audio used. Students should finish recording their podcast interviews by lesson 7.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Begin by showing more examples of podcasts. The [Historias archive](#) has several podcast clips to choose from. [The Latino Underground](#) offers additional examples of counterstories. As you play podcasts, have students focus on the structure of the podcast and how it is edited.
- Step 2: Discuss the students’ first impressions of the story.
- Step 3: Inquire about the technical aspects of the podcast (e.g. vocal tics like umms and silences). Discuss how these affect the listening experience.
- Step 4: Introduce [Adobe Audition](#) as the editing tool that the students will use for the program. Give students a basic tutorial on how to use the program. Adobe Audition was selected because it was available at the public library for free. There is also free editing software available such as [Audacity](#) that might be a better fit for your students.
- Step 5: Homework: Have students interview somebody before the next class.

Lesson 7: Editing an Intro and Outro

Students will work on their intros and outros. They should bring their recorded interviews.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Check in on how students are doing with their interviews. Ideally, they should have recorded their interviews by this time. If students need more time, they can use this class to record their interviews with a peer.
- Step 2: For the students who have completed their interviews, focus on writing an introduction and outro for their podcast. This will include writing a few sentences about their vision for their podcast.
- Step 3: Have students record their introduction and outro for their podcasts.
- Step 4: Have students import their interviews, introductions, and outros to the editing software. They will add music in the next lesson.
- Step 5: Have students listen to their interview recordings and decide what parts of their recordings they would like to use for their podcast.

Lesson 8: Editing and Finalizing Your Story

Students will add music to their podcasts and polish it.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Discuss royalty-free music and why it's important to use it. The website [Free Music Archive](#) can be used to have students find royalty-free music.
- Step 2: Have students explore the website and select music for their podcast. Have students download the file and then upload it in Audition.
- Step 3: Students will need time to edit their interview, their introduction, and their music.
- Step 4: Check in with students to see how they are doing with their editing, and offer help and advice as needed.
- Step 5: Ask if they would like to share parts of their podcast for the next lesson. Some students may not feel comfortable sharing their podcast episodes yet.
- Step 6: Homework: Ask students to continue editing their podcasts to be ready to share by the next lesson if they choose.

Lesson 9: Listening Session Party

The goal is to have students share their podcasts during this final session, but some may not feel comfortable doing so. Students in our workshop had intimate conversations with family members and friends and those conversations were not always meant for public-facing audiences. The ethical question of what gets produced and shared with others is one that took place throughout the workshop. Have students reflect on their intended audience and the impact they want to make with their podcasts. Students can keep the interview between the two individuals or choose to share that conversation within the podcast workshop and/or online.

Procedures:

- Step 1: Before the lesson, ask students to email you their podcasts to share during the Listening Session Party. This allows you to prepare enough time for all the podcasts that are willing to be shared, and time for students to reflect on the process of creating their stories.
- Step 2: For students who do not feel comfortable sharing their podcasts, offer them the opportunity to share their experience with the program and space to reflect on the process of creating their podcasts.
- Step 3: Allow all participants to share as much as they feel comfortable.
- Step 4: Discuss resources and future opportunities for them to continue developing their podcasting skills.

Lesson 10: Sharing the Experience with the Larger Public

General information about the project and the learning that occurred was shared publicly on the FoSS (2022) website. With their consent, we also shared pictures of the students that were taken during the program. The authors, two students, and two coordinators presented this program at the International Conference on Education and Justice. Additionally, Mancilla and Rodriguez

Camacho (2023) also shared about the program on the *Education for Sustainable Democracy* podcast. In this way, the lessons learned from the program were shared publicly while also respecting the participants' desire to control their own narratives.

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