

Rompiendo Silencios: Bridging Spanish Language Arts and Ethnic Studies for Archival Activism

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Abstract

This autoethnography explores the transformative potential of *Aquí Estamos*, a community-based digital archive project co-created with high school students. In this project, we disrupted archival silences in our local community archives and amplified Latine testimonios. As a critical language educator, I argue Spanish language arts curricula must be grounded in ethnic studies principles to empower Latine youth fully. I discuss how community-based digital archives and oral history methods align with ethnic studies frameworks and can serve as activism tools in the community. Subsequently, I provide the historical context that motivated the creation of this project, highlighting the power of co-creating community-based archives that center historically marginalized communities in the classroom. I then offer insight for practitioners, sharing a comprehensive guide for educators to implement similar projects in their classrooms. Finally, I reflect on *Aquí Estamos's* profound impact on student learning and my understanding of community-based archives as tools for activism within the classroom and beyond.

Keywords: community digital archives, digital activism, ethnic studies, Latine youth, Long Island, oral history, secondary education, Spanish language arts, suburban schooling

My lived experiences as a first-generation Colombian-American growing up in a predominantly Latine suburb in Long Island inform my thinking on liberatory education. While I had firsthand experiences with socioeconomic oppression and discrimination, I was never afforded the chance to critically examine the systems that have historically marginalized communities of color, including my own. Ironically, these traumatic, disempowering schooling experiences—feeling invisible in a curriculum that ignored my culture—influenced my motives for returning to my alma mater as an educator. I felt a sense of responsibility and passion for co-constructing liberatory educational spaces with young people in my community. When I reflect on returning home to Long Island to serve as an educator, I recognize how much this



decision was rooted in my love and accountability to the immigrant community in my hometown. Schooling made me question the richness of my borderlands identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). Yet, *mi gente*, *inmigrantes*, and *hijos de inmigrantes* in my community helped me feel pride in the wealth of our culture.

“Matriarch” photo was taken circa 1996 in our apartment, Long Island, N.Y.

In this special photograph, my cousin and I are loving up on our Granny, Elsy. I love how the sunflower is placed over her. She was our radiant woman. Our pillar. Our matriarch.

Granny was known in our community as a respected elder who was *una madre en este país* for many other migrant women. Her passing in May 2022 was a testament to her legacy and motivated this work. *Inmigrantes* are the backbone of our community and deserve to be legitimized as knowledge holders within curricula.

In recent decades, the Latine immigrant community has seen a significant surge in growth within Long Island's already segregated towns. My hometown on the South Shore, a mere 22 miles from Manhattan, has demographically shifted into a Latine immigrant enclave. It's where my mother settled in the early 90s, and it continues to be a destination for newcomers, predominantly hailing from the Dominican Republic and Central America. Being an educator at my alma mater, working alongside students with whom I culturally and linguistically connect and whose identities I feel passionate about empowering has been an extremely gratifying experience. However, as a critical educator, I witness today the persistence of the same inequities I faced 20 years earlier and, with a newfound awareness, the systemic inequities that perpetuate the marginalization of racially and linguistically minoritized students. My cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) and a deep love for my community guide my work as a critical pedagogue and scholar. Recognizing the power of education to empower and liberate, I design learning experiences that cultivate critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and pride in students' historically marginalized identities. To achieve this, I integrate ethnic studies pedagogical approaches into my praxis, empowering students to analyze and challenge systems of oppression.

Mi Pedagogía es Mi Protesta: Integrating Ethnic Studies into the Spanish Language Arts Curriculum

In the United States, an oppressive schooling system deeply entrenched in historically white supremacist and capitalist structures continually harms racially and linguistically marginalized students. This system prioritizes social efficiency at the expense of a child's psychological well-being, individuality, and cultural identity (Kliebard, 2004; Tyack, 1974). Despite today's ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in K-12 classrooms, educational institutions remain unwelcoming environments for students of color (Love, 2019). The absence of a curriculum that resonates with their experiences is one element that disconnects historically marginalized youth from educational institutions (hooks, 1994). Moreover, student disengagement often stems from being viewed as passive recipients rather than active participants in the learning process (Freire, 1970).

In the United States, curricula frequently confine students to a singular, white-centered perspective and a colonial worldview (de los Ríos, 2020). Ethnic studies counter one-sided Eurocentric curricula and pedagogical approaches by centering the histories and perspectives of historically marginalized communities, allowing students to critically analyze systemic inequality and be knowledge producers and change agents in their communities (Okimiro, 2016). My

introduction to Ethnic Studies occurred through the documentary *Precious Knowledge* (Palos, 2011), which focuses on students' experiences in the Mexican American Studies Program at Tucson High School. As a first-generation Latina growing up in the United States, I immediately connected with the Tucson youth's journey, recognizing similarities between my schooling experiences and those of my students. Ethnic studies scholars have exhibited the significance of creating learning environments where students can critically examine the prevalence of whiteness (de los Ríos, 2020), engage in a thoughtful exploration of their true histories (Cuahtin et al., 2019), and the importance of developing curriculum that empowers students to actively engage in the creation of knowledge, thereby addressing epistemic injustice (Barrales, 2023).

Determined to start an ethnic studies course at my alma mater, I was disappointed when the school administration deemed it "too political." Bureaucratic challenges and political complexities within the school district made it extremely difficult to create an Ethnic Studies course in a public school on Long Island. However, I was committed to reclaiming the academic space that made me question the richness of my linguistic and cultural wealth by transforming it into one co-created with youth in my community and their identities at the center. I viewed my pedagogy as a means to protest the white-washed curriculums still in place from when I was a high school student that centered on Eurocentric literature from Spain and harmful standard language ideologies (Mena & Garcia, 2020). Taking matters into my own hands, I redesigned the Spanish Language Arts course curriculum that connected critical language awareness and ethnic studies principles with two objectives: to deconstruct dominant language ideologies and to deepen a critical understanding of Latine experiences and histories.

As a first-generation Spanish Language Arts educator, I'm deeply connected to the Latine community where I grew up and have the privilege of serving Latine immigrant-origin youth. The Spanish Language Arts course is for Latine students whose home language is Spanish. While some students are immigrant youth who have received most of their formal education in Spanish, others are heritage speakers raised in a Spanish-speaking household in the United States and received most of their formal education in English. My classes encompass diverse Latine ethnic backgrounds, mainly from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Students range from recent to first-generation immigrants, and a few are second-generation. What makes the Spanish Language Arts class particularly special is the shared Latine identity within the United States that binds us together and our diverse connections to the Spanish language. This diversity within our linguistic journey is a testament that Latinidad is not a singular, monolithic identity. Instead, it thrives within distinct experiences and backgrounds, rendering it nuanced and complex.

It is important to acknowledge that Latine students in the United States have varying comfort levels, literacy, and verbal skills in Spanish. Further, they have authentic language practices, such as translanguaging, that go beyond school-constructed classes titled Spanish for first language and heritage speakers (Garcia, 2019). Translanguaging empowers Latine bilingual youth to draw on their entire repertoire of communicative tools, including words, symbols, gestures, and actions, to construct meaning grounded in their lived experiences (Otheguy et al., 2015). Traditional schooling systems have perpetuated a harmful disconnect, forcing Latine youth to compartmentalize their English and Spanish skills. This marginalizes their full linguistic capabilities and ignores the richness of their multilingual identities. Traditional language instruction silences the voices and hinders the academic success of multilingual students (Garcia, 2019). Recognizing the power of language as a

tool for either liberation or oppression, language educators must integrate translanguaging into the curriculum to empower linguistically minoritized students with rich linguistic repertoires fully.

Gloria Anzaldúa's essay, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," is a cornerstone text in my Spanish Language Arts curriculum. The text's exploration of the intertwined nature of language and identity resonates deeply with the lived experiences of my Latine immigrant-origin students. Anzaldúa's powerful assertion, "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 26) exemplifies this connection, aligning with the work of other scholars who argue against the artificial separation of language, race, and identity (Amezcuca & Sánchez-Muñoz, 2024; Rosa & Flores, 2017). While providing learning experiences for Latine youth in their home language is important, it is not enough. Latine youth deserve a critical curriculum that acknowledges the deep connection between language and identity.

One way to achieve this is by integrating principles of ethnic studies and critical language awareness. Critical language awareness is a pedagogical approach beyond understanding how language functions. It empowers learners to analyze how language reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, power dynamics, and societal beliefs (Leeman & Serafini, 2016). By integrating critical language awareness and ethnic studies pedagogies, students can deconstruct harmful language ideologies while developing social awareness, ethnic pride, and community engagement (Amezcuca & Sánchez-Muñoz, 2024). Despite the substantial benefits of connecting both disciplines, a critical gap exists between the rich body of ethnic studies scholarship and traditional approaches to Spanish as a first and heritage language instruction. The current separation of Spanish language instruction from ethnic studies perpetuates a harmful disconnect that further marginalizes ethnically and linguistically minoritized students by silencing their cultural heritages and undermining their linguistic identities (Aponte, 2024).

I have observed this troubling pedagogical disconnect in my decade of experience as a language educator. Spanish courses for Latine students lack integration of ethnic studies, while ethnic studies courses are rarely offered in Spanish. This disconnect presents a missed opportunity to fully empower Latine students and equip them with critical tools to challenge marginalization. Determined to bridge this critical gap, I design a Spanish curriculum that goes beyond mere language instruction. I work towards designing learning experiences that foster critical consciousness around language, culture, and history while centering identities in the classroom. To achieve this, we delve into diverse texts and movements. We read and analyze Black, Queer, Indigenous, and feminist literature, poetry, and art from Latino America. We study social movements such as the Chicano student walkouts and the Young Lords in New York City. We also explore the history and knowledge of Latin America's Black diaspora and indigenous communities. Further, I work towards crafting experiential learning projects that engage students with our local Latine community. By combining critical language awareness and ethnic studies pedagogies, I aim to empower students as agents of social change within their communities and beyond.

***!Aquí Estamos!* Community-Based Digital Archiving as Digital Activism**

This section will discuss the roots and process of a community-based digital archival project grounded in ethnic studies and critical language awareness principles. In collaboration with my students, we launched a place-based bilingual digital archive titled *Aquí Estamos*, amplifying Latine voices in our hometown to disrupt archival silences and resist the erasure of Latine history and

contributions to our community. For this project, students conducted oral histories with Latine community residents. They created a multimodal video merging photographs and audio from the interview to house in a digital archive accessible to the community. The digital archive will be publicly available to local students, educators, and community members in collaboration with the local library. This project is designed to be an ongoing community effort, collecting stories over time to create a resource with which members can always connect. In conceiving this project, my motivation was to provide students with an authentic, empowering learning experience rooted in their cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal, 1998), entire linguistic repertoire, creativity, and digital skills to produce public-facing knowledge that advocates for the visibility of our community in the suburbs of Long Island.

Before diving into *Aquí Estamos*, I want to give *mi querida amiga*, my sis, ethnic studies teacher and scholar Wendy Barrales (2023), her *flores*. She founded the Women of Color Archive (WOCA), to which her students contributed by preserving the experiences of important matriarchs of color in their lives. Their beautiful and powerful work can be seen at www.wocarchive.com. The Women of Color Archive exemplifies how educators can legitimize local community knowledge and testimonios in the classroom, disrupting traditional forms of teaching and learning. With Doctora Barrales' femtorship and guidance, I could implement and co-create a digital archive with my high school students.

Community-based digital archiving and oral history are liberatory pedagogical and research methods. Traditional archival practices have historically upheld systems of white supremacy, excluding marginalized communities and their histories. However, community archives created and maintained by historically marginalized communities can serve as tools of liberation and social change (Caswell, 2012). Community-based archives embody the phrase *for us, by us*, empowering communities to document their histories on their terms, democratizing traditional Western archival practices.

As a critical educator, I saw co-creating a community-based digital archive and engaging students in oral history work as a powerful tool for building solidarity and empowerment within and beyond our classroom. I framed the project as a way to preserve testimonios in our community. As a social justice practice, oral history aims to amplify often silenced counter-narratives excluded from mainstream records (Augusto et al., 2022; Poole, 2020). Critical oral history methods challenge dominant narratives and empower interviewees to center their stories (Augusto et al., 2022). Testimonios, a narrative approach rooted in Latin American social movements (Delgado-Bernal, 1998), involve individuals sharing personal experiences that reflect broader collective struggles. Through *Aquí Estamos*, students conducted oral histories, centering and documenting these testimonios from our community members. This digital archive ensures community testimonios are preserved for future generations while empowering students as producers of historical knowledge, affirming our community as valuable knowledge holders.

The co-creation of public-facing digital archives in the classroom aligns with the core goals of ethnic studies: Access, Relevance, and Community (ARC). According to ethnic studies scholarship, the ARC of ethnic studies challenges traditional power structures in education, shaping students' critical engagement with their learning (Tintiango-Cubales, 2012). Designing learning experiences grounded in the ARC of ethnic studies ensures that students of color have **access** to a quality education in which the curriculum is **relevant** to their lived experiences by centering their histories,

challenges, and contributions. It also connects students to their **communities**, fostering critical consciousness and engagement that can lead to activism and advocacy for positive change (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Creating community-based archives in the classroom allows students to critically analyze and produce local history often not centered on curricula. Further, it creates a learning experience that centers community knowledge and counternarratives not legitimized in traditional curricula. It also serves as activism and advocacy as students collectively work to disrupt archival silences and resist the erasure of historically marginalized community knowledge and contributions.

My experiences with our traditional community archives, where our stories were absent, ignited the passion and urgency behind *Aquí Estamos*. This project directly confronts this historical erasure by empowering students to analyze local history critically, conduct oral history interviews with Latine community members, and co-create a multimodal digital archive. Through this process, students transform from passive learners to active history-makers, ensuring their stories and experiences are documented and preserved. *Aquí Estamos* is not just an archive; it's a reclamation of agency and a powerful act of resistance against historical silencing. By amplifying Latine testimonios, this project dismantles the invisibility imposed by traditional archives and challenges the systems perpetuating marginalization. We use community-based digital archiving as activism, disrupting traditional archival methods and boldly declaring *¡Aquí Estamos! - We are here* and resist the historical erasure of Latine stories and contributions within our community.

Las Raíces: Project Historical Context

As a scholar-activist, I aim to challenge the stereotypical view of suburbs as idyllic, conflict-free havens and instead shed light on the realities faced by Black and Brown communities. The monolithic framings of suburban schooling (white, middle-class) have encouraged education researchers to focus on issues in urban contexts, overlooking the inequities racially and linguistically minoritized youth experience in the suburbs (Diamond & Poxey, 2020). It is worth noting that nearly half of Black and Brown youth are growing up in the suburbs of the United States, surpassing urban settings in numbers; yet suburban stereotypes and one-dimensional portrayals erase the rich cultural diversity and the lived experiences of many historically marginalized youth impacted by inequities (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). My interest in amplifying suburban schooling scholarship led me to a research endeavor that birthed *Aquí Estamos*.

Early in my PhD journey, a research paper on my alma mater's late 1960s student-led demonstrations and racial tensions sparked my interest. Eager to delve into the local archives, I was met with a stark reality: a one-sided narrative devoid of Black voices. This archival silence ignited a sense of something missing. Trusting my intuition, I embarked on a new path – seeking out community elders who were high school students during that era. Through powerful oral histories, a previously undocumented history of injustice unfolded: housing discrimination, forced displacement, a shuttered Black school, police brutality, and segregated education. Unearthing this silenced past left me deeply troubled. As a lifelong resident, why was I unaware? Why wasn't this history taught? The lack of these narratives in my education led me to question: *What impact would these stories have had on me if I had known them sooner?*

The realization of this silenced history within the place I call home left me feeling deceived. The passion and frustration that accompanied lifting the veil of silence fueled the creation of *Aquí*

Estamos. The deafening silence in the local archives was not merely an oversight; it was a reminder of the ongoing project of erasing historically marginalized voices. This archival violence exposed a deep-seated imbalance: a community overflowing with Latine heritage, diversity, and experiences yet absent from its documented history. The silence became a call to action. *Why are the narratives of our immigrant families, the backbone of our community, absent? What is happening now within our community that will not be documented for our future generations to learn from? How can I contribute to preserving the valuable histories and testimonios de mi gente? How can I include young people in my community in this work?*

As a young student in Long Island, I was keenly aware of the visible segregation among towns and school districts. Still, I was unaware of the historical reasons behind it. My hometown stood out as one of the few predominantly Black and Brown districts on the island, surrounded by notably white towns. Historians studying suburbanization have documented how white racism, discriminatory governmental housing policies, and real estate covenants played a role in shaping Long Island's segregation (Wiese, 2004). This process is connected to the post-World War II era, marked by demographic shifts in New York City as African Americans and Puerto Ricans migrated into the city. Encouraged by the GI Bill and mortgage programs, white residents fled to whiter suburban commuter towns on Long Island. From the 1940s to the 1960s, as more people migrated from New York City, housing discrimination and redlining tactics aimed at keeping Black families away from white residential areas became increasingly common in real estate practices. It's important to recognize that established Black communities on the island were adversely affected by post-World War II suburbanization and urban renewal projects that displaced Black families from their homes. The historical discriminatory housing policies and pattern of white flight continue to influence the present-day segregation seen in towns and school districts on Long Island. Today, Long Island is acknowledged as one of the most segregated suburbs in the United States, with its 124 school districts serving as a reflection of the legacy of discriminatory housing policies and racism.

When designing the curriculum to create *Aquí Estamos*, it was essential for students to reflect and learn about the critical history that has shaped the place they call home and their schools. My own experience growing up unaware of the historical roots of segregation in Long Island highlights the need for accessible and inclusive local history education. *Aquí Estamos* aims to break this cycle by empowering students to become researchers, storytellers, and agents of change, fostering understanding and dismantling the legacies of racism and discrimination in our communities.

Teaching Critical History & Centering Testimonios

Exploring the critical history of a place will expose information omitted in traditional, white-centered narratives—a key principle within Ethnic Studies—thus fostering engagement as students connect their learning to their realities. As students delved into our town's history and politics influencing our schools, there were many “ah-ha” moments as students connected newfound knowledge to their own experiences. Students specifically homed in on the negative perceptions surrounding our town and school, especially compared to the more affluent, predominantly white communities in our vicinity. They delved into discussions about the quality of education, available resources, and the alienation experienced by our immigrant Spanish-speaking families within the school community. Student-athletes echoed similar encounters of discrimination when facing opposing teams. Exploring our history triggered crucial conversations that facilitated the

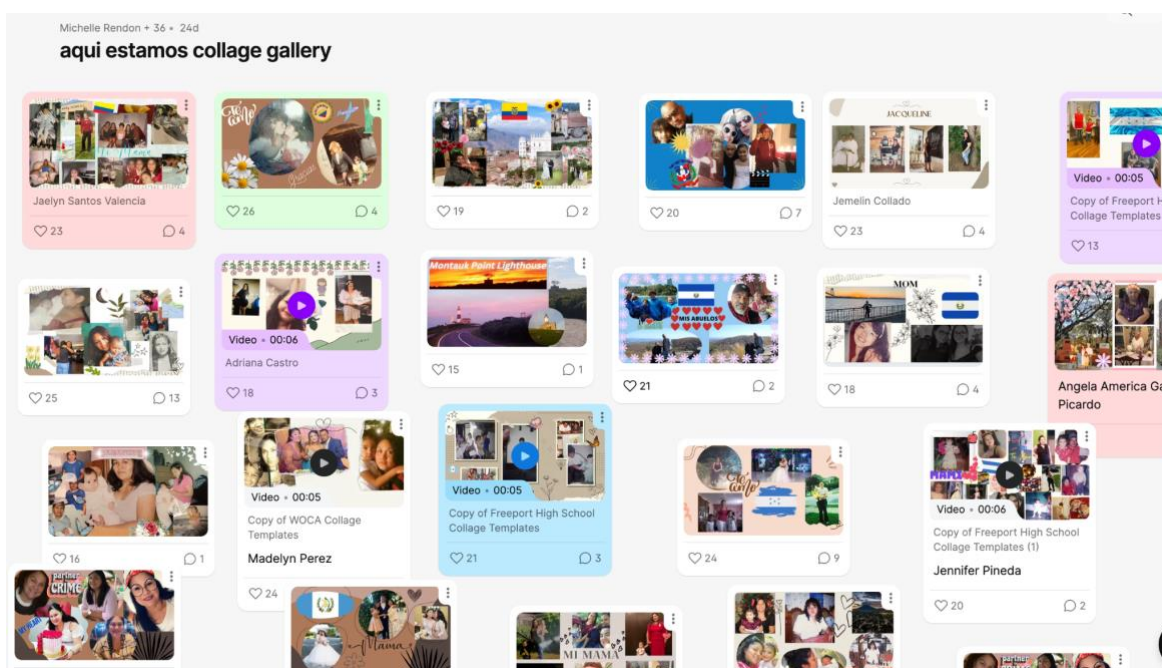
development of critical consciousness. Much like my own experience, this revelation served as a catalyst, fueling students' desire to delve deeper into learning.

Equally significant was allowing my students to delve into our local community's digital archives. In this exploration, I encouraged them to consider what they saw and what was absent, who was represented and who was not. Further, what messages were the archives conveying? During this exercise, students made notable observations such as:

1. Despite our town's demographics being over 50% Latine and our school having over 70% Latine students, there was a glaring absence of Latine history. For instance, information about the first Latinx business, the first Latinx graduate from our high school, and the arrival of the first Latinx family in our town was absent.
2. Available archival material was not in Spanish. Students recognized this as an access issue, expressing concern that our families, integral to the community's history, would be unable to navigate the archives without English proficiency.

We discussed archival erasure and how archives can shape our community's history. Therefore, students embraced the idea of reclaiming our power by creating a community-based archive accessible to our Spanish-speaking community where we could preserve *las memorias e historias de nuestra gente*. Drawing from my experience with the oral history project that centered on the counter-narratives of the Black community in our town during the late '60s, I encouraged students to think about visuals like photos and videos they may have and people in our Latine community whose stories they would like to uplift.

Teaching critical local history and discussing digital archives as activism motivated students to take ownership of our archival project. They actively sought to create something for our community that could uplift Latine testimonios and counter-narratives that would be accessible to future generations. Through this project, we aimed to preserve photos, *recuerdos y homenajes a nuestra comunidad* as a tribute to our community, honoring the people and places that shaped our life experiences. We named our digital archive "*Aquí Estamos*," which translates to "We are Here." We chose this phrase because it represents our commitment to resisting the erasure of the Latine diaspora in Long Island. I invite fellow educators who are thinking about incorporating digital archival projects into their curriculum to explore local history through a critical lens and share that history with students. Creating a digital archival project with a critical purpose will motivate and empower students throughout the learning experience. *Aquí Estamos* is an example of how educators can empower students to actively participate in shaping and sharing their communities' critical histories.



During one of our sessions, Dra. Barrales visited our classroom and taught students about the Women of Color Archive. Students engaged in an arts-based archiving workshop in which they honored a Latine resident in our community. We archived the collages in a Padlet.

Preserving Community Stories: A Guide for Oral History and Digital Archiving Projects

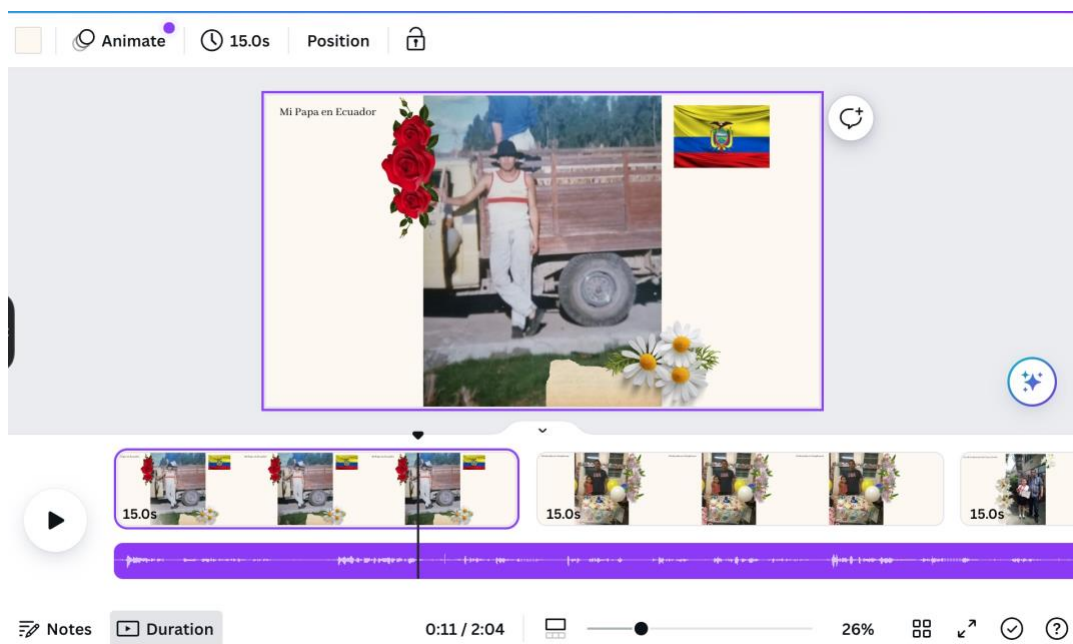
In this section, I will share insights from creating *Aquí Estamos* and provide a framework to help educators incorporate oral history and digital archiving into their curriculum. The following table provides a guide for educators wanting to incorporate oral history and digital media in the classroom. The objectives, guiding questions, and activities can be adapted to serve your learning goals and students best.

Objective	Guiding Questions	Activities
Identify people in our Latine community students would like to interview.	Who would you like to talk to about their life and experiences as a Latine on Long Island? Whose story do you want to amplify and preserve? Why?	Consider the parameters you may want to give students as they consider at least three possible interviewees. For example, I asked my students to think about people who were Latinx, at least 15 years older than them, residents of Long Island, and whom they were deeply interested in speaking to. Have students create a list and reflect on why they chose those three candidates.
Explore “good” questions and interviewing skills. Create a list of tips for interviewing and a bank of	What makes an interview successful? What are good interview questions?	Look at oral history project examples with students. I used StoryCorps and the Women of Color Archive as a reference. Together, analyze the type of questions being used and good interviewing skills. Create a list of tips for good interviews and a list of

<p>questions students can use as a reference.</p>	<p>How do you interview someone?</p> <p>What do you want to know about your interviewee's life?</p>	<p>questions students may want to include in their interviews.</p> <p>For example, my students identified that questions should be open-ended; therefore, we avoided yes or no questions in our bank of questions. Additionally, we spoke about making the interviewee feel seen by keeping eye contact and being fully present. Collectively, we created a list of tips for interviews. There are plenty of resources online that you can explore together as well. We also collectively created a bank of questions to pick from.</p>
<p>Practice interviewing and deep listening.</p>	<p>How do we practice listening?</p> <p>How does it feel to interview someone?</p> <p>How does it feel to be interviewed?</p>	<p>Before students conduct their official oral history interviews, have them practice with each other in class and reflect on the process. How did it feel to listen to your classmate? What went well? What needed to be improved? What will they keep in mind when interviewing their chosen storyteller?</p>
<p>Learn and understand the concept of consent and ethics in this work.</p>	<p>What is consent?</p> <p>Why is consent required for this project?</p>	<p>If you plan on making the oral history projects public, getting consent from students and interviewees is necessary. This is a great moment to have discussions around consent and digital ethics.</p> <p>For example, in our classroom, we discussed digital citizenship, which is the responsible, safe, and ethical use of technology.</p> <p>We also discussed ethics in creating a public-facing archive in which we are centering histories of historically marginalized communities.</p> <p>I explained to students that they must obtain consent from their chosen storyteller to make the project public to others. As a class, you can look at consent form samples and make your own. If you collaborate with a local archive or library, they will likely have a consent form you can share with students. You can also reach out to me via email, and I will be happy to share the one we used.</p> <p>A great resource for us was Voice of Witness. You can explore their site here: https://voiceofwitness.org/about/</p>
<p>Organize and Conduct Interview</p>	<p>When and where will you meet your chosen storyteller?</p>	<p>Students should set a time and place to interview. Remind students to show up ready with consent form and digital device. Most of my students used</p>

	<p>What device will you use to record your interview?</p> <p>Do you have consent to record and share their story?</p> <p>Which questions are you bringing to the interview with you?</p>	<p>their cell phones to record the interview. Beforehand, we made sure to practice using the recording app and how to transfer the audio into their laptops. We also went over how to discuss the consent form with interviewees. Further, we revisited interview and listening skills tips. Finally, students prepared a document with the questions they would bring to the interview. Students selected around 5-7 questions from the question bank we created. We aimed for the interview to be at least 20 minutes long. In groups, students shared the questions they selected and discussed why they chose them.</p>
<p>Reflect and Discuss Interviews</p>	<p>What did we learn?</p> <p>What are we taking away from this experience?</p>	<p>Once students conducted their interviews, we engaged in a reflexive writing exercise. Provide students with prompts such as:</p> <p>How did the interview go? How did you feel during and after? What was your favorite moment during the interview? Which moments in the interview would you like to revisit? Why? Is there anything that you now want to know more about? Have students share their reflections aloud and have conversations around those reflections.</p>

Creatively Digitizing Testimonios



Screenshot from editing process of “La Vida de Mi Padre” by Raschel

After reflecting on and discussing the students' interviews, we brainstormed about developing creative multimodal representations of the stories. Because the interviews ranged from 20-45 minutes, we thought about ways to make the content more digestible and accessible to our intended audience, our community. We decided to create 2 -3 min videos combining audio clips of favorite moments from the interview and photographs shared by the interviewee. To create the short video, students learned how to edit audio on Audacity, a free software for recording and editing audio, and use Canva, a graphic design platform with free online video editing. I first learned how to use both digital platforms to teach students how to navigate them. Once students became familiar with these tools, they took ownership of their creative process, and I provided guidance. Editing the content allowed students to re-listen and revisit the interview numerous times, heightening thoughtfulness and care throughout the creative process. Digitizing the testimonios allowed students to be creative and intentional in honoring their interviewees.

When students finalized their creative digital testimonios, we shared them in class, and they were assigned to share them with their interviewees. In class, we collectively listened to mothers, fathers, grandparents, older siblings, and other relatives share their struggles and triumphs, bringing up many emotions - pride, anger, and joy. We identified common themes of sacrifice, resilience, courage, injustice, gratitude, love, and grief within the stories. It was beautiful and powerful to listen and reflect on the experiences our loved ones shared. Students shared their projects with their interviewees and returned to class to share their reactions. Many students shared how these interviews and the digital videos made their chosen storyteller feel important and like they mattered. I am currently working on organizing a community exhibition event where students, interviewees, and other guests can gather, engage with the digital testimonios, and celebrate our collective history.

Amplifying Las Voces de La Comunidad

Before engaging students in this project, I knew I wanted to house their projects in a digital space our community could access. Through my studies in technology in pedagogy, I became familiar with Omeka, a free, flexible, and open-source web-publishing platform for displaying libraries, museums, archives, and scholarly collections. However, as a class, we discussed how this website had its limitations on accessibility and design. Finally, we agreed that sharing content through Instagram would be easier for us and our community to access on their phones. Therefore, we created an Instagram account (@*aqui_estamos516*) where we would share our work and invite community members to share *fotos y recuerdos* that we could post on our account. This way, it could genuinely be a community-based digital archive. We also agreed to ask our interviewees for verbal and written consent to share their stories before we posted them on a social media platform.

Collaborating with local libraries or museums can amplify the impact of digital archival projects. They can serve as community partners with resources available to expand and uplift your students' work. The local library manages our community's digital archives. Therefore, I approached the archivist to share our project, and she was happy to support and collaborate with us. My students' work will be included in the local community and New York State archives, making it publicly available to local students, educators, and community members. We plan to share our work through community exhibitions publicly, collaborate with district educators to grow the project, and develop curriculum resources for future use by librarians and educators.

Closing Thoughts: Student & Pedagogical Reflections

In my 10 years of teaching, this project has highlighted the importance and power of centering the local community in the curriculum. Centering and connecting with voices in our community was truly a transformative experience for my students and me. When the project culminated at the end of the year, students shared their thoughts on engaging with oral history work, digital design, and media.

Below are a few student reflections and perspectives.

“I really enjoyed working on this project because I learned so much about my father as he shared his story. I’m really glad that I have a recording of this interview because he spoke about moments we never talked about before like his journey migrating to this country. I am glad I will always have it with me to share with other family members. It was also really fun to create a video honoring his story and sharing it with my classmates. I recommend this project to other students because it taught me to value our stories and to value what our community has been through.”

“At first, I was skeptical about the project because I never interviewed anyone, and it just felt like a lot of work. After the interview I was more motivated to keep working on it because my mother’s story was really powerful, and I wanted to make a really nice video about her. She sacrificed so much to give us a better life. I learned a lot about her, and it got us closer. I also really liked learning how to edit sound and make a video with pictures and audio. I recommend this project to anyone because you really learn a lot and it’s different from what we usually do in school.”

“My favorite part about the project was learning about Long Island’s history because we never talk about that in school. It was really interesting to learn about laws that created segregation in the towns here because although it was a long time ago, we still see it. I think we should learn more about our own history in school. I recommend this project to other students in our community because they will learn so much and get to honor someone by preserving their story for other generations to come.”

Aquí Estamos empowered students and allowed them to be history-makers, producing public knowledge that will shape our community’s history. Community-based digital archival projects that center and empower historically marginalized voices allow students to engage with digital activism as they resist the erasure of their communities. Through this project, students filled archival gaps within our hometown’s traditional records. This project allowed our local community to be centered in our curriculum as valuable knowledge holders and students as knowledge producers.

As a critical language educator aware of the inseparable connection between language and identity, I believe that Spanish as a home language course must be taught beyond language instruction. To fully empower Latine youth, I argue that Spanish curriculums must include principles of ethnic studies. Although I was initially not trained in Ethnic Studies, I was able to subvert my classroom space and develop a curriculum grounded in critical language awareness and ethnic studies that allows students to deconstruct harmful language ideologies while centering historically marginalized communities. This language classroom transformed into a space where students could analyze the power structures inherent in language and develop their voices to

advocate for social justice within their community. By infusing the Spanish language arts curriculum with the ARC of ethnic studies—access, relevance, community—educators foster students' critical consciousness around language, culture, and history while centering identities in the classroom.

Aquí Estamos is an example of a meaningful project in the language classroom that implements Ethnic Studies principles. Through this project, we identified the absence of Latine voices in our local community archives. We disrupted this archival silence by co-creating a bilingual community-based digital archive to amplify and reshape community counternarratives, *los testimonios de nuestra comunidad*. Students actively thought about the critical history of the place they call home, learned about oral history methodology as a social justice practice, used their full linguistic repertoire, and creatively designed a multimodal video to honor *testimonios en nuestra comunidad* that will be shared on a public-facing digital repository. The project positions the community as a vital source of knowledge and history, disrupting traditional dominant narratives. Through this process, I observed the development of critical consciousness, digital literacy, and communication skills and increased ethnic pride. Students were engaged in a meaningful learning experience that was relevant to their lived experiences and advocated for their community.

This approach to language instruction demonstrates the profound potential of an ethnic studies framework to transform language classrooms into spaces of empowerment, critical inquiry, and social justice. Language educators committed to equity in the language classroom must embrace this transformative potential. By providing students with the tools to challenge dominant narratives, centering historically marginalized voices, critically examining language ideologies, and connecting learning to lived experiences, we equip them to become agents of positive change. This approach cultivates a generation of students ready to challenge oppressive systems and create a more just future.

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