**Testimonios**

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| **Summary** |

This strategy, Testimonios*,* comes from the deep storytelling tradition in Latin American culture and has been amplified by the work of Jose Medina and Educational Solutions. Testimonio, a Spanish term for “witness account,” embodies a narrative research methodology, also employed as a pedagogical practice, rooted in Latin American history, against the backdrop of social inequality that has plagued the region since the 1950s (Medina, 2019). Testimonios amplify student voice by explicitly naming cultural, racial, and linguistic experiences as assets in order to transform what might be internalized as a deficiency into a source of strength. They can be a powerful way to engage students and their families as they either recount their own Testimonio and listen to the Testimonios of others.

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| **Rationale** |

Through authentic opportunities, Testimonios give voice and provide validation to students, families, and teachers who have often been marginalized or silenced in the U.S. school system. Testimonios enable the storyteller to illuminate obstacles they’ve overcome and triumphs achieved, while inviting diverse perspectives of cultural wealth into the classroom. In a classroom community, listening to Testimonios affords benefits to the student, their family, and the teacher. Some of these benefits include:

* helps build relationships between teachers, students, and families
* creates a welcoming and inclusive classroom community
* helps students make connections to academic content
* serves as an avenue to process emotions and challenges
* fosters deep conversations at school and at home
* teaches appreciation of diverse perspectives and empathy for others
* creates authentic bonds within the classroom and the community

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| **Implementation** |

First and foremost, it is critical to recognize that Testimonios are often emotional and can place students and families in vulnerable spaces. Therefore, they are best done when a safe learning and sharing environment has been established. The transformation comes from the collective experience of sharing and valuing each person’s perspective - whether the teacher, student, or family member - thereby enhancing the positive and inclusive climate in the classroom environment.

To begin, teachers should share 2-3 of their own Testimonios. This serves to open the space for students to feel comfortable sharing their experiences by modeling brave storytelling so that students and families feel safe doing the same. Teachers can share a Testimonio through in class and evening events so students and families can participate.

There is no formula for the perfect Testimonio*.* They can be written, oral, and/or visual representations, all of which are powerful storytelling techniques. Testimonios can connect and add to academic content, or they can be unrelated to the content, serving only to make personal connections and aid in relationship and community building. For younger grades, students could draw a picture or use photos/visuals of how they feel or something they have experienced to share their story. For older grades, students can write a full description of a challenging event or experience and can serve as a shared journal or whole group or small group oral presentation.Generic prompts for Testimonios include:

* Tell about your family and background.
* Share the story of your name.
* Share a challenge you overcame.
* Share a time you were brave.
* Share your “language story.”
* *For older students, teachers, and families:* Share your own experience as a student.
* *For teachers*: Why did you choose to become a teacher? What are your hopes for your students?

Finally, Testimonios can be connected to many SEAL strategies. Some suggestions include:

* **Academic Process Journal** - Provide prompts designed to process content with a personal connection.
* **Read Aloud/Dialogic Read Aloud/Narrative Input** - Use as a springboard for Testimonios connected to the story.
* **Culture Wheel Activity** - Family can help their child to create their person Culture Wheel emphasizing what is important to the student and family as a whole.
* **Home School Connection** - Connect content to the personal experiences of the student or family member using written or visual representations.
* **Family Cohort Meetings** - Utilize as a “get-to-know-you-BETTER” activity
* **Bridging School to Family Project** - Families can create a poster describing who they are and what is most important to them. Posters/projects can then be displayed on a classroom wall or virtually on a Jamboard.
* **Culminating Activity** - Offer a Testimonio as a choice to demonstrate learning at the end of a unit.

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| **Resources** |

Video Examples of Testimonios:

* [Facundo](https://storycorps.org/animation/facundo-the-great/) - Story told through humor of a man’s experience in elementary school of classmates' names being changed.
* [A Mother’s Promise](https://storycorps.org/animation/a-mothers-promise) - Emotional story of a daughter asking her mother how she feels about being separated from her because of fear of being deported.

Articles:

Tara J. Yosso (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth, Race Ethnicity and Education, 8:1, 69-91

# Christina Passos DeNocolo, Monica Gonzales, Socorro Morales & Laura Romani (2015) Teaching Through Testimonio: Accessing Community Cultural Wealth in School, Journal of Latinos and Education 14(4):1-16