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“Let Me Tell You...”. Terrorism and Political Violence in the Classroom: A Didactic Application

Abstract

This article presents a project implemented for several years with 10th-grade history students. Interviewing family members and gathering their testimonies offers a valuable educational tool that, while inherently subjective, allows students to critically reflect on conflictive and everyday events in Spain's recent past. This activity aims to encourage students to develop their intrinsic motivation through experiential learning, employing research methods, digital tools, and collaborative work, among other strategies. It helps them explore historical memory, with a particular focus on the political violence experienced in Spain over decades.

Keywords: oral history, memory, Social Sciences, secondary education, terrorism

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1. Introduction

This article explains how, through a classroom research project using an active methodology such as the interview, 4th-year ESO students can come to understand the most recent past of their country.

The interview that students conduct with their grandparents allows them to develop various skills, but above all, it brings them closer to the political violence experienced in their country's recent history, which seems alien to them because their current reality is very different. Many of them live unaware that there was a dictatorship or that there were assassinations, yet they are aware of events occurring in other countries, as if those held greater appeal for them.

What causes our young people to be unaware of what happened here? There are various reasons. One could point out that if what they learn comes from what they read in textbooks, the lack of information would be understandable, since constant changes in legislation have altered educational curricula to the point that in 4th-year ESO students must study nearly four centuries of world history – a task that is impossible to do in depth. Adding to this the fact that content on Spanish history has been substantially reduced compared to that devoted to other countries, it is not easy for them to finish the academic year with a high level of knowledge about what happened here. In other words, there is a palpable lack of information. And if we focus on what can be found about terrorism – specifically ETA – it is practically nonexistent. What little there is, remains superficial, as concepts are mentioned but not developed. Given all this, the students' lack of interest is understandable. It does not appear; it is not mentioned; it does not matter.

First, I will explain the theoretical framework on which the project is based, before describing what led to its implementation. Once the background has been outlined, we will focus on the project itself, detailing the work carried out in each phase and session, the methodology employed, and the evaluation system applied.

The project includes group work, but it would not be complete without using other activities and materials available to us, which will also be discussed here.

2. Theoretical Framework

The general objective is for students to learn about the reality of Spain – and the Basque Country in particular – through microhistory, going beyond textbooks and learning a different research method. As Thompson (1988) put it, they can learn that “oral history returns history to people in their own words” and that “by offering a past, it also helps them find a future of their own making”. The proposal is for students to create a historical framework in which to situate the lives of their family

members, giving voice to them despite being “ordinary people”, as authors such as Studs Terkel (1974) would describe them.

To justify the relevance of this methodology for the proposed project and give it shape, I have drawn on specialists in oral history such as Alessandro Portelli, Paul Thompson, and Allan Nevins, who have been key figures in developing this research method and consolidating archives of testimonies. The project builds on them and on more recent authors to create the necessary theoretical framework for introducing students to what oral history entails. Among these are historians Irene Díaz Martínez, Miren Llona, and Juana María Sancho Gil, who are relevant both for their work on life stories and biographical-narrative research and for creating specialised archives.

Liliana Barela has helped to crystallise a series of ideas for guiding students. In her work (Barela, 2009), she discusses *traumatic memory* and *how to ask questions*. Her contribution has been particularly useful because it is expressed clearly and is easily readable for students, to whom her work is recommended. The aim is not merely to explain the importance of the interview and its methodology or potential complications, but for students themselves to consult written sources and read directly – without intermediaries – the recommendations or guidelines provided by experts. One such guide is that proposed by Beorlegui through the project *Cómo hacer entrevistas* (INTEF, 2024), an initiative that seeks to connect classrooms with the world beyond school walls while explaining, like other texts mentioned, the methodology to follow.

As we can see, there is growing involvement from the Government and various institutions promoting initiatives that help work on memory. However, there is no doubt that to guide students properly, we as teachers must first receive adequate training. It is crucial to raise awareness in teacher education about the need to use these primary sources, as we are gradually losing them and will soon be left working only with written texts selected by others...

Thus, we also draw on the recent work of Ortega (2024), who argues for the relevance of oral sources in the didactics of History. His contribution confirms that such practices are being implemented in both school and university classrooms. Lara (2014), in an earlier study, joins this reflection and highlights the value for researchers of approaching the object of study through interviews.

By learning to recover memory and valuing it through a practice that involves the researcher (in this case, the student), we can address diverse topics, including State terrorism – a controversial subject in the classroom. This practice helps tackle it because the emotional involvement between interviewer and interviewee makes all narrated events feel closer.

This project responds to several commitments sought in this educational stage and subject, as indicated in the LOMLOE and the Democratic Memory Law¹, regarding the “knowledge of Spanish history and democratic memory” (Art. 4, point 1).

1 Law 20/2022, of October 19, on Democratic Memory.

3. Background

The presented project arose from observing that 4th-year ESO students generally lack knowledge of the country's recent history, for various reasons.

First, students have access through their elders to a valuable primary source for understanding the Spanish Civil War, the postwar period, the dictatorship, the transition, democracy, ETA, etc. Grandparents – and in some cases great-grandparents or other relatives – have personally experienced highly significant events over the last 70–90 years. These grandparents come from different regions of the country; some are even foreigners or were exiled for various periods and reasons. Yet young people do not turn to them to learn about these fragments of the past, leaving this source untapped.

Second, there was a lack of suitable materials for learning about the country's history. Textbooks (Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2022) barely included information on the Civil War or Francoism and even less on ETA or terrorism. These topics were excluded from ESO teaching because they were scheduled for 2nd-year Bachillerato History classes, as per the curriculum. The problem is that not all students continue to Bachillerato, meaning a significant number never address these topics in compulsory education.

These two factors led to the design of a project that would solve the initial problem: students' ignorance of the country's most recent history and events. On one hand, we would use primary sources by retrieving information from elders through interviews; on the other, we would compensate for the lack of textbook content.

Thus, thanks to the interviews conducted in the proposed project, we can better understand those periods from different perspectives, making use of an otherwise wasted source.

Fortunately, over the years new materials have been created that we have incorporated to support teachers in addressing the issue. Among them is the work of authors such as López Romo (2023), education officer at the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism, who has explored how to teach the history of terrorism in schools so that young people understand it and avoid radicalisation. This has resulted in teaching units such as *El terrorismo en España* for 4th-year ESO within the "Memory and Prevention of Terrorism" project².

The project is currently implemented using supporting materials such as the one mentioned, as we will see below.

2 The teaching units are accesible via: http://www.memorialvt.com/wp_content/uploads/2019/06/terrorismo_en_españa_PROFESORADO_WEB.pdf

4. The Project

The project, which has been carried out with 4th-year ESO students since 2015, is titled "Let Me Tell You...". It initially aimed to help students learn about 20th-century Spanish history through their grandparents. Thanks to the project, students felt closer to events such as the Civil War, the dictatorship, or the transition than if they had studied them solely from textbooks. The challenge arose when, in the last four years, grandparents were no longer old enough (most had not lived through the Civil War), prompting a shift along the timeline to emphasise more recent history, addressing topics such as terrorism in general and ETA in particular.

To carry out this project, students use the interview as a historical research method – an approach different from what they are accustomed to in this course. This tool allows for "two different methodological approaches", as González (2015:14) notes: passive oral history and active oral history.

According to this author, the active form is more beneficial for students, as they become investigative agents, interpreting collected material and producing significant cognitive and affective outcomes. The passive form is also necessary, for example, when students refer to pre-recorded interviews as models to guide their own.

My students work in the active mode, in line with González. However, to help them prepare interviews – giving them an idea of how and where to conduct them and what is appropriate – I occasionally use pre-recorded interviews (passive mode).

Throughout the process, adolescents develop the competence of learning to learn, as they must organise their time, locate information in physical or digital repositories and encyclopaedias, and overcome obstacles encountered over the weeks allotted for the task. They also test their *digital* competences³ as well as social and civic competences, learning to listen and engage with local historical heritage.

Finally, but no less importantly, we highlight linguistic communication competence, which includes oral and written comprehension and expression in different contexts.

4.1. Project Objectives

Like any project, this one has specific objectives defined in a document that students read at the start and have available in the shared repository⁴. The objectives are:

3 Regardless of the chosen method, students must record, transcribe, edit, and add music to a video, which is the final product submitted.

4 The school uses Google tools. Information is usually shared via Google Classroom, where documents, videos, and rubrics are posted for students to access as needed.

- To learn to work with primary sources in historical research.
- To learn to design and conduct an interview as an oral history research method.
- To learn about Spanish history in the last century.
- To create intergenerational social relationships.
- To promote the use of ICTs.
- To understand and express ideas orally and in writing.

4.2. Development

The project is designed to be carried out over six weeks (alongside regular classes covering related topics) and includes the following phases:

4.2.1. Initial Phase

This first phase takes place over two classes. In the first, students receive an explanation from me about the project and the methodology to be used. All information is detailed in a document that students work on using shared reading technique⁵. To capture their attention and help them better understand what such a project entails – rescuing elders’ testimonies – I project a video from the TED-Ed platform in class⁶.

Given that they need specific vocabulary (both for searching information and creating content), I explain key terms. We watch video-scribing animations together on concepts such as “terrorism” or “delegitimisation of terrorism”⁷. We collaboratively create a timeline to check their grasp of the most relevant historical moments in recent decades of Spanish history. This timeline guides students when designing the questionnaire, ensuring chronological order.

For homework, students check whether they can find an elder willing to be interviewed. With this preliminary survey, they come to the next class.

5 Technique used in cooperative work.

6 Smith, P. (n.d.). Let’s make history... by recording it. TED-Ed. Retrieved November 24, 2025, from <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/let-s-make-history-by-recording-it-storycorps-ted-prize>. TED-Ed is a platform providing interactive animated educational audiovisual resources on a wide range of topics to support teachers.

7 Animated videos featuring a hand drawing/writing on a whiteboard. I use those created by the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism and the Fernando Buesa Foundation to explain what terrorism is, its history in Spain, and how to delegitimise it: <https://fundacionfernandobuesa.com/web/video-scribing/>

In the second session, students form groups of their choice⁸ (not exceeding four members – five if class size requires it), where they propose their candidate (if they have one). The group decides whether to interview one person or several⁹.

Once organised, students begin planning and designing the research project. They draft initial interview content and define the format of the final product.

4.2.2. Development Phase: The Interview

"It is obligatory to research the topics to be addressed with the interviewee, preparing a script with a list of ideas to cover during the meeting" (Mariezkurrena 2008:231). They should start by establishing the interviewee's date and place of birth to delimit the chronological and spatial framework.

Searching for this information and visual support to construct the historical context surrounding the interviewee is not always appealing to students. This is the more traditional research part. Despite their enthusiasm for creating their own product and unleashing creativity, this aspect has been the most challenging over the years. Students struggle to start searching and reading; they are impatient and prefer immediate answers. At least, that has been my experience.

Simultaneously, while some group members research historical facts, others design the interview, creating the set of questions. The project's objective must not be forgotten: to learn recent national history through grandparents' experiences. Therefore, they should prepare questions about everyday life in the interviewee's hometown, schooling, games, food, meeting and marrying partners – anything to get to know their elders – but questions about Franco, the transition, democracy, terrorism, or ETA must also be included, seeking elders' opinions on these issues. Vocabulary must be carefully chosen for appropriate communication.

Students have two class sessions for research and question design, though more time will be needed outside class. These sessions are used to resolve doubts, make corrections¹⁰, guide searches, and address emerging problems. Supervision during these sessions is essential.

Most interviewees are "ordinary" people without public lives. Yet they are important because through them students learn about everyday life when their grandparents were children or teenagers.

8 Occasionally, some students struggle to find a group, requiring teacher intervention to suggest suitable partners; such "forced" alliances often benefit everyone. Exceptionally, at a student's request, individual work has been allowed. The most recent example (2024-25) involved a student handling "sensitive information" who preferred to work alone, including private viewing of the final product (e.g., political issues or experiences the interviewee wished to keep private).

9 If no second-degree relatives are available, students may interview another close relative, neighbour, or acquaintance willing to participate.

10 We apply the "flipped classroom" methodology: students work at home, and in class I guide, correct, and support them.

As the interview progresses chronologically, students discover interesting details about first jobs, city life, married life, etc.

4.2.3. Implementation Phase

Once I approve a well-formulated, organised questionnaire with a solid historical framework, it is time for action.

The interview must always prioritise the interviewee's well-being. First, confirm whether the person wishes to appear on camera; if not, only audio is recorded¹¹, to document the work and allow reference for refining the final product.

Beyond image concerns, the ideal location – agreed with the interviewee (living room, kitchen, terrace) – must be comfortable, especially for the person being interviewed, who needs to feel at ease recalling memories that may discomfort, move, or please them; various emotions may surface. This relates to the traumatic memory mentioned earlier.

Questions must be direct yet respectful. Students must be aware they are engaging with someone whose feelings and memories will be temporarily stirred. We dedicate part of a class to explaining – via presentation and audiovisual examples – how to behave during the interview. They are reminded to practise active listening, allowing free expression without judgement, reading body language to detect discomfort and subtly move on, or noticing fatigue and offering a break... Many details must be considered (Thompson, 1988:221-242), but only basic guidance is provided, remembering these are 4th-year ESO students likely undertaking such work for the first time.

1.1.4. Editing the Interview

Once the interview is completed and all necessary accompanying material gathered¹², students select the programme best suited to their needs for editing¹³. They create a montage using family photos and/or online archives, music, and voice-over commentary to provide narrative continuity. The aim is to tell the story with the interviewee as protagonist of the past six or seven decades.

11 A dedicated recorder may be less intrusive. Students must know how to use it and test it beforehand. If using a mobile phone, ensure sufficient storage for a nearly two-hour interview.

12 It is advisable to ask interviewees if they have photos or documents (letters, press clippings) they are willing to share.

13 As teacher, I provide programme options and discuss limitations (e.g., editing time restrictions or watermarks requiring payment). New platforms emerge yearly, and students are adept at finding tools that suit their needs.

The submitted video must highlight key interview moments: anecdotes of daily life, feelings, evaluations of specific historical events (political regimes, coups, the March 3, 1976 events in Vitoria¹⁴, terrorist acts, voting in democracy, etc.). As noted, music must accompany the narration, evoking¹⁵ memories for the interviewee without interfering with the interview audio.

Students intersperse off-screen commentary as images of the interviewee or located photos appear. At the end, they must include reflections on what they learned, difficulties overcome, and lessons gained.

4.2.5. Presentation Phase

After weeks of work, videos are presented to the class, though unfortunately only partially due to length and time constraints; we use two extra sessions for viewing. As teacher, I review them fully to appreciate effort and originality, learn from proposals, and evaluate using rubrics provided from the start.

Interviewees are invited to the school. If they accept, they attend the classroom, allowing further questions or additional details.

4.2.6. Evaluation

Students are assessed based on several elements in the evaluation rubrics provided from the outset. All sections and tasks must be completed for the final product to be submitted on the deadline.

One rubric evaluates daily group work, another attitude towards the task (including self-reflection), and a third the final product, as shown in Figure 1.

14 The Armed Police killed five striking workers – an event that marked the city's recent history.

15 I refer to music played in village squares on Sunday dances, or heard on the radio – music that transports listeners to the past when viewing the work.

Civil War Project (ESO4)	EXPERT	ADVANCED	INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	
	4	3	2	1	WEIGHT
Accuracy of Content	All facts in the video are accurate.	99-90% of the facts in the video are accurate.	89-80% of the facts in the video are accurate.	Fewer than 80% of the facts in the video are accurate.	30%
Task accomplishment (length, context, images, etc.)	Students complete all the tasks (90-100%)	Students complete the 80-90% of the tasks	Students complete 60-70% of the tasks	Students complete less than the 60% of the tasks	30%
Creativity	The video shows considerable originality and inventiveness. The content and ideas are presented in a unique and interesting way.	The video shows some originality and inventiveness. The content and ideas are presented in an interesting way.	The video shows an attempt at originality and inventiveness on 1-2 parts.	The video is a rehash of other people's ideas and/or graphics and shows very little attempt at original thought.	10%
Attractiveness	The video has exceptionally attractive formatting (IMAGES) and well-organized information.	The video has attractive formatting (IMAGES) and well-organized information.	The video has well-organized information or attractive formatting (not both things) .	The video formatting and organization of material are confusing to the viewer.	10%
Audio/ Music	The audio in the video is clear. Music is appropriate.	The audio is pretty clear. The music used in the video is good, but doesn't match very well with the product	The music doesn't match at all with the product. There are some noises in the background.	The video doesn't have music at all/ the music/ sound is not well recorded/ the music/ noises doesn't allow the message to be heard	10%
Delivery time	Students finish the exercise before the deadline	Students finish the exercise just in the deadline	The students finish the exercise the following day(s) of the deadline	The students don't finish the exercise. They leave it uncomplete.	10%

Figure 1. Evaluation rubric for the project's final product. **Source:** author's own elaboration

5. Supporting Activities and Materials

While the project aims for students to learn national history from the Civil War onward, in the last three years we have placed special emphasis on understanding terrorism, as explained throughout this document. Interviews provide irreplaceable data and foster intergenerational connection with grandparents.

Two activities complement the study of Spanish history, both focused on terrorism and ETA. The first is a guided visit to the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism. The second is a talk at the school by an educator who is a victim of terrorism¹⁶.

Since starting the project, we have enjoyed two such experiences: visits by Antonio Miguel Utrera, victim of jihadist terrorism (11-M 2004 attacks), and Koldo San Martín, son of Civil Guard José San Martín Bretón, assassinated by ETA in Getxo in 1992.

In addition to activities, we use specific supporting materials, especially for addressing terrorism in Spain: learning situations from the “Memory and Prevention of Terrorism” programme and the video-scribing mentioned in the initial phase (INTEF, 2025). Music by national and international artists addressing terrorism or specific events, literature (poems, novels), and cinema (increasingly prominent in recent years) are also sources for contextualising, reflecting, or illustrating. These are teacher-proposed resources, though students' suggestions are welcome.

¹⁶ For over 10 years the school has participated in Adi-adian (Listen attentively), the Basque Government programme featuring in-person testimonies from victims of terrorism and political violence, but only with Bachillerato students. The Memorial proposed extending in to 4th-year ESO organising events either at the school of the centre itself.

6. Conclusions

Undoubtedly, a project requires time for planning, implementation, and evaluation. But it is worthwhile. Stepping outside conventional lessons allows growth for both students and teachers. No two classes are alike, even when teaching the same content, and daily challenges vary greatly.

Over the years, this project has led students to explore family pasts, uncover secrets, and awaken the desire to create songs and poems while reconnecting with elders in ways they had not done – or not for a long time.

Discussing politics, dictatorship, and terrorism has helped them mature and think, learning about elders' daily lives – how hard rural life was, regrets about not studying or travelling more, fears of rapid changes in technology...

It prompts them to question their reality: whether a new dictatorship or terrorist acts are possible today. It makes them view the world – and their own world – differently. Ultimately, it remains a classroom task requiring collective contribution and team decision-making.

I admit initial doubts about how 4th-year ESO students would behave when meeting educator-victims and their maturity for the project. However, the experience has been immensely rewarding for all.

Regarding victim-educator visits, students listened respectfully, asked pertinent and interesting questions, which speakers answered generously and naturally. Adolescents felt grateful for these life examples in their school; several personally greeted speakers afterward.

To break the barrier of perceiving the issue as distant and alien, the visit to the Memorial Centre allowed students to leave the classroom and engage with the topic in a specialised centre through diverse audiovisual formats. They were deeply affected by police recordings, the recreation of Ortega Lara's hideout, imagining the anguish in such a small space for so long, viewing seized weapons, forged documents... They read extensively, examined posters and photos, asked questions... The visit was attentive, reflective, and silent, fully engaging with what the space offered.

Like any project, improvements are needed; as a teacher, I learn daily and adjust details. I conclude by recalling López Romo (2023) on the importance of educating about terrorism: "Educating about terrorism is highly relevant: both for the historical weight the phenomenon has had in Spain and for the opportunities it offers to foster values of respect, pluralism, and empathy with those who have suffered unjustly" (López Romo, 2023).

Efforts must continue to ensure textbooks include these aspects as guides and support for teachers. Creating projects and learning situations is part of teachers' work in adapting materials, but constant creation is unsustainable; institutional and publisher support is needed for high-quality, ready-to-use resources.

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