

“I didn’t know what to do, where to go”: The voices of students whose parents were born in Latin America on the need for care in Quebec universities

Roberta de Oliveira Soares and Marie-Odile Magnan

Volume 52, Number 4, 2022

Special Issue: The Perspectives of Traditionally Underrepresented Students

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102546ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189469>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

ISSN

2293-6602 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

de Oliveira Soares, R. & Magnan, M.-O. (2022). “I didn’t know what to do, where to go”: The voices of students whose parents were born in Latin America on the need for care in Quebec universities. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education / Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur*, 52(4), 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189469>

Article abstract

This qualitative study reports the university experiences of Quebec students whose parents were born in Latin America. The analysis, which looks at students who have either persisted in school or discontinued their studies, underscores the importance of cultural capital and, especially, an understanding of the student craft for school retention. The students report a low sense of affiliation with the university, and a perceived lack of support and care from the university and its social actors. Our interpretation of the data highlights self-blame for the challenges faced in university concurrently with the implementation of strategies to meet the challenges of the institution. We conclude by emphasizing how important it is for universities to support students better, adequately inform them about their options and the institution’s inner workings, and form a community with students in a spirit of care.

“I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO DO, WHERE TO GO”: THE VOICES OF STUDENTS WHOSE PARENTS WERE BORN IN LATIN AMERICA ON THE NEED FOR CARE IN QUEBEC UNIVERSITIES

ROBERTA DE OLIVEIRA SOARES
UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

MARIE-ODILE MAGNAN
UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Abstract

This qualitative study reports the university experiences of Quebec students whose parents were born in Latin America. The analysis, which looks at students who have either persisted in school or discontinued their studies, underscores the importance of cultural capital and, especially, an understanding of the student craft for school retention. The students report a low sense of affiliation with the university, and a perceived lack of support and care from the university and its social actors. Our interpretation of the data highlights self-blame for the challenges faced in university concurrently with the implementation of strategies to meet the challenges of the institution. We conclude by emphasizing how important it is for universities to support students better, adequately inform them about their options and the institution’s inner workings, and form a community with students in a spirit of care.

Keywords: university experiences, student craft, care, immigration, Latin America, Canada

Résumé

Cette étude qualitative relate des expériences universitaires d’étudiants québécois dont les parents sont nés en Amérique latine. L’analyse, qui porte sur les étudiantes qui ont persévéré ou interrompu leurs études, souligne l’importance du capital culturel et, surtout, de la compréhension du métier d’étudiant pour la persévérance scolaire. Les étudiantes rapportent un faible sentiment d’affiliation à l’université et un manque perçu de soutien et de soin de la part de l’université et de ses acteurs sociaux. Notre interprétation des données met en évidence une autculpabilisation pour les défis rencontrés à l’université en même temps que la mise en œuvre de stratégies pour relever les défis de l’institution. Nous concluons en soulignant à quel point il est important pour les universités de mieux soutenir les étudiantes, de les informer adéquatement sur leurs options et le fonctionnement interne de l’institution et de former une communauté avec les étudiantes dans un esprit de soin.

Mots-clés : expériences universitaires, métier d’étudiant, soin, immigration, Amérique latine, Canada

Introduction

Immigrants from Latin America represent the second-largest ethnolinguistic group having recently immigrated to Quebec (Armony, 2017). With regard to the labour market, their social network changes in the receiving country, which makes job access—and therefore access to income—difficult (Wilson-Forsberg, 2015).

At school, students whose parents were born in Latin America share certain challenges. Compared with other immigrant groups, they are more likely to need language support in high school, be behind academically when they start high school, come from families with a lower socio-economic status and attend schools in disadvantaged areas (Benoît, 2011). These conditions can affect their chances of pursuing post-secondary education and

the quality of the information they receive about orientation options. In Canada and Quebec, young people of Latin American origin appear to have lower educational aspirations than other immigrant groups (Finnie & Mueller, 2010; Kamanzi et al., 2018). They face a combination of challenges, have a high dropout or interruption rate, and are overrepresented in adult education and among students with difficulties in the special education sector (Mc Andrew et al., 2011). Furthermore, many do not pursue post-secondary education, or drop out of university (Turcotte, 2019).

In this article, which is based on a qualitative methodology, we focus on the voices of these young people to gain a better understanding of the barriers they face and the strategies they employ in universities in Quebec, specifically in Montréal. The conceptual framework is based on both social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) and the concept of the student craft (Coulon, 1997), taking into consideration the concept of care in education (Banda et al., 2020). The aim of this exploratory research is to understand the participants' university experience by analyzing qualitative interviews. We conclude with avenues for intervention that could support persistence in school and inspire university practices in this regard.

Educational Inequalities and Immigration

International research has shown that young people whose parents are immigrants generally do not perform as well in school as those whose parents were born in the receiving country (Dronkers, 2010). Specifically, recent immigrants whose parents have low academic capital are more vulnerable. However, in Canada and Quebec, the socio-economic characteristics of students with immigrant parents resemble those of the general population (Picot & Hou, 2012). Their educational performance is relatively similar to that of their peers whose parents were born in Canada (Hochschild & Cropper, 2010), partly due to Canada's selective immigration policies favouring skilled and highly educated immigrants (Abada et al., 2009; Kamanzi et al., 2018). Furthermore, researchers have found that young people whose parents immigrated from certain regions (the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and South America, South Asia) have more precarious school paths and higher dropout rates in high school than other students (Kamanzi et al., 2018; Mc Andrew et al., 2015). According to this quanti-

tative data, even if their parents have relatively elevated economic and academic capital, their dropout rates remain higher (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). Likewise, young people whose parents were born in the Caribbean and Latin America are less likely to enroll in university and persist in school (Kamanzi et al., 2016).

Researchers who conducted studies in several countries have also found that young people from Latin America have less information about their orientation options (Brown et al., 2003; Magnan et al., 2017). These students tend to go to public schools in disadvantaged areas, which may influence their access to a social environment that values post-secondary education and to information resources on orientation options. Therefore, secondary studies may have an impact on the construction of aspirations for higher education and on the ability to act strategically in an educational system based on competition and merit, or on a meritocratic ideology (Draelants, 2013).

Be that as it may, in Quebec, the scientific literature is more focused on quantitative analyses aiming to identify obstacles related to families' academic and economic capital, and to ethnocultural origin. However, this approach may result in an essentialization of inequalities by country of origin, obscuring the systemic processes leading to the production and reproduction of these inequalities. Furthermore, these studies do not consider the experiences of young people whose parents were born in Latin America. So, our qualitative research focuses on the voices of these young people regarding their university experiences.

Conceptual Framework

We took inspiration from the social reproduction theory of Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), using the concepts of cultural capital and habitus. These authors argue that educational institutions do not recognize, in their internal mechanisms, the initial inequalities in the institutional culture's implicit norms, embracing a meritocratic vision, an ideology of the "gift." A meritocracy is a social system based on individual merits (talents, abilities, effort). However, this does not take into account the social privileges that make it easier for certain people to be deemed more worthy than others due to familial socialization and cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) criticize the classificatory devices of

educational institutions which condition and validate a symbolic domination that contributes to social reproduction. The authors maintain that educational institutions tend to alienate students (and parents) whose cultural capital is further from the institutions' pedagogical ideal and implicit requirements.

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to an individual's dispositions (e.g., skills) which are valued within a given social class (e.g., university diplomas) (Bourdieu, 1986). This type of capital is related to habitus. Habitus is an individual's set of dispositions, including tastes and habits. It incorporates the expectations related to their social class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). The habitus and cultural capital of dominant groups are reproduced, and school is a central institution that contributes to this social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Hallett & Gougherty, 2018). For this reason, social actors must know the rules of the field of education and make efforts to adjust to them. Students who learned the school's values at home adapt more easily. However, those whose habitus and cultural capital clash with the school's values may experience a form of symbolic violence and, as a result, exclude themselves, be excluded by the institution, or attempt to conform by minimally adapting to the school environment or simulating adaptation (Nowicka, 2015).

In the specific case of pupils and students with immigrant backgrounds, particularly recent immigrants, since their culture and language differ from those of the receiving country, they tend not to have the expected habitus and cultural capital. As a result, habitus is reassessed in the receiving country. Consequently, valued habitus and cultural capital create and reproduce a structure of domination and power (Kelly & Lusi, 2006). It is therefore important to understand the disadvantages in terms of migratory status and path. Thus, the concept of cultural capital is especially useful in showing how the school institution reproduces the values of privileged groups that belong to the majority group, which can hurt students' chances of success if they are not part of this group. However, this does not mean we believe students are unable to react to structural constraints. Indeed, in our article, we also underline the possibilities of agency for social actors, particularly through the strategies they implement. Therefore, we use certain concepts of the social reproduction theory, but we are conscious of its limitations.

The analysis of our data also inductively revealed

a lack of information about and a poor understanding of the student craft. We therefore opted to include the concept of student craft—closely related to Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of habitus and cultural capital (1970)—in our analysis of these young people's experiences. Indeed, the student craft may be difficult to decode for students having recently immigrated who are still attempting to understand how the receiving country's university system works. According to Coulon (1997), to succeed, students must learn the student craft, i.e., understand the university institution's rules and codes. This process consists of distinct stages: strangeness, time to learn, and affiliation. During the strangeness stage, students face practical problems. To tackle this challenge, they use various sources of information. However, since these codes are not always obvious, the period is tumultuous, because universities require that students be highly autonomous. In this stage, a feeling of isolation and anonymity can contribute to discouragement and a lack of sense of belonging (Coulon, 1997). When students understand that they need to learn how to be students, they enter the time to learn stage, which is a period of gradually becoming familiar with how student life works. This stage includes an understanding of codes that are sometimes implicit (e.g., professors' informal expectations). It entails the need to understand not only academic content, but also the nature of the work to be performed (Coulon, 1997). In this process, students may also employ informal learning practices, developing strategies to cope with the obstacles they encounter in university (Alava, 2011). In the third stage, affiliation, students decode not only the formal curriculum, but also the hidden curriculum; that is, the institution's informal expectations. Therefore, they fully learn the explicit and implicit codes to succeed in university. At this point, they develop a sense of affiliation with or belonging to the university (Coulon, 1997).

According to Bernard (2014), the university should be able to support students during this three-stage process, so they can overcome their feeling of strangeness. Indeed, universities can give students information that helps them during this adaptation period. According to Coulon (1997), this involves mutual adaptation between students and the university. However, with the concept of student craft, the onus is especially on students to adapt. The concept of student craft does not underscore the university's responsibility as an institution that should offer students what they need to persist in school, es-

pecially in terms of access to information resources. We would therefore like to draw attention to this limitation in the concept of student craft, nevertheless acknowledging its usefulness in analyzing the data that emerged from our qualitative study. We will come back to this limitation in the conclusion to this article, identifying potential solutions for universities.

Methodological Framework

Before presenting the methodological framework, we would like to note that the word “Latinos,” which homogenizes people from Latin America, is criticized as being a term that comes from a colonial perspective, and that does not take into consideration the linguistic, cultural, and other differences in this region of the world (Farret & Pinto, 2011). The young people in our corpus do not form a homogeneous group. However, they have faced similar challenges in their receiving country, which we highlight in this exploratory research.

The findings in this article are the result of a qualitative study involving interviews of students attending four Montréal universities: Université de Montréal (French-language university), McGill University (English-language university), Concordia University (English-language university), and Université du Québec à Montréal (French-language university). We recruited participants based on the following inclusion criteria: they have two immigrant parents who were born in Latin America, they attended high school in Quebec, they are enrolled or discontinued their studies in an undergraduate program at a Montréal university, and they are 19 to 35 years old. We employed various recruiting techniques, including targeting student groups on Facebook, sending calls for recruitment to undergraduate program heads, and using snowball sampling.

We interviewed 10 respondents, including six who persisted in obtaining their bachelor's degree, two who switched from an undergraduate program to a certificate program, and two who discontinued their university studies. Four have parents who were born in Colombia; two, in Mexico; one, in Chile; one, in El Salvador; one, in Honduras; and one, in Brazil. The corpus consists of eight women and two men. Two participants came to Quebec while in primary school, four came to Quebec while in high school, and four were born in Quebec to immigrant parents. Nine speak Spanish as their first language, and

one speaks Portuguese as a first language. Six have at least one parent with a university diploma, one has at least one parent with a college diploma, two have at least one parent with a diploma of vocational studies, and one has at least one parent with a high school diploma. The participants' university study programs are varied. For further details on the participants' sociodemographic characteristics, see Table 1. For confidentiality reasons and in accordance with the guidelines of the university's multifaculty committee on research ethics, in this article, pseudonyms are used to refer to participants.

We conducted semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour and 30 minutes (Savoie-Zajc, 2021). This data collection method makes it possible to consider the participants' views of their experiences. During the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their migratory path and their experiences at school in Quebec, from primary school to university. In this article, we focus on their self-reported university experiences. The students had the choice to answer in French or in English. We recorded the interviews, which were transcribed in full.

An inductive analysis of the interviews revealed a low sense of affiliation with the university, especially among students having discontinued their studies. We also found that both the students who discontinued their studies and those who persisted in school appeared to have difficulties in decoding the student craft. However, the students who persisted in school were able to implement strategies to meet the challenges of the university experience. Furthermore, both those who persisted in school and those who discontinued their studies called attention to the importance of support and even care on the part of the university and its institutional actors.

After our inductive analysis, we conducted a detailed analysis of the interviews according to these themes. Using QDA Miner, we coded interview excerpts that were related to these themes, in line with our conceptual framework. Our conceptual framework choices allowed us to conduct a cross-case analysis, giving us an overview of the inequalities experienced in university without lingering on each respondent's individual path. In the following interpretation of our data, we use the respondent excerpts that best illustrate the results of our analysis (Schnapper, 2012).

Table 1

Detailed Portrait of Interviewees

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | First language | Parents' country of origin | Parents' level of education | University | Program | Changes in university studies | Migratory status |
|-----------|--------|-----|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Amanda | F | 28 | Spanish | Chile | Vocational studies | McGill | Translation | Program change to certificate | Born in Quebec |
| Marcos | M | 29 | Portuguese | Brazil | University | Concordia | Independent Studies | Discontinuation of university studies and transfer to a technical course | Arrived while in high school |
| Adriana | F | 22 | Spanish | Colombia | College | Concordia | Art History | Discontinuation of university studies and transfer to a college course | Born in Quebec |
| Alejandra | F | 25 | Spanish | Honduras | University | Concordia | Human Relations | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Arrived while in high school |
| Valeria | F | 22 | Spanish | Colombia | University | McGill | Human Resources | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Arrived while in high school |
| Samuel | M | 25 | Spanish | Colombia | Vocational studies | Concordia | Accounting | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Born in Quebec |
| Valentina | F | 19 | Spanish | Colombia | University | Concordia | Marketing | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Arrived while in high school |
| Cristina | F | 28 | Spanish | El Salvador | University | McGill | Microbiology | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Born in Quebec |
| Rosa | F | 26 | Spanish | Mexico | University | Université du Québec à Montréal | Public administration | Persisted in bachelor's degree | Arrived while in primary school |
| Camila | F | 29 | Spanish | Mexico | High school | Université de Montréal / McGill | Independent Studies | University change / Program change to certificate | Arrived while in primary school |

University Experiences

In our interpretation of the data, we consider the paths of students who discontinued their studies as well as students who persisted in school. We present the following themes, which emerged from both path types: low sense of affiliation with the university (more pronounced

among participants who discontinued their studies), difficulties in decoding the student craft, the implementation of strategies to meet the challenges of the university experience (mainly among students who persisted in school), and the importance of care from universities.

Low Sense of Affiliation with the University

Our interviewees report a low sense of affiliation with the university, especially those who discontinued their studies. They report the absence of a network and of a sense of community in university, which they are accustomed to in their families, at church and in their communities. This appears to be related to the perception that the receiving country's culture is more individualistic. The students report a need for community and sociability, which university seems unable to provide, and which they seek outside university, in their communities, at church, with friends, and so on. We chose to illustrate these findings by highlighting a few excerpts of the interview with Adriana. She said:

I also had discovered that I need to like, be around people, I need to communicate with people, I need it, and I was just kind of not getting that at school with people from my class, and so I had to do that separately with friends from high school. (Adriana, parents born in Colombia)

She even decided to leave university because of this weak sense of community:

I don't see myself going back, no, it was just such a bad experience, it's just so cold, it's such a cold experience, just no.... Like I said, no sense of community, no sense of...it's all about community.

She added, "Culture has a role in how I kind of reacted to university." In general, the students in our corpus have not developed a network at university (relationships with peers, professors, other professionals). Consequently, they tend not to participate in university activities or use the university's resources. For example, Adriana said, "I just try to get in and out as fast as possible and just go home."

Low sense of affiliation with the university has also been highlighted in other studies pertaining to first-generation students in which the terms "retention" and "engagement" in class are used (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Furthermore, studies involving Latinx students specifically underlined a closeness to family embedded in their culture which could influence their ability to adapt to university (O'Hara, 2020). Several studies point to the lack of positive interactions with staff and peers, resulting in

social isolation (Beard, 2021; Dennis et al., 2005; Solis & Durán, 2022; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Winterer et al., 2020). While a low sense of affiliation is a common finding in studies concerning first-generation and Latinx students; according to our analysis, the interviewees need a sense of community in university to succeed. For example, Adriana mentioned a need for community at university so that it could make sense to her. However, in her opinion, university culture in the receiving country seems unable to offer that. She needs to feel that the environment is not "cold."

Difficulties in Decoding the Student Craft

Our data also showed that both the participants who discontinued their studies and those who persisted in school find it difficult to decode the student craft. They do not have a clear understanding of what university studies entail. They expect university to function the same way as high school or college, and express surprise that university requires more autonomy. In this respect, they report feeling lost and alone in the process. For example, Valentina said, "I didn't know what to do, where to go" (Valentina, parents born in Colombia). She also said, "I kind of discovered that in university they don't actually teach you, you kind of teach yourself and then you go to class and then you talk about what you've taught yourself at home." Valentina did not anticipate that she would need to be autonomous in this learning process: "What nobody told me, so I was going to class to learn, and then sometimes we weren't really learning anything." Adriana also felt that in university, she had to learn alone, saying, "Difficult, really, really difficult, because in university, you mostly have to learn on your own, so during my courses...it's better if you read before, because if you don't read before, you don't understand anything in class" (Adriana, parents born in Colombia).

Furthermore, the students do not seem to understand the importance of attending class, participating in class, meeting deadlines, performing the required tasks, managing their workload, knowing how to study for tests and write papers, etc. For example, Adriana felt lost trying to accomplish her tasks at university: "I had like, research papers I had to do, I didn't really know how to do them." She added that she failed a course for this reason, saying, "I had to do a big research paper using all the readings that I had to do during the semester.... I just kind of didn't read them. I failed that class" (Adri-

ana, parents born in Colombia). Alejandra also faced this challenge: "I'm not the most efficient person when it comes to studying, I still don't have like, a great system, I'm actually trying to like, learn from other people" (Alejandra, parents born in Honduras).

We also noted an internalized meritocratic logic when the students spoke of their grades. For example, Samuel blames himself for not getting As. He believes that he is responsible for achieving excellence, because other students are able to get As. When we asked him why his grades were lower, he responded:

I'm not sure, exactly.... It's my note-taking, the way I study...I find it very difficult to stay focused when I study, so I need to improve certain things in that respect. The blame lies with me, really. I'm not necessarily criticizing the school, because if others can get As, so can I. (Samuel, parents born in Colombia)

The interviewees say that they need to know how to study, use university resources, connect with their peers and professors, ask for help, etc. Some of these students report that they do not know how to do these things, saying they are too shy or immature, or simply uninterested in studying. Marcos believes he will be more prepared, more mature, if he returns to university:

I'm a little more mature and this time it's.... So, let's say if I chose to go back to university this year, I would be more kind of focused on what I need to, I need to do this, this is something that I actually chose to do, rather than 7 or 8 years ago when I was kind of just going through the motion. (Marcos, parents born in Brazil)

Similarly, Amanda believes that her difficulties in university were due in part to her shyness: "When I was in university, I was so shy that, when I would get a bad grade, I was like...I didn't talk about it. I wouldn't even go see the professor to understand why" (Amanda, parents born in Chile).

The literature on first-generation and Latinx students has also documented difficulties in decoding the student craft. Students sometimes feel that they do not have enough information about resources (Solis & Durán, 2022), that they are not prepared (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020) or that they do not have the necessary study skills (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). However, our

analysis shows that the students we interviewed blame themselves for these difficulties. This is connected to the deficit thinking endorsed by institutions of higher education, as suggested by some studies (Winterer et al., 2020), especially when an emphasis is placed on motivation (Dennis et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2000), shifting responsibility away from universities. Studies pertaining to first-generation students in particular have examined the impact of deficit thinking (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). However, some of the students in our corpus are not first-generation students; six out of 10 have parents who attended university. Also, immigrating to Quebec after having started school seems to affect students' understanding of the Quebec education system, but four of the 10 students in the corpus were born in Quebec. Therefore, both lower social class and recent migratory status seem to contribute to their self-blaming discourse, lack of understanding about university and expectations of what university is and should be. They do not learn the student craft at home, unlike those who are introduced to it before they start school, and they must adapt to the context of a different society with a different cultural and linguistic setting. Therefore, the lack of cultural capital and local habitus plays a role. According to our data, this situation seems to get worse as they continue their studies until university, since the educational system does not appear to be adapted to them and vice versa.

Strategies to Meet the Challenges of the University Experience

The students who have persisted in school implement strategies to meet the challenges of the university experience. The presence of family is related to these strategies. Indeed, the students report both pressure and support from their families to pursue their university studies, choose certain programs, and attend certain universities. The overall goal of the family project appears to be finishing university in order to secure better employment than their parents (social mobility project related to the family migratory project). To persist in school and meet these family expectations, certain students succeed in asking for help (e.g., on the university website, through student groups on social media, and from university peers and professionals). Furthermore, these students make changes allowing them to persist in school, such as switching from full-time to part-time studies or from an

undergraduate program to a certificate program, changing universities or programs of study, and so on. These strategies are ways for them to adapt and continue their studies, and are mainly the result of an adjustment in the students' expectations. The ultimate aim becomes completing their university studies at all costs, as opposed to getting good grades or continuing with the program or university they chose initially. For example, Samuel said:

...the grades weren't that good. In fact, I would say they were mediocre...even when you study hard, even when you feel ready for an exam, sometimes it doesn't necessarily turn out the way you would like. The important thing is, I passed my classes and I can move on. Of course, I would have liked to do much better... (Samuel, parents born in Colombia)

Several articles explore factors that influence student success in a positive way (e.g., family support) (Harris, 2017) and in a negative way (e.g., limited information about resources) (Solis & Durán, 2022). According to our research and other studies, students sometimes manage to continue their studies by getting support from family (Harris, 2017), peers and staff (Dennis et al., 2005; Winterer et al., 2020); they also rely a great deal on their counsellors (Arteaga, 2015). However, our study also shows that some students decide to adapt their expectations in order to continue and finish their university studies. Our findings indicate that the goal becomes to finish their studies at all costs. Thus, having good grades is no longer something to strive for.

Beyond the Need for Affiliation: The Importance of Care from Universities

Some students seem unaware of the university resources available to them. Others admit that the university surely has resources, but do not seem to know any details or attempt to use them. A few participants use these resources as a last resort, when they reach an elevated level of stress.

The participants also mentioned that universities could offer better follow-up. For example, Amanda said:

Maybe, like, have more support, if we want it, or follow up with students, like an advisor. I just felt like I

didn't have anyone I could talk to. Then again, I didn't look. So maybe there was someone; it's just that, in my mind, I was alone in the world. (Amanda, parents born in Chile)

According to Adriana, university is a bureaucratic environment that lacks warmth: "I had to get used to being a number and not a person" (Adriana, parents born in Colombia). The students do not know how to use university resources and feel alone.

I feel like I have no support, no support, it's up to me to put in the effort of finding the help that's available, because there must be help, but I don't know what it is. I don't know how much help there is. (Samuel, parents born in Colombia)

Others, like Valentina, succeed in asking for help and use university resources as a last resort. Valentina did not feel she could continue her studies, but she asked the university for help at the suggestion of a friend at school:

Like my friend told me if you saw.... The way I learn, it wasn't...it wasn't the right way. Like, I would spend hours, I would spend 12 hours at the university one day, then it was like that almost every day, and I saw that my friends were studying less than I was, even half as much, and they performed better than I did. So I went to see someone at the university called a learning specialist, and the lady, like, I still see her, and now we're looking at, OK, what do you do to study? What are your methods? Why don't you understand this? Is it a language issue? Is it a learning issue? What is it? So we're seeing, and we've seen, that it's more with math courses, courses that have math, and, like, I find multiple-choice questions difficult as well. (Valentina, parents born in Colombia)

Lastly, we would like to point out that in addition to having the impression that the university is not providing enough support, some students complain about a lack of care from the university and its social actors, especially in relation to psychological support:

If you're stressed out, you can go and there are workshops, um, sure, the resources are there.... I would say a little more humanity is needed. They're trying, but they need more people who really care about it,

like really, OK, we'll try this, and sometimes I find this is something that doesn't fit with education in general. (Valentina, parents born in Colombia)

Regarding the importance of care from university, previous studies have discussed support (Winterer et al., 2020), such as the support students already have (e.g., from family) (Harris, 2017), or the support specifically offered in an institutional setting (e.g., from peers and staff) (Winterer et al., 2020). However, in our research, we also noted a desire that goes beyond the need for support; it entails a desire for care, an inductive finding we will develop further in the conclusion of this article. For example, Adriana said she felt like "a number and not a person," Amanda said she felt "alone in the world," and Valentina said she did not feel care from the university and wanted "a little more humanity"; such statements and feelings should not be ignored by institutions and their social actors, or dismissed as individual deficits.

Discussion and Conclusion

In our corpus, both the students who discontinued their studies and those who persisted at school reported a low sense of affiliation with the university (especially the students who discontinued their studies), difficult or delayed decoding of the student craft, the implementation of strategies to meet the challenges of the university experience (especially the students who persisted in school), and the importance of care from the university.

The data presented in this article reveals the influence of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) on the ability to decode how the student craft works (Coulon, 1997) and, more specifically, on the ability to develop a sense of affiliation (Coulon, 1997) with the university. The data showed that the gap between habitus/cultural capital and the norms valued in university partly explain the students' feelings of disconnectedness, and their difficulty navigating a competitive and merit-based system once in university. Indeed, since the students in the corpus do not necessarily have the same values as those held in universities, they find it difficult to understand what is expected of them in terms of the student craft, which can prevent them from exiting the strangeness stage and lead them to discontinue their studies. Lastly, the students also report a need beyond affiliation, underscoring the importance of care (Banda et al., 2020) from the university.

The young people described the difficulties they experienced in university. We identified self-blame for these challenges at the same time as the implementation of strategies (agency) to be able to continue their studies. To move beyond deficit thinking with respect to the young people's paths, our analysis also highlighted that, according to the interviewees, the university institution and its social actors are unsuccessful in supporting and taking care of them, so they can reach the time to learn and the affiliation stages. Consequently, this appears to put them in a situation where they are forced to overcome obstacles in order to succeed and make sense of the institution. In any case, their reported experiences should prompt universities to reflect on how to improve the support they offer and how to take care of students.

In general, the young people interviewed realized that the institution expects them to be ready for university when they arrive. However, students who do not have the habitus and cultural capital valued by the institution (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) begin university unaware that they do not know all the codes to succeed and tend to blame themselves and internalize the meritocratic ideology. Also, certain participants feel that they alone are responsible for their success and their understanding of the student craft (e.g., figuring out how to find the resources that the university offers) (Coulon, 1997). In this respect, the participants point out that the support offered in universities does not always appear to be appropriate for students who need to familiarize themselves with the implicit expectations (the hidden curriculum) related to the student craft.

In our corpus, the interviewees who discontinued their studies and those who persisted in school were more or less ready to begin their university studies. However, they were not fully aware of this when they started university. Once they made this realization, it was sometimes too late. Accessing university resources can take a long time (e.g., waiting lists for psychological or psychoeducational help). So, university resources become palliative as opposed to preventive. Furthermore, universities may expect students to ask for these resources themselves, but the students do not always know that these resources exist or are not aware that they need them. However, if the university and its social actors become aware of the issue, they should be able to be proactive in supporting and taking care of students, especially those from minority groups.

According to recent research, varied factors can affect the academic success of Latinx students, such as limited information about available resources and social isolation (Solis & Durán, 2022). Some studies also highlight the importance of quality interactions with peers and staff (Winterer et al., 2020). In fact, several persistence strategies employed by Latinx students have been documented. Studies have shown that they need to be able to count on institutional, financial, and family support (Harris, 2017). The importance of institutional actors' respect for their culture is emphasized; at the same time, students mention a need to face different challenges (in the institutional setting), far from their family bubble (O'Hara, 2020). Apart from this support system, the "desire" to succeed has also been pointed out as a factor that influences Latinx students' persistence in college (Hernandez, 2000). Nevertheless, while several factors can influence persistence, these matters remain complex and require further research (Hernandez, 2000).

In addition, studies have highlighted that first-generation students in university face more challenges than those who are not first-generation, such as job and family responsibilities, as well as mental issues (e.g., depression) (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Another common concern among first-generation students in university is the feeling that their study skills are not satisfactory (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). It has also been shown that first-generation students tend to engage less in terms of participation in class compared with non-first-generation students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Research has shown that various initiatives can improve students' sense of belonging in university, such as first-year seminars specifically for first-generation students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Furthermore, there tends to be an assimilation approach in higher education focusing on so-called deficits related to cultural capital and a lack of preparation for university. Such an approach suggests that students should simply adapt to the environment (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). In fact, even when the perceived academic and social support provided to first-generation and non-first-generation students is the same, their academic performance differs (Eveland, 2020). Studies pertaining specifically to ethnic minority first-generation college students have cited not only parental and peer support, but also motivation as factors that influence academic success (Dennis et al., 2005).

With respect to Latinx first-generation college stu-

dents in particular, social networks, that is, their social capital, have been shown to contribute to success and perseverance. Thus, once again the importance of peers and institutional agents is underscored (Beard, 2021). Furthermore, they tend to rely on guidance counsellors for various matters, from selecting courses to planning their study goals, which can have a positive impact on their trajectory (Arteaga, 2015).

From a deficit-based perspective, students are supposed to be able to fix these issues to succeed. They are expected to be prepared for the challenges of higher education, they need to master the language of teaching, they need familial and financial support, and they need to have sufficient aspirations to succeed (Winterer et al., 2020).

Thus, like our research, these studies corroborate the importance of study skills (a matter of social class and cultural capital above all), and of support from university social actors (both peers and agents). However, these studies do not consider care beyond support in learning the student craft to succeed in university. Also, they do not consider the lack of a sense of affiliation stemming from the need for community in university among students whose parents were born in Latin America. In addition, our study highlights how the students we interviewed have shown agency in their lives and studies beyond the limitations imposed by the institution.

Furthermore, note that, on its own, the qualitative analysis of the interviews with these students does not explain why access to and persistence in university is lower among young people whose parents were born in Latin America (Kamanzi et al., 2016). However, it sheds light on their experience and makes it possible to propose hypotheses that could subsequently be confirmed in large-scale quantitative studies. Lastly, since our corpus is varied (in terms of age, gender, countries of origin, programs, etc.) and consists of only 10 respondents, we cannot generalize the results; therefore, research with a larger corpus should be considered for future quantitative or qualitative research.

We would like to conclude with avenues for intervention that could help students persist in school. The interviewees' reported experiences reveal a need for accurate information about their options and the university's functioning and expectations, not only once in university but also throughout the entire school path, especially at the end of high school and in college.

The students report that they need more than just a sense of affiliation; they also need care. Universities should therefore further develop practices of care. The concept of care has its origins in critical theories in education. Indeed, these theories developed the concept of care in connection with the concept of radical love, particularly as regards interactions in school (e.g., between teachers and students) (Banda et al., 2020). We are using it here to discuss care in institutions, such as university, through the actions of its social actors. These concepts are rooted in the community traditions of the Global South and were created to show the importance of relationships in daily school life. Considering the systemic oppression of minority groups, care and radical love could create opportunities for healing (Banda et al., 2020). This would entail the construction of a space of critical consciousness where differences (e.g., in cultures) are not understood as obstacles to be overcome but wisdom to be shared. Education should enable schooling that decolonizes and empowers minority and other groups through critical thinking (consciousness of systemic oppression) (Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020).

Specifically, according to the care theory, because caring is relational, there is no single model of caring. However, the concept involves shifting from a problem-solving response, a corrective response aimed at assimilating students from minority groups (i.e., “fixing” their academic and behavioural performance), to daily support during which care and radical love are practised (i.e. coexistence and affection) (Banda et al., 2020). This response incorporates collective and communal responsibility rather than institutionalized requirements. The goal would be to practise care and love, with a view to furthering social justice in education. The concepts of care and radical love are intricately linked to a sense of communal responsibility, intimate investment of self, and political engagement on the part of all social actors involved in everyday interactions (Banda et al., 2020). In our interviewees’ reported experiences, universities and their social actors offer limited support and lack care, thus they should adapt practices accordingly. Canadian universities should draw inspiration from these findings to develop equity, diversity, and inclusion policies (Tamtik and Guenter, 2019). Training should be given to make the entire university community aware of this need for care.

References

- Abada, T., Hou, F., & Ram, B. (2009). Ethnic differences in educational attainment among the children of Canadian immigrants. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 34(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs1651>
- Alava, S. (2011). Pratiques informelles d'études et autodirection des apprentissages : un autre regard sur le « métier d'étudiant » [informal study practices and self-directed learning: another look at the “student craft”]. In PH. CARRE (Ed.), *La formation auto-dirigée : approches éducatives et cognitives* [Self-directed training: educational and cognitive approaches] (pp. 21–36). L'Harmattan.
- Armony, V. (2017). *Les Québécoises et Québécois d'origine latino-américaine : une population bienvenue mais reléguée?* [Quebecers of Latin American origin: a welcome but relegated population?] Coalition pour l'intégration latino-québécoise.
- Arteaga, B. E. (2015). Applying cultura in the community college counseling practice. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(8), 708–726. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2013.876374>
- Banda, R., Reyes, G., & Caldas, B. (2020). Curricula of care and radical love. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1434>
- Beard, T. A. (2021). Emerging social capital in the lives of Latinx first-generation college students: the case for “apprentice agents” in a social capital framework. *Journal of First-Generation Student Success*, 1(2), 92–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26906015.2021.1940389>
- Benoît, R. (2011). La réussite scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration au secondaire : portrait des jeunes Québécois originaires de l'Amérique centrale et du Sud, secteur français [Academic success among students with immigrant backgrounds in high school: A portrait of young Quebecers of Central and South American origin, French sector]. In M. Mc Andrew & A. Balde (Eds.), *Rapport de recherche, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* [Department of Education research report].
- Bernard, M.-C. (2014). Circulation des savoirs, mobil-

- ité internationale et études supérieures. Récit de la mise en place d'une voie favorisant l'insertion universitaire en milieu francophone nord-américain [Circulation of knowledge, international mobility and higher education. Supporting integration at francophone North American universities]. *Globe : Revue Internationale d'Études Québécoises*, 17(2), 93–115. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1036239ar>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research in the sociology of education* (pp. 241–248). Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1970). *La reproduction : éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* [Reproduction: In education, society and culture]. Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Brown, S. E., Santiago, D., & Lopez, E. (2003). Latinos in higher education: today and tomorrow. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 35(2), 40–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091380309604092>
- Coulon, A. (1997). *Le métier d'étudiant : l'entrée dans la vie universitaire* [The student craft: Entering university life]. Presses universitaires de France.
- Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223–236. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0023>
- Draelants, H. (2013). L'effet établissement sur la construction des aspirations d'études supérieures [The role of secondary school for students' pursuit of higher education]. *L'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle*, 42(1), 3–32. <https://doi.org/10.4000/osp.4028>
- Dronkers, J. (2010). *Positive but also negative effects of ethnic diversity in schools on educational performance? An empirical test using cross-national PISA data* [MPRA Paper 25598]. University Library of Munich.
- Eveland, T. J. (2020). Supporting first-generation college students: analyzing academic and social support's effects on academic performance. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(8), 1039–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1646891>
- Farret, R. L., & Pinto, S. R. (2011). América Latina: da construção do nome à consolidação da ideia. (Latin America: from the construction of the name to the consolidation of the idea). *Topoi (Rio de Janeiro)*, 12(23), 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2237-101X012023002>
- Finnie, R., & Mueller, R. E. (2010). They came, they saw, they enrolled: Access to post-secondary education by the children of Canadian immigrants. In R. Finnie, M. Frenette, R. E. Mueller, & A. Sweetman (Eds.), *Pursuing higher education in Canada: Economic, social and policy dimensions* (pp. 192–216). Queen's University Press. <https://www.mqup.ca/pursuing-higher-education-in-canada-economic-social-and-policy-dimensions-products-9781553392774.php>
- Hallett, T., & Gougherty, M. (2018). Bourdieu and organizations. In T. Medvetz & J. J. Sallaz (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Pierre Bourdieu* (pp. 274–298). Oxford University Press. <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/28103?login=true>
- Harris, L. N. (2017). Latino student persistence strategies in transferring from community college to tier 1 universities: A phenomenological analysis. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 6(2), 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.6.2.113>
- Hernandez, J. C. (2000). Understanding the retention of Latino college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(6), 575–588. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2000-12548-001>
- Hochschild, J. L., & Cropper, P. (2010). Immigration regimes and schooling regimes: Which countries promote successful immigrant incorporation? *Theory and Research in Education*, 8(1), 21–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878509356342>
- Ives, J., & Castillo-Montoya, M. (2020). First-generation college students as academic learners: A systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(2), 139–178. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319899707>
- Kamanzi, P. C., Bastien, N., Doray, P., & Magnan, M. -O.

- (2016). Immigration et cheminements scolaires aux études supérieures au Canada : Qui y va et quand? Une analyse longitudinale à partir du modèle de Cox [Immigration and school paths to higher education in Canada: who goes, and when? A longitudinal study based on the Cox model]. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 46(2), 225–248. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/184865>
- Kamanzi, P. C., Magnan, M. -O., Pilote, A., & Doray, P. (2018). Immigration et morphologie des parcours scolaires dans l'enseignement supérieur au Canada : le cas de la province de Québec [Immigration and morphology of school paths in higher education in Canada: the case of the province of Quebec]. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 34(2–3), 253–277. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.11280>
- Kelly, P., & Lusic, T. (2006). Migration and the transnational habitus: Evidence from Canada and the Philippines. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38(5), 831–847. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37214>
- Magnan, M. -O., Pilote, A., Grenier, V., & Darchinian, F. (2017). Jeunes issus de l'immigration et choix d'orientation au postsecondaire à Montréal [Young people with immigrant backgrounds and postsecondary orientation options in Montréal]. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education/Revue Canadienne de l'Enseignement Supérieur*, 47(3), 34–53. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/cjhe/2017-v47-n3-cjhe-03415/1043237ar/>
- Mc Andrew, M., Balde, A., Bakhshaei, M., Tardif-Grenier, K., Audet, G., Armand, F., Guyon, S., Ledent, J., Lemieux, G., Potvin, M., Rahm, J., Vatz Laarousi, M., Carpentier, A., & Rousseau, C. (2015). *La réussite éducative des élèves issus de l'immigration : dix ans de recherche et d'intervention au Québec* [Educational success among students with immigrant backgrounds: 10 years of research and intervention in Quebec]. Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Mc Andrew, M., Ledent, J., & Murdoch, J. (2011). *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire (Groupe de recherche immigration, équité et scolarisation)* [Academic success among young Quebecers with immigrant backgrounds in high school (Immigration, equity and schooling research group)]. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [Department of education research report].
- Nowicka, M. (2015). Habitus: Its transformation & transfer through cultural encounters in migration. In C. Costa & M. Murphy (Eds.), *Bourdieu, habitus and social research: The art of application* (pp. 93–110). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137496928_6
- O'Hara, E. M. (2020). Latino student retention: A case study in perseverance and retention. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 21(3), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192720968509>
- Picot, W. G., & Hou, F. (2012). *Immigrant status, early skill development, and postsecondary participation: A comparison of Canada and Switzerland*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2012344-eng.htm>
- Savoie-Zajc, L. (2021). L'entrevue semi-dirigée [The semi-structured interview]. In I. Bourgeois (Ed.), *Recherche sociale: de la problématique à la collecte des données* [Social research: From the research problem to data collection] (7th ed., pp. 273–296). Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Schnapper, D. (2012). *La compréhension sociologique : démarche de l'analyse typologique* [Sociological understanding: typological analysis approach] (3rd ed.). Presses Universitaires de France. <https://doi.org/10.3917/puf.schna.2012.01>
- Solis, B., & Durán, R. P. (2022). Latinx community college students' transition to a 4-year public research-intensive university. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 21(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192719899628>
- Soria, K. M., & Stebleton, M. J. (2012). First-generation students' academic engagement and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(6), 673–685. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.666735>
- Sosa-Provencio, M. A., Sheahan, A., Desai, S., & Secatero, S. (2020). Tenets of body-soul rooted pedagogy: Teaching for critical consciousness,

- nourished resistance, and healing. *Critical Studies in Education*, 61(3), 345–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2018.1445653>
- Stebbleton, M. J., & Soria, K. M. (2012). Breaking down barriers: Academic obstacles of first-generation students at research universities. *Learning Assistance Review*, 17(2), 7–20. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1002281.pdf>
- Tamtik, M., & Guenter, M. (2019). Policy analysis of equity, diversity and inclusion strategies in Canadian universities—how far have we come? *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 49(3), 41–56. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/188529>
- Turcotte, M. (2019). *Educational and labour market outcomes of children with an immigrant background by their region of origin*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019018-eng.htm>
- Wilson-Forsberg, S. (2015). “We don’t integrate; we adapt”: Latin American immigrants interpret their Canadian employment experiences in Southwestern Ontario. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 3(16), 469–489. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0349-1>
- Winterer, E. R., Froyd, J. E., Borrego, M., Martin, J. P., & Foster, M. (2020). Factors influencing the academic success of Latinx students matriculating at 2-year and transferring to 4-year US institutions—implications for STEM majors: A systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 7(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00215-6>

Contact Information

Roberta de Oliveira Soares
roberta.de.oliveira.soares@umontreal.ca