First-Generation Latinos and the University Library

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I am a classroom practitioner, interested in better teaching and learning, not a trained social scientist.
We were curious

- How did Latino students view the University library?
- What were library-use patterns like prior to coming to college?
- Was library use correlated with the development of research skills (i.e. information literacy)?
- No recent studies answered our questions.
We observed

High use of the university library by our Latino students
Research agenda

- 2005 Seed grant to study 105 first-year Latino students at California State University, Los Angeles
- 2007 Spencer Foundation grant to study high- and low-achieving students at Garfield High school, a Cal State LA feeder
- Study continued
Study model

Ronald Gallimore (UCLA)

- Longitudinal literacy development of immigrant Latinos
- Explores when cultural beliefs and practices change among parents

Mixed methods

Testing qualitative findings using quantitative methods

Primarily a qualitative mixed-methods project
QUAL → quan

- QUAL
  - To hear stories and capture voices
- quan
  - To validate these
Two phases of data collection

- Held six focus groups
- Created a 56-item survey based on data
- Administered the online survey to 105 first-year Latino university students
Focus groups

- Administration/logistics
  - IRB
  - Identified first-year Latino students via campus solicitation
  - Signed agreement
  - Focus groups:
    - Latina student guide
    - Taped 1.5 h
    - Food/stipends
Survey

- Modified self-efficacy instrument
- Administration/logistics
  - Library computer classroom
  - Signed agreements
  - $5 stipend
We found

- Homogenous sample of students from largely Central American backgrounds
- Children of immigrants
- Spanish-dominant
- Compelling student narratives (noisy homes meant more time in the library)
Data confirmed:

- K-12 library use and information literacy development were correlated, except for high school
- Notions of “doing research” were associated with use of the academic library
- English-dominant students did report learning to do ‘research’ before high school.
We found

Haras, Lopez & Ferry, 2005
The high school bottleneck was worth investigating.

- Study continued at Garfield High School in 2007
- Similar mixed methods design (focus groups informed a paper questionnaire)
- Confirmed first study’s finding—that high school was a pivotal time for the development of information literacy
Library curriculum

Research findings guided library curriculum design:

- We developed outreach to the high schools.
- We scaffolded library instruction via games.
- Where possible, we addressed affect and self-regulation (metacognition)—these ‘non-cognitive’ behaviors play a greater role in academic tenacity than once thought.
What I Learned

- My own agency in the process mattered.
  - Authenticity and mindfulness
  - Researcher behaviors
    - Do not take notes while interviewing
    - Use your eyes, remain open

- Instrument design
  - The question you ask is often not the right question.
  - The answers students give can resemble ‘presenting problems’.
What I Learned

- Research, done well, acts as a powerful form of evidence for your library.
- Research has a shelf life.
- *Educación* includes moral development and familial responsibility. (Gallimore, 2000)
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