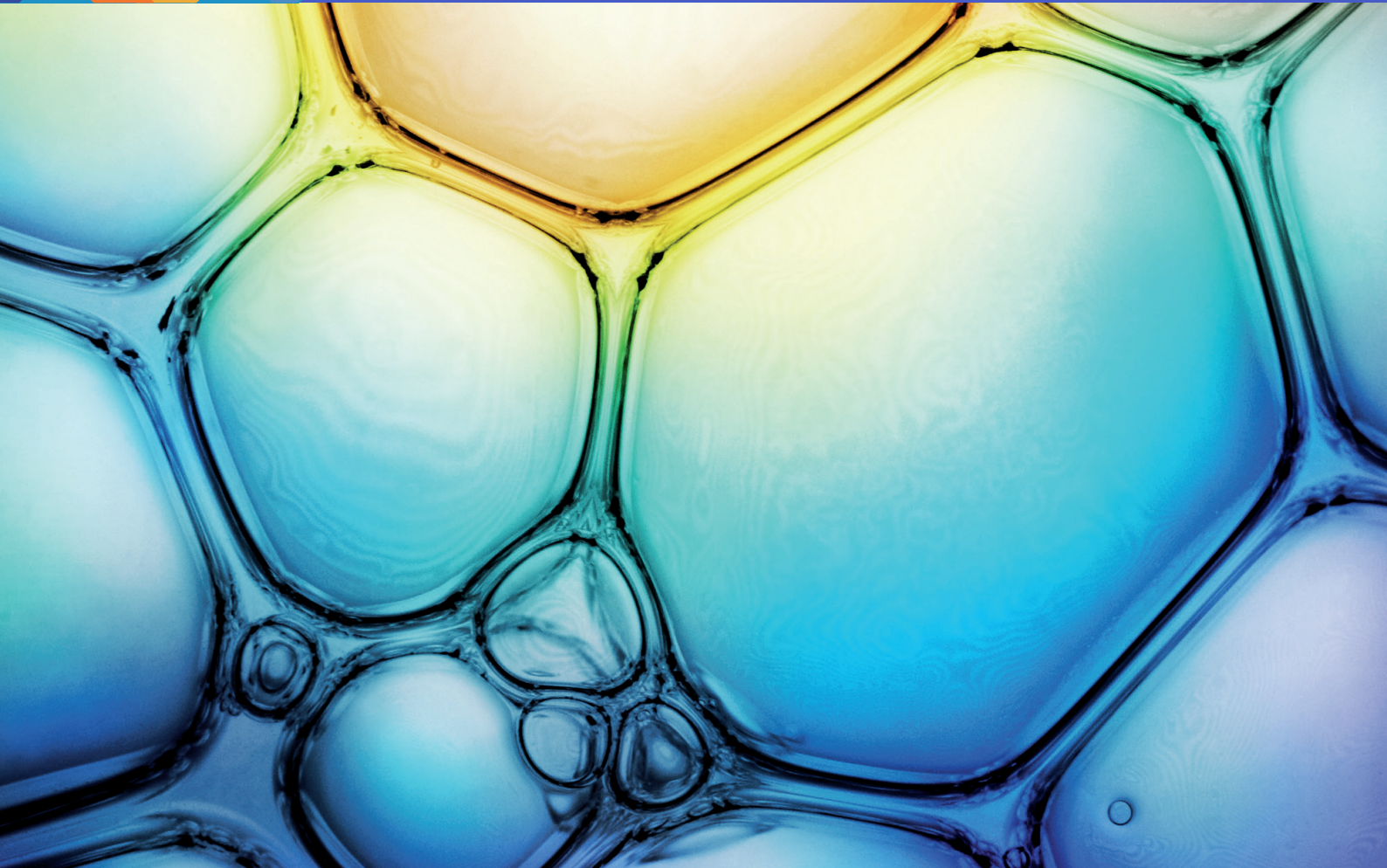


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"I had him in my head reminding me to persist": The Role of Mentoring in Shaping Immigrant Youth Expectations

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Abstract

This study presents data aiming to analyse the educational and occupational expectations of low-status immigrant students who had participated in a community-based mentoring program in the past. In order to carry out a longitudinal case study follow-up of the mentees, immigrant adolescents were surveyed before and after they participated in the program and again four years later. Data from in-depth interviews show how mentee's expectations were shaped by the role of the mentor or other significant adults. The results suggest the quality of the relationship, the advocating role played by mentors as institutional agents, how mentors provided social capital skills to mentees, and the way mentors dealt with the language of the new context of reception as key features for mentees' empowerment.

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Keywords: Youth mentoring, immigration, educational expectations, occupational expectations, social inclusion, adolescence

Resum

Aquest estudi presenta dades amb l'objectiu d'analitzar les expectatives educatives i ocupacionals dels estudiants immigrants de classe treballadora que varen participar en un programa de mentoria en el passat. Per tal de realitzar un seguiment longitudinal d'estudi de cas dels mentors, els adolescents immigrants van ser enquestats abans i després de participar en el programa i de nou quatre anys després. Les dades de les entrevistes en profunditat mostren com les expectatives dels mentorats es troben condicionades pel paper del mentor o d'altres adults significatius. Els resultats suggereixen la qualitat de la relació, el paper actiu dels mentors com a agents institucionals, la manera com els mentors van proporcionar habilitats de capital social als estudiants i la manera com els mentors van tractar el llenguatge del nou context d'acollida com a trets clau per a l'apoderament dels estudiants.

Paraules clau: mentoria social, immigració, expectatives educatives, expectatives laborals, inclusió social, adolescència

Resumen

Este estudio presenta datos con el objetivo de analizar las expectativas educativas y laborales de estudiantes inmigrantes de clase trabajadora que participaron en un programa de mentoría en el pasado. Se llevó a cabo un seguimiento de estudio de caso longitudinal de los mentorados, se encuestó a adolescentes inmigrantes antes y después de participar en el programa y nuevamente cuatro años después. Los datos de entrevistas en profundidad muestran cómo las expectativas del mentorado fueron moldeadas por el rol del mentor u otros adultos significativos. Estos resultados sugieren que la calidad de la relación, el papel de que juegan los mentores como agentes institucionales, cómo los mentores proporcionaron habilidades de capital social a los mentorados y la forma en que los mentores

trataron el lenguaje del nuevo contexto de recepción son algunas características clave para el empoderamiento de los mentorados.

Palabras clave: mentoría social, inmigración, expectativas educativas, expectativas ocupacionales, inclusión social, adolescencia.

1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, Spain has been one of the population-receiving countries that has experienced the greatest growth. Between 2001 and 2016, the number of foreigners living in Spain increased from 1 to 4.4 million, from 3% to 10% of its population in relative numbers. Many of them were children, accounting for almost one out of four adolescents from 10 to 19 years old in the country (INE, 2016). The largest and most relevant sociological study in the Spanish context on the adaptation of children of immigrants was carried out by Portes, Aparicio and Haller (2016), who conducted two waves of the *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study* (ILSEG in Spanish acronym) in 2008 and 2012. ILSEG scholars observed how high educational aspirations and expectations predicted further educational achievement of the second generation in Spain as had occurred in the United States. In these studies, the presence of significant others was one of the most relevant variables associated with an increase in the educational goals of immigrant youths, as early studies on the status attainment approach showed in the past (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969). The authors of the status attainment model highlighted the need to establish close and role model relationships to enhance and boost their future educational goals and ambitions. But scholars have also shown the existing paradox, demonstrating that while immigrant youth have higher educational aspirations than their native born peers, expectations may decline as soon as their performance drops (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn, 2009). In this sense, these results argue that supportive adult relationships could help to fill this gap, even more than the role that parents play (Crul and Doornik, 2003).

1.1. The role of mentoring on youth expectations

In the last decade, studies exploring how informal mentoring positively affects many areas of youth development have become more frequent (DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005; Hurd and Zimmerman, 2014; Schwartz, Chan, Rhodes and Scales, 2013). More specifically, on educational expectations and attainment, Erikson, McDonald and Elder (2009) found that exposure to informal mentoring was relevant for youth success in their educational careers and warned about the unequal access to mentors between wealthy and low-income youth. Having a mentor raised from 0.35 to 0.65 the odds of the latter in gaining access to college. Regarding minority youth, Sánchez, Colón and Esparza (2005, 2008) identified how Latino high school students who reported having natural mentors

showed higher educational expectations, a greater sense of school belonging and, ultimately, higher academic outcomes.

Mentoring programs aim to replicate the above-mentioned effects on the youth population they serve. The largest existing meta-analysis, conducted by DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn and Valentine (2011), found that while mentored youth attained modest gains on outcome measures, such as academic achievement or test scores as well as other indicators that affect youth development, non-mentored youth showed declines. Along the same lines, Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman and McMaken (2007) showed statistically significant but modest improvements in school attendance and attitudes and in reducing school infractions fifteen months after starting the program. The major effects of mentoring programs are possible when enduring and close connections between the pair are established (Rhodes, Schwartz, Willis and Wu, 2014) and mentors become significant adults and sources of support in the lives of youth (DuBois, Neville, Parra and Pugh-Lilly, 2002).

No studies have been conducted, to the best of our knowledge, which pay attention to how immigrant mentees' educational and occupational expectations were shaped and persisted over time due to their participation in a mentoring program by expanding their social capital.

Moreover, very few studies have explored the effects of mentoring programs on recently arrived immigrant youth (Oberoi, 2016). Some of these explored how academic engagement of mentees and their cross-cultural relations improved (Diversi and Meacham, 2005; Author blinded for peer review, year), or how mentees showed greater peer attachment after participating in a group mentoring program (Yeh, Ching, Okubo and Luthar, 2007), but no study has yet to explore these processes through a longitudinal follow-up. In this latter regard, when exploring the youth mentoring literature, it is common to find pre- and post-test evaluations of short and mid-term effects, but long-term follow-up evaluations analysing the transition of mentored adolescents into adulthood remain very scarce (Rhodes and DuBois, 2008). More studies are needed in order to demonstrate how mentoring outcomes flourish over time because relations require time and patience to see how the seed germinates and grows. The purpose of this study is to see how expectations were shaped by the quality of the relationship they had with their former mentors.

2. Methods

2.1. Program description

The Nightingale is a one-to-one community-based mentoring program that aims to enhance educational expectations of children and adolescent newcomers through providing them with a caring adult they can rely on and that can show them how to navigate in the new context of reception. The program began in 1997 in Malmö (Sweden) when Malmö University decided to create a program that could enhance well-being of immigrant children, on one hand, and promote better intercultural competence in their university students on the other (Sild-Lönroth, 2007). Its mission is that by having a university student as a role model in the present, children will be more likely to attend college in the future, thus contributing to a more diverse society in all social spheres. Since its inception, the program has expanded to twenty-seven universities in six European countries and one in Africa, with a thousand mentoring pairs annually.

Elementary and high school teachers select mentees taking into account that a) they lack caring adults around them, b) they are able to be minimally communicative with others, c) they would be the first generation in their family to gain access to college, and d) they are not extreme cases requiring intervention of a professional rather than a volunteer. Furthermore, mentors are selected by the university or civic organization staff running the program after a screening process consisting of interviews or filling out an online form with indirect questions regarding motivation, available time and desire to participate in the Nightingale program. Generally, they receive college credit for serving as mentors and are given ten hours of intensive training and orientation on how to carry out the mentoring successfully before it starts. Matching is done taking into consideration the interests and characteristics of the pair and then they start meeting once a week for three hours during eight months. There are no structured activities to carry out; it is an open model in which they do leisure activities together in order to build a relationship of friendship through which conversations regarding their future, acceptance of the new context and relationships with parents emerge. Mentors are encouraged to bring up these topics to foster meaningful interactions, thus avoiding leisure activities devoid of meaning. Finally,

supervision is carried out by the staff through a mobile phone application that mentors fill out after each encounter.

2.2. The study

This study presents data from a longitudinal case study follow-up of immigrant adolescents who were interviewed in 2012 and 2013, while they were being mentored, and again in 2016. This study aims to gain detailed explanations of how individuals' expectations were shaped and maintained over time in their interaction with other significant adults. Thus, this is not a counterfactual analysis designed to observe the effects of a given cause; rather, it focuses on what causes or does not cause a given effect on the protégés (persisting with high educational and occupational expectations), and how it does so. This orientation, drawing on the sociological tradition, can help us to better understand some flaws of counterfactual thinking, such as observing how meaning-making is situated in action, context and time (Small, 2013; Tavory and Timmermans, 2013).

2.3. Data analysis

For the analysis, twelve interview transcripts were coded into categories and dimensions considering how mentors created meanings with mentees that symbolically shaped their educational and occupational expectations, as well as whether they acted as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar and Urso Spina, 2003) or connected their mentees to others who could play this role. In the analysis, we also tried to identify how mentees remembered how mentors advocated for them, willing to address systemic barriers (Liang, Spencer, West and Rappaport, 2013), and how the mentoring program provided to immigrant youth some informal learning on how to reach other adults and have a wider social capital in the future (Schwartz and Rhodes, 2016).

3. Results

To dig deeper into how these expectations were shaped by the mentor and how the relationship became significant to former mentees, we interviewed a selection of ten former mentees who answered positively to this question and another eight who did not. All

interviewees share the belief that the mentoring experience helped them to learn the language of the new context of reception with greater self-confidence, through speaking with someone who is close to them and who does not represent any formal institution such as schools (i.e. teachers). Former mentees describe the mentoring relationship as a safe environment where they can commit mistakes without being penalized, escaping from some situational factors that generate anxiety in them.

3.1. Overcoming linguistic barriers when adjusting to a new context of adaptation

This situation is described in Joana's narrative. Joana was born in the Dominican Republic and arrived in Spain when she was ten with her two brothers and mother. She is now sixteen and does not know what her educational and occupational future will be because she dropped out and was expelled from high school. She now lives with her boyfriend and obtained a GED Spanish diploma [ESO] by participating in a second chance program. The first years at school were difficult because she was placed in a segregated classroom to learn the language and felt discrimination from her native peers. She remembers how mentoring helped her with language acquisition, to learn how to speak Catalan and convince her teacher to place her in class with the rest of native students.

The language was hard for me and I felt discriminated by my peers because we were going to the *aula d'acollida* [welcoming class]. I was not relaxed or accepted; I could speak Spanish but because there is a lot of Dominican jargon they did not understand me. Afterwards, it was way easier. We were friends and hung out, speaking with confidence...since I was with her Catalan was not difficult anymore. Since then, the teacher noticed a big change in my Catalan and they brought me with the rest in the ordinary class.

The narratives of Joana and other mentees represent their former mentor as someone they were close with and through whom they learned to speak Catalan and discovered many new places in the new context of reception. However, they also express in their narratives that they did not remember many conversations they had; they remember they had fun, played and did a lot of leisure activities together but do not remember what their mentors were studying in college, or significant conversations they had about their educa-

tional and occupational future, or whether their former mentors acted as advocates in the face of structural barriers they were confronting.

On the other hand, what was remarkable and repeatedly common among immigrant youth mentees who identified their former mentor as one of the most significant adults of their life was how they vividly remember how their former mentors, i) helped them to navigate through the new educational system in order to fulfill their educational aspirations, ii) how former mentors acted as institutional agents helping them to overcome oppressive structural barriers and, finally, iii) how former mentors provided the groundwork to foster skills to trust and approach other adults and institutional representatives, thus broadening their social capital in a context of institutional racism and high degrees of discrimination.

3.2. Supporting mentees to navigate through the educational system and persist

The case of Guiping, a Chinese girl participant who started higher education training to work as a teacher in early childhood education, reflects how a meaningful conversation with her mentor four years ago shaped her educational trajectory. In this case, her mentor started to think about her interests and about what she could study in the future. Guiping describes her feelings of loneliness when she arrived in the new context of reception six years ago and how her mentor helped her to shape her educational expectations and trajectory. This epiphany marked her educational trajectory.

I do not know anything about here; I had no friends. And my parents were working a lot at the beginning. I was like a blind person because I didn't recognize anything, and like a deaf person because I didn't understand the language; it was so different... it was really hard. I had a terrible time the first two years. I had many conversations with my mentor and we walked around the city a lot. What helped me the most was her advice because I really didn't know what to do in the future. She asked me what I would like to do and I told her that I really liked children. And she said to me, "you can study early childhood education", and she explained to me how things work to get into college. I finished intermediate vocational training and now I'm starting higher education training and maybe I'll make it to the university. She really gave me a lot of motivation telling me, "you can do it".

3.3. Mentors as institutional agents that may provide structural holes for mentees

In the analysis, we wanted to explore whether having the mentor as a significant other in immigrant students' most recent life trajectory also provided them support to navigate within a stratified educational system where class, sex and race segregation are very present. In this sense, understanding how mentors could become agents of empowerment providing support to mentees, as Stanton-Salazar (2011) highlights, is relevant to strengthening the effectiveness of mentoring programs. In the following quote, one could observe how mentors could become *institutional agents*. Mentors may help mentees to learn to safely navigate through an oppressive system and advocate for their interests. They provide direct support to mentees but they could also become what Stanton-Salazar (2011) identifies as *institutional brokers*, when an actor bridges networks characterized by their closure. This is the case of Constantin, a participant who arrived in Spain from Romania six years ago. He was placed in the lowest educational track in high school when he was in tenth grade (4th ESO). As he explains, it was difficult for him to have high educational expectations and move forward in his studies in that class. His mentor helped him to work on his shyness, to speak in public and to give him courage to persist. He talked with his tutor in high school, convincing the school staff to place Constantin in the highest track. At first, this seemed like a mistake to him because he needed to work harder, but he soon began to realize that the decision benefited him even though he had to retake that class again the following academic year. When he faces challenging moments with his studies, he seeks insight and dialogue with his three significant others who remind him that regardless of the obstacles he faces, he can progress and reach his goal of becoming a computer technician or scientist in the future. Constantin is now studying vocational training in informatics and he hopes to continue through higher education vocational training (two-year community college) and pursue further studies later on.

I was about to repeat and he told me that if I made an effort I could do it and I could get very good grades if I wanted to. It was hard for me because I had only been here for two years. I didn't want to repeat; he encouraged my mother and spoke with my tutor teacher about putting me in the advanced class. I was in the F class and they put me in the A. The A class was too calm, they were real studious and the atmosphere was very easy. In the F, since there were only Muslims and foreigners, things were very complicated and I also participated [in that]. If I had stayed in F I would have taken [bread and pastry] baking and my grade point average wouldn't

have gone up, and I wouldn't have gone to computer science, where I am now. It was an important decision. At first, I thought it was a bad idea, but eventually I realized it wasn't. Later, in difficult moments when I had to study hard, I had three people in my mind: Pere [his mentor] who reminded me that if I persisted I could do it; my teacher, who told me that if I had made it this far I could pass other courses; and my mother who said that if I didn't pass I wouldn't have any future.

3.4. Mentors as providers of social capital skills

In a few cases, we have observed how mentors can instill some skills in mentees that will aid in their empowerment once mentoring is finished. Some mentees remember the role their former mentors played in their lives in terms of helping them not to be afraid to approach other adults. Thus, mentors not only may be institutional agents but also help mentees in building skills to increase their social capital network. This happened, for example, in the case of Iovanna who arrived in Spain from Bulgaria when she was two years old. She moved with her mother because her father had come a year earlier and found a job. Her language skills were soon acquired in early school education. She is now sixteen and remembers what the mentoring meant to her. She was mentored the year before she was to start high school. She remembers talking with her mentor about the need to study hard to reach her aspirations, as well as how her mentor helped her not to be afraid in high school and to approach teachers. They usually talked about kids because initially she wanted to study teacher education but she changed her mind two years after the mentoring was finished. She wants to be a police woman. Her mother wanted to be in the police but she was never able to fulfill her dreams. Iovanna learned to rely on other adults that could help her persist to reach higher education and become a police officer.

When you are growing up teachers approach you more. Aida [her mentor] helped me finish with my fears and address them too. I felt them closer. I have a teacher saying that it is not bad for us to study vocational training but if you want to have a good future, it is better to study baccalaureate and then go to the university. I connect with her and she has helped me a lot in finding more information and motivation.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This longitudinal case study follow-up analyses how, when mentoring only help mentees in language acquisition and the sense of belonging to the new context of reception through a friendly relationship, it is insufficient to overcome structural barriers faced by many immigrant youths in their process of adaptation to the new environment. As Colley (2003) states, the mentoring relationship is embedded in a web of power relationships that could represent other interests, rather than those of the mentee. We explored how when former mentors acted as facilitators for mentees and they engaged in meaningful conversations related to overcoming discriminatory practices; mentees tend to persist in higher educational and occupational expectations over time. Mentors usually remain significant adults and are vividly present in the memories of the mentees for years after mentoring finished. This is because mentees remember them as their advocates, who believed in their strengths rather than their deficits. Besides playing or having fun, they had meaningful conversations about their future; mentors acted as institutional agents or brokers and, in some cases, helped mentees to learn how to trust other adults and build their own social capital network beyond the mentoring program.

These results have implications for mentoring programs focused on the inclusion of first generation immigrants and refugees, more extensive in Europe than in the United States. Although all these highlighted features occurred naturally in a mentoring program that did not specifically orient and train students explicitly in such practices; the data gathered in these cases could be helpful for reorienting such mentoring programs to give them a more socially transformative approach connected with social justice (Liang, Spencer, West and Rappaport, 2013). In this sense, it would be necessary to promote training sessions for future mentors on how they can be advocates for their mentees, carefully and in consultation with multiple stakeholders (Rhodes, Liang and Spencer, 2009), or how to become institutional agents or brokers (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), taking into consideration the limited or constrained field of action they may have. Training could also include specific content on how to empower mentees in building their own mentoring support networks (Schwartz and Rhodes, 2016).

Another implication deriving from this study is the need to place emphasis on how to build high-quality mentoring relationships, as many studies have recommended (Liao and Sánchez, 2016; Rhodes, Schwartz, Willis and Wu, 2014; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes,

Silverthorn and Valentine, 2011). The highest quality relationships identified in this study were made possible by building a close relationship of friendship, taking into consideration the involvement with mentees' families and interests, and when former mentors had adopted a critical outlook regarding their situation of deprivation. Some former mentees showed deep memories of the activities and conversations they had in the past with their mentors, when close bonds were established between them, while other former mentees did not. It could be usual then, that those mentoring relationships that were able to foster new relationships with other adults beyond the dyad relationship were those of quality (Thompson and Zand, 2010), guided and strengthened by authenticity, empathy, collaboration and companionship between the pair (Spencer, 2006).

More research and longitudinal inquiries are still needed to observe how formal mentoring relationships affect the educational and occupational trajectories of low-income immigrants and refugees. Along these lines, further interdisciplinary and transatlantic research is needed on how mentors foster children's development and empower mentees in navigating through different oppressive social subsystems. In this regard, other contributions could also shed more light on observing why and how mentoring relationships especially help adolescents in persisting to seek post-compulsory education, struggling against the odds of what is expected.

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Table 1. Nightingale Longitudinal Study Sample and some preliminary results

Boys		53.8
Girls		46.2
Age Mean (2016)		16.5
Median (2016)		17.0
Percentage of foreign born		100.0
Year of arrival Mean		6.9 (SD=3.01)
Still studying		
<i>No</i>		5.4
<i>Yes</i>		94.6
<i>ESO compulsory secondary education (< tenth grade)</i>		38.6
<i>PQPI (GED)</i>		2.7
<i>CFGM – Postcompulsory Vocational training</i>		23.6
<i>Bachillerato (High School – College prep)</i>		10.8
<i>CFGS – Higher Education Vocational training Community College</i>		10.8
<i>College</i>		8.1
Context of origin		
<i>Latin American & the Caribbean</i>		41.2
<i>Africa</i>		20.6
<i>Eastern Europe</i>		17.5
<i>Asia</i>		20.7
Parents' Human capital		
<i>Without college degree</i>		84.6
<i>With at least one parent with college degree</i>		15.4
Felt discriminated upon their arrival		
<i>Yes</i>		33.3
<i>No</i>		66.7
Significant Others in mentees life		
<i>Friends same or similar age</i>		100.0
<i>Another adult person</i>		61.8
<i>Mentor</i>		33.3
<i>Teacher</i>		29.4
	2012	2016
Educational Aspirations		
<i>At least College degree</i>	80.5	48.7
<i>Other</i>	19.5	51.3
Educational Expectations		
<i>At least College degree</i>	51.4	38.5
<i>Other</i>	48.6	61.5
Occupational Expectations		
<i>Professions requiring College degree</i>	57.1	44.7
<i>Professions not requiring College degree</i>	42.9	55.3

N= 39

Source: Nightingale Longitudinal Study.

Table 2. Profile of the interviewees

Sex	Age	Age when mentored	Gender of the mentor	Current studies	Country of origin	Years in the country
Male	15	11	Female	4 ESO	Bolivia	Five
Male	17	13	Female	PQPI	Honduras	Five*
Male	18	14	Female	CFGM	Senegal	Five
Female	17	13	Female	Batxillerat	República Dominicana	Four
Male	15	11	Female	4 ESO	Honduras	Five
Male	19	15	Male	CFGM Informàtica	Rumania	Six
Female	18	14	Female	CFGM Infermeria	Venezuela	Five
Female	19	15	Female	CFGS Educ. Infantil	China	Six
Male	19	15	Male	CFGM Comerç	Honduras	Four
Male	16	12	Male	CFGM Comerç	Morocco	Four
Female	17	13	Female	:	Honduras	Seven
Male	18	14	Male	:	Bolivia	Six

* Came to Spain in 2008 and went back to Honduras one year later because he was not adapted. He was brought again in 2012.

Table 3. Educational and Occupational Expectations of Mentored Children, 2016

	Educational Expectations 2016		Occupational Expectations 2016	
	Lower than College	At least College degree	Lower than College	At least College degree
<i>Boys</i>	81.0	19.0	52.4	47.6
<i>Girls</i>	38.9	61.1	44.4	55.6
	±2 7.245**		±2 2.055	
<i>Mentor as S.O.</i>	42.9	57.1	21.4	78.6
<i>Non-mentor as S.O.</i>	72.0	28.0	56.0	44.0
	±2 3.220		±2 6.510*	
<i>Education asp. College</i>	25.0	75.0	65.0	35.0
<i>Education asp. no College</i>	100.0	0.0	36.8	63.2
	±2 23.156***		±2 3.092	
<i>Occupational asp. College</i>	73.7	26.3	--	--
<i>Occupational asp. Non-C.</i>	50.0	50.0	--	--
	±2 2.309		--	

N= 39

* P< .05

**P< .01

***P< .001

n.s. Not significant.

Source: Nightingale Longitudinal Study.

Table 4. Nominal regression of Mentored Educational Expectations and Occupational Aspirations on selected predictors

Predictors	Educational Expectations			Occupational Aspirations		
	Coeff.	Exp. B	Wald	Coeff.	Exp. B	Wald
<i>(Expected to reach college or a profession with college requirement)</i>						
Female	3.579	35.83	8.09**	-.261	.77	.08
More than 17 years old	-1.258	.28	1.57	.178	1.20	.43
More than 5 years living	.627	1.87	.33	2.849	17.27	4.43*
Felt discrimination	.739	2.20	.54	1.503	4.49	2.59
Mentor as Significant Other	3.554	34.94	7.16*	3.231	25.31	6.16**
Mentor contact	-1.982	.14	2.87	-2.924	.05	4.91*
X2 – 2 Log		20.34**			15.20*	
Nagelkerke R2		.56			.44	

N= 39

* P< .05

**P< .01

***P< .001

Source: Nightingale Longitudinal Study.



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