Validating Students: A Conceptualization and Overview of Its Impact on Student Experiences and Outcomes

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Abstract
The importance of the validation of students through transformative teaching and counseling (Rendón, 1994) emerged as a framework to conceptualize the underlying mechanisms necessary to validate the experiences, expectations, and performance of college and university students, particularly low-income students. In this paper, we examine the divergent perspectives of how validation has been defined since its foundation. We also draw upon a corpus of qualitative and quantitative data that centers on the role of validation in all its different proxy forms as well as on its impact on an ethnically diverse group of secondary and postsecondary students’ experiences and outcomes in educational settings. The findings on validating both secondary and postsecondary students’ experiences point to implications and recommendations for policy and practice that illuminate ways to increase the engagement, persistence, and graduation rates of these students.

One of the most common practices in higher education research is the use of proxies to represent theoretical constructs that underlie quantitative models and qualitative frameworks in the study of student persistence. When it comes to quantitative studies, often datasets that are available for testing hypothesized structural models have been created without much thought to theoretical perspectives or conceptual points of reference, resulting in an array of survey items that were not intended to represent specific latent constructs. In qualitative studies, emerging categories or themes derived from a data reduction are often labeled one thing, when in fact they may or may not represent a concept appropriately. Moreover, a lack of communication among researchers from different disciplines or methodological orientations leads to the introduction or use of different wording when discussing the same construct or phenomenon under study.

Because researchers often do not communicate with each other, one is led to believe that they are discussing entirely different phenomena, when in reality these investigators incorporate proxies with a great deal of conceptual overlap and are much more similar than different. This practice results in different disciplines neglecting to inform each other, ultimately resulting in no integration or synthesis of diverse bodies of literature that capture the same underlying construct. One such variable in the student persistence literature is the concept of student validation.

Student Validation: Opposing yet Overlapping Views
While validation as a theoretical perspective was not widely acknowledged until first introduced by Rendón (1994), research by investigators such as Bean (1982), Hurtado (1994), Nora (1987, 1990), and Nora and Cabrera (1993, 1996) focusing on the dilemma of student attrition in higher education had previously touched upon the fundamental nature of validating students. Nora (1987, 1990), for example, focused on the importance of support and encouragement in different forms and sources by significant others. Hurtado (1994) concentrated on the issue of campus climates. In all instances, whether family or instructor support or overall campus climate, these constructs served as “proxies” for the validation of students inside the classroom or around the campus. The underlying premise captured by the different conceptual meanings attributed to a variety of variables and themes was the same as that captured by the term validation. Be it the use of words and gestures that convey a support system by the student’s parents, words of encouragement provided by an instructor, or the feeling of belonging on a campus, the underlying premise remains the same—a sense of caring on the part of a significant other, their acceptance as human beings, a sensitivity on the part of the instructor, and an affirmation as valuable contributors to the learning that is taking place in the classroom or on campus.
Other investigators who have incorporated Rendón's (1994) notion of validation have also relied on the use of proxies. Some have focused on the notion of a sense of belonging provided by peers as the way to validate students (Martínez Aleman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). In such cases, validation has focused around relationships with peers and the sense that they were accepted or valued by their own groups. Another set of research studies has centered on the notion of mentoring as a form of validating students (Barnett, 2011; Bragg, 2001; Crisp, 2009; Crisp, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2009; Nora, 2001; Osegueda, Locks, & Vega, 2008; Suarez, 2003). Within this set of research studies, Bragg (2001) cited respect, support, and caring as influential in bringing about changes in instructional strategies and access/outcomes.

Proxies for validation are not only limited to faculty behavior and student attitudes or perceptions of caring and being valued on campus. In his examination of students' sense of belonging, Jehangir (2009) established that a curriculum that values student experiences fosters the development of a sense of belonging and the "re-position[ing]" of self on campus, a view that focuses on student validation. At the same time, Schuetz (2008) found that students' sense of belonging on campus was also influenced by the validation students received from their relationships with faculty, peers, and administrative and office personnel. Furthermore, Museus and Quaye (2009) ascertained that cultural agents from the home or campus cultures were important in shaping students' cultural identities. Those campuses that valued cultural diversity and demonstrated it throughout their environments provided a source of validation that translated into positive cultural identities for undergraduates.

In much the same way, Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) had previously noted the importance of student perceptions surrounding university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs in dealing with culture shock upon entering college. Padilla (1999) interpreted Rendón's (1994) validation theory as an acceptance of experiential knowledge in the classroom, which would provide additional support for students when overcoming such barriers. All represent some form of student validation on the part of the institution.

The final set of research studies that include proxies for validation are those that focus on a student's self-worth or self-concept. Tinto's (1997) early study took notice of the fact that academic involvements are instrumental in shaping a student's sense of ability and subsequently validate the presence of the student on campus. Hernandez and Lopez (2004–2005) examined research on personal, environmental, involvement, and sociocultural factors that influence student retention and found that affirmation of students led to the development of a positive academic self-concept. Likewise, in a study of Latino/a transfer culture, Perez and Ceja (2010) noted that affirming students as knowledgeable and valuable provides students with a sense of self-worth, also a proxy for student validation.

Quantitative Proxies of Validation and Their Impact on Student Outcomes
This section will examine the impact of validation as a proxy or under its own label, on different student outcomes. The first section focuses on quantitative studies in which the selection of variables underlying a specific conceptual framework incorporates an aspect of student validation.

Studies Centered on Faculty/Institution Validation
Barnett's (2011) study on academic integration and intent to persist, based on Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, incorporated aspects of Rendón's (1994) validation theory within the framework of her investigation—student interactions with faculty/staff. Barnett (2011) tested the influence of endogenous and exogenous constructs on two outcome measures—academic integration and intent to persist. To capture a measure of student validation, Barnett constructed an instrument with student validation items that identified experiences involving faculty validation. The study analyzed its relationship with a student's sense of academic integration and intent to persist. Barnett utilized exploratory factor analysis and established four latent constructs among the survey items: (1) students known and valued, (2) caring instruction, (3) appreciation for diversity, and (4) mentoring. All four constructs were found to positively impact indicators of psychological and behavioral academic integration within Tinto's (1993) model. Her findings revealed that caring instruction was the strongest validation predictor of integration. Two other proxies for validation, students known and valued and mentoring, also exerted direct, positive, and significant relationships with a student's intent to persist. Barnett's (2011) findings substantiated Rendón's (1994) validation theory as an extension of Tinto's academic integration and, subsequently, the intent to persist in college. She suggests that faculty members must increase the cultivation of student skills and become aware of the impact of student affirmation within the classroom, further contributing to greater student persistence.
In a discussion of the challenges community colleges face in offering an assortment of programs to meet the needs of a diverse student population, Bragg (2001) explored issues related to student access and the maturation of the community college system. She introduced Rendón's (1994) validation theory as an instructional strategy that can "transform underprepared students into college-ready learners through the respect, support, and care that faculty demonstrate through meaningful interpersonal relationships" (p. 105). Bragg (2001) asserted that when faculty and administrative leadership engage in policies and practices that incorporate validating experiences for undergraduates, student outcomes are positively impacted.

Osegueda, Locks, and Vega (2009) also focused specifically on an institution's effort to support Latina/os sustainment and student graduation. All factors examined centered on the increased involvement of Latino students with faculty and other students in a culturally congruent environment. The authors noted that upon entering college Latino students experience a culture shock. Positive relationships built with faculty members through institutional efforts, specifically with faculty members of color, serve as a cultural liaison, providing students with feelings of confidence or validation (Rendón, 1994) that help them succeed in the new environment.

Although the discussion on support and encouragement from significant others was not all focused on faculty, Nora (2001) introduced the notion that support and encouragement of students comes in different forms and from different agents and mostly concentrated on aspects of positive reinforcement (Nora et al., 1996; Nora, 2004; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005), affirmation (Nora et al., 1996, 1999, 2001), caring, and mentoring (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Nora's (2001) in-depth examination of Tinto's "rites of passage" conceptually analyzed the relationship of support and encouragement from significant others through the separation, transition, and incorporation stages. Nora argued that different forms and sources of support and encouragement by family, friends, and faculty are all proxies for Rendón's (1994) student validation both in and outside of the classroom. Nora (2001) posited that the building and maintaining of relationships with significant others support the students' concurrent development through the separation, transition, and incorporation phases. Subsequently, these processes validate their enrollment, participation, and engagement during their time in college by alleviating some of the stress related to the change of environment, ultimately culminating in student retention and degree attainment. Along this same line of reasoning, Nora, along with other scholars (e.g. Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992, Nora, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1990; Pascarella, 1980; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981) noted that student responses regarding their satisfaction and commitment to an institution also serve as proxies for the concern and care—validation—they received through these stages of transition.

**Studies Centered on a Sense of Belonging**

Zhao and Kuh (2004) examined the relationship between participating in learning communities and student engagement in a range of educational activities of first-year and senior students from 365 four-year institutions. They defined learning communities as collaborative learning experiences and involvement in academic and social activities that extend beyond the classroom. Learning communities were positively related to student gains in personal and social development, practical competence, and general education. Overall, students demonstrated the ability of the small groups within the learning communities to increase the student's sense of belonging to the university and overall community through their relationship with other students and faculty members. The authors speculated that through collaborative learning, students were able to share experiences and to have greater access to faculty that increased the opportunities for students to feel more validated.

Schuetz (2008) developed and tested a conceptual model of student engagement based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002). The framework describes the psychological need for belonging, as well as the feeling of competence and autonomy to increase engagement. The author concluded that regardless of academic preparation and other obligations outside of school, students need the opportunity to experience belonging, competence, and autonomy. Schuetz relied on Rendón's (1994) validation theory to describe the type of belonging necessary for students to succeed. Schuetz interpreted this explanation as incidents of early outreach to underrepresented students in order to demonstrate a belief in their ability and to take an active interest in them.

**Studies Centered on Valuing Cultural Identities**

Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) examined the extent to which university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs were interrelated and predicted academic nonpersistence for Latino/a undergraduates. The authors utilized
Rendón (1994), Hurtado (1994), and Hurtado and Carter (1997) to describe the environmental factors and possible cultural shock students experience as a measure of university comfort. Subscales were created for social support, self-beliefs, and the criterion variable, persistence decisions. In the first set of results, the authors found that university comfort and social support, as well as university comfort and self-beliefs, were significantly related to the study’s outcomes. The results demonstrated that an increase in cultural congruity, more positive perceptions of the university environment, and a decrease in perceptions of barriers would occur if one stayed in school, which was related to an increase in family social support. In addition, these findings also indicated that these same positive perceptions of university comfort (suspected as different validation experiences) were strongly associated with an increase in self-efficacy beliefs. In conclusion, social support and university comfort (through words of encouragement, affirming words, sense of belonging) were the strongest overall predictors of academic nonpersistence decisions for the sample of Latino/a undergraduate students.

**Studies Centered on Self-Worth/Self-Concept**

Tinto (1997) concluded that several main aspects influence a student’s decision to remain enrolled: level of involvement, educational setting (two- or four-year institution, level of academic and social integration), and amount of integration outside and inside of the classroom. Tinto relied on Rendón’s (1994) theory of student validation to describe the importance of extending integration outside of the classroom. In line with the results from his previous studies, Tinto (1993) recommended particular organizational reforms to increase student persistence, including a focus on first-year college students as a distinctive unit, a multidisciplinary program, student cohorts, learning communities as a curricular structure, an emphasis on shared knowledge, and an extension of classroom learning outside of class. Through these reforms, students are more likely to feel validated as students, individuals, and members of an educational institution. Academic and nonacademic involvements help to shape a person’s sense of ability and feeling that his or her presence is validated on campus.

In a review of student retention, Hernandez and Lopez (2004–2005) discussed the current understanding of personal, environmental, involvement, and sociocultural influences that impact student retention in order to make recommendations to increase Latino persistence in higher education. The authors argue for the development of a student’s self-concept; the involvement of family in the student’s life; sufficient financial aid; the institutional development of positive racial climates, ethnic communities, and living/working conditions; and the level of student involvement through faculty-student interactions, mentorships, and participation in student organizations. Hernandez and Lopez (2004–2005) utilized Rendón’s (1994) validation theory as the driving force for students of color to develop an academic self-concept. They described validation as a type of affirmation from university personnel for academically unprepared or first-generation students to identify ways to encourage the development of a positive self-concept.

**Qualitative Proxies of Validation and their Impact on Student Outcomes**

The following section will examine those qualitative studies that have also focused on student validation and its impact on a variety of student intermediate and final outcomes.

**Studies Centered on a Sense of Affirmation and Belonging**

Suarez (2003) identified factors that contributed to the transfer of community college students to a university from student, counselor, and administrator perspectives. She categorized her findings into three groups: individual, institutional, and environmental. At the individual level, the results revealed that a student’s personal drive, a rigorous academic preparation, and a set of educational/career goals resulted in transfer. At the institutional level, validation by faculty/staff, the active presence of role models, institutional flexibility, a view of transfer as a shared responsibility, and active minority support programs contributed to a successful transition from a two-year to a four-year college. Suarez based her study on Rendón’s (1994) validation theory and established that support from faculty and staff helped students to develop into successful learners as well as persisters.

In an earlier study by Dodson, Montgomery, and Brown (2009), the authors relied on validation theory to explain the impact of a social support mentoring system for students of color. They defined validation operationally as a source of affirmation for the student’s ability to complete academic work and a source of support for academic activities and social inclusion and growth. Using a collective/collaborative group model of peers and faculty, the goal of a mentoring program was to increase the number of students of color academically prepared for high quality doctoral work. The authors found that minority students maintained an average GPA higher than 3.8 and received research scholarships and grants, but
that their likelihood of graduating with an earned doctorate was improved because of the nature of mentoring (or validation) that they received.

**Studies Centered on Programmatic/Institutional Efforts and Validation**

In an attempt to better understand the impact of a multicultural learning program for TRIO students, Jehangir (2009) focused on issues of isolation and marginalization of first-generation college students. The author relied on the theoretical frameworks by Rendón (1994) and Tinto (1987) to identify specific aspects related to a sense of belonging and academic integration within the curricula and the academy. In their analysis of student experiences through critical pedagogy, five common themes emerged: finding place, finding voice, conflict as a catalyst, bridge-building and transformational learning. Jehangir (2009) noted that the curriculum and peer interactions in the program promoted the validation of students through the sharing of experiences, which developed a literal and figurative sense of place. The discourse further encouraged student voice while it allowed for critique and meaning-making. In other words, the program’s reliance on critical pedagogy, identity, community, and agency allowed students to develop a sense of validation through the curriculum and experiences with peers in the classroom.

**Studies Centered on Students of Color and Validation**

Martínez Aleman’s (2000) qualitative study of sophomore and junior undergraduate women of color concentrated on the role of friendships as learning relationships through inquiry into their topics of conversation and the role that friendship played in their academic development. Martínez Aleman found that friendships for women of color helped to develop a positive self-image, to engage in noncombative and noneducative “race talk,” to give and receive academic encouragement and support, and to construct a gendered understanding. The author further noted that her findings extended and mirrored Rendón’s (1994) utilization of validation through peer friendships that provide sororal support with intellectual and developmental growth to help advance student success.

Museus and Quaye’s (2009) study of undergraduate students of color and the role of campus cultures on their persistence relied on Kuh and Love’s (2000) eight cultural propositions (cultural meaning-making systems, precollege cultures, cultural distance, amount of time in culture of origin, extent and intensity of students’ connection to programs, and their belonging to one or more cultural enclaves for interviews and analysis). The authors established that minorities viewed the campus as more culturally homogeneous. Precollege experiences shaped student expectations for diversity. Cultural origin and immersion impacted their ability to navigate the campus culture, and cultural dissonance impacted their cultural adjustment. Moreover, students of color felt pressure to acclimate to the dominant culture, while cultural agents helped to validate their traditional culture, connections to people influenced adjustment, and quality and quantity of relationships with cultural agents validated their cultural identities. These influential relationships with cultural agents, peers, and faculty transformed the students’ experience of the campus culture through the emphasis of achievement, value attainment, and validation of their cultural heritage. This represented the author’s interpretation of Rendón’s (1994) definition of validation, the supportive and confirming process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents to develop academic and social integration.

**A Case Study: Mentoring Relationships as a Form of Validating Experiences**

The following section is an in-depth case study of how validation is embedded within the interpretation and discussion of the implications for policy and practice among an American Indian secondary school student population. The data gathered for the project consisted of semistructured interviews, focus groups, participant observations, field notes, and memos from students and faculty. The qualitative investigation centered on the development and maintenance of a strong, close relationship between secondary students and faculty. The high school site is a small public school with an enrollment of 184 students (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2007). The high school is located in a rural area very close in proximity to two Native American tribal reservations.

**Validation and the Building of Student Relationships**

Linking knowledge and cultural experiences in the formation and maintenance of relationships is a central element of validation theory (Rendón, 1994), a fact that is critical for educators to appreciate. American Indian students are more often engaged in faculty/student relationships that are neither validating of who they are as native students nor meaningful to them. These relationships are seldom or never reciprocal or understanding of students. Therefore faculty validation is never fulfilled in the classroom or outside on campus. Quite
often in educational settings, campus-based policies endorsed by an institution perpetuate an assimilationist structure and agenda.

The focus groups and individual interviews served as a catalyst for students to engage in a conversation about their experiences at the high school. As a result, students critically examined their schooling experience and, in particular, illuminated the policies and learning opportunities offered by the institution. For these students the independent nature in which classroom activities were organized and taught did not foster an opportunity to build relationships with other teachers and their peers or establish a classroom community.

Even at institutions with smaller student populations, which would facilitate the building of relationships between students and faculty, and where relationships would be reciprocal and demonstrated with a commitment and responsibility to each other, American Indian students (self-identified as Pueblo) did not experience any real form of validation in the classroom. For students, the main push for building closer relationships with faculty meant establishing a reciprocal relationship whereby faculty would talk to them and get to know them as a method of building individual relationships and school community (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010; Quijada Cerecer, in press). The building of relationships between students and faculty is a form of validation.

Students sought out faculty who would freely share their personal experiences in navigating the successes and challenges in achieving career mobility. One student, William, elaborated:

"Unless you ask a teacher, you never hear about a teachers’ life, where they live, or how they grew up—I mean, come on, it would be cool to know a little more about their college life … or what life was like before they went to college."

William and other students continually faced faculty who restricted conversations to the daily lecture or curriculum content. Students were eager to learn more about how faculty identified and lived life. Most participants described faculty as rarely understanding the ways students constructed and embodied relationships with each other. This ideological misunderstanding between faculty and students created a foundation of instances where faculty did not validate students. For example, faculty were unable to understand or problematize the importance of attending off-campus events for this group of students and their respective communities. Rather than inquiring about the event and using it as a pedagogical moment that would validate the students and their community, faculty chose to critique their students and their respective communities. For American Indian students certain events are symbolic in that they mark an individual, familial, and community accomplishment. Rather than using such events as examples of inappropriate student behavior, faculty could have used those cultural events to affirm students and their respective communities.

Mentoring and Validation
Students rarely identified faculty as mentors. While committed to teaching, according to student narratives, faculty lacked the qualities that are important in building a validating, trusting, or “real” relationship. When asked to describe a mentor, a student said the following: “A person who shares their personal experiences and who makes me think about things differently … someone who gives me advice but yet listens to how I am feeling about it.” Other students described a mentor as an individual who is “trustworthy, loyal, and honest.” One participant defined a mentor as someone who shared his or her experiences. When asked to name a mentor and/or role model, all but one participant immediately named a family member, thus reinforcing how disconnected students felt from faculty in educational settings. Despite this disconnect, many students persisted in their attempts to seek out faculty who would serve as mentors for them. Students yearned for faculty to share personal and professional stories that demonstrated some of the challenges each had endured, giving the students a sense of validation and commitment to their educational goals.

Community Building and Validation
Students indicated a desire for activities that would validate who they were as American Indian students, yet also build community between students and faculty (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010; Quijada Cerecer, in press). For example, several students mentioned community-building events that had occurred in years past, events that validated the students’ accomplishments, were engaging, and built community among students, faculty, and the community. Adrien shared the following:

"They changed our award assembly. It used to be at night but they changed it to the day. Now my parents and family can’t attend because they work. I was mad about this, you know, because I worked hard to get good grades, and now my family couldn’t be there to see me receive the award."
For Adrien the awards assembly was an important event that provided a space to honor her parents and her work. This change reinforced how the administration at this high school viewed merit as an individual process. To avoid an epistemological disconnect—such as when an institution values individual merits but where individual merits for indigenous students are directly linked to communal merits—specific transformative training must be provided so that faculty can come to understand the value of validation in different forms. This study illuminates how educational institutions should consider even the scheduling of events that do not validate the students and their respective families. Over time, these instances need to be reexamined and recreated so as to establish a validating classroom experience for all students.

The Need for Extension and Specificity

Based on the review of existing literature and discussions of what researchers have found and implied regarding the validation of students on our campuses, there is still a significant need to extend the conceptualization of student validation into different realms that have not been explored. At the same time, there is a need to bring some more definitive operationalization to the construct of validation and invalidation through the identification of specific indicators of validation as well as through different methodological perspectives.

Prominent in the discussion of validation is the focus on the academic and social openness and thoughtful interaction between faculty and students in the classroom. This discussion illustrates the benefits that can be derived when faculty acknowledge and reward student perspectives and realities. This pedagogical approach creates increased opportunities for the development of student self-concept, positive involvement of significant others and peers, validation of cultural identities, and the creation of a sense of belonging on campus. All of these validation proxies serve to operationalize how and why students who lack the social and academic preparation for postsecondary success decide to persist and, in turn, build the potential to navigate through barriers to graduation. A combination of newer methodological approaches and diverse conceptualizations of validation would advance our understanding of how student validation contributes to important student outcomes such as persistence and student success.

Proposed Quantitative Extensions

Capturing the role of a “validating agent” such as a faculty member in the classroom could illuminate the interactive process between student and faculty within statistical models. The focus on the interaction between the student and validating agent could empirically extend current conceptualizations of validation and help to better operationally define the phenomenon. Current quantitative views on validation have mostly focused on the development of self-worth and academic gains on the part of the student. Not included in that affirmation viewpoint are how support systems (i.e., faculty in the classroom) or how an array of significant others (i.e., faculty, parent, friend, counselor) perceive their roles as validating agents. For example, little is known about faculty who value experiential knowledge while at the same time build a support climate for students. Conceivably, nested faculty and student models would add to our understanding of a true validating experience. More current and sophisticated statistical techniques such as hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and multilevel structural equation models, capable of testing nested models, could provide a more holistic perspective of the underlying structural patterns among multiple indicators of validation, predictor variables, and outcomes of interest. These nested models of student and faculty attitudes, behaviors, and perceived support networks could more accurately capture and assess the validation taking place between faculty and students.

Additionally, measures of complex constructs such as validation are often very difficult to operationally define, leading to the misspecification of quantitative models, ultimately resulting in findings that do not contribute significantly to our understanding of the phenomenon. Multiple measures of student and faculty perceptions of validation examined with latent class analysis could describe different types of students and mentors within the validation process. These quantitative research methodologies can be utilized to better clarify and

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1 To exemplify this point from a theoretical perspective, a broad framework from the literature on leadership provides an example of how it can be applied to validation. Rosti (1993) divided leadership definitions into two eras: the industrial paradigm and the postindustrial paradigm. According to Rosti, leadership is an "influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purpose" (p. 102). He further explains that this interaction between leaders and follower is multidirectional and noncoercive. In addition, followers are active in the process of leadership, and more than one leader and follower typically exist.

Based on Rosti’s (1993) definition, the relationship between validating agents and students mirrors that of leadership, wherein real changes include validation toward an outcome (i.e., persistence) as a mutual purpose. Although validating agents have more resources, and therefore more influence, to support the student’s success in college, the student must play a more active role in shaping how those intended changes take place, while at the same time recognizing that not all students have the social capital to exercise their agency to negotiate these changes. In addition, students also have connections to other students, who can assume the role of validating agents (Nona & Crip, 2005).
investigate the contribution of validation toward such important educational issues as student persistence and accomplishment.

Proposed Qualitative Extensions
While quantitative research on validation has emphasized students as the preferred unit of analysis, qualitative research has concentrated its focus on institutions (i.e., intervention programs), their roles (i.e., learning communities), and their impact on validating undergraduate students. The majority of these qualitative studies can be classified as interpretive studies conducted through interviews and observations. However, to better illustrate the process, experience, and practice of validation, rigorous case studies, narrative-based inquiries, and ethnographic studies should be utilized. Required within such in-depth case studies would be a history of the institution or program, a document analysis, participant interviews, and a measure of change over time. Narrative-based approaches could provide a more thorough investigation of the experiences of faculty members as they incorporate a practice of validation both inside the classroom and outside on campus. Finally, a smaller form of ethnography that includes interviews and participatory observations focused on the impact of ethnicity and class would incorporate additional student and faculty information to learn the cultural interactions between students and validating agents. These qualitative methodological approaches could extend the knowledge base on validation by illustrating more specific inquiries that better represent concepts or current issues regarding validation theory.

What is more, specific procedures and research designs within qualitative approaches serve to increase the validity and overall significance of the data collected. As previously noted, a focus on the metrics within a qualitative study in the form of pre- and post-interviews measures the amount of validation gained within a period of time. In this way, researchers will be more likely to extract definitions of validation from the themes that emerge from the narratives.

Concluding Remarks
Both quantitative and qualitative researchers have begun to extend and stipulate the current understanding and measurement of validation. Much more is now known than when Rendón (1994) first introduced the concept. However, since the concept of validation is based on an individual's experience and perceptions, there is a need to consider the degree of fluidity that must be maintained in those studies. For example, careful construction of survey items derived from interviews or focus groups as well as follow-up interviews of participants with too much specificity would only represent the pilot group. While identifying specific measures and items is helpful in understanding the concept of validation, it is important to keep in mind that the perceptions of the individual participant should still be represented. The notion of methodological positionality is important in defining validation for participants within a study.

As more and more questions are now focused on issues related to student success in higher education, every bit of information that addresses issues of equity and diversity on topics as important as student engagement, persistence, academic achievement, and degree attainment is helpful and worth exploring. To that end, current findings from studies focusing on the validation of students in the classroom and on campus have been helpful in linking the validation of students with the student outcomes previously noted. These are suggested quantitative and qualitative procedures and methods can be used to enhance our insight of validation and how it is, and should be, practiced on our campuses.

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