

Motivational and Social Aspects of the Filipino College Experience

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Although the literature on student motivation has focused on mastery and performance goals, more recent research has shown the predominance of social goals among Filipino students. Using mostly an inductive qualitative approach, such research showed the importance of accounting for the diverse aspects of the college experience. The current research is an attempt to document students' motivations for studying and the factors that facilitate or inhibit learning. Data from five focus group discussions among students in Philippine universities show that beyond students' valuing of education for the professional competence it builds, students value education as a means of fulfilling filial and familial responsibilities. The findings that parents and family are a main source of motivation and that positive relationships with peers and teachers are major facilitators of learning show the primacy of personal relationships as students work towards their college degrees. Implications of this research on the differential roles of family and school-based relationships are discussed.

Keywords: Adolescents, positive youth development, learning, motivational experiences, relationships

For many Filipinos, a college diploma symbolizes the attainment of a life goal, along with the hard work that led to its attainment, and the promise of professional success, financial stability, and personal stature (Puyat, 2005). Completion of a college education being a milestone, it behooves human development specialists who study the transition from adolescence to adulthood to examine the Filipino college experience. In particular, it is important to characterize, in the context of school, what enables and motivates Filipino youth to develop the competencies and outlook for effectively recognizing and assuming adult roles and identities (Furstenberg, 2000). This paper is an attempt to characterize the Filipino college experience in this regard.

Beyond Achievement Goal Orientations

Research on academic achievement has focused on two constructs, namely, goal orientations and learning strategies (e.g., Boekaerts, 1996; Hofer, Yu, & Pintrich, 1998; Pintrich, 2000). The two widely-researched goals are task or mastery goals, or studying in order to master a task; and, performance or ability goals, or studying in order to exhibit one's ability or to avoid revealing one's lack of ability (Ames, 1992; Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991; Wolters, 1998). With regard to learning strategies, various strategies have been identified and studied using standardized self-report questionnaires. An example of this is the Motivated Strategies and Learning Questionnaire, which measures student use of cognitive strategies at various levels (rehearsal, elaboration, organization, critical thinking, cognitive and metacognitive self-regulation) and management of time, space, and resources for studying (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991).

Research and theorizing on goal orientations (often referred to as achievement goal theory) and on learning strategies (typically examined using a cognitive perspective) have shown how different goal orientations determine the practice of learning strategies, as well as how goal orientations and learning strategies together predict learning and achievement (Cleary & Chen, 2009; Schraw, Horn, Thorndike-Christ, & Bruning, 1995; Schutz, 1994; Sperling, Howard, Staley, & DuBois, 2004). An ubiquitous result is that mastery goals lead to better learning and higher levels of achievement than do performance goals; this has been attributed to the use of more effective strategies and deeper cognitive processing of learners with mastery goals compared to learners with performance goals (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996).

While stable and useful results have been found regarding mastery and performance goals, students may be oriented towards other goals. A goal domain regarded as important by a number of researchers is the social domain. Urdan and Maehr (1995) and Dowson and McInerney (2003) have examined various social goals of education, such as getting an education in order to be a productive member of society, to meet roles and obligations, to give honor to one's family, to be of help to others, to attain social position or stature, to gain the approvals of others, and to gain belongingness in a group. Indeed, such results suggest the critical role of the social and cultural environment in how students frame their educational goals (cf. Salonen, Vauras, & Efklides, 2005; Tharp, 1989). For example, various social constructs have been shown to be linked to goals and motivation, including

friendships (Nelson & De Backer, 2008), student-faculty interaction (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009), and family factors (Ratelle, Guay, Larose, & Senécal, 2004).

The argument we present here is not merely to include social goals as a third goal orientation in order to more adequately capture the Filipino college experience. Social goals are an important construct, but there are many other constructs, which characterize students, that also need to be identified and studied (Bernardo, Salanga, & Aguas, 2008). In the area of learning strategies, for example, there have been identified novel constructs, such as coregulation in learning (Salonen, Vauras, & Efklides, 2005) and student interpretation of daily school experiences (Witkow & Fuligni, 2007). Indeed, the limitations of treating motivational cognitive variables as a priori constructs and of quantitatively examining their interrelationships on the outset have been pointed out by various authors (Bernardo, 2003a; Bernardo, Salanga, & Aguas, 2008; Dowson & McInerney, 2003; Van Etten, Pressley, McInerney, & Liem, 2008), who have subsequently espoused and pursued inductive, qualitative research in order to examine student perspectives, thus revealing other critical constructs.

Such qualitative studies and related reviews document constructs and issues going beyond achievement goal theory and cognitive perspectives. Among these constructs or topics are students' theories and beliefs on learning (Dowson & McInerney, 2003); possible antecedents and consequences of students' social goals, such as family and peer influence, institutional practices, and task demands (Urduan & Maehr, 1995); and, various factors that college students think affect their academic motivation, such as the nature of course work or activities, family members and peers, and various aspects of the college environment (Van Etten, Pressley, McInerney, & Liem, 2008).

Characterizations of Filipino College Students' Motivations

The broadening of the scope of research on school learning is all the more important when studying non-western cultures, because of the often Western origin of constructs and theories in the extant literature; thus, socio-cultural factors and differences, cultural meanings of constructs, and cultural-specific factors are not considered (Anderman & Kaplan, 2008; Schommer-Aikins & Easter, 2008; Tharp, 1989). Inquiries and research have been made in this regard. Thus, for example, Anderman & Kaplan (2008) underscored the importance of examining cultural processes and meanings when studying social processes and academic motivation; and,

Bernardo (2003a) examined the applicability to Filipino students of certain western-based learning measures. Bond and Sabourin (2000) commented on the importance of social factors in collectivist cultures in which much premium is placed on "relationship harmony". Relatedly, Watkins and colleagues found that among Filipino students, social acceptance and social anxiety are part of a six-factor self-concept model (Watkins, Fleming, & Alfon, 1989) and that social roles are oriented more towards family than towards institutions (Watkins & Gerong, 1997).

Bernardo and his colleagues (2008) have examined extensively Filipino college students' goals, perspectives, and experiences regarding college education, using not only quantitative correlational methods, but also inductive qualitative and open-ended survey methodologies. Bernardo (2004) showed that achievement goal orientation and learning strategies are correlated with what he called "socially-rooted beliefs", such as how one assesses events, their outcomes, and their origins. Bernardo (2003b; Bernardo, Salanga, & Aguas, 2008) also documented the different ways by which Filipino youth value education: Filipinos recognize the pragmatic value of education, seeing it as a path to professional success and socio-economic stability; they see the personal value of education, recognizing that it leads to personal goals, personal competency, and self-improvement; and, they also see the social value of education, admitting to various parent- or family- and peer-related educational goals.

Characterizations of Filipino students' learning motives and strategies were also obtained in a cross-cultural study of learning motives and strategies of students from Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Australia (Liem, Nair, Bernardo, & Prasetya, 2008). The learning motives of Filipinos, in the order of prevalence in the studied sample, were: "surface" motives of landing a good job, earning money, and passing a course; encouragement received from loved ones; curiosity and excitement about learning; and, achievement and competition. The learning strategies of Filipinos, in the order of prevalence in the studied sample, were: rote learning and memorizing, deeper comprehension and application, and organization of time and effort.

Examining the Filipino College Experience

What has so far been discussed in this paper is the trend towards recognizing and accounting for the diverse aspects of the college experience, going beyond goal orientations and learning strategies and expanding the scope of inquiry to aspects that are more salient to the students' minds. The

studies on Filipino students that were discussed indeed suggest that the motives of college students are rich and complex. Possibly rich and complex, too, are the students' actual college experiences, which are the contexts in which these motives and concerns are enacted.

What possibly are the critical and salient aspects of the college experience? Students' day-to-day experiences are important as they serve as backdrop for attaining educational goals. Witkow and Fuligni (2007), for instance, had students document in a diary checklist their day-to-day experiences (number of daily school demands, positive or negative school feelings). Their study showed that these day-to-day experiences mediate the relationship between student goals and student achievement outcomes. The youth's social network of teachers and peers is another important aspect of their college experience in part because it influences the extent of the youth's school engagement or involvement (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). The various course activities form another aspect. Not only do the youth devote much time on these activities, the youth's academic success is determined largely by the quality of their performance in these activities.

Identifying and documenting the various aspects of the college experience is appropriate, even necessary it seems, when examining how college students transform their goals and motivations to academic achievement and success. In all likelihood, many aspects of the college experience are not indifferent to the students' goals, so to speak, in that they either facilitate the attainment of these goals, or hinder it. Just which of these are hindrances and which of these are facilitators need to be documented, too. Thus, identifying and documenting the various aspects of the college experience would contribute to the discourse, currently prevalent in the area of positive youth development, in identifying the desired or valued outcomes of the youth-to-adult transition and in examining whatever promotes their attainment (Grantmakers in Health, 2002).

Using an inductive qualitative methodology as was done in the Philippine studies cited above, we attempted to document in this research students' perspectives of their college experience, specifically their motivations for and valuing of education. Here we took the psychological approach, as proposed by Furlong, Whipple, St. Jean, Simental, Soliz, and Punthuna (2003), of using students' perspectives and beliefs as primary data, recognizing them as promising starting points of theory building. In addition, examining the youth's perspectives and beliefs has merit given that the youth are seen as active agents of their development (Washington State University Extension, 2008); thus, what the youth think and believe would have a bearing on whether expected or desired developmental outcomes (e.g., acquired competencies) are achieved.

In order to gain insight on how Filipino youth work towards these outcomes and competencies, we also attempted to document how Filipino youth study and what factors facilitate or inhibit their studying. Here, we took a social perspective, as proposed, too, by Furlong, Whipple, St. Jean, Simental, Soliz, and Punthuna (2003), of looking into the specific social context in which outcomes and competencies are, or are not, attained. Such context is critical given the aforementioned importance and prevalence of social goals of education.

To summarize, the current research addressed the following questions: First, what are the Filipino college students' motivations for studying and what value do they place on education? Second, what is the Filipino college experience like: which of it facilitate their studying, which hinder their studying, and how do they study in the face of these facilitators and hindrances.

METHOD

Participants

Participants (approximately 80 in all) were college students from two private universities in Manila, one private university each in Pampanga and in Cavite, and one public university in Mindanao. Majority of the participants were in the latter part of the teen years; a few were in the mid-teens or early twenties. Participants came from across all year levels and from various majors (education, engineering, humanities, social science, science, and medical-related courses). Approximately half were males and half were females. They were recruited through faculty and student contacts.

Procedure

Focus group discussions. Five focus group discussions (FGDs), one from each participating university, were conducted. For each FGD, there were a total of 12 to 20 participants. There were three facilitators across the five FGDs, all of whom used the same questions and knew the FGD protocol. All FGDs were audiotaped and a documentor took notes during the FGDs.

The FGD questions were meant to generate participants' descriptions of their college experience and were about (a) forms of learning (activities and requirements, learning and study strategies, extra-curricular activities); (b) facilitators of learning (activities and requirements, teachers, classmates); (c) inhibitors of learning (activities and requirements, teachers, classmates);

motivation and achievement (what motivates, what discourages); and (d) education (why is education valuable, what can be improved). The questions were asked in the order in which these are listed in the Appendix.

Some of these questions were skipped, or allotted only little time, if participants' responses to earlier questions already substantially addressed these questions. Probe or follow-up questions were asked as needed.

Organization and analysis of data. For each FGD question, a research assistant listed the words, phrases, or sentences from the participants' responses, grouping similar responses together and attaching a word- or phrase-descriptor for each group. One of the authors then formed larger conceptual categories out of these groups to further summarize the data and determine the salient underlying themes of the Filipino college experience. Word- or phrase-descriptors were attached to each category.

The other author sorted the data strands, grouped by the research assistant, in yet another way, around more general, higher-level constructs, namely (a) participants' perceptions of school, peer, and family (as the participants frequently referred to peer and family in the FGDs); (b) the schooling demands that school, peer, and family place on the participants and the kinds of support they give to the participants, (c) the participants' traits and actions (both positive and negative) that they think influence schooling success and satisfaction; and (d) schooling outcomes that participants desire or target. Word- or phrase-descriptors were attached to each category.

Both authors then discussed their respective categories and the underlying themes that ran across these categories.

RESULTS

Valuing of Education and Motivations for Studying

There are various ways that the participants value education. First, participants either regard education as an unqualified good or regard learning as having an intrinsic value. Participants also noted what education does to them: education develops self and character, guides one's actions and living, and facilitates life goals. A value of education often mentioned by participants is the financial benefit that they and their families can derive from their having a college degree. Finally, participants noted the wider social consequences of education as they see education as a solution to poverty and ignorance.

There also are various reasons that motivate participants to study; these parallel the reasons they gave for valuing education. Thus, an intrinsic liking for and being challenged by what they do drive them to do their best. Some participants have internalized the importance of education and this serves as a motivator. Still for others, either the desire to have high grades or the fear of failing make them study harder. Aside from course- or performance-related motivators, what drives participants to study hard is the thought that they have been given the opportunity to go to college in spite of financial difficulties coupled with the thought of their parents or a sibling struggling to work to finance their schooling. They desire to succeed to make their families proud, to provide for their families, and to work for a stable career and financial stability.

Learning Strategies and Points for Improvement

When asked to describe their study techniques, participants emphasized the way they manage their study hours. They determine which courses or activities take priority over others and they find the best time and place to study, arranging their study area so as to make it more conducive to thinking. They described techniques for acquiring, organizing, and retaining what is being studied; these include memorization techniques, note-taking and organization strategies, and strategies for reading, review, practice, and understanding (e.g., frequent use of dictionary, reading notes soon after lecture). Participants also reported setting goals, such as having a target grade and increasing one's efforts after getting a low or failing grade.

Participants feel they can improve on focus and determination (e.g., prioritizing studies over just having fun, willingness to work hard), patience and discipline (e.g. not procrastinating, consistency in one's efforts to study), and critical thinking.

Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning

Courses activities. Participants were involved in various course activities, namely, lectures, examinations, discussions, seminars, research papers and reports, field trips, and hands-on projects and applications.

Course activities that participants considered as facilitators of learning are those that ensure their acquisition of knowledge and skills; moreover, these activities must compel them to work hard. For example, participants prefer research activities over rote memorization. They also said they learn better when teachers assign homework after a lecture and conduct recitations every session. Participants also prefer activities that prepare them for their

future profession (e.g., practicum, board exam reviews, involvement in organizations) and that are applied rather than theoretical (e.g., laboratory projects and case analysis). Lastly, participants value interactions and the exchange of insights and ideas with their teachers. Participants also mentioned as facilitators of learning non-majors and general education subjects and activities that enhance their English communication skills.

Participants considered as inhibitors of learning those activities that are irrelevant to their majors. They do not learn much from very simple tasks, such as rote memorization, or from very technical or unnecessarily complicated activities. Requirements that are too many given the allotted time also do not help participants learn.

Teachers and their pedagogy. Participants discussed how teachers and their pedagogy are facilitators or inhibitors of learning. What help participants learn are teachers who explain well and simplify difficult topics, who are efficient (e.g., employ innovative pedagogies, are punctual, give feedback about student performance), and who provoke and inspire students to learn. Participants appreciate teachers who are knowledgeable (e.g., teachers who don't stop learning or who possess extensive knowledge), who are like a family member or friend, and who are personable (e.g., have sense of humor, are fun, behave like a family member or friend).

On the other hand, participants find learning harder when teachers do not explain well or in detail, are boring and use traditional pedagogy, exerting little effort in helping students learn. Participants appear to be affected by the demeanor of teachers who think poorly about, or have a negative attitude towards them (e.g., those who address or describe students using foul or derogatory terms).

Classmates. Participants reported receiving a lot of support from their classmates. This support come by way of being a good example, by taking studies seriously, or by motivating them to be as good as others (e.g., through friendly competition, as a source of inspiration). Interactions among classmates provide encouragement and develop friendships. Classmates also facilitate learning through actual assistance extended (e.g., group study, classmate's willingness to answer questions, stimulating class discussions).

On the other hand, the lack of order, of silence, and of cleanliness in the classroom discourage participants to learn. Their peers' negative habits also pose barriers to learning; these are: not taking work seriously, cheating, being absent frequently, not studying while depending too much on others' help, and not contributing to groupwork. Peers who gamble or drink also have a negative influence on them. Unfriendly competition also was noted as an inhibitor of learning.

Underlying Themes on College Learning Experience

A number of underlying themes run through participants' accounts of their valuing of and motivation for studying, their manner of studying, and their perceived facilitators and inhibitors of learning. The underlying themes are about (a) the value of personal relationships, (b) college as a venue for developing achievement-related competencies, and (c) the construal of the college experience in terms of self and family. Each of these is described below.

The value of personal relationships. One sense in which relationships are important in the college experience is that learning almost always happens amidst positive relationships. Participants find themselves involved in learning when there are lively classroom interactions, when teachers are amiable, when there is mutual exchange of help and support among classmates, and when parents support and inspire them. They expressed regret over, and were not indifferent about teachers who dislike students as a whole and classmates who are not serious about learning.

Sa mech, lalaki kaming lahat...masaya...sharing answer kami lahat...if hindi ma-gets yung assignment...tulungan kami. [In mechanical engineering, we are all guys....it's fun...we share our answers with each other...if one doesn't understand the assignment...we help each other.] (student from a public university in Mindanao).

Magaling siyang magturo; meron siyang ways na ang gaan dalhin; marami kaming natutunan sa kanya. [She (He) teaches well; She (he) has ways that are likeable; we learned a lot from her (him).] (referring to a speech class teacher; student from a private university in Manila)

Hindi nakakatulong pag may absent...inuman...check attendance lang...tapos takas...tapos inuman and tong its...instead na mag study...gawa kami ng kodigo...lahat nandun na...kala mo naka study talaga...Pagnakatalikod ang teacher....wala na. [It doesn't help that others are absent...drinking...(they just wait for) attendance to be checked...and then (they) surreptitiously leave the class...and then (they) drink and gamble...instead of studying...we make a cheat sheet...everything is there...as though (we) really studied...When the teacher isn't looking...that's it (we cheat).](student from a public university in Mindanao)

May pagka-psychotic siya. Sinasabihan ka niyang basura; sinasabihan niya kaming lahat utak talangka. [She (He) is somewhat

a psychotic. She (He) tells you that you are garbage; she (he) tells us all that we have the brains of a crablet.] (student from a private university in Manila)

The other sense in which relationships have primacy in the college experience is the participants' intrinsic need for and the satisfaction they receive from meaningful relationships. While participants said that respect between teacher and students, friendships among classmates, and good family relationships help or motivate them to learn, they appreciate these relationships beyond the learning support they receive, indicating that these are in themselves highly valued.

Pag sa classroom, prof siya; parang barkada namin and prof namin na yun. [In the classroom, she (he) behaves like a professor; but really, she (he) is like one of us in our peer group.] (student from a private university in Manila)

Compared *sa dating school ko, mas friendly dito. Kami-kami nagsasama-sama, nagtuturuan. Iba bonding ng mga students dito.* [Compared to students in my former school, the students here are friendlier. We are all together, we teach each other. The bonding of students here are special.] (student from a private university in Pampanga)

Family *ang motivation ko; gusto ko graduate on time kasi uuwi ang mother ko pag graduation ko.* [Family is my motivation. I want to graduate on time, because then my mother will come home for my graduation.] (student from a private university in Manila.)

College as a venue for developing achievement-related competencies. The other themes point towards college learning as a venue for exhibiting and developing competence. First, the understanding of knowledge and acquisition of skills by themselves are important to the participants. They thus value what contribute to these, such as competent and knowledgeable teachers, appropriate course activities, effective study techniques, and an interest in their work.

Education is one of the best things; you can show it and be proud of it. You can be proud of what you know. (student from a private university in Manila)

Magkaroon ng critical mind. Mas gusto kong lumawak ang kaalaman ko. Gusto ko pang magtanong ng maraming bagay. [(I want to have) a critical mind. I want all the more to broaden my

knowledge. I still want to ask questions about many things.] (student from a private university in Manila)

Quizzes *nakakatulong*; not purely memory you have to understand. [Quizzes help. Rote memory is not enough, you have to understand.] (student from a private university in Cavite.)

Second, participants value engaging in tasks that are actual applications of knowledge or principles, specially tasks similar to what are done in their target professions or that develop the competencies needed in these professions.

(We had a seminar) on new trends in teaching; team-teaching, demo-teaching. (education students from a private university in Cavite, when asked what helped in one's education)

We're given machine projects to do. These projects help us practice programming, which is needed in our course. When machine projects benefit more than one subject, that is even better. (student from a private university in Manila)

Interview with the governor. Also with the grassroots level of society. Important *kasi yung na-apply mga natutunan namin sa school. Na-feel namin na professional kami*. [(We) interviewed the governor. (We) also (interviewed people) at the grassroots level of society. It is important that we applied what we had learned in school. Then, we felt like we were professionals.] (student from a private university in Pampanga)

Third, they value hard work and a learning environment that facilitates it. Hence, they set and acquire learning or achievement goals and appreciate course activities that facilitate goal attainment. They express concern about inhibitors of learning such as the lack of silence and order among students, and the desire to acquire good work habits such as discipline and determination.

Mahirap...pero maganda. Maraming discrimination...di nila alam kung gaano kahirap. Noon ayaw ko, pero now...gusto ko na. [It's hard, but it's fine. There is a lot of discrimination...they just don't know how hard it is. At first, I felt like giving up, but now I like it already.] (student from a public university in Mindanao)

Students *kailangan ayusin*. Not all students persevere enough to finish their college. Others are just having fun. *Kailangan nilang malaman na once matanda na sila...* [Students must improve. Not

all students persevere enough to finish to college. Others are just having fun. They should know that once they are old] (student from a private university in Pampanga)

Thus, the college experience leads some participants to be engaged in what they do. College then becomes a form of personal investment through which students achieve various outcomes such as competencies, thinking skills, creativity, and interest in one's work.

It's so interesting so *gusto mo aralin ulit, kaya mas natuto ako dun.* [It's so interesting that you want to study it again; that's why I learned more from that.] (student from a private university in Manila)

Minor subjects can help you explore options and in discovering yourself. (student from a private university in Cavite)

Construal of the college experience in terms of self and family. The FGD participants construed their college experience in terms of self and family. For them, college is not only for developing competencies and attaining academic success, college also present them a choice of acquiring and practicing resilience that in turn would lead to the development of self. Students can either accept defeat or surmount obstacles. They can either succumb to being overwhelmed; or, they can harness their negative experiences or emotions, thus recovering from setbacks and avoiding being demoralized.

Minsan gusto kong sumuko pero isipin ko na lang, may makukuha ako balang araw. [Sometimes, I just want to give up, but I just tell myself that some day I'll get something good out of this.] (student from a private university in Manila)

Discouraged *ako sa pagsabi sa akin ng bobo.* I did my best, *pero bobo ako.* [I get discouraged when I am told that I am dumb. I did my best, but I am dumb.] (student from a public university in Mindanao)

While they have positive external attributions for their development (i.e., the help and support of others), they also have positive internal attributions, viewing themselves as effective agents of their development:

Myself. *Sa akin yung effort. Sarili ang key factor.* [Myself. The effort was mine. Self is the key factor.] (student from a private university in Manila)

Me, *kasi ako yung gumawa noon*. If I did not do it, I would not have achieved it. [Me, because I did it. If I did not do it, I would not have achieved it.] (student from a private university in Manila)

The last theme sets academic achievement at the stage of filial and familial piety and gratitude, revealing an interface between themes pertaining to personal relationships and themes pertaining to achievement-related competencies. In many instances, participants recognized families' financial and personal struggles in sending them to school; they articulated their dream of professional success and financial stability in order to make their parents proud and to pay back their debt-of-gratitude. While they expressed wanting to earn for their future families, they also expressed wanting to improve the economic status of their parents and siblings. They see academic achievement as a necessary preceding goal to this twin-goal of professional success and financial stability for filial and familial reasons.

Kailangan kong magsikap para makatulong sa family kasi galing ako sa broken family. [I have to strive so I can help my family, because I come from a broken family.] (student from a private university in Manila.)

Motivation *ko* parents *ko kasi ginagapang kami sa pag-aaral*. [My parents are my motivation, because they work so hard to get us through school.] (student from a private university in Manila.)

DISCUSSION

The current research provides an account of students' motivations for studying, their ways of studying, and how various aspects of their learning experiences help or do not help them. From this account, themes on valuing personal relationships and aiming at academic achievement surfaced, with the former serving as both a means and an end to the latter.

The Value of Personal Relationships

It is not at all surprising that college students would report on the importance of personal relationships to their learning experiences. Studies in the Philippine context have already begun to reveal the significance of socially oriented learning (e.g., Liem, Nair, Bernardo, and Prasetya 2008). What is particularly informative about the results is that they reveal the sheer ubiquity of relationship concerns in the academic context, at least

from the point of view of undergraduates. Students take note of and are attentive to certain relational cues, not just from their friends and classmates, but also from their teacher. The teacher's display of good-will and fellowship seems to be given much weight by students. It forms a possibly integral part of how they explain their academic successes or failures to themselves.

At another level of relevant relationships, students credit their families, especially parents, for the motivation to persevere in their education. However, there is a notable qualitative difference between their reports regarding the contributions of teachers and classmates on the one hand, and family members on the other. The relationship with the teacher and with classmates is framed as more proximal to the act of studying itself. This kind of motivation is more direct and immediately consequential to learning (e.g. teacher prods students to study; friends explain the lessons to other classmates). In contrast, the students do not speak of their family's relevance to their schooling in this way. The family seems to provide the greater narrative within which students pursue some more-or-less defined end-goals set by the perceived expectations of the family. With regard to the role of family members in actual learning behaviors and strategies, the respondents are notably silent. The implications of this will be discussed in a later section.

College as a Venue for Developing Achievement-related Competencies

A different set of motivations emerges from students' reports of their attempts to do well in school. There appear to be two distinct but not mutually exclusive sets of reasons that students give for why they strive to acquire knowledge in school. There are pragmatic/extrinsic reasons for acquiring skills that are expected to facilitate future career success, and there are also more intellectual/intrinsic motivations that reflect a basic interest in and enjoyment of learning and mental effort.

Bernardo's study (2003b) confirms that beliefs about the pragmatic valuing of education has consequences on learning. In contrast, the authors are not aware of research evidence indicating that, in the Philippine context, the need for intellectual stimulation is, at least, as consequential for learning outcomes as is the pragmatic valuing of education. Intuitively, this is the case. Moreover, research on mastery goal orientations (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996) that was cited in the introduction of this paper also points to interest in learning and desire of mastery as predictors of academic achievement.

We therefore cannot take for granted that interest in subject matter has learning consequences until this is shown empirically. What the data at

hand do indicate is that having interesting topics and engaging activities help students have a positive construal of their college experience. We might speculate that this would in turn have consequences for their satisfaction with their college education.

Although the FGD data do not present evidence, a possibly complicating factor that limits the link between intellectual/intrinsic motivations and learning outcomes is that intellectual stimulation is not a commodity monopolized by schools. Television, the internet, non-academic reading, and other extra-curricular activities compete with school work for the student's attention, and all of these are potentially as intellectually stimulating as academic activities. How non-academic activities is a source of learning and how they compare to the quality and effects of actual school learning merit investigation.

With regard to dealing with the demands of school-work, participants again cite personal relationships as an important factor. Specifically, they believe that the focus and resources required in schoolwork are contingent on the behavior of their classmates and teachers. It is possible that they adapt their learning strategies according to both the opportunities and the challenges that these relationships present. A scenario to illustrate how personal relationships inform students' learning strategy could be the student who becomes concerned about finding the time and place for studying because her classmates are disruptive.

Construal of the College Experience in Terms of Self and Family

An immediately striking feature of the participants' accounts of their college experience is that the theme of self and family seems absent from the context of learning itself. This echoes the observations made earlier regarding the differences between the motivational roles of family and of school-based relationships. In comparison to family relationships, relationships with teachers and students seem directly implicated in students' accounts of their learning behavior. This may suggest that the level at which students construe their filial responsibilities and ultimate life-goals is not necessarily concomitant with their actual learning situation and behavior. At least two interpretations are possible. One is that these aspirations are usually implicit and indirect, rarely verbalized in the context of actual schoolwork and study. Although family might provide meaning and justification to schooling and although family members might guide behavior and motivation at a general level, students do not expect them to play a direct role at the actual "operational" level of the classroom.

Another way to understand the apparent disjunction between family and school-based relationships is that the FGD participants were simply reporting their knowledge of the existing social mores governing parent-child relationships. Sternberg (1990) calls these culturally accepted constructions as "implicit theories" that can constitute a folk-psychological way of explaining behavior. Students might have been reporting their implicit theories of academic motivation. This is not to say that the respondents did not believe their own statements regarding their love for their parents, or their appreciation of the sacrifices involved in getting them a good education. It is important to point out, however, that such beliefs, though genuinely held, could be inconsequential for actual behavior.

Motivational and Social Aspects of the Filipino College Experience

It is important to note that the task required of participants in this study boils down to answering the questions "Why do I study?", or "What helps me keep studying?" Their statements were responses to the different forms in which this basic, overarching question was posed to them. The results therefore tell us that students believe that they study because of significant personal relationships, because they like studying, and because they want to achieve long-term goals for themselves and their families. In turn, they perceive that they pursue various learning strategies and behaviors, presumably so that it would allow them to satisfy the stated motives in some form or another.

The account seems straightforward enough, but if we begin to elucidate on the possible relationships between the stated motives and the declared learning strategies, we are confronted with the discrepancy between personal relationships in school and the motivating value of family. Bernardo, Salanga, and Aguas (2008) noted similar themes extracted from their sample of 710 students, two of which were conceptualized around "Parent/Family" and "Peer". The parallel between their themes and those of this study is clear: family is reported as a powerful source of motivation for doing well in school, but it is the relationships with peers (including teachers in the current study) that seems to directly inform study behaviors and learning strategies.

It is possible that participants' accounts of the differential roles of family and of peers and teachers are merely artifacts of the FGD structure and questions. It could be that the participants received the notion that "learning strategies" is to be construed as "things you do in school". This construal might then inhibit the students from thinking about examples of learning

strategies from the family context, assuming that there were such unreported experiences. The possibility that the family directly informs students' learning experiences cannot be completely ruled out, but there seems to be no clear indication that the responses were strongly biased in this way. This possibility also is borne out by the fact that the Parent/Family and Peer themes as described in Bernardo, Salanga, and Aguas (2008) also show a similar disjunction with each other, although the authors did not call attention to it.

Still another explanation is that students might perceive family to be largely irrelevant to actual learning in college. At this phase in students' academic careers, they are expected to be independent and to solve school problems by themselves. Even if it were true that parents do aid their studying in some direct way, the data might be indicating that students will not readily acknowledge this assistance.

An observation that could be germane to a possible explanation is that the family seems to be invoked as an explanatory factor only when students are asked to be reflective about their learning experience and its consequences. This is also true of their beliefs about the self-transformational effects of education. It might then be plausible that the family takes on a certain degree of abstraction when students are asked to think about it in relation to their education. This is because there are two ways to appreciate the question "Why do I study?" These roughly approximate the "efficient" and "final causes" of Aristotelian metaphysics (Aristotle trans. 1952): on the one hand, the question might be referring to the situations and circumstances that enable a student to study, such as "I study because my friend encourages me to get a good grade" (to wit, that if the encouragement was not given, I might not have studied); on the other hand, the same question might be understood as a query regarding the purpose of studying, such as "I study because I want to provide for my family". What the data suggest is that, in the context of the school, it is the former construal that is invoked. Questions about the value of education seem to invoke the latter.

Admittedly, the small and unrepresentative sample used in this study puts a limit on the generalizability and definitiveness of its conclusions. Patterns in the data strands, however, as summarized in the underlying themes, are useful in building a working model of the Filipino college students' understanding of their own educational motivations. Specifically, this model can be one that places the family at the level of an implicit paradigm - an abstraction, almost like a strongly-held belief - that might influence actual learning behavior but in an indirect way through meaning-making. Beliefs about the family can provide the student with a narrative that gives them a purpose that is both noble and self-gratifying. Also at this level would be

self-transformational goals that are believed to be achievable through education, which provides the young adult with a narrative about progress and optimism. Both these narratives can provide the student with an implicit but steady source of motivation. Closer to the actual theater of action, however, are the personal relationships in the school context which also motivate but more directly lead to actual learning strategies. This is supplemented by pragmatic goals of future career or achievement, or more intrinsic motivations of interest and challenge.

If it were true that the model accurately depicts most Filipino students' belief structures, some interesting implications are worth exploring. First, actual learning outcomes will most probably not influence the beliefs about family-oriented goals. This is because the literature on attitude change (Lambert, Scherer, Schott, Olson, Andrews, O'Brien, & Zissert, 2010) predicts strengthening of conservative values under threat (e.g. academic failure), while absence of threat would maintain the status quo. Since most of the participants endorse the arguably conservative value of filial piety, it can be inferred that this would remain stable whatever the students' learning outcome. Second, changes at the level of family oriented goals should have implications for actual learning motivation. This would follow if indeed the family served as an important focus for the achievement narratives of Filipino college students. Third, peer and teacher relationships would be better predictors of learning strategies than would family relationships.

In conclusion, students see themselves in social situations that need to be managed, both to maintain personal relationships and to create space for pursuing learning goals. In some cases, these personal relationships might be instrumental to learning; in other cases, they can make learning more difficult. It is evident from the data that students recognize the double-edged nature of certain relationships. With regard to the role of the family, though love for their parents might give Filipino students a firm existential anchor, they might also implicitly believe that it is the love of their teachers and classmates that is consequential to their academic performance. While the welfare of the family as an abstraction lends impetus for students to persevere and to be optimistic, the actual praxis of learning is mired in the politics and compromises of the classroom, not always unpleasant but definitely always social.

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APPENDIX

Guide Questions for the Focus Group Discussions

1. What are the typical activities and requirements in your subjects? Which activities and requirements help you learn and why? Which activities and requirements do not help you learn and why?
2. What are your favorite subjects? What make you like these subjects? What subjects don't you like? What make you dislike these subjects?
3. How do your teachers teach? What is it that you like in the way they teach? What is it that you don't like in the way they teach?
4. In what ways are your classmates of help in your studies? In what ways are your classmates a hindrance in your studies?
5. How do you study? Please share with us your study techniques.
6. What motivates you to study? What discourages you from studying?
7. When you achieve something, who or what do you regard to be responsible for that achievement?
8. What can be derived from one's education? How important is education to you? Why is it important?
9. What three things can be improved in your schooling? How can these be improved?

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