

**NO PAIN, NO GAIN: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT
OF PERSISTENCE IN LEARNING
IN A TAIWANESE COLLEGE PROGRAM**

**Submitted by Li-Chi Pan
M. A.**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Education**

**Trescowthick School of Education
Faculty of Education**

**Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115,
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
Australia**

July 2006

Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part form a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the theses received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Li-chi Pan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the page.

Li-chi Pan
July, 2006

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,

PAN, FU-TIEN AND PAN-TSENG, TSUI-LIU,

whose endless support allow me to persist in my learning

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could never have been accomplished without the guidance and caring advice of my supervisor Dr. Caroline Smith. She encouraged me to find my strength and voice, and patiently tried to keep my spirits up through this long and challenging learning process. By providing the opportunity to learn her self-reflective teaching as well as research philosophies and approaches under her guidance, I have had the privilege to learn from her personally and academically.

I thank my supervisor Dr. Lyn Carter for sharing with me her expertise in research methodology. She has been generous with helpful comments, criticism and suggestions for improvements that have helped to shape this dissertation. I am also grateful to others in the faculty, Dr. Ken Smith, Dr. Valda Ward and Dr. Jackie McGilp, who shared their time and introduced me to educational research methodologies. Professor Philip Clarkson and Dr. John Brick have been a source of inspiration and suggestions and they demonstrated to me the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for academic research.

In addition, I want to acknowledge Gary, Lina, Betty, Rosa, Alice and Leo and all my close friends for their company through the journey of doctoral study. I also want to thank Elizabeth Powell, Professor Judith Chapman and Dr. Stewart Sharlow, each played a unique and supportive role in facilitating my study. Included in this group are the participants, without whom this study would not exist. I appreciate their openness and trust in sharing with me their persistence experiences. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my students. They showed me the importance of education in their lives, and inspired me to learn to be a better teacher for them.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore, describe and thus understand the phenomenon of two-year college program students' persistence within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition; and to develop and provide a framework or patterns for understanding working adult students' persistence for educators. By using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach, the persistence in learning experiences of specific participants was explored based on semi-structured interviews in two exploratory studies linked by a comprehensive literature review. The researcher's own experience of persistence was also included as part of the study. The data were analysed by using thematic analysis and narrative construction.

Findings reveal that participants persist with the support of enabling factors and application of coping strategies despite barriers. The intertwined relationship between the value placed on qualifications, identity recognition and views of persistence contribute to the concept of persistence. This concept develops through schemas emerging from the data: historical effect, cultural reproduction and identity construction. Under the influence of Taiwanese tradition and culture, this concept of persistence immerses into the participants' knowledge ground and standpoints to understand the world they live in. The concept is defined as 'no pain, no gain' and includes dimensions of insisting on the right to study, fulfilment of dreams, being a role model of good study habits, personal growth and enrichment. Participants construct both social identity as graduates and personal identity as progressive, competent and respected individuals.

The findings of this study benefit both theory and practice. Theoretical implications and recommendations include providing insights into the concept of persistence through development of schema that underpin factors contributing to working adult students' persistence in Taiwan. Practical implications and recommendations include insights drawn from the perspective of Taiwanese culture and tradition to understand the experience of two-year college program working adult students to persist in a high level learning environment, which informs educators to see themselves as important sources of support and information, and thus able to assist their students to cope with the barriers to their learning, or to extend persistence outside their formal educational settings and maintain their learning.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF PERSISTENCE IN LEARNING IN A TAIWANESE COLLEGE PROGRAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
STATEMENT OF SOURCES	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES	ix
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	
Introduction	1
Definition of Terms	4
The Role of Culture and Tradition	5
My Experience of Persistence in Education	6
Overview of the Literature with Respect to Taiwan	9
Site of the Study	10
The Participants	11
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Research Methodology	12
Data Collection	14
Significance of the Study	15
Limitation of the Study	16
A Note on Writing Style	16
Overview of the Thesis	16
Towards Chapter Two	17
 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW I AND EXPLORATORY STUDY I	
Introduction	18
Literature Review I: Themes Contributing to Persistence	19
Barriers to Learning	19
Coping Strategies for Barriers	20

Enabling Factors for Persistence	24
In Summary	27
Exploratory Study I: Finding Direction	29
Research Design of the Exploratory Study I	29
Findings of the Exploratory Study I	33
Theme One: Barriers and Coping Strategies	33
Theme One Overview	42
Theme Two: Enabling Factors for Persistence	43
Theme Two Overview	45
Theme Three: The Value Placed on Qualifications	47
Theme Three Overview	51
Theme Four: Recognition of the Importance of Identity	52
Theme Four Overview	56
In Summary	57
Framing the Rest of the Study	58

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	60
Disciplined Literature Review	61
Hermeneutical Phenomenology	61
Role of the Researcher: Researcher as Researched	64
Research Design	65
Data Collection	66
Data Sources	66
Data Collecting Method	68
Data Interpretation	70
Conducting Thematic Analysis	70
Narrative Construction	71
Process of Interpretation	72
Validation and Reliability	74
Internal Validity	74
External Validity	74
Reliability	75
Limitation of Methodology	75
Toward Chapter Four	77

CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLORING PERSISTENCE: LITERATURE REVIEW II

Introduction	78
Literature Area One: Identity and Persistence in Learning	79
The Concept of Personal Identity	79
Personal Identity and Persistence in Learning	80
The Concept of Collective Identity	81
Collective Identity and Persistence in Learning	82
Process of Adult Identity Construction: Whitbourne's Model	85
Discussion of Identity and Persistence	90
Literature Area Two: The Value Placed on Qualifications within the	
Context of Taiwanese Culture and Tradition	91
Education in Chinese History	92
The Examination System in Chinese History	94
Education in Modern Taiwan	96
The Examination System in Modern Taiwan	98
The Discussion of the Value of Qualifications Placed in	
Taiwanese Society	101
Literature Area Three: Underlying Theories Contributing to	
Understanding of Persistence in Learning	103
The Effect of History	104
The Effect of History and Persistence in Learning	109
Schema of Cultural Reproduction	111
Cultural Reproduction and Persistence in Learning	120
Summary: Exploring Persistence	122
Toward Chapter Five	125

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORATORY STUDY II: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction	126
Analysis Approach One: Thematic Analysis	127
Theme One: Barriers and Coping Strategies	128
Theme Two: Enabling Factors for Persistence	131
Theme Three: Construction of the Concept of Persistence	134
Discussion of Themes	141
Analysis Approach Two: Narrative Construction	143
Journey One: Sally	144
Overview of Sally's Journey	152
Journey Two: Charlie	154
Overview of Charlie's Journey	164

Journey Three: Tina	164
Overview of Tina's Journey	173
Journey Four: Tony	175
Overview of Tony's Journey	182
Summary: Relationship of Journeys to Theoretical Perspective	184
Toward Chapter Six	186
CHAPTER SIX: REVIEW, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Introduction	188
Review	188
Overview of Findings	190
Answering Research Questions	191
Conclusions	195
Implications for Adult Education	198
Theoretical Implication	198
Implication and Recommendation for Practice	198
Implication and Recommendation for Further Research	200
Epilogue: My Own Journey	202
REFERENCE	206
APPENDICES	216

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. <i>Factors for Adult Persistence</i>	26
Table 2. <i>Participants' Characteristics of the First Exploratory Study</i>	30
Table 3. <i>Interview Guide Questions for the First Exploratory Study</i>	31
Table 4. <i>Participants' Characteristics of the Second Exploratory Study</i>	68
Table 5. <i>Interview Guide Questions for the Second Exploratory Study</i>	127

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1. Research Design for the Study Data Collection</i>	14
<i>Figure 2. Preliminary Conceptual Framework of Persistence to Guide Data Collection for the Exploratory Study</i>	28
<i>Figure 3. Factors Contributing to Persistence</i>	58
<i>Figure 4. The Process of Adult Identity</i>	86
<i>Figure 5. Formation Schemas of the Concept of Persistence</i>	124
<i>Figure 6. Formation Process of the Concept of Persistence during the Process of Learning</i>	197

LIST OF APPENDICES

A. Diagram of Taiwan's Formal Education System	216
B. Interview Guide Questions for the Exploratory Study I	217
C. Consent form	218
D. Information Letter to Participants	219
E. Excerpt from Interview Transcript	221
F. Interview Guide Questions for the Exploratory Study II	222
G. The Digest of 'The Trimetric Classic'	223
H. Approval Form of Human Research Ethics Committee	225

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study describes and interprets the lived experience of persistence in learning of two-year college program students in Taiwan. It seeks understanding of the phenomenon of their persistence. It is expected that through this hermeneutic phenomenological study the behaviours, beliefs, values and feelings reflected by these students' persistence processes, and the related experiences within the whole of their lived experience, will be clarified. The interest in this study was inspired by the journey of my own persistence in continuing education as well as similar experiences revealed in my students' persistence in their two-year programs in the study college.

In my own case, the pressure for upgrading college teachers' qualifications made me decide to start a doctoral study at an Australian university. To satisfy the demands of work, family and study at the same time, I had to fly back and forth between Taiwan and Australia twice a year to continue my education. The barriers to my learning included high tuition fees, high living expenses in Australia, long journeys and an academically challenging degree course. It was the support from my family, colleagues, student services and supervisors that helped me persist in my study. Thus my first hand experience enabled me to feel intensely what it was like to persist in learning while balancing study with work and family responsibilities.

According to the literature, persistence refers to "the result of students' decisions to continue their participation in the learning event under analysis" (Berge & Huang, 2004, p.4). Derrick (2001) defines persistence as the behaviour of continuing effort and self regulation to achieve success in a learning situation in spite of obstacles,

distractions or competing goals. As Hagedorn (2005) states, the words “persistence” and “retention” are often used interchangeably. However, retention relates more to an institutional measure while persistence is concerned with the actions of the students themselves, in particular the notion of remaining in education until completion of a qualification. St. John, Oescher and Andrieu (1992) regard re-enrolment during the second semester after being enrolled in the first semester as a manifestation of persistence. Taking these ideas together, persistence can be thought of as continuing registration in an educational institution until completion of the desired qualification (Brenden, 1985).

A recent survey by the American association of community colleges, the Community College of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2004), found the risk factors that characterize students who did not persist in their learning include:

- delayed entry (students who delayed entering a postsecondary institution for one year or more)
- part-time attendance (students who enrol in part-time study)
- full-time work (students working full time)
- financial independence (students classified as financially independent for financial aid purposes - that is, do not receive financial support from their parents or others)
- dependents (students who have at least one dependent)
- single parenthood (students who are single parents)
- absence of high school diploma (students who do not have a high school diploma)
- first-generation status (students whose parents' highest level of education attainment is a high school diploma or less). (Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2004).

This national report showed the highest proportion of at-risk students is in two-year or less-than-two-year institutions (CCSSE, 2004). In contrast, from my experience of practice in 2003, the retention rate in most weekend two-year college programs in the

study college in Taiwan is higher than 98% with between fifty or sixty students in a class. This is in spite of the fact that students in these programs fit the characteristics of the at-risk students described in the CCSSE study (2004). What is more, this rate is high, even compared with the mean retention percentage either in Taiwan or in OECD countries. The university retention rate in Taiwan is 91% (Su, 2005), while in OECD countries it is 70% (ranging from a high 94% in Japan to a low 42% in Italy) (Hall, 2001). Curiosity about this high retention rate is one of the drivers of this study.

From informal conversations with adult students in my college, I started to hear stories about the problems they had in trying to balance the demands and their duties of work, study and family, as well as their strategies for coping with and confronting barriers to their learning. It seemed that the barriers to their learning were diverse and difficult to surmount. However, in spite of these barriers most students showed the same determination as myself, and persisted in their learning without considering withdrawing from the course.

Some of the students lived a long way from the college, and endured long and expensive journeys to get to and from the college. Others felt their learning skills were rusty, or they had poor computer technology skills due to long absence from study. Still others felt they had to cope with memory difficulties due to their age.

Given my own history of persistence in learning and the realisation of the extraordinary difference between retention rates in my college and those reported elsewhere, I became interested in exploring the stories of the students in my work place, and in understanding what the experience of persistence in learning meant to them. This is the focus of this thesis.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this thesis and are defined here for the benefit of the reader.

Two-year College Program

The two-year college program is one of the formal education programs which awards a Bachelor's degree after successful completion (See Appendix A: diagram of Taiwan's formal education system). This program started in 1999 and is one of the Ministry of Taiwan Education's education programs that aim to encourage people in the work place to continue their education after being absent from school for a period of time (Ministry of Taiwan Education, 1998). To ensure working people's learning opportunities would not be hampered by work commitments, universities and technology institutes offer weekend or evening programs. To gain entry, an entrance examination, evidence of technological skills, work performance assessment and learning experience are taken into account.

Persistence in Learning

In this study, the two-year college program students who continue to complete their degree despite barriers and obstacles, and are still enrolled in the last semester of their course, are considered as persisters and their behaviour is described as persistent in their learning.

As noted earlier, in spite of these and other barriers, these students maintained a very high retention rate. As I reflected on these students' persistence, two critical questions emerged. If these working adult students are at-risk of dropping out as the CCSSE

data (2004) suggests, why do they, and others such as myself, persist in our learning despite our multiple responsibilities and other barriers to our learning? What are the factors that contribute to our persistence in learning? Reflecting on these questions, and on my own experience, led me to find clues from Taiwanese culture and tradition.

The Role of Culture and Tradition

Mansfield (2000) describes the impact of culture on the individual thus: “the subject would not simply rely on some unknowable notion of a pure natural selfhood, but would produce itself endlessly as a response to its cultural and historical context” (p. 63). Crotty (1996) refers to culture as a symbolic interaction which is “caught up in a profound fascination with our enculturated ways of knowing, understanding and communicating...our culture—our symbols, our meaning systems—is to be seen as liberating. It allows us to emerge from our immediate environment and to reflect upon it. It offers us the possibility of knowing our past and planning our future” (p. 5).

These two authors clearly show that culture plays such an important and definite role in shaping attitudes and knowledge, to the extent that it can become a barrier which limits and excludes our ability to understand that meaning is constructed (Crotty, 1996). As Crotty (1996) puts it: “[I]n other words, it (that is, the culture) tends to exclude or at least inhibit the immediate experience of what we make sense of through it. It tends to substitute itself for what we actually see, hear, feel, smell, taste or even imagine” (pp. 5-6).

Gadamer (1993) points out the cultural tradition functions as a prejudice to our understanding. Tradition is like a living force which enters into all processes of understanding. All our understanding derives from our interpretation of our experiences which are embedded in traditions, that is, “meaning is understood only

‘historically’” (p. 275). In other words, when we are situated within tradition; it becomes part of us and shapes and limits our viewpoint and our understanding. Thus, Gadamer (1993) suggests that to understand what we always have taken-for-granted we have to disclose meaning found in lived experience, and open up the world which belongs to the determination of human existence itself. Only through openness to tradition, can we understand the essence of schema which have such power to impact on our experience and to shape our actions and beliefs in our life world.

In summary, culture and tradition dwell within our interpretation of the meaning of our experience and shape and limit our understanding of ourselves, objects, others, or the past and the future. Thus, it is necessary to examine and interpret the meaning of persistence in learning through higher education within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition. As an example, and in order to explore some of these issues further, I recount my own experience of persistence to illustrate how Taiwanese culture and tradition has shaped my actions, beliefs, and experience of persistence in learning.

My Experience of Persistence in Education

When I was a junior high school student I was told I should study hard to reach the next life goal – gaining entry to the top girls’ high school in my hometown so as I could secure the possibility of entering university. Because I trusted that my teachers and parents knew what was right for me, it seemed natural to follow their instructions and suggestions. “No pain, no gain” was the catch cry used by the adults around me, and it is an apt title for this thesis.

My junior-high school study hours were scheduled as if I were in the army. I woke up at six o’clock in the morning, finished my breakfast (most of time I had to skip my

breakfast because I awoke late) and then walked to school. At seven o'clock I had my first test and then four more tests every hour till noon. I could have a break between twelve o'clock and one o'clock for lunch and a nap. Then there would be four more tests waiting for me till 5 p.m. From 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., I could exercise and have dinner, and then I would take more tests till 8 p.m. When I got home, I was so exhausted that I could only take a shower and then jump into bed. I would wake up to revise my homework between 1 to 4 o'clock in the morning. If the alarm did not wake me up, I faced the possibility of failing ten tests the next day. This schedule was designed by my teachers who were authorized by my parents and the principal of the junior high school. That was my schedule for the whole third year in my junior high.

By working hard the whole year I was successful in gaining entry to the top girls' high school along with forty-nine of my classmates. But there were fifty-one students in my class. One managed entry to the second best high school. She was regarded as a failure and soon forgotten. The high pass rate of my class was claimed as a success and an honour for my teachers and the school principal. The joy of success made us forget the pain and the fatigue caused by working so hard, and we were convinced that there was no such thing as a free lunch. To obtain high academic achievement, one must persist in learning at all costs.

My goal then moved to passing the university entrance examinations. From 1990 to 1998 in Taiwan this was considered a highly challenging examination, because the pass rate of 100,000 candidates was no more than 20% (Iang, 1998). Thus successful candidates were assumed to be intelligent, competent young men or women who having demonstrated high levels of persistence could expect to enjoy good prospects in their careers.

In the last year of high school, I attended a winter study camp designed by the school. Here we studied new text books for that semester, and used the whole semester to review the past five semesters. Tests were held only two or three times a day. The rest of the time was the students' own time. I personally set my own study plan by following the procedure which I had learned from my junior high school years to fulfil my goal of becoming a successful candidate. In comparison with my junior high study schedule, this plan seemed more like a holiday. Nevertheless, I passed the examination, and was showered with gifts, money and best wishes from my friends, family and relatives.

Again, the teachers and the president of the high school were honoured by the high acceptance rate into universities that year; again those who failed the examination were forgotten immediately. For me, I had persisted in my learning, achieved my goals, and met new friends in the university all of whom had similarly persisted in their learning. "No pain, no gain" became the motto to live by, and we were so convinced of this that we believed it helped us to gain entry to university. That there could be other ways or choices for learning never occurred to us.

My past experiences describe how I came to know, understood and interpreted the world around me as part of my generation. I adopted every value defined by Taiwanese society, and learned the behaviour of persistence to attain goals set by people who believed it is worthwhile. In the world at that time, persistence became a behaviour as well as a habit that I needed in order to reach my life goal - passing university entrance examinations. I neither doubted that the goal was a worthy one nor refused to accept the pain I needed to go through to achieve the goal. I simply enacted whatever society required of me, and followed all instructions without argument. If this was the way I constructed my understanding of the world, and if I let this

understanding dominate my thoughts as well as my actions, then it seems reasonable that my students who grew up as part of the same generation or who had been brought up by the people of that generation might have the similar interpretation or understanding of their world as I did.

Hence, understanding the phenomenon of persistence within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition must include the ‘indwelling’ influences shaping students’ interpretation and any understanding of the meaning of the experience of persistence needs to include this perspective. In addition to this understanding, my personal curiosity and responsibility as an education practitioner together led me to focus my study on exploring adult students’ persistence in learning as the subject of this thesis. However, a search of the literature showed that little research in this area relates to Taiwan.

Overview of the Literature with respect to Taiwan

There is a wide range of literature on college students’ retention in educational institutions at all levels in Western countries (Berge & Huang, 2004). Studies have focussed on factors contributing to adult persistence (Stevens, Slavin, & Famish, 1991; Burns, 1995), barriers to adult persistence (Beford & Durkee, 1989; Tynes, 1993), and developing inventories for adult students’ persistence (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994). However, none of these themes are discussed within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. Those Taiwanese studies that do exist relating to adult college students’ persistence mainly discuss the relationship between persistence and barriers to learning from a psychological perspective (see for example Huang, 2000; Pong, 1992; Chang, 2002); or the influence of higher education policy on persistence from an organizational or policy making perspective (see for example Yang, 1996; Tsen,

1998; Lai, 1998). There are a few studies from cultural or tradition perspectives, but they either do not discuss the phenomenon of persistence or relate it to mature age students as subjects. Rather they focus on young adult college students who attend full time four-year college programs (see Yang, 1996; Tsen, 1998; Lai, 1998).

Studies from cultural and traditional perspectives tend to focus on educational expectations (Yang, 2000; Tseng, 2000; Chiang, 1998; Blair & Qian, 1998), values placed on qualifications (Huang, 1998; Yang, 1994), their relationship to high academic performance (Liu, 1998) or to motivation in learning (Yang, 2000; Tseng, 2000; Chiang, 1998, Lin & Chou, 1994). Motivation and high academic performance has been shown to be positively correlated with adult students' persistence (Mackinnon-Slaney, 1994; Brackney & Karabenick, 1995), yet it is clear that their relationship to the context of culture and tradition has not been examined fully in Taiwan. Moreover, it is estimated that there are 114,689 students (male 50%, female 50%) over the age of 25 enrolled in college programs (Ministry of Taiwan Education, 2004). Given this large number of adult students in Taiwanese higher education settings, and the lack of a comprehensive research pertaining to persistence in learning, there is clearly a need to develop a more holistic approach to the description and study of persistence that takes into account the unique aspects of the Taiwanese culture and tradition context.

Site of the Study

The two-year college program at the college that is the site for this study is one of four key educational programs in the college. The college courses are designed for people who already hold a junior college degree. The program's study hours are offered in the daytime, at weekends or at night. Preference is given to people with

more workplace experience for weekend or evening programs. Thus the majority of students in these programs are working people who have acquired advanced technology skills, and who perform at a high level and have earned respect in their work settings.

The Participants

The participants for this study are students enrolled in a number of two-year college evening or weekend programs. These participants were selected by purposeful sampling using a snowball technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They had to be working adult students, who intended to complete their degrees in spite of any barriers to their learning, and were willing to share their persistence in learning experiences and could provide information rich cases for the study (Patton, 1990). Eleven students were interviewed from a variety of backgrounds and learning situations including gender, age, marital status and family situation. As a contrast to these students, a drop-out student who was persisting in difference ways was interviewed to provide possible disconfirming themes and perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is firstly, to explore, describe and thus attempt to understand the phenomenon of two-year college program students' persistence within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition, and secondly, to develop and provide a framework for understanding working adult students' persistence to bring to the attention of educators and provide directions for further research. However it should be made clear that this is not a comparative study. While data from other countries were initially used to frame some of the research direction, the study certainly does not seek to draw comparisons with students in other countries, settings or situations.

Research Questions

As discussed earlier, it is clear that in the study college most of the two-year college weekend program students persist until they complete their degrees. But why did the majority persist despite of barriers to learning while others did not? What is it like to persist in learning despite barriers? How do students interpret their experience within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition? What factors contribute to their persistence? How do these factors affect their persistence? Such questions helped me frame the research questions for this study:

1. What is the experience of two-year college program students who persist in learning in spite of the barriers?
2. What theoretical frameworks underpin the phenomenon of persistence in learning?

To answer these questions I required a research design that would answer the research questions and help me to describe and thus understand the experience of two-year college program students' persistence at the study site. Assuming that students could tell me what persistence was like for them, I have chosen a qualitative research approach to help me to understand their persistence behaviour through reflection and interaction with them. My methodological approach is described next.

Research Methodology

Barnard (1990) notes that in recent years, cultural studies have moved away from survey techniques to exploring the lived experience of social groups in society. A qualitative research method for studying and exploring lived experience seems appropriate for this study which explores the phenomenon within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition. Thus, this study uses the hermeneutic phenomenology

approach to answer the research questions. Van Manen (1990) explains hermeneutic phenomenology as an attentive combination of a descriptive (phenomenological) and an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology. This approach allowed me to investigate and seek understanding of the phenomenon of two-year college program students' persistence, and could offer descriptions and insights of what the lived experience is like for the students who persisted in their learning despite confronting varied barriers.

The data collection and methodology were first trialled during the first exploratory study. This generated further insights into the phenomenon of persistence. These, and a more focussed review of the literature on adult persistence in learning, culture and tradition enabled me to refine the framework for another exploratory study. The aim of the second exploratory study is to understand participants' interpretation of their persistence in learning experience. My personal persistence experience is described as one possible experience and starting point for data interpretation. My role in this study is thus as a researcher and interpreter as well as being part of the research. The details of the methodology are described in Chapter Three. Figure 1 presented as a flow chart explains the research procedures of this study.

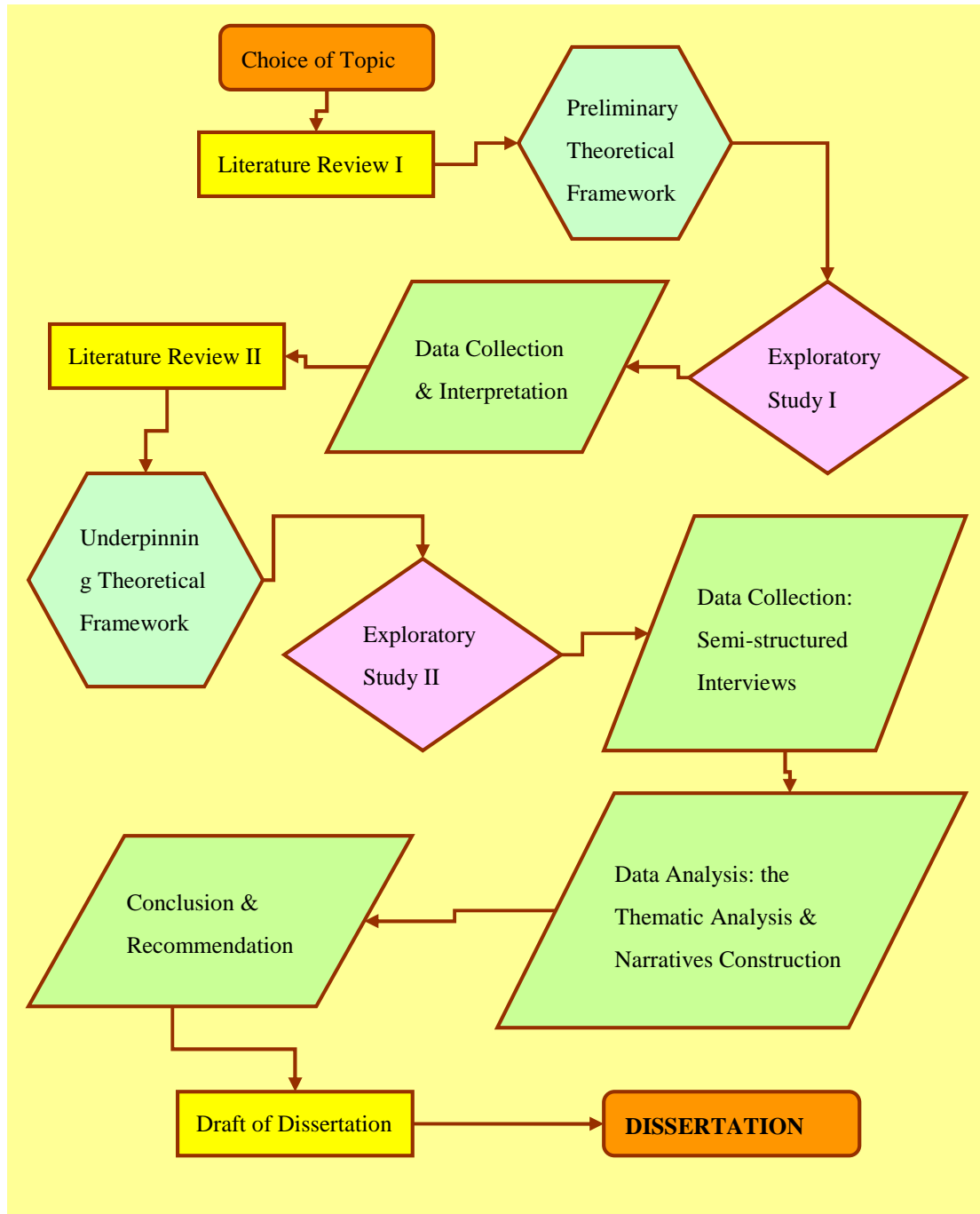


Figure 1: Research Design for the Study Data Collection

Data Collection

The data collecting method selected for this study is the semi-structured interview because understanding occurs in the process of dialectic questions and answers

(Gadamer, 1993). The data was analysed by identifying the common themes and sub-themes in the description of persistence in learning experience following the procedures for the thematic analysis method (Boyatzis, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). Themes underpinning conceptual formulations weaving throughout participants' persistence in learning phenomena were identified. These themes were also re-worked into individual narratives for each participant to provide a different reading of the data and so to build up a picture of persistence in more than one way.

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Firstly, the theoretical significance of this study contributes to the knowledge gap between Western and Eastern qualitative research associated with adults' persistence in learning. From the findings, it is expected that factors contributing to working adult students' persistence can be presented, and a model for explanation of persistence developed within the context of culture and tradition.

Secondly, the practical significance is to provide directions and insights to educators in Taiwan so they can more effectively assist students to persist their learning. This study will empower my ability to teach, to research and to learn with colleagues for professional growth and self-reflection. It will also have implications for policy and practice at the administrative and pedagogical levels for the college in particularly and tertiary education in Taiwan in general. As a college teacher educator, I will benefit from this research in the sense that it will provide me with deeper insights into the way some two-year college program students' experience aspects of their persistence in learning. These insights will be useful as I educate others to understand two-year

college program students, and will assist me to develop the ways to help students cope with barriers in their learning situations.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited in its generalizability. Data were collected from eleven specific participants in a particular setting in South Taiwan who were able to express their persistence in learning experiences clearly, and had the time to be interviewed. The data is limited to those participants who were prepared to share during interviews. However it is likely that some of the findings of this study may be generalized to some degree within adult college students in Taiwan, in general the study can provide clear pointers and directions for further research in this area.

A Note on Writing Style

In this study, the first person singular, “I/me/mine”, will be used instead of ‘the researcher’. There are two reasons for this choice. Firstly, writing in the first person singular is appropriate and fits the nature of qualitative inquiry (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992); secondly, through this study, I hope not only to understand the feelings and meanings attributed to persistence for the participants, but also to share with and learn from their world as well as mine within the process of the research. An objective writing style (third person passive) would seem to distance me from the research and the research participants.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One provides an introduction and overview of the study. Chapter Two presents a first review of the literature relevant to persistence in learning and first

exploratory study of participants' persistence in learning. Synthesis of major themes from participants' interviews will be explored that shape the methodology for Chapter three as well as set the scene for Chapter Four. Chapter Three presents a rationale for choosing the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology for this study. Issues such as sampling, instrumentation, data collection and analysis processes, ethical issues, and planning for trustworthiness (validation and reliability) are described and addressed. Then a more detailed and focused second literature review is provided in Chapter Four that will shape the research questions. In Chapter Five the data analysis and research findings of the second exploratory study will be discussed. Participants' profiles as narrative stories of their persistence in learning will be presented. Chapter Six contains conclusions, implications of the study and recommendations for further research.

Towards Chapter Two

In Chapter One, I have stated the purpose of the study, posed the main research questions and briefly described the approach to the study, the setting and the participants. I summarized the significance and limitations of this study, and outlined the organization of the study. In Chapter Two, I go on to review the current literature in relation to persistence in learning, and conduct a pilot study to gain more insight into the phenomenon of persistence in learning.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW I AND EXPLORATORY STUDY I

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, literature from the areas of adult learning, adult student retention and adult student attrition will be reviewed; the second section describes the exploratory study including its research design, findings and discussion. The purpose of constructing the exploratory study is to answer the research questions and hence foster a better understanding of students' persistence from their perspectives.

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize theoretical or empirical findings to develop a conceptual framework and themes to guide the exploratory study. This review has two aims. The emphasis on barriers to learning and coping strategies helped me to understand what barriers adult students have confronted in their learning process and to clarify what strategies they would use to overcome their barriers; while the focus on enabling factors for persistence in adult learning helped me to understand what factors enable adult students to persist in their learning.

The second part of this chapter describes the site of the exploratory study, participants, methods of data collection and analysis and is presented in. From the first literature review, themes related to persistence were developed through interpreting interview data from seven two-year college program students. The synthesized themes are expected to extend the discussion in the literature review and also point further to areas of the literature with which I need to become more familiar so that key themes can be better focused for theoretical perspectives.

Literature Review I: Themes Contributing to Persistence

Barriers to Learning

Before understanding why adult students would persist despite barriers to their learning, I needed to examine the meaning of “the barriers to learning”. Barriers to learning are obstacles or boundaries which prevent success in learning. Their relationship to adult students’ withdrawal or nonpersistence is often discussed in the literature relating to adult attrition or adult learning. Huang (2000) investigated adult students’ attrition, and found barriers to learning include factors such as inflexible curriculum design, inadequate faculty, high tuition fees, and limited student counselling. Other research (see for example, Spanard, 1990; Tynes, 1993) shows that family and work responsibilities are the most typical barriers. Those responsibilities can often cause time restriction in adult students’ learning. Moreover, Mayfield (1989) points out, for students who are mothers, lack of child day care can result in anxiety from conflicts between particular responsibility and study.

Age can result in nonpersistence as well. Tierney (1992) states that older students have lower persistence rates than younger peers. Those who do not share similar values with younger peers are more at risk of dropping out. The barriers that influence adult students’ determination to persist include: limitation of institutional resources (Beford & Durkee, 1989), on-and off campus orientation programs and access to academic resources after class, inadequate faculty and peer support or counselling, lack of child day care, shortage of knowledge or social skills training to overcome anxiety from social contact with young peers (Mayfield, 1989). Financial aid is another institutional barrier related to within-year nonpersistence. As tuition and fee amounts increase, students’ persistence tends to decrease (Tynes, 1993).

In addition to financial aid, it appears that age, personal family or work responsibilities, inadequate curriculum, institutional resources or support are all barriers to adult learning. However, other literature related to distance learning (Muilenburg & Berge, 2001; Clayton, 2005) or adult teaching (Burant, 1999) suggests that there is something more. These researchers divide learning barriers into three categories including situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. They explain that situational barriers are obstacles that need to be overcome in current and practical life, including insecure employment status or low pay, lack of time, child care or public transportation, and the cost of a parking permit. Institutional barriers are practices and procedures set by institutions that limit or hinder adult students continuing or to completing their learning, including high tuition fees, lack of financial aid, inconvenient scheduling, and inadequate student services. Dispositional barriers are those obstacles related to the adult students' self-imposed or psychological feelings or perception, including lack of confidence in their own abilities, fear of failure, fear of competition with younger students, and guilt feelings about neglecting the family or spending part of the family income on education for themselves (Tynes, 1993; Burant, 1999; Muilenburg & Berge, 2001; Clayton, 2005).

Coping Strategies for Barriers

It has been shown that barriers to adult learning are multiple and have a strong relationship with adult students' nonpersistence. Therefore, researchers are interested in helping adult students cope with their barriers in order to help them persist. Coping approaches are balancing processes that aim at achieving equilibrium between internal and external as well as physical and emotional demands. The assessment of coping requires an individual to determine which effort or method is the most effective one in the circumstances. In most cases, coping results in good control of the situation or a

good quality of life (Kuuppelomaki, Sasaki, Yamada, Asakawa, & Shimanouchi, 2004). Greve and Strobl (2004) refer to coping as problem management, and classify it into three categories. Details are explained as follows.

Assimilative Problem Solving

This strategy refers to solving problems through planning. The suggestions from attrition research include enhancing the quality of student services by considering adult students' needs and by offering assistance for campus life, personal and academic counselling, food services or child care, and access to computers (Barragan, 1989). Also providing support groups and mentor type relationships to decrease students' feelings of inferiority or isolation while they try to assimilate into new educational environments (Tinto, 1998). Seeking effective learning strategies or social support are exacts of assimilative problem solving strategies are discussed here in more detail. Learning strategies are discussed next.

Learning strategies

According to Brackney and Karabenick (1995), learning strategies can be grouped into three categories as follows:

- (a) Cognitive strategies which are ways that learners manipulate information in response to task requirements, including rehearsal, elaboration, organization, and critical thinking;
- (b) Meta-cognitive strategies which represent executive functions designed to assess and control the use of cognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring, and regulating;
- (c) Resource management strategies which seek to establish conditions that facilitate learning, including the effective use of time and study environment, effort regulation, peer learning, and help seeking.

Stevens, Slavin, and Famish (1991) agree that peers' support and assistance can facilitate learners' learning. In a cooperative learning situation, students can interact cooperatively, and explain their understanding of tasks and topics to each other in their own words. As a result, their cooperation helps them to complete the complex cognitive learning activities.

Social support

Social support is another assimilation problem solution strategy that refers to specific transactions involved in seeking and receiving help. It has long been known to mute the experience of stress and enhance individuals' well-being. Usually it has three forms (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004):

- (a) Information support. This occurs when one individual helps another to understand a stressful event better and to ascertain what resources and coping strategies are needed to deal with it;
- (b) Instrumental support. This involves the provision of material assistance such as services, financial assistance, and other specific aid or goods;
- (c) Emotional support: This involves providing warmth and nurture to another individual and reassuring the person that he or she is a valuable person who is cared about.

Adequate social support for educational pursuits is especially important. Family can be a source of tremendous support for the adult students. For example, a working spouse or partner can provide financial backing. Family members can perform household chores, tend to social obligations, give emotional support or provide the necessary infrastructure to make a return to study both possible and successful. It appears that adults whose children are successfully launched can have additional time, energy, and financial resources to spend on educational pursuits of their own

(Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). Moreover, the presence of supportive significant others can enhance adult students' intention to persist (Tynes, 1993).

Accommodative System Adaptation

This strategy refers to the adaptive readjustment of evaluative standards. MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) suggests that adult students who have time restrictions and multiple responsibilities could persist in their learning by electing to maintain a low academic performance and pursuing a "pass" grade only. Ainley (1993) agrees, and argues that adult students could balance their failure against not working too hard by doing what is set and no more.

Defensive Problem Avoidance

This strategy refers to problems that cannot be solved but are disputed or rejected. In the situation of learning, withdrawing, attrition or dropping out is included.

In short, the many barriers to learning can hinder adult students' persistence. However, through effective coping strategies hence a higher level of persistence can be expected. It appears that if students continue their enrolment despite obstacles, they may achieve persistence in their learning; in other words, as long as the action of withdrawal is not taken, students continue to persist. From these points of view, any action, procedure, or strategy which results in adult students coping with barriers to learning and decreasing the risk of withdrawal, enhancing retention, continuing to attend classes or enrolment until degree completion can all be seen as factors contributing to persistence. Further discussion about other factors contributing to adult student persistence is presented in the next section.

Enabling Factors for Persistence

Reinforcement is a significant enabling factor for persistence. Reinforcement stands for persons or material which can support or strengthen an individual's behaviour. Reinforcement can be divided into two groups: positive or negative reinforcement. Unlike negative reinforcement (in the form of penalties, disapproval or threat), positive reinforcement (in the form of money, prizes, approval and affection) can result in students' effort in learning and persistence (Wlodkowski, 1988; Burns, 1995). A teacher's attention is regarded as one of the positive reinforcements to students' learning. However, research also reveals that too much attention or sympathy from teachers can also have negative effects (Wlodkowski, 1988). More positive reinforcements relevant to adult persistence are introduced as follows.

Tynes (1993) found that living close to the work site, living at home and receiving financial support are significantly and positively related to working adult students' persistence. St. John, Oescher, and Andrieu (1992) emphasise that financial support is particularly important and includes grants, loans, and work study arrangements. St. John, Kirshstein and Noell (1991) say, in general, students who are interested in the college experience as a whole are more likely to persist than those who are only interested in acquiring a Bachelor degree. Full-time students are more likely to persist than part-time students.

Tinto (1993) in his Student Integration Model argues that the integration and commitment between student and the institution can predict students' persistence. Factors that affect academic integration include direct, meaningful interaction with faculty regarding learning, and active participation in the learning process. Factors that affect social integration include involvement in campus activities, developing

meaningful relationships with peers, faculty and staff, perceived support from institutional agents, adjustment to institutional culture, and developing a sense of community.

Student commitment includes identification of educational and career goals and intent to persist. Institutional commitment includes the academic and social conditions of the institution. The decision to persist is based on the students' intention and their commitment to the goal of graduation, as well the nature and extent of social interactions within the institution. The better the match between student and institutional commitment and meaningful integration as seen by the student, the more likely the student is to persist towards completion or graduation.

Tinto's Student Integration model is supported by Holland and Huba (1991) and Grosset (1991). They found that students' involvement in the college environment that leads to satisfaction with the college's policies and procedures, working conditions, compensation, the quality of education, and student services can influence students to persist. As well, students with good grades, better study skills, more certainty about their study, and more commitment to the institution are more likely to persist. Chartrand (1992) also agrees regarding the effect of institutional support. He says that most adult students are employed and live off-campus. Students may persist when psychological distress is reduced if counselling service, support groups or informative courses workshops for time-management and study or test-taking skills in the evening are provided.

However, Cabrera, Cataneda, Nora and Hengstler (1993) argue that Tinto's model does not adequately address all adult student situations because it mostly applies to the young adult and full time students at four year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini,

1998). On the other hand, Mackinnon-Slaney (1994) focused on adult participants. She developed an Adult Persistence in Learning Scale (APIL) based on her Adult Persistence in Learning Model to predict, explain and assess adult student persistence. In her model, Mackinnon-Slaney (1994) transformed Tinto's (1993) model of academic integration, social integration, student commitment and institutional commitment into three components and groups ten factors relating to adult persistence into these three components. Table 1 shows these components and factors.

Table 1. *Factors for Adult Persistence*

Components	Factors
personal issues	self-awareness, willingness to delay gratification, clarification of career and life goals, mastery of life transitions and a sense of interpersonal competence
learning issues	educational competence, intellectual competence
environmental issues	information retrieval, awareness of opportunities and impediments, and environmental compatibility

Summarised from Mackinnon-Slaney (1994).

Finally, my own experience shows that educational expectations also need to be considered. Education is highly valued and acknowledged as a means to upward social mobility by most Asian communities (Blair & Qian, 1998). Wu (2004) found that children from families with high educational expectations have more interest in continuing their education. Zhang and Huang (1998) studied Taiwanese Aborigines' language learning experience and discovered that both parents' and teachers' educational expectations are highly related to children's academic performances. Moreover, the effect of parents' expectation is twice as higher as teachers' expectation. The influence of educational expectations can be preserved in the family

and spreads with it during immigration. Studies show that the educational expectations of Asian-American families are higher than in non-Asian families. Asian-American college children experience high pressure for academic success from their parents, and these students' self-expectations are higher than other students (Liu, 1998).

In Summary

The literature reviewed a number of themes of factors contribute to persistence in learning, and during the process of theme analysis, similarity of context within different theory categories can be found. For this summary, to avoid the repetition, I have woven categories together according to their similarities. For instance, factors including age, personal family or work responsibilities are combined into the category of situational barriers; factors including limitation of institutional resources, inflexible curriculum design, and inadequate faculty or counselling are combined into the category of institutional barriers; and factors of anxiety due to lack knowledge or social skills to interact with young peers are combined into the category of dispositional barriers. On the other hand, Mackinnon-Slaney (1994)'s three components, institutional support, student service, interest in subjects and commitment to the institution are combined into Tinto's (1993) suggested four categories.

As a result, themes and subthemes contributing to persistence can be synthesised as:

(1) Barriers to learning that includes the three subthemes of situational, institutional and dispositional barriers; (2) Coping strategies for barriers which include three subthemes of assimilative problem solving, accommodative system adaptation and defensive problem avoidance; (3) Enabling factors for persistence that include six

subthemes of academic integration, social integration, student commitment, institutional commitment, positive reinforcement and educational expectation. This synthesis has enabled me to develop figure 2 which shows this conceptual framework to guide data collection for the first exploratory study.

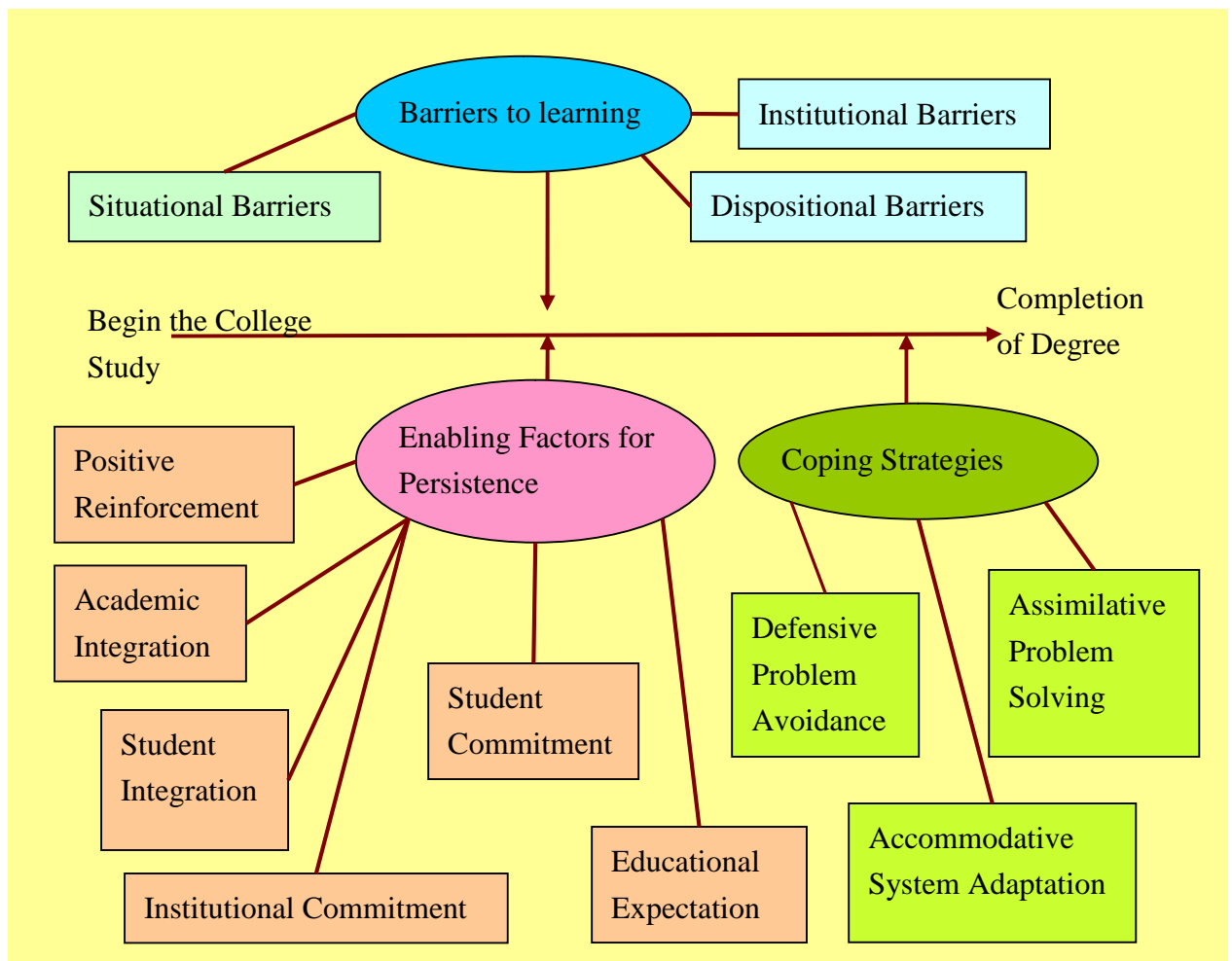


Figure 2. Preliminary Conceptual Framework of Persistence to Guide Data Collection for the Exploratory Study

Exploratory Study I: Finding Direction

Based on my synthesis from the literature, the purpose of this trial exploratory study is to gather the data to describe a clear picture of two-year college program students' experience of persistence and to gain some insight into the process of persistence. This first exploratory study also allowed me to trial both a semi-structure interview technique as well as to develop a thematic approach for analysis of the data. The research design of this exploratory study including study site, selection of participants, methods of data collection and analysis are as follows.

Research Design for Exploratory Study I

Study Site

The study college is a medical technology college in South Taiwan. This college provides four types of higher education programs; the two-year college program is one of them. Students who attend two-year college program may take courses at different study times according to their needs. Study time may be in the daytime, at night, or at weekend. The working adult students with more experience have a preference for weekend or night courses.

Participants in the Exploratory Study I

The participants in the first exploratory study were adult students who experienced persistence in their learning despite varied barriers. Seven, two-year college students were invited to participate in this exploratory study. All of these selected students were from weekend classes with high retention rate of over 98%, so they are representative. These participants were students known to me and were free to give of their time and

willing to share their persistence experiences. All of them were finishing their third semesters and would graduate in the coming semester.

To identify information rich cases for the study, a variation of sampling was used. Five participants were studying in weekend courses, while the other two studied in evening courses. Each was given a pseudonym. The age of the seven participants (5 female, 2 male) ranged from 28 to 45. As well as their difference in ages, participants' absence from previous education ranged from 4 to 20 years. Six of the participants worked in a professional capacity in hospitals. Alice was an exception; she was an employee in a small business. Donna and Daphne were colleagues and wanted to be interviewed together. Key data about each participant are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of the First Exploratory Study (N=7)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Family Background
Adam	45	Male	Married	One son & one daughter
Alice	28	Female	Married	One son (1)
Ben	30	Male	Married	One daughter (3)
Fanny	40	Female	Married	One son & one daughter
Donna	30	Female	Single	
Daphne	28	Female	Single	
Jo	42	Female	Married	Two daughters

Data Collecting Method

To understand participants' beliefs, values, feelings and behaviours reflected in their persistence in learning experiences, this study used interviews to collect the data. Interview questions were framed and developed from themes synthesised from the first literature review as summarised in Figure 2. The interviews were semi-structured and were guided by open-ended descriptive questions. The first exploratory study's interview guide can be seen in Appendix B. Table 3 presents the interview guide questions, their purpose and theoretical underpinning.

Table 3: Interview Guide Questions for the First Exploratory Study

Questions	Purpose	Theoretical Underpinning
What makes you want to attend the two-year college program? How did the idea of attending a two-year program first arise?	Knowledge base; motivation of participation	Educational expectation; adult learning
Was there any barrier to your learning? What was it like to meet the barrier(s) to your learning?	Participants' barriers to learning; experience of encountering barriers	Barriers to adult learning; adult retention / persistence; adult learning
How did you decide to persist in learning despite the barriers to your learning? How do you deal with your "barriers to learning" in your family / work setting? What helped you to persist in your learning?	Factors contributing to persistence: Coping strategies or enabling factors	Adult retention / persistence; adult learning
What is it like to persist in learning? What does the term "persistence in learning" mean to you? How does your family/work setting feel about your persistence in learning?	Knowledge base; The experience of persistence within Taiwanese tradition and culture	Adult retention / persistence

Most of the interviews took place in my work office at the study college. Each interview started with a welcome and introductions. I presented and explained a consent form and information for participants (Appendix C; D) which stated the study purpose and the anonymity of the participants. Each participant understood that the pseudonyms were to be used to preserve their anonymity and their interview sessions would be audio-taped. The interviews lasted from 40 to 65 minutes each, and were designed to encourage the participants to reflect on their persistence in learning experience. The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed, translated from Mandarin, and analysed using a thematic approach.

Analysis Method

For the data interpretation, I decided to trial a thematic approach because concurrent reading suggested this was most appropriate for data of this nature. Van Manen (1990)

suggests that themes are a way of capturing the phenomenon one is trying to understand. Themes describe an aspect of the structure of lived experience. Thus, “theme analysis” refers to “the process of recovering the theme or themes those are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (p.78). To grasp and formulate a thematic understanding is “a free act of seeing meaning” (p.79).

I used the line-by-line approach suggested by Van Manen (1990). Firstly, the conversations were conducted in Mandarin, the researcher’s and participants’ first language then transcribed and translated into English (See example Appendix E). To provide a more authentic flavour to the participants’ world, verbatim quotes are kept in the Mandarin idiom as far as possible. Subtleties of meaning expressed in Mandarin are often difficult to translate and may not even have equivalents in English, and the cultural significance of the data can be lost in translation. This needs to be borne in mind when reading the data.

After translation, I read each sentence or sentence cluster in the transcripts carefully to note certain experiential themes that commonly recurred in the various descriptions I have gathered. I categorised these themes by lifting appropriate phrases or singular statements that described the participants’ lived experiences. After repeatedly reading the data, I then sorted and collapsed data into four themes. The first two themes were framed according to the first literature review, while the third and fourth themes of the first exploratory study emerged from the interview data. To compare, the themes synthesised from reviewing the literature were:

1. Barriers to learning
2. Coping strategies for barriers
3. Enabling factors for persistence

As participants tended to interweave the barriers with their coping strategies in their descriptions, I decided that purposely dividing sentences into two themes could hinder the understanding of whole experience. So I combined the theme of the barriers to learning and the theme of coping strategies into one theme. The new concerns were:

1. Barriers and coping strategies
2. Enabling factors for persistence
3. Value placed on qualifications
4. Recognition of the importance of identity

As I continued to read and process the data, I became convinced that interweaved relationships between these themes provided a clear picture for this study. Collected data were displayed by identifying themes and then the exemplars from the interview, name of participant is indicated by a bracket [] and is put afterwards. Continuation marks (...) are used where text has been omitted because ideas were repeated or text was redundant. The evidence for these themes is discussed as follows.

Findings of Exploratory Study I

Theme One: Barriers and Coping Strategies

After closely reviewing each participant's barriers to their learning expressed in their interview data, it appears that most of the participants experienced more than one barrier. Indeed each person confronted at least 6 barriers throughout their study. Consistent with the literature review (Burant, 1999; Tynes, 1993; Muilenburg & Berge, 2001; Clayton, 2005), the barriers to participants' learning included situational barriers, institutional barriers and dispositional barriers.

Situational Barriers and Coping Strategies

Time restriction and coping strategies

Participants' most often cited barrier of situational barriers was time restrictions due to family and work responsibilities as shown in Spanard (1990) and Tynes's (1993) research. Ben realised that he did not have "so much time for his family", so he decided "life has changed, no rest at all, all the free time was in Taiwan mainland [for study]". To attend evening programs punctually, Jo had to leave her busy office in the rush hour, and skipped her dinner. She said that "attending classes every night is a battle to me".

Fanny had a thoughtful superior and when the semester begun, Fanny would tell her superior to let things go, and her superior would not put too much pressure on her. Nevertheless, her time was so stretched that she did not have enough time for her young boy:

I don't have so much time [pause], at nights, I have to stay with my son watch him do homework. Now, it is his first year in primary school. Sometimes you want to study late, but he would not sleep and stayed with you. So, if we want him to sleep we have to sleep too. Time, there is not enough time, right. [Fanny]

Fanny had to deal with balancing study and work meant no time to travel with her children. To Fanny, children's complaints were signs of disapproval of her study:

I do not have any time in the summer or winter vocation. I had to exchange the work shifts and that made my children complain. They argued that I did not take them to travel this year, in this issue, my family, in this way, they show their disapproval. [Fanny]

Donna and Daphne complained how stressful it was to organize their work schedules every week. Donna described herself as life was "exhausted" and her life was "like in hell". To manage this problem, Donna quit her job and applied for another in the

neighbourhood with lower pay but fewer duties. Ironically, Donna's quitting helped solve Daphne's work schedule problem:

The people who need to attend two-year college programs have decreased. Some have quit their jobs [turns and looks at Donna], and now our unit only hires clerks who have bachelor degrees. At that time, there were a lot of people attending the program, so no one could replace your work schedule. Now, people who are attending programs are fewer and fewer, so things turn out better. [Donna and Daphne]

Donna was glad that Daphne was able to accompany her to attend the program and help her persist. She explained why she appreciated this company so much:

There was a person who could understand you, he or she would give you empathy and support no matter how hard it was, you would feel you had a companion, someone who understands you, you would go on, you would persist. [Donna and Daphne]

Alice had to manage her marriage, her new-born baby, her work and her study, but luckily she had a great deal of support from her family. She told me that attending the program did not affect her family life, because they were so supportive. She recognised the value of strong interpersonal relationship. After the birth of her first child, she came back to school and received support from her extended family and classmates:

I asked my family to take care of my child. I came to school whenever I had classes; the time wouldn't take too long, I asked my mother-in-law to take care of my child for a while. [pause] If there was a final term exam, he [husband] would say, he would help and he did all the house work. A supportive husband is very important. He would share the workload of the housework; share the things that you could not deal with at once. [After the birth of my baby], I asked my classmates to help me, such as lend me their notes. [pause] Yeah, the interpersonal relationship is important. If you have better relationships, your classmates will help you more. [pause] Yes, my husband is nice to me and my parents-in-law treat me well too. You know some parents-in-law or husbands will not support advanced study. My sister-in-law is taking courses in another two-year college program too.

Since someone else in this family is attending a two-year college program, they think that attending two-year college programs is the essential choice at this stage of life. So they would not object to my study. On the contrary, they have become more considerate, they always tell me that if I work and study too late, I do not have to come home to take care of my child; my mother-in-law will take the responsibility for me. [pause] I'm quite happy and lucky to have considerate parents-in-law. [Alice]

As Spanard (1990), Tynes (1993) and Mayfield (1989) suggest, the majority of participants have multiple social roles and duties of study, work and family, and they found it difficult to balance the demands of these roles. Strategies they used included assimilative problem solving suggested by Greve and Strobl (2004). They overcame the problem by planning time management and reordering priority of duties. Most of all, gaining social support including information, instrumental and emotional support suggested by Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, and Dunagan (2004). It would appear that without participant family, superior and classmates' support it would be harder for Donna, Fanny, and Alice to persist in their learning. This outcome supports the findings of Stevens, Slavin, and Famish (1991), Tynes (1993) and Settersten and Lovegreen (1998) that support and help from family or peers is positively related to students' persistence. Other barriers for participants: distance problems and lack of public transportation are discussed next.

Distance problems and coping strategies

Burant (1999) and Tynes (1993) claim that lack of public transportation and living away from the campus were barriers to adult learning. Fanny could not drive and always depended on a colleague to get to college. Thus she kept complaining how inconvenient it was to get to college without public transportation:

I cannot drive, so one of my colleagues used to give me a lift. She has passed the entrance exam of a graduate institute this year, so there is no one who can drive me here. I have to ask around if there is someone to help me. It is quite inconvenient to get here, no bus, and no school bus on Sunday. [Fanny]

For Donna, Daphne and Ben, to attend classes they have to endure long expensive travel as they did not live near the college. Ben lived on an Island and had to take a plane back and forth between the Island and mainland Taiwan every week. The return ticket cost Ben \$ NT 2,500 (\$AUS 104), and the expense was doubled with his wife's ticket, as the couple were attending different two-year college programs in the same study college at the same time. Ben said the total amount for two-year study including travel would be up to \$ NT 600,000 (\$AUS 25,000). As to the high cost of long journeys, Ben considered it as an investment in his future career. Ben confessed that if he attended the program alone, he would not have enough strength to persist his study, because "It is too far. To tell the truth, it is too far."

To cope with the expense of long journeys, Ben told me he would miss some of his classes:

It depends on the classes. Occasionally I choose not to show up to some classes.
[laughs] [Ben]

Donna and Daphne have the same distance problem as Ben. Donna and Daphne had to take a three-hour train and a one-hour bus journey to come to college. To Donna, it was the mental frustrations of the long journey and the stress of work after the journeys that she found "exhausting":

The most awful thing was the torture to your mind and spirit. In the train you couldn't rest at all; so many kids were running and making noise. We used to take the midnight duty turn. As soon as we returned to the workplace, we had to start working right away. You had to adjust your attitudes; we didn't have any break [or vacation for two years] After school, we had to work right away. [Donna and Daphne]

Donna and Daphne used the same strategy as Ben did: they missed some classes:

Really, there was no way to attend every single class. Be honest, our work has been busy. And we felt no energy to pay attention to all classes, we really felt sleepy.
[Donna and Daphne]

Here participants showed they used three types of coping strategies (Greve & Strobl, 2004): assimilative problem solving, accommodative system adaptation, and defensive problem avoidance to effectively overcome their distance problems, including seeking peer or family support, quitting jobs to avoid long journeys, decreasing academic performance and missing some classes. The next section examines how participants cope with their institutional barriers.

Institutional and Barriers and Coping Strategies

The majority of the participants discovered that what they had learned from their previous education was not comprehensive enough to cope with the academic demands of their present study. The barriers they faced were varied, ranging from lack of skills to complete assignments to computer technology.

Rusty computer technology skills and English comprehension ability were barriers for Adam, because he had a long absence from previous education. Adam described there were two “little hard” things in his study. His lack of peer’s help made the situation harder:

It is just, my English is not so good, and I do not understand computers so well, so these two things are a little hard for me...It is just a little embarrassing to ask someone to help you in the class [pause] Some might help, but not so many. Because everyone is busy, everyone has a meeting [with the teacher]; they have to find the literature for themselves. They can not help you. [Adam]

He complained that tests in classes and study load had pressured him and affected his work and family life:

The pressure of test [pause] More or less, it [study] has affected my work. Sometimes I could not keep concentrating on my work. I have to find some literatures or type my assignments in my office hours. So, more or less it has caused some influence to my work. It infects my family life too. We can not go out at the weekends. So, more or less, it does infect my life. [Adam]

The ways Adam used to cope with this situation were to study in his leisure time and cut down the days of going out with his family:

You can not go too far and keep studying at your work as well. You have to study at your leisure time. The family life, [pause] I try to negotiate with my family and change two days out to one day out. [Adam]

Similarly, Fanny described she did not know how to use the computer software “Power Point” in her oral presentation:

We are not good at computer technology. When we found the literature for our assignments, we have to transfer them to projects by PowerPoint. We are not good at computer technology, we are not young. [Fanny]

Fanny was also strongly challenged by the academic demands of her studies. She attributed the biggest barrier to her learning to the need to memorise large amount of materials for tests. She complained that she was experiencing losing her capacity to remember large amounts of material because of her age. She talked about how her difficulty in memorising once drove her to consider quitting study. She claimed that focusing too much on memorizing the content of text books instead of being taught new information by her teacher made her feel study was “painful” and caused her “Saturday syndrome”: her head started to become dizzy on the day of school. To overcome

difficulties remembering text book material, Fanny studied hard, reviewed text books at least three times, and relied on her classmates' notes:

I do have thoughts to quit study. The pressure is too high; I really can not memorize things...Some teachers push us too hard, we just want to catch new knowledge, that's all [pause], they [teachers] kept requiring us to memorize this, memorize that. I believe there are reference books; I know where they are; I will check the content of the books some day, that's enough. Till now, every teacher is the same. Some teachers push us too hard. Right, memory is quite a [pause], for example if we had a test, we just reviewed and reviewed it [text book] three times, and we could not memorise anything. While teachers were lecturing, we know what they said, but, if we put what they said on the paper, we just missed a lot of it [pause] So, I discovered it was very hard to take the notes. My memory, my memory. [Fanny]

Donna remembered assignment writing had caused her stress at the beginning of her study. She had no idea how to do her assignments, and had no one to ask because she lived in a different area of Taiwan:

Assignments. At first they are pressures, at the beginning. We just started doing our reports, and got a lot of pressures [Laughs] You could learn how your classmates did it. You would find out something you did not understand, but you had no one to ask, you were too far away, so you had to do what you can do, and wait for teachers' [blame]. [pause], if they blamed you, you had to take what they said. [Donna and Daphne]

Donna's coping strategies for dealing with assignments was "just do it" and not to argue with the teachers. The other strategy Donna used was not to aim too high but to look for a "pass" academic performance:

Well, pass, not the last one would be ok, [laughs], well, about seventy [is enough]. [laughs] [Donna and Daphne]

Ben used the same strategy as Donna. He chose not to expect too much from his academic performance:

Do not be left behind would be fine. I do not care about grades. [Ben]

Strategies Ben, Donna and Daphne used were similar to those cited in Ainley's (1993), MacKinnon-Slaney's (1994) and Greve and Strobl's (2004) studies. For Ben, Donna and Daphne, an adaptive readjustment of evaluative standards helped them to overcome the pressure of academic demand. They report maintaining a low academic performance, pursuing a "pass" grade, or doing what is set and no more. In addition, participants seemed to use a range of assimilative problem solving and learning strategies noted by Brackney and Karabenick (1995). They reordered study time (solving problem through planning, meta-cognitive strategies), used rehearsal materials from text books (cognitive strategies) and sought for peer learning (resource management strategies). The next section examines how participants cope with their dispositional barriers.

Dispositional Barriers and Coping Strategies

Lack of confidence in their own abilities and fear of competition with younger students are included in dispositional barriers (Tynes, 1993; Burant, 1999; Muilenburg & Gerge, 2001). For Jo, these were two barriers she had to deal with. Her feelings reflected in her sigh and saying "you know, we can not compete with the young men any more; I am getting old, I do not have their capacity of memory". Forty-five year old Adam also described how age has affected his energy. "I am getting old, everything is different; my energy is decreased, everything is going down". Both Jo and Adam chose to work harder to cope with their problems.

Another dispositional barrier to learning is feeling guilty about neglecting family (Tynes, 1993). Fanny had the same feeling. She complained that her husband did not help her, and let the children stay at home alone:

I just felt it was a great pity for those two kids to stay at home all alone. So there were many times I was struggling with myself, and considered quitting study. [Fanny]

Luckily, with the help of her sisters, Fanny was able to leave her children at her sisters' homes, and solved her most pressing issue. Her sisters said to her "It is okay, you can leave your child with me whenever you need me to take care of him within these two years." Fanny confessed her sisters' support made her "feel secure to complete this two-year college program." Again, social support (Taylor et al., 2004) showed its importance in coping with Fanny's problems.

Theme One Overview

In this study, the findings are in contrast to Tierney (1992) and St. John, Kirshstein, and Noell's (1991) hypothesis and demonstrate that age and part-time study are not necessarily the factors for nonpersistence. In contrast to the findings of similar studies (Mayfield, 1989; Tynes, 1993; Beford & Durkee, 1998; Huang, 2000), this small sample of Taiwanese adult students did not consider limitations of institutional resources or financial aid as barriers to their learning. It seemed that, generally, their high motivation to successfully complete their studies may have diminished the impact of these factors in their thinking.

It seems that age, distance, academic demand, rusty learning skills, restricted time due to multiple obligations and guilt feeling about neglecting children did not hinder participants' persistence either. The interviews show that multiple barriers do affect participants' learning, their personal lives and work, and had driven some of them to consider withdrawing. Participants described the pain and difficulties of persisting in learning. It seemed that participants who were absent from education longer revealed

more worries about their age-related problems. Nevertheless, none of the barriers actually prevented participants' determination to persist.

Findings also showed that participants either persisted despite the considering barriers or they used multiple coping strategies to overcome their barriers. The interview data revealed coping strategies that were of benefited to participants' persistence despite the barriers participants encountered which in other studies show may lead to their nonpersistence. Coping strategies participants used in their process of learning included forms of assimilative problem solving, accommodative system adaptation and defensive problem avoidance (Greve & Strobl, 2004). These strategies helped participants overcome problems in managing the household, social obligations, transportation difficulties and child care. In addition to social support including information support, instrumental support, emotional support, and family sources (Taylor et al., 2004), learning strategies including cognitive, meta-cognitive or resource management strategies helped participants overcome the pressure of academic demand.

Theme Two: Enabling Factors for Persistence

The majority of the participants agreed that they gained some benefits during the process of learning, including acquiring technological knowledge and new information, making new friends and classmates from different levels of society, enriching interpersonal relationships, enjoying student life after the boring and heavy burden of work, or learning a different life philosophy and coping strategies from classmates. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Wlodkowski (1988), Tinto (1993), Mackinnon-Slaney (1994) and Burns (1995), that positive reinforcement, academic and social integration, and student commitment can enable

students' efforts in persistence. The factors that seemed enabling to these students in their two-year college programs are discussed next.

Positive Reinforcement: Knowledge Enrichment

Participants agreed that they acquired knowledge in their process of persistence. Alice claimed that attending this program opened her eyes and mind to knowledge of healthcare management, and increased her learning experience as well:

I become more thoughtful. Because the junior-college students can only meet the students over the same age, in my class, I can meet different levels of people from diverse areas...The older classmates could teach us their experiences and knowledge, which would help me to clarify my thoughts and experiences. I have realised I could not deal with things without thinking twice. When you were young, you would respond too fast, and said something that you should not say. You would not think before you response. If you were more mature, you would cool down first to deal with things and you would not express anything without thinking...and your views will change too. To learn [from your older peers] is to let you become more mature, not to step backwards. [laughs] [Alice]

Academic and Social Integration

Tinto (1993) defines social integration as developing meaningful relationships with peers; on the other hand, academic integration refers to active participation in the learning process. Adam, Fanny, Donna and Daphne showed they were highly involved in these integrations. Adam agreed that he had been able to “meet more people, get acquainted with more friends and classmates” in his class. Fanny said that “being a student again is great; I can meet a lot of new classmates”. She described learning new information was a kind of “self-endorsement” for her:

It [Attending two-year college program] is a kind of self-endorsement. I have learnt something which I did not acknowledge before. [Fanny]

Donna also thought it was good to learn either in classes or from classmates:

Most of all is accepting new knowledge. Though you can not learn anything, you can still know about what others are talking...You can still learn something. The feeling in our class is quite good; there are no such classification or competition stuffs. Some of my classmates are at managerial level, and some of them have jobs in the medical centre. But you won't feel distance from them, they are nice. You can get acquainted with new classmates, meet some new friends, connect with each other, and gaining some new knowledge, lot of benefits. [Donna and Daphne]

Being satisfied with the social integration brought another benefit described by Donna and Daphne as their simple and happy student life:

And I think, as I took classes on Saturday and Sunday, it might be short, to me it was the most simple and the happiest time. [Donna] You won't think anything related to the work, you just felt very happy and you are a happy student [Daphne] Yes, yes. [Donna]

Theme Two Overview

In this study, most of participants did not report that institutional commitment was factor in their persistence. Though Tinto (1993), Holland and Huba (1991) believe it is positively related to students' persistence, it seemed that participants did not seriously regard the study college or its staff as a significant role in their persistence. Secondly, while participants might show they had active participation in learning process, nevertheless, they nonetheless seemed to have few direct and meaningful interactions with faculty regarding learning.

From my own practice as a teacher in these programs, weekend and evening program students have restricted time due to their intensive study schedules and are not able to engage socially with the institute. Weekend programs have eight to ten classes a day with a ten minute break between classes; evening programs have four classes a night

with only a five minute break between classes. Students spend most of their time in classrooms; after school, they are anxious to get home. Such intensive study schedules may lead to low expectation of institutional commitment or academic integration with faculty. On the other hand, the study institute did not offer student counselling services for weekend program students either.

Interestingly, limited time did not hinder participants from establishing friendly relationships with their peers. Most participants stated that they did not find peer competition in their classes, instead, younger peers especially appreciated that they could learn knowledge, life experience and wisdom from older students. This feeling of appreciation was also linked to the enjoyment of a 'simple' student life. And most participants agreed that attending programs helped them to improve their knowledge and skills.

Another factor needed to be noted is that the majority of participants did not connect their persistence with educational expectations. As discussed in theme one, participants showed high interest in continuing their education, as cited in Wu (2004). However, to some participants their educational expectations did not reflect their academic performance, as Zhang and Huang (1998) and Liu (1998) reported. Instead, their expectations were transferred into the forms of social trend, demand of workplace, or family honours. Similarly, the factor of student commitment is shown on the participant's hunger to gain qualifications. This phenomenon will be discussed more fully in themes three and four.

Theme Three: The Value Placed on Qualifications

While Donna and Fanny spoke about their feelings about qualifications and regarded the qualification as very important, Fanny indicated what she wanted from the two-year college program:

I pay the money, you teach what I need. And all we want is the qualifications.
[Fanny]

This utilitarian value placed on qualifications is fully reflected in encouragement from family and acquaintances to continue education, participants perceived social trend, demand of workplace, or fears of unemployment.

Encouragement for Continuing Education

For many participants, it was the encouragement of acquaintances and family that motivated them to attend two-year college programs. Adam, Donna and Daphne mentioned that their acquaintances who had studied in the two-year college programs or had completed degrees encouraged them to attend the programs. Ben had his family's encouragement:

My colleagues have encouraged me [to attend this program]...well, [and tell me that] I can learn more new techniques, professional techniques, every thing which can enrich myself, everything which can enrich myself, I can learn new stuffs.
[Adam]

Most of our classmates, friends have encouraged us to attend this program and complete the degree. [Donna and Daphne]

Many people [family] encouraged me to continue my education. They said study would help my job prospect; it is a security for my family too. [Ben]

Fanny said that she had put the family first and initially refusing to attend the program, it was with her husband's approval, and encouragement from her father-in-law and her work superior that made her decide to grasp the last opportunity to study before the program she wanted would be cancelled next year:

My father-in-law encouraged me a lot. He got a master's degree from a national university. So, he kept encouraging us to continue our education... [Besides] our office chief always told me that I should not do the work which everyone can easily do. You should know the theory and can explain the meaning of the data; you should enrich yourself to that level instead of just knowing the operative procedures. I think my chief's encouragement has influenced me as well. [Fanny]

A Social Trends

After listening to participants' descriptions of how they were encouraged to participate, I asked what role qualifications played in their persistence. Instead of answering this question directly, most of the participants rather emphasized how important the qualification is in Taiwanese society. They said it was a social trend to attain further qualifications:

Now society prefers college graduates. I am only a junior-college graduate; if I want to get a promotion, they will consider my qualification. [Adam]

The society is changing; this is the trend of society. College graduates are so many, just like high school graduates before; there are so many in the society [pause] In fact, a qualification is very [pause], I have mentioned before, if you want to compete with others, you need to have that qualification. [Alice]

If I want to apply a job, the minimum application qualification is a Bachelor's degree...If I want to change my job; at least I am capable of competing with others. [Alice]

Ben commented upon these commonly held Taiwanese perceptions as: "Taiwanese society still judges people by their qualification. The time has changed; you are forced to

study further”. With qualifications a criterion for employment or judgment of people, its value became important for participants.

The Demand of the Workplace

As participants referred to “the demand of the society”, they pointed to how to keep their jobs, get promotions, or earn higher wages by being qualified with Bachelors’ degrees:

Most of my classmates have jobs in the public hospital. Those institutions regard employees’ degrees seriously and they would raise employees’ pension level after the completion of their degrees. That’s why these about to retired people would rush to attend our college’s program. [Fanny]

Jo said that she could not get promotion or a salary raise after she completed her degree. However, with this qualification her application to transfer to another office she wanted would not be refused. She told me, “There is nothing wrong with your ability or experience; it is just the thing that you have to be a Bachelor”.

Fear of Unemployment

While describing job demands, feelings related to fear or anxiety about losing jobs were revealed. Ben was the first interviewee who showed he was frightened and anxious about the possibility of losing his job:

There are so many college graduates in the market, so I am a little worried about my job...now that the economic situation has worsened, graduates from colleges or universities can not find any jobs, so if they want to find jobs here, I might have to leave...Because my job needs advanced study,...people who have a chance to continue their education are taking or have taken courses now. So, it has become more dangerous now. [Ben]

To avoid pressure from new competitors who are college graduates and who might have an interest in his job, Ben decided to follow in others’ footsteps to participate in a

two-year college program which would grant him a Bachelor's degree. Ben admitted that he had planned to continue his education later, in his forties, if it were not for what he saw as an "urgent situation":

It's just like that, the bigger environment changes; you have to follow its steps...The purpose of attending this program is to keep my job and to take care of my family.
[Ben]

Therefore, Ben regarded attending a two-year college program as an "investment" for his future career. He would never borrow for his education expenses because he believed that would put his family at risk. But if there was a guaranteed job, he would consider paying up to two million Taiwan dollars (AUD\$ 80,000) for his and his wife's education:

If there were a guarantee that job was still there for ten more years? Yes...Yes, if I still had that job, it is acceptable. If your job is not bad, it is worth it to do that, you have to invest. [Ben]

Donna and Fanny similarly expressed concern about their jobs:

Not at the moment. But no guarantee it won't in the future. If everyone is graduated from college, and you are not...They just want the college graduates. [Donna and Daphne]

One of the reasons why I want to attend this program is the lay-off at my hospital. So we need qualifications to keep our jobs...I hope I can retire at the age of fifty. I don't know if I could still hold this job for the next nine or ten years, so I think if I had a chance I would continue my education. [Fanny]

Clearly, the fear of losing jobs motivated some participants to attend the two-year college programs until they complete their degrees.

Theme Three Overview

The majority of the participants believed that attending two-year college programs was a necessary approach to retain their jobs. Appreciating the increasing value of qualifications and a demand of the workplace essential for job positions or promotions, these participants decided to attend two-year college programs, and persisted in learning until they completed their degrees. Their educational expectations were to gain their qualifications. For participants, educational qualifications had two meanings. The first was economic capital, the second, the common value placed on qualifications in Taiwanese society.

To describe educational qualifications as capital means they could be transferred from abstract concept to economic reality. This concept is adapted from Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1990) sees qualifications as a kind of cultural capital which can be accumulated and transmitted. By granting Bachelor's degrees, two-year college programs became a means for improved work prospects. As long as they persisted in learning until graduation, participants were able to gain higher salaries or better positions. Qualifications became the medium of exchange for capital including salaries and positions in workplaces. An economic perspective on qualifications suggests the need to review Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory for a more comprehensive understanding about the value placed on qualifications. This will be presented in Chapter Four.

The encouragement to attain advanced qualifications showed that participants as well as their relevant others appreciated the value placed on qualifications. What they have seen, heard and learned from their enculturation from Taiwanese society led them to cherish the value placed on educational qualifications. Being clearly aware that two-year

Bachelor's degrees were the means to career prospects, relevant others committed their support to help participants to persist in learning until they completed their degrees. Pursuing qualifications became an issue of common interest among them. Whoever ignored this interest might have to deal with the cost of losing jobs or losing career prospects and hence their social status. To be immersed in pursuing qualifications and meet the requirements of society became the most natural thing in participants as well as their relevant others' lives. It appeared that participants, their relevant others, and the whole Taiwanese society take the value placed on qualifications for granted. As Crotty (1996) and Gadamer (1993) pointed out, for participants and their relevant others, this value has made sense in their understanding and limits their viewpoint about their persistence. Since this value and its notion as cultural capital needs time to construct, tracing the process of the value construction from history and culture is now necessary. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Theme Four: Recognition of the Importance of Identity

This theme was another new theme emerging from the data. Two types of identity have been identified from the interview data. The first one is social identity, and the second one is personal identity. As Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) state, social identity refers to people's knowledge that they belong to certain social groups which brings emotional and value significance to them as part of the group membership, while personal identity refers to something of self for public consumption, that is, the social meaning of the self (Vaughan & Hogg, 2002). This personal identity as well as social identity was clearly identified as participants expressed how they sensed the difference by being a college student or a graduate.

Alice labelled her husband's junior college qualification as "inferior to" a Bachelor's degree. A similar perception could be found in other participants' interview data. Donna explained being a college student would be different, because this status implied a graduate qualification on graduation. Donna said "it surely sounds different". Corrected by Daphne, she supplemented "It sounds better; it feels like it sounds better". On being asked which part is better, Donna replied "Bachelor sounds better". And Fanny told me that being a Bachelor made quite a difference in public institutions; people treat you differently according to your education background:

The way people treat you, [pause], if your colleagues know about your degree.
[Fanny]

With this identity, participants' self-esteem is enhanced. Gaskell (1999) defines self-esteem as fluid, reflecting perceptions of the self. These perceptions are responsive to change whilst also being strongly correlated to social role. Low self-esteem is one of the dispositional barriers to adult learning (Hall, 2001). But positive self-esteem can help individuals to meet social expectations for psychological well-being where social roles are important to the individuals (Ofori & Charlton, 2002).

Adam mentioned he was afraid to tell others he was only a junior-college graduate. He told me, "After attending this program, I can chat with others about my degree." The need to be recognised is also revealed in his academic performance. Adam had achieved a better academic performance level, he said it was not the result of peer competition, rather than it was motivated by the lost of face:

Yes, in my class there are some people who do care about the grades, yes, some people would care for competition. It does not mean we want to be the top in our

class, it just the don't-look-too-bad things, such as everyone got their eighty or ninety, and you only got a sixty or seventy something, it just looks bad. [Adam]

To Adam, achieving respect and enhancing self-esteem seemed to be the consequence of his persistence. Next I discuss the influence of the recognition by family and workplace of participants' persistence.

Recognition by Family

Many of Jo's comment about the interactions with her daughter centred on ongoing processes through which Jo needed redefined her mother image throughout her persistence in learning:

After I had enrolled in a two-year college program, my daughter regarded me differently. Previously my daughter used not to mention a word about my junior college qualification at school. Now, my daughter frequently introduced me as a graduate rather than as a well-known corporation's senior employee in front of her class teachers or classmates...My daughter was now more willing to accept instead of ignoring my advice about study. [Jo]

Fanny's experience showed that a mother with a Bachelor's degree earned a higher social status in her children's school than one with a junior-college degree:

When she [my daughter] was a child, she used to treat me as her idol, she felt what her mother did was great. But last year, as she filled the Information Form for High School, she suddenly realized that my degree was not so high. So, when I asked her to get into the best female high school, she always replied, "you could only send yourself into a not-a-big-deal junior college." So, I have a kind of feeling that I was underestimated because I have studied in that kind of junior college [pause] .Now my son can put Bachelor in his mother's education background blank of the family sheet. Everyone has a college degree now. Junior college is nothing [pause] They make a lot of comparisons, and in a serious way. [Fanny]

Alice's parents showed their pleasure in her attending two-year college program in a more conservative way:

In fact, after graduation, people will address me as a Bachelor. They [my parents] think it's great to have a [first] college student in my family. Hum, they did not say anything. But I could feel they are [happy] When someone chatted with my parents and asked, "Is your daughter studying right now?" They would answer, "Yes, she is studying in a two-year college program. [Alice]

In asking if Alice' parents felt proud of her, she raised her voice excitedly with a rush and replied "Yes, yes." This attitude affected her older sister, and motivated her to a plan to also attend a two-year college program next year. The other factor motivating participants to persist revealed in the interview data was an attempt to set a model of good study habits and persistence for their children. These are discussed below.

Modelling Good Study Habits

Fanny reported how she gained recognition from her children by being a role model of good study habits:

I always ask my children to study, keep on studying. But, she always saw me around the house not doing anything. She said to me "You have nothing to do; you do not know how hard it is being a student. You always ask me to study, but you do not study at all". She argued with me often, and made a lot of complaints. So I felt, right, I should return to twenty years ago, [go back to school], to feel the same way as she feels now, to feel how hard study is. [Fanny]

I am not asking for one hundred, but others might wish to get one hundred...But I couldn't, I believe ninety is enough...If her [daughter] grade is not so high, I could tell her, "You should work harder, look, your mother can get a high score, why can't you?" [laughs] You can say this to her now, [laughs], you can say this to her now. So I think, it's great to study here, it's great to study here. [laughs] [Fanny]

There are only six months to graduation. I will persist, I have to persist. I can not let my children see me quit in the middle of something. I always encourage them to learn something. What if I quit and they will have reason to say, "You did not graduate either" or "You did not finish anything, you quit in the middle of it." So, I will be graduating, definitely. I just wish to work harder, and get a higher grade to show them that, "Their mother is a hard working student. [Fanny]

It appears that by getting a high academic performance or earning respect from family or colleagues are factors contributing to participants' willing to put more effort in the learning, and thus persist.

Recognition by the Workplace

Fanny felt she had great progress and regained her confidence to chat with her senior colleagues:

Ah, I learnt something that I had not acknowledged before, including new [medical] information or techniques. Now I can understand what others are talking about; I can chat with doctors now. I feel I have great progress. [Fanny]

For Jo, to achieve recognition at work was to maintain her self-esteem by attending the program and achieving higher grades than her colleagues:

I am a senior employee in my office, and my colleagues always look to me for my decisions. What if I got a grade lower than a junior? People would question my ability as well as my authority, then how can I maintain my position with the other colleagues in the office? [Jo]

Theme Four Overview

The majority of these participants, though from a variety of ages and backgrounds, experienced a relatively similar process of identity reconstruction. Participants' reshaping of their identity became an on-going process, which started at the moment they were accepted as successful candidates. This is similar to my own experience outlined in Chapter One. This indicates that the value placed on qualifications does not decrease over time because the image of the college student has not changed. The interview data indicated that participants not only had accepted and adapted the value placed on qualifications but also have tied their identity to the value and regarded the

recognition by family and by work as the affirmation of their personal identity as well as their social identity. To better understand the interactively bounded relationship between identity and the value of qualifications, the process of identity construction needs to be explored further. Also, the notion of identity within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture needs to be examined as this clearly has a bearing on how participants view themselves. well. This will also be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

In Summary

The first exploratory study data revealed that participants persisted in their study objectives despite their multiple barriers to learning. Their barriers included situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. Coping strategies for barriers were assimilative problem solving, accommodative system adaptation, and defensive problem avoidance strategies. Social support and learning strategies are included in assimilative problem solving strategies. Enabling factors included positive reinforcements, academic and social integration.

It also became clear from the data that persistence was a perceived reflection on the interactive relationship between identity and the value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. It appears that both participants and their relevant others assigned the same value to qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and identified aspects of qualifications as an underlying symbol of social status and economic capital in Taiwanese society.

In undertaking their college studies, participants seemed to re-shape their own identities as part of their ongoing social interaction and thus enhanced their determination to persist in spite of the barriers to their learning. As long as participants continued to persist, their relevant others showed them respect and were proud of

participants' attempts to pursue qualifications. In return, they would then offer more generous support or encouragement to participants. The more encouragement and support participants received, the stronger the determination to persist and confidence as a college student grew.

Figure 3 presents an overview of the factors contributing to persistence including coping strategies for barriers, enabling factors for persistence, the value places on qualifications and the recognition of identity.

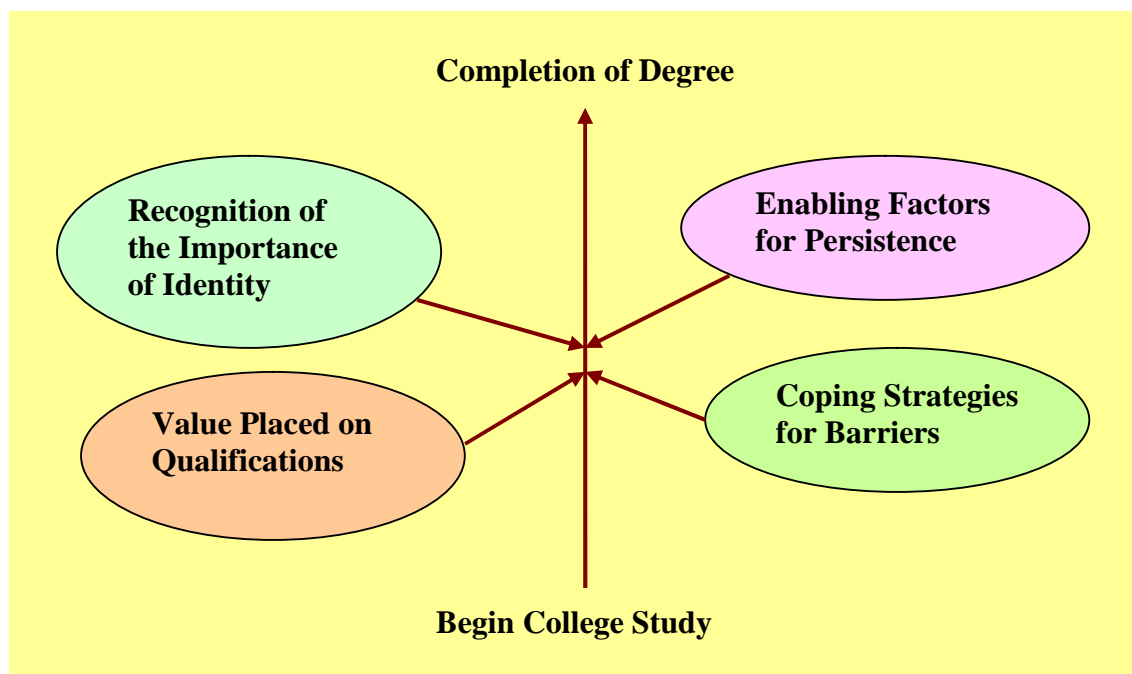


Figure 3. Factors Contributing to Persistence

Framing the Rest of the Study

Chapter Two has set the scene for the remainder of the thesis. The first exploratory study generated a number of areas for further research; as a result my understanding at this point in the thesis is that a combined perspective from psychological, traditional and cultural areas best describes the phenomenon of persistence in the two-year college

program. These areas point to the need for further research of relevant literature, in particular, the notion and construction process of identity, the meaning of qualifications from an economic perspective, and the value placed on qualifications and their relationship with identity within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture.

A further in-depth reading of the literature in these areas is intended to highlight the complex dimensions of what appears to influence participants' persistence through the two-year college program. As such, a purposeful and disciplined exploration of the literature is best regarded as part of the methodology for this thesis. As a result I have decided to present the methodology chapter next, in Chapter Three, before the second literature review in Chapter Four. Chapter Three will discuss the rationale for the methodology (which now includes the disciplined literature review), research procedures, data collection and data interpretation for the thesis as well as the further exploratory study enabled by the focussed literature review. This review will then inform the development of interview questions for a second exploratory study, the purpose of which is to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of persistence.

In Chapter Four, I will present themes from the second exploratory study within the theoretical frameworks derived from the disciplined literature review. By building on the first exploratory study and the second literature review, I hope to be able to provide further evidence and detail of some of the theoretical underpinnings that explore the complexity of the nature of persistence in learning in Taiwanese society as interpreted by the participants.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

It is essential that the methodology supports, and is consistent with, the research interest and questions. My research derived from an interest in exploring the multiple phenomena of two-year college program students' persistence experiences and their description as well their interpretation to the process of persistence. Chapter Two explored the barriers to learning as well as the coping strategies for barriers, and the factors contributing to persistence. This Chapter presents a discussion of the methodological approaches for further exploration of the unanswered research questions.

Two methodological approaches of methodology are used in this thesis. The first approach is the disciplined literature review (Clarke, 2000). The purpose of this approach is to review relevant literature to uncover the theoretical frameworks that may underpin the phenomenon of persistence, and elaborate the themes of the concept of persistence. This will be presented in Chapter Four. The second approach I have selected is a human science research orientation using hermeneutic phenomenology because I need a methodology that allows me to understand, to describe and to gain insights into the experience of persistence. The purpose of preceding the second exploratory study seeks to answer the research questions that emerged from the theoretical underpinnings of the phenomenon of persistence in learning, which was not discussed in the first exploratory study. This will be presented in Chapter Five. The rationale of methodology, data collection and interpretation procedures adopted for the thesis is presented next.

Disciplined Literature Review

By the term 'disciplined literature review', Clarke (2000) means “a disciplined examination of published research, in order to identify commonalities and differences in method and/or content, to classify papers within a pre-determined taxonomy, or to abstract a new taxonomy”.

As I examined the findings of the first exploratory study, I found that the participants' thinking revealed essential themes which characterized the phenomena of their persistence. As well, the interplay between Taiwanese traditional values regarding qualifications and identity emerged as important themes. Hence I review relevant literature a second time to seek synthesis of possible schemas contributing to the concept of persistence. Three schemas--identity construction, cultural reproduction, and the effect of history will be focused on. I expect to combine the themes developed from the first exploratory study, the three schemas and the concept of persistence, to provide a framework for the second exploratory study. It is hoped that through interpreting participants' descriptions of their lived experience in the second exploratory study, progress towards answering to the second research question can be made.

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

To inquire into the persistence experience of two-year college program students, I required a research approach that allows me to describe and interpret the nature of these students' experience. Van Manen (1990) considers that “human science is the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings. Human science research is the activity of explicating meaning” (p. 181). He points out that hermeneutics and phenomenology

are two research methodologies which are involved in all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Plager (1994) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a combination of these two approaches and commends it as seemingly offering a holistic perspective for research, best suited for answering questions about human issues and concerns.

Van Manen (1990) explains that phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches combine descriptive (phenomenological) methodology and interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology. This approach is the study of human existence; it acknowledges the essence of lived experience and captures it in language (the human science text). Essence means “the inner essential nature of a thing, the true being of a thing (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177), and this essence can only be collected by the lived experience from the life world. The life world refers to the world of lived or everyday experience which is not immediately accessible to us because we take it so much for granted that we often fail to notice it (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000). To ensure phenomenological description aiming at lived experience, and to avoid considering meaning behind the experience as “given” or “granted”, Patton (1990) believes that it is essential for a researcher to focus on understanding the meaning of human behaviour, personal experience, and the capacity in a social context through reflection and interaction with other people.

Thus reflecting on other people’s experiences and their own reflections on these same experiences, which have occurred via the dialogues with participants in this research, I have been enabled, as Van Manen (1990) suggests, to gain a deeper understanding of human experience, as reported and reflected upon, specifically, Taiwan adult students’ persistence as an aspect of motivation towards their college studies.

Gadamer (1993) explains that language is the medium of conversation, it conceals thought and allows the object to come into words. To interpret the spoken language used between two people within the process of conversation, it has to transform into written text. Text is “interpretive in the sense that it mediates between interpreted meanings and the thing toward which the interpretations point” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 26). Text speaks through interpretation; similarly, only through an interpreter can the written marks change back into meaning (Gadamer, 1993).

From Gadamer’s point of view, the researcher’s role becomes a research instrument for listening to, understanding and interpreting the experiences of the participants. Relating to this, Gadamer (1993) further suggests that the researcher should use his/her own horizon as an opinion to make the text speak and let common subject matter take place; that is, the researcher binds him/herself with the text through a hermeneutical process of “fusion of horizons”. To gain this fusion of horizons, it requires the researcher not to dominate the other, instead, he or she should really consider the weight of the other’s opinion, see each other’s point and perform the communication of meaning, and then form concepts through working out the common meaning.

In short, in the request to reveal the lived experiences of the two-year college program students’ perception and interpretation of their process of persistence in learning, I have chosen a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach as my research approach. This approach allows the phenomena of two-year college program students’ persistence experiences speak for themselves, and enables me to grasp and acknowledge the meaning embodied in expressions and objectifications of students’ lived experiences. As a researcher and an interpreter, I will open to the researched students through conversation with our joint views becoming the common meaning

behind the experience of persistence. I expect that through the process of meaning communication by using language as medium, a fusion of horizons, an understanding of persistence phenomena can take place.

Role of the researcher: Researcher as Researched

Van Manen (1990) suggests that the researcher draws up his or her personal descriptions as one of the possible experience of others, and use personal experience as a starting point for data interpretation (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). For me, describing my personal persistence in the learning experience gives possible insight into the experience of others but also provides a journey of understanding of self as a researcher: my role in the inquiry process, my frame of reference guided by my methodology, and too, my cultural or personal biases implicit in the research process.

As Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe, I incorporate my personal experience and standpoints in my study with my experience of persistence to explain my personal connection to the study. Hence I use my personal knowledge to help me in the research process. The purpose of this self-reflection is to resonate with readers through an open and honest narrative (Creswell, 2003). It is expected that my personal experience can help illuminate and understand the phenomenon of persistence. Further more, Gadamer (1993) suggests that to open oneself to the participants, is to listen to what they say. Thus, I let the common meaning between participants and myself inform my understanding to elaborate the essence of two-year college program students' persistence experience.

At the beginning stage of the research, I looked back to my own persistence experience and saw it as different from the participants' perspectives. Nonetheless, I used what happened in our persistence experiences to review relevant literature, and

construct the first exploratory study, which brought to the surface issues that had been previously invisible: the relationship between students' persistence, identity and the value placed on qualifications. At this stage, I started to understand that the persistence experiences students were talking about were in fact a reflective expression of both their and my lived experiences. I was amazed about the similarity of persistence experience between the participants and myself, and I became aware that I had taken persistence in learning for granted.

In the next stage, the second exploratory study, I will hope to further sense participants' feelings of pride and joy in their journeys of persistence. I would like to feel their desire for qualifications and their concern about competition in the work setting, and to listen to their struggles with the pressure of multiple responsibilities and their strategies for coping with their barriers to learning. I hope too, that after a reflexive examination of my own narrative, I can experience growing self-awareness and self-knowledge, look more deeply at self-other interactions, and understand the phenomenon with increasing depth through playing the role of researcher as well as interpreter in this hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Research Design

The persistence in learning experiences of two-year college program students at the Study College were explored in this study in an effort to understand students' description and to their persistence despite multiple barriers to their learning and to interpret their persistence experiences. The research design of this study including data collection, selection of participants, validation, data interpretation, and limitations of methodology is presented as follows.

Data Collection

Data Sources

Data sources for this second exploratory study are both the self reflection of my personal experience and the participants in the two-year college programs. The second exploratory study had fewer participants (4) than the first exploratory study (7), consisting of 2 woman and 2 men.

Participant Selection

The purpose of phenomenological research is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better understand the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience (Van Manen, 1990). This is usually achieved by describing in depth the experience of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). So this study employs purposeful selection of participants (Patton, 1990) to produce information-rich detailed descriptions of central themes, significant shared patterns and characteristics of persistence in learning.

Following Patton’s (1990) suggestion and characteristics described in the reviewed literature, the criteria for selection were (1) participants who were working adults; (2) participants who were continuing enrolling from first semester and had a strong intention to complete their degrees; (3) participants who had the ability to insightfully reflect upon and articulate their experiences; (4) participants who would verbally commit to completing the research; and (5) participants from varying age levels to generate “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of the heterogeneity” (Patton, 1990, p.172).

For a phenomenological study a much narrower range of sampling strategies is used than quantitative study (Creswell, 1998). Criterion for minimum sample size is based on the sufficiency and saturation of information (Seidman, 1998); that is, when no more new information is forthcoming from new sampled units (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Participants were recommended and identified through a snowballing process. Here information-rich people were identified by people who know these people (Creswell, 1998).

This study selects three students who were persisting in their learning in evening programs with a range of retention rate from 100% to 64% in the study college. It also selects and studies a person who has not persisting in formal educational settings to explore any discrepant information and a different perspective. It is expected that through discussing contrary information the credibility of an account for a reader can be added (Creswell, 1998).

Participants' Background

In this study, pseudonyms are used to preserve participants' anonymity. Two men and two women representing a range of ages 25-55 were chosen. There are two hospital employees, one kindergarten teacher, and one technology technician. Three participants are two-year college program students at the Study College. The first one is Charlie, who had achieved a Bachelor degree; the second is a first-year two-year college program student, Sally, and the third one is Tina who was waiting to graduate. In contrast to these three participants who expressed a strong wish to complete their degrees, the fourth participant is Tony who is a college computer technology technician. He dropped out of two formal education settings, thus illustrating a different experience, where a student failed to achieve a pass in spite of initial

persistence. Participants' personal information and frequency of interview is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Participants' Characteristics of the Second Exploratory Study* (n=4)

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Marital status	Family background	Frequency of interview
Sally	F	30	Married	Stay with mother-in-law Three sons	2 (Year 1)
Charlie	M	55	Married	One son and one daughter	2 (Year 2& Graduation)
Tina	F	25	Single	One sister & one brother	2 (Year 2)
Tony	M	28	Single	High achieved sister	1 (drop out)

Data Collecting Method

Semi-structured interview

For a phenomenological study, such as this, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998). Van Manen (1990) clarifies two specific purposes of the interview in hermeneutic phenomenological human science research:

- (1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon; and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66).

To allow the interview to elicit information about experience of persistence from each unique participant within the study, I used a semi-structured interview format that followed an interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix F). The interview guide questions, their purposes and theoretical underpinning for the second exploratory study will be presented in Chapter Five.

The Interview Process

Prior to the interviews, I communicated with participants by phone to explain the purposes and design of my study, and assured them their participation or rejection had nothing to do with their academic performance to avoid the influence of educative authority over the participants. However, the issue of authority will always be present and it is not possible to ascertain the actual impact of this on the participants. After verifying their interest in participating, we then agreed on the interview date, time and date at the participants' convenience. All interviews took place in my office at Study College. Most participants were interviewed twice; each interview lasted for forty-five to sixty-five minutes.

Along with a Statement of Research Purpose, a Consent Form approved by the ACU Ethics Committee was given to each participant. Explanations of interview procedures included the right to say or comment on anything, to ask questions at any point during the interviews, and to withdraw from the interview session at any point. Participants were reassured that there would be no unpleasantness or damaging effects on the individual, the setting, or others close to the participant either during or subsequent to the research. Participants were informed that interview recorded tapes and verbatim transcripts would be kept confidential after asking for permission to record the interview and to arrange follow up interviews. The privacy of the participants was respected and anonymity or confidentiality was ensured as well (see Appendix C; D). Participants also were invited to comment on their transcripts. The translated verbatim quotes are kept in the Mandarin idiom to give a more authentic flavour to the participants' world (see example, Appendix E).

Data Interpretation

Gadamer (1993) says that all understanding is interpretation; all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language and text is the written form of language. Following Roberts and Taylor's (2000) definition, one of the forms of text is the interview transcript. To grasp the structure of the meaning of the text, Van Manen (1990) suggests using theme analysis; while Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest narrative construction.

Conducting Thematic Analysis

Van Manen (1990) describes "a theme as the meaning units or structures of meaning of experience" (p. 79). To analyse a phenomenon, we need to determine what the themes are to ensure what make up the experience. Van Manen (1990) emphasizes that "formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of "seeing" meaning" (p. 79).

Boyatzis (1998) explains that a theme can be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon). Themes can be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research. Both approaches are used in this study. Boyatzis (1998) also claims that thematic analysis is useful at all research stages because the characteristics of thematic analysis are as follows:

- (1) a way of seeing;
- (2) a way of making sense out of seemingly unrelated material;
- (3) a way of analysing qualitative information;
- (4) a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture;

- (5) a way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data (Boyatzis, 1998, pp. 4-5).

Narrative Construction

To emphasize the more personal experience of participants, I also use narrative as a form of text to show the effect of reality and the complexities of lived moments of participants' struggling with persistence. Ellis and Bochner (2000) write:

The meaning of prenarrative experience is constituted in its narrative expression. Life and narrative are inextricably connected. Life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it. Narrative is both about living and part of it (pp. 745-746).

Narrative truth is not "akin to correspondence with prior meanings assumed to be located in some sort of prenarrative experience" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 p. 745); instead, it is to seek to keep the past alive in the present, to show the meanings and significance of the past, and to present its nature of "incomplete, tentative and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745).

Thus, I hope through constructing selected participants' narratives in this study, I can present the consequences participants' narratives of their persistence produce, what kind of persons they have become and what new possibilities for living have been introduced into their lives. Three voices are expected to be heard as Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) suggest: (1) the voice of the narrator as presented in the text; (2) the theoretical underpinnings and (3) the reflexive self-awareness during the process of reading and interpretation. In the process of this study, I hope that readers can feel the truth of participants' narratives and become sensitive to participants' voice and meanings. It is hoped that exemplars of the theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapter three, drawing particularly on the work of

Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986), Gadamer (1993) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), will be evident while reading and analysing the narratives, and in return enrich further reading and understanding.

Process of Interpretation

In this second exploratory study, I combined Creswell's (1998) phenomenological analysis steps and Van Manen's (1990) suggested line-by-line approach, to identify themes which capture the phenomenon of persistence. Themes drawn from thematic analysis was used as a leading guide to reduce the clauses of interview narratives. I further followed Mishler's (1991) suggestion to characterize the significance of the interview clauses and link them together to construct a story with coherence. My process of interpretation is presented as follows:

- (1) I typed and saved every taped interview into verbatim transcript in Mandarin
- (2) I then translated transcript from Mandarin into English;
- (3) I read each verbatim transcript numerous times both in Mandarin and English to gain a general picture of the participants' views on their persistence behaviours. Because of the complexity of working in two languages, movement between the Mandarin and English transcripts was frequent to try to ensure meaning was being carried across. Other bilingual Mandarin/English speakers were frequently consulted at this time for confirmation. Then I read each sentence or sentence cluster carefully to find out what sentence or sentence cluster seemed to reveal about the nature of experience. I found out statements about how participants are experiencing

their persistence. I then worked to develop a list of these significant and nonoverlapping statements;

(4) I grouped statements into “meaning units” (Van Manen, 1990) and coded them. Then I listed these units with a description of the experience including verbatim examples;

(5) Next, I grouped key categories of meaning units into themes;

(6) I reflected on my own descriptions and used imaginative descriptions to seek all possible meanings as well as divergent perspectives. Then, I constructed a description of how the phenomenon was experienced;

(7) I further constructed an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience;

(8) I Then wrote a composite description to present it as a narrative;

(9) I used themes synthesised from thematic analysis to characterise the significance of the interview narrative, and then reduced the interview narrative clauses;

(10) I constituted interview clauses in terms of the description of the meaningful social events participants reported;

(11) I preserved the temporal ordering of events to recapitulate the experience happened in the real world;

(12) I then linked each part of interview narratives and combined them together to display a coherent story for the reader.

The interpretations of the second exploratory study are presented in Chapter Five and Six. Chapter Five presents the themes identified from the interview data, while Chapter Six traces the journey in the form of a narrative of four selected participants.

Validation and Reliability

“Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description” (Janesick, 2000). In this study, I adapted strategies suggested by Merriam (1998), Creswell (1998; 2003), and Janesick (2000) for meeting the criterion of internal validity, meeting the criterion of external validity, and meeting the criterion for reliability.

Internal Validity

Firstly, I followed Merriam (1998) and Creswell’s (2003) suggestions to enhance internal validity of this study. I used two sources of data (my personal experience and interview data) and two methods (themes analysis and narratives construction) to confirm the emerging findings and used them to build a coherent justification of themes. Secondly, I used member-checking (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2003) by taking transcribed verbatim back to the participants to ask them if the results were plausible.

External Validity

In spite of attempts to achieve trustworthy data and their interpretation, the major limitation of this study remains the extent to which they are externally valid, that is the generalisability of the findings. A study such as this can at best only paint a picture of experience of persistence within a certain time frame acknowledging the assumptions and biases, minimised as far as possible, of one researcher.

My sense is that the external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Through

providing a rich and thick description of each interview, the context and background of learning experiences, the demographic data of participants including age, marital status in this study as Creswell (2003) suggested, I hope I can facilitate the reader to transfer the research to their own situations, and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.

Reliability

Merriam (1998) emphasises that in a qualitative study, reliability suggests the dependability or consistency of the results obtained from the data. That is, to ensure the results make sense, and be consistent and dependable within the data collected (Merriam, 1998). This derives from a clear explanation of the assumptions and theory behind the study, the basis for selecting participants and a description of them, how data was collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry.

Limitation of Methodology

This study's methodology does pose some limitations. First, this hermeneutic phenomenological study does not allow for empirical generalisations in the statistical quantitative sense. It does not attempt to discover or to prove a universal law, instead, its focus is to provide the reader with an in-depth examination of the process of persistence from the perspective of those who were working adult students in two-year college programs.

A second limitation is that this study is exploratory in nature. Its purpose is to increase our understanding of the meaning of persistence in learning within the context of Taiwanese tradition and identity construction. However, I hope that this study

contributes in a small way to other examples of lived experience, as well as to benefit the study and development of a comprehensive theory of adult persistence in learning.

Thirdly, this study was based on the assumption that participants say what they really mean and that I interpret what they say in the same way as they do. Consequently, my interpretation of the data as well as the conclusions I draw will be perspectival. As Gadamer (1993) emphasizes, “try to escape all prejudices is a bias itself” (p.270). He explains that prejudices does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but it can be negative value prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition. Though I might not able to separate myself from these limiting prejudices in advance, I can be aware of my own bias in understanding by remaining consciously sensitive to the text, and by preparing myself to let text present itself in all its otherness. It is expected that through my openness to text and by allowing new elements of meaning to continually emerge, the understanding of what is said in the text can appear.

Fourthly, limited by the selection of information-rich participants who were free and were willing to be interviewed, this study has only one male respondent (non-persister) and is lack of the narrative data from the female non-persisters. As a result, this study is not attempted to make a comparison study neither between persisters and a singular non-persister nor between two genders.

As noted earlier, data interpretation in qualitative analysis is a time consuming and complex task, particularly when the data first need to be translated from one language to another. Subtleties and nuances of meaning expressed in Mandarin are often difficult to translate and may not even have equivalents in English. And the cultural and contextual significance of the data can be lost in translation. This needs to be borne in mind when reading the data.

Towards Chapter Four

In this Chapter, I explained why I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as the research approach to this study, as well the detailed description of research design including data collection method, participant selection, data analysis method, validation, and the limitations of methodology. In Chapter Four, the second literature review to provide a theoretical framework for the second exploratory study will be presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPLORING PERSISTENCE: LITERATURE REVIEW II

Introduction

To understand how the intertwined relationship between the recognition of the identity and the value placed on qualifications is constructed within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition, I provide a more extensive disciplined literature review (Clarke, 2000) as methodology. This identifies literature from three areas to explore theoretical underpinnings which had not been fully discussed in Chapter Two.

The first area presents the concepts and theories of identity and their relationship to persistence in learning. In particular, I draw here on Whitbourne's theory of identity construction process (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986). The second area focuses on the value of qualifications within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition and its relationship to persistence in learning. The third area provides a theoretical base that attempts to understand why these notions of persistence in learning are largely unexamined and taken for granted in Taiwanese society. Here I draw on Gadamer's theory of effective history perspective (Gadamer, 1993) and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural reproduction to develop an understanding of how the relationship between persistence in learning, identity and culture emerges. These areas are then synthesised to develop schemas associated with the formation of the intertwined relationship between identity, qualifications and persistence in terms of Taiwanese culture.

Two outcomes are expected from this exploration of the relationship and the formation schemas of this relationship. First, it is expected that a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of persistence in learning of students in

the two-year college program will be developed. Second, it will provide themes and direction to inform data collection for the second exploratory study which follows.

Literature Area One: Identity and Persistence in Learning

This section of the literature review focuses on concepts and theories about identity and its process of formation. The rationale for this review was based on the findings discussed in Chapter Two that suggested that participants showed their determination to persist because they identified as successful college students, as mothers with high qualifications, and as competent employees. However, the data also showed that participants' personal identity as well as social identity were enhanced through the process of their study and provided further impetus to persist. As such, to understand the relationship between identity and students' persistence, I first need to clarify the meanings of the concepts of identity and their relationship to learning and persistence. The discussion in this section is thus divided into two parts. The first part explores the concept of identity and its relationship with persistence; the second part focuses on the identity construction process and how the concept of persistence is enhanced through this process.

The Concept of Personal Identity

The concept of identity is so complex that it requires consideration from varied perspectives to attain a comprehensive picture. From the psychological perspective, identity is constituted through memory. Through personal identity, the continuity of the essential conditions for somatic and psychological wellbeing are able to be maintained. Also, personal psychological connections including belief, memory, desire and character emerge through social interactions to presuppose the self-consciousness of selves and others at different times (Garrett, 1998).

From a social psychological perspective, identity is a form of individual reflexivity; a form of social action. Identity produces particular kinds of action, or role performances which, in turn, are situated within a social setting and presumably alter or shape the social context (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Whitebrook (2001) suggests that identity represents the convergence of the psychological development of the self with the social position of the individual. People become self-conscious in the process of being inducted into their social lives. As a consequence, people are conscious of themselves.

Identity is understood as the integration of the physical characteristics, abilities, motives, goals, attitudes, values, and social roles that the individual attributes over time to belonging to the self. Identity is developmental and is impacted in adulthood by the experiences encountered in the course of interactions with others in the family, work setting, or through exposure to broader social influences (Whitbourne & Weinstock 1986). Identity expresses the notion of self as social object. Identity is a variable, and is transacted in interaction by announcement and placement. Announcement relates to the identity in which one claims for oneself; placement is the identity in which one is cast by others. Further, identity is socially validated through the coincidence of placements and announcements (McMahon, 1995).

Personal Identity and Persistence in Learning

A focus on the relationship between identity and learning directs attention to how personal identity enhances students' determination to persist as well as their academic performance. For Grinsber and Wlodkowski (1995), identity has a powerful influence on motivation and hence willingness to learn. In Tinto's (1993) theory, students' self-identities are critical for their ability to integrate into the college environment. If

students' commitment to the institution and educational goals fit the college environment, then the results reinforce their persistence (Witte, Forbes, & Witte, 2003). A strong sense of self identity would encourage students to value themselves so as to reach high levels and perform competently in intellectual, social, interpersonal, creative and ethical tasks (Finalborgo & Dionision, 1996). In his study of Taiwanese aboriginal students' learning behaviour, Tsai (1995) found that identity is the main factor contributing to their high academic performance which enhances their determination to complete their study. In short, it appears that personal identity is highly related to persistence in learning.

The Concept of Collective Identity

Identity can also be considered in the collective form. Collective identity is defined as a process whereby group members do not only share self-defining attributes but also engage in social action to retain an image of what the group stands for and how it is represented and viewed by others (Whitebrook, 2001). This is because identity is a given, deriving from the social rather than a private possession. Identity can be viewed as a private experience of human beings which is shaped and ordered in learning to speak and write, and in acquiring the know-how of social and material practices. When people sense their own identities, they are expressed in the public space. In this way, identity becomes a group characteristic, and is the form of human activity in which the answer to the question "who am I?" is also the answer to the question "who are we?" (Whitebrook, 2001).

Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) describe identity as ranging from a purely individual form to a purely group form. An individual's behaviour can be perceived either as a unique disposition or as a member of groups. Belonging to a group confers

social identity or a shared and collective representation of who one is and how one should behave. Social identity relates to people's knowledge that they belong to certain social groups which have emotional and value significance for them.

Harwood (2004) has also considered the distinction between personal identity and social identity. For Harwood, personal identity refers to a person's conception of their own individual characteristics such as their traits, likes and dislikes, characteristics which can be shaped by family experiences. On the other hand, social identity refers to a person's conception of the groups to which they belong, along with evaluative connotations attached to those group memberships. Vaughan and Hogg (2002) explained that social identity defines the self in terms of group memberships, that is, the part of the self-concept that derives from one's membership of a social group. Social identity is associated with the group's shared aims, conformity, and normative behaviour; or stereotyping, prejudice and inter-group bias. Social identity relates to the interpersonal relationships that provide a sense of belonging. This consideration of collective identity as socially and culturally constructed sets the scene for a discussion of one of the key ideas of this thesis - the relationship between collective identity and persistence.

Collective Identity and Persistence in Learning

As Finalborgo and Dionision (1996), Grinsber and Wloodkowski (1995), Tsai (1995) and Tinto (1993) suggest, there is a positive relationship between students' personal identities and their academic performance and persistence in learning. However, these studies disregard the role of collective identity in persistence, because from the social psychological perspective, collective identity generally is linked to the sense of belonging to a group (Harwood, 2004; Vaughan & Hogg, 2002; Widdicombe &

Wooffitt, 1995). So how does collective identity relate to students' persistence in learning?

Ogden and Hilt (2003) explain that collective identity involves the absorption of cultural traits by an individual in the construction of self-identity. As an example, in their study of African-American youths' preference for basketball, they found that there are four factors tied to these young people's collective identities. These are: encouragement by authority figures to pursue basketball; basketball's portrayal as a positive form of expression and empowerment; the abundance of black role models in basketball, and the perception of basketball's influence on social mobility. Clearly, African-American youths adopt the value of playing basketball in American society and regard it as a means towards gaining a new cultural space and civic pride rather than just a sport or an interest. As a result, basketball becomes part of a collective identity and influences African-Americans' self-perception and the ways others perceive them. In return, these personal images act as continual reinforcements of basketball's high status in African-American youths' sport preference.

Cremer and van Vugt (1998) further clarify the circumstances in which self-perception may be linked to collective identity. They found that when engaged in intergroup comparisons, people define their self-concept in terms of collective identity, while they define their self-concept in terms of personal identity when engaged in interpersonal comparisons. Harwood (2004) also confirms the relationship between social identity and the construction of the individual's self-concept. He states that if groups with which people identify are valued positively, members may feel honoured to be part of the group which may positively influenced their self-concept, and vice versa.

Gale and Austin (2003) suggest ways to promote collective identity. They studied counsellors' sense of professionalism and found that formulating a collective identity can help counsellors to establish their unique roles in the helping professions. They recommend utilising the perspectives of those who have made significant contributions to the counselling profession to provide inspiration on how to promote a collective identity.

In summary, Ogden and Hilt (2003), Cremer and van Vugt (1998), Harwood (2004) and Gale and Austin (2003) do not claim there is a direct relationship between collective identity, academic performance and persistence. Instead, they regard collective identity as reinforcement for action or for enhancing the self-concept as a membership of the group. Through the engagement of comparisons or the construction of personal identity, collective identity absorbs cultural values and transmits these values into the perception of self. With this collective identity, individuals are more able to express their unique roles and gain status in society. Additionally, this collective identity is reinforced by respected role models.

Reviewing the findings of the first exploratory study cited in Chapter Two, it is clear that the perception of collective identity is manifest in the process of persistence in learning as described by the participants in this study. By enrolling in college programs, they adopted the image of a college student, which is held in high esteem in Taiwanese society. Their identity becomes a group characteristic as they engage with like-minded others to generate a sense of belonging to the group. With this sense of belonging they share a collective representation and then adopt the group's behaviour which becomes significant and important to them. In this way, the participants persisted in their learning and completed their degrees, leading to a sense of belonging to an elite and valued group – that of the college graduate. By re-identifying their

self-concept as graduates in their relationships with others, the participants share in the respect and honour afforded to members of this particular social group.

In the above discussion I attempted to tease out the relationship between personal and collective identity and the notion of persistence. It is clear at this point that an exploration of the process of adult identity construction is now required in order to gain a better understanding of how collective cultural values transform into collective as well as personal identity. For this I turn to Whitbourne's (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) model of the process of adult identity construction.

Process of Adult Identity Construction: Whitbourne's Model

Whitbourne's (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) theory of adult identity construction has been applied in various fields including adult development (Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997) and gerontology (McAuley, 2002; Whitbourne, 2000). Compared with other theories (for example, Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Erikson, 1980), Whitbourne's (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) model was developed from empirical studies of adult experience, and thus I believe it is appropriate for the purposes of this thesis to explain adult students' process of identity construction. Moreover, the findings from the first exploratory study cited in Chapter Two revealed a process of identity construction similar to that as described by Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

For Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986), adult identity changes over the life span as humans attempt to achieve an optimal balance between self and experience. Through the processes of assimilation and accommodation, a state of dynamic equilibrium between identity and experience can be attained. It would appear that adults are not ready to change themselves until they reach this state

of equilibrium; only then are they able to make changes if or when their identity is challenged and at the same time maintain a consistent sense of self. By maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between identity and experience, adults are able to achieve a positive view of the self as loving, competent, and good, and are able to reflect and evaluate themselves realistically. Whitbourne's model is displayed in Figure 4, and discussed in the next section.

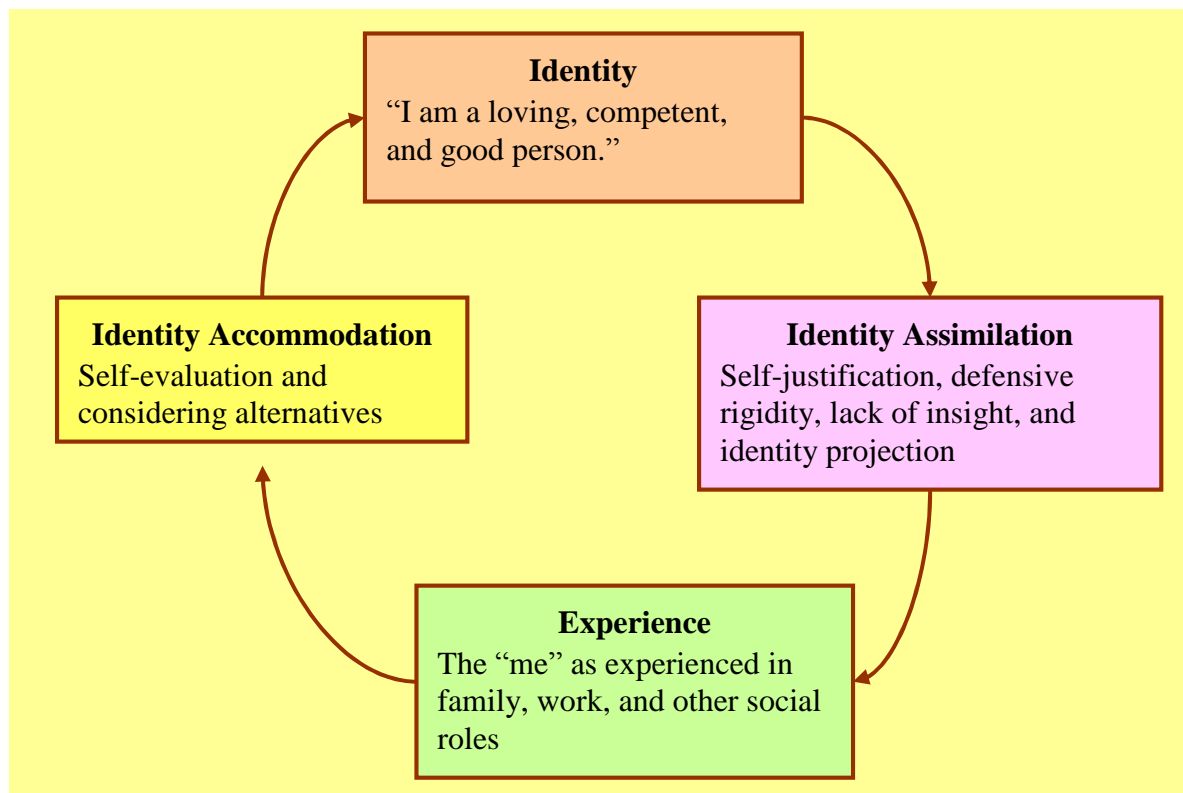


Figure 4: The process of adult identity (Whitbourne, 1986, p. 18)

For Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986), both the identity assimilation and identity accommodation processes form the basis for the interaction between the adult's self and experience, and both processes are flexibly used to balance identity if or when it is challenged. When identity-discrepant experiences occur, they are first processed through identity assimilation. If the process of identity assimilation fails to occur, the process of identity accommodation will start.

Experience in the adult identity process brings forth changes in the normative physical, psychological and social roles. Thus experience can challenge the individual's sense of self which may impact on psychological well-being. The processes of identity assimilation and accommodation (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) are introduced next.

Identity Assimilation

Identity assimilation refers to the interpretation of life events in terms of already established cognitive and affective schemas incorporated in identity. In this process, adults try to interpret experiences in a manner that is consistent with an identity as a loving, competent, and good person. This process makes the external environment a place that can be understood in terms that reinforce the individual's existing identity instead of in terms that challenge it (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

The process of identity assimilation involves stages that include self-justification, identity projection, defensive rigidity, and lack of insight. As individuals experience challenges to their identity from their environment they will start to protect their identity as loving, competent, and good individuals, and begin to compare themselves with others by pointing to the others' negative qualities. In this way, individuals defend their identity from any outside threats and hold their own identity as favourable compared with others'. This however can lead to lack of insight and reflection as individuals try to protect their identity from discrepant experiences by refusing to examine the implications of their own thoughts or behaviours, and by avoiding or having difficulty in reflecting upon their own motivations, needs, and character (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

With lack of insight individuals interpret events within the model of an existing identity rather than allowing events to effect a change in identity. This is the end stage of the assimilation process. It is not until individuals feel uncomfortable, threatened or anxious or dissatisfied with the outcomes, that they will start to consider seeking a new equilibrium, and begin the process of identity accommodation, discussed next (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

Identity Accommodation

Identity accommodation refers to the change in an individual's existing identity in response to discrepant identity experiences. Experiencing discord and a challenge to identify as a worthwhile individual, or lacking self-knowledge may enable individuals to reflect on and examine their identity through a process of accommodation (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

This process of accommodation is motivated by two sources: internal and external. The internal source refers to the desire to achieve balance or equilibrium between experience and identity which originates from within; the external source refers to interactions with others, success or failure in the economic marketplace, and competence in performing actions necessary to adapt to the external environment. What makes the individual actually change by engaging in identity accommodation is internal; it is assumed that an unpleasant inner feeling regarding a state of disequilibrium results in identity accommodation and thus leads to the individual's identity change (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

The process of identity accommodation begins with self-evaluation. Here, the individual engages in an evaluative process of trying to determine whether a discrepancy between identity and experience actually exists. After questioning

personal identity, and examining the relationship between present experience and prior beliefs, the individual considers making changes. He or she might consider either searching for a more congruent experience or pursuing an altered identity. The stage of considering alternatives can guide individuals to a better match between identity and experience, thus leading to a more satisfactory outcome and re-establishing of equilibrium. But if individuals fail to establish a coherent identity they may initially not have a consistent definition of their motives, goals, attitudes, values or social roles. As a result, a negative perception of identity will be constructed and disequilibrium will occur (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986).

Examples of this can be seen in the participants in this study. As noted in Chapter Two, the participants in the first exploratory study were regarded as competent and highly achieving employees in their workplaces. Experiencing the demand for higher qualifications persuaded participants to begin to engage in a process of assimilation, and led them to the state of disequilibrium as manifest by feelings of threat and anxiety. For many these were so severe that the participants' inner desires to achieve equilibrium were triggered, leading them to begin the process of identity accommodation. After careful evaluation, participants chose to attend the two-year college program to reconstruct their identity as favourable and thus maintain a new equilibrium, obviating the negative feelings that were occurring in the state of disequilibrium.

Because the social and cultural value placed on qualifications is connected to the notion of a favourable identity, attending college programs was seen to be a positive option. This helped participants construct a better match between their identities and their external circumstances. As long as the participants persisted in their learning, they could remain in an equilibrium state, and thus maintain their positive identity. If

they refused to follow this track, their inner desire to attain an equilibrium state would eventually be triggered by the anxiety and discomfort caused by the pressure to gain qualifications, thus forcing them to pursue further study. So it can be seen that the value placed on qualifications is instrumental in the process of identity construction.

Discussion of Identity and Persistence

In the first section of the literature review, the concepts and the construction processes of identity were presented. A review from the perspectives of psychology and social psychology indicate that identity refers to the social meaning of the self and it expresses the notion of self as social object; it can be transformed in a collective or given form. Collective identity is seen as reinforcing and enhancing an individual's self-concept to engage and continue behaviours accepted by society. Literature review also shows that identity construction is an ongoing process in adult development. Change of identity is constantly occurring throughout the adult life span. That there is a strong relationship between personal identity and persistence in learning is supported by a number of authors (for example, Tinto, 1993; Tsai, 1995; Grinsber & Wloodkowski, 1995; Finalborgo & Dionision, 1996).

I then introduced Whitbourne's (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) model to throw light onto the process of identity construction. This circular process of adult identity construction illustrates how adults' experience relates to identity by attempting to maintain equilibrium through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. I noted that this model could provide a basis to explain the schema in the first exploratory study participants' persistence in learning. Also, it is clear that the value society places on qualifications plays a significant role in maintaining the equilibrium state in the identity construction process. As well, the incorporation of

this value by participants in the construction of their self-identity helped them identify a collective identity as college students and thus motivated them to persist.

Taking account of the directions pointed to by the first exploratory study and now applying theories of collective identity and identity construction to notions of persistence in learning raises a further critical question: why is this collective identification as a graduate so strong and so highly valued in Taiwanese society? The next section, which constitutes the second major area of this literature review, examines the history of the development of the value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture, and discusses how tradition and culture influence students to persist in the learning that is required for pursuing qualifications. As such, this provides insights into answering to the second research question:

What theoretical frameworks underpin the phenomenon of persistence in learning?

Literature Area Two: the Value Placed on Qualifications within the Context of Taiwanese Culture and Tradition

Identity alone does not fully account for the high levels of persistence described in this thesis. To understand the experience of persistence in learning as interpreted by the two-year college program students in this study despite the barriers they experience, the notion of the high value placed on qualifications and education within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition needs to be examined. The reasons for this are firstly: we reflect ourselves in a living relationship with culture and tradition. In Chapter One, I defined tradition as a kind of opinion, belief or custom handed down from one generation to another (Turner, 1993). Gadamer (1993) explains that

tradition refers to something in the past that still represents a living force which enters into all understanding. The particular nature of understanding is shaped by the tradition in which we stand and understanding continues tradition. So understanding of the present is always grounded in a cultural past which we carry with us; tradition always is part of us (Gadamer, 1993). Secondly, culture is represented as the taken-for-granted background to everyday life. It defines our identity, and is tightly integrated in a way that makes our lives and the world we live in meaningful (Vaughan & Hogg, 2002). Because the Taiwanese cultural value placed on qualifications was derived from China, to identify the value through education providing the context in forming persistence and identity, I need to explore and locate the importance of the Taiwanese education and examination system within Chinese history, culture and tradition.

Education in Chinese History

The high value and importance of education in China can be traced back as far as the Western Zhou Dynasty (770-475 BCE). Then, education was seen as a privilege and also an obligation for Chinese nobility, the class that provided the Scribe-Officials. Scribe Officials were responsible for providing social activities and for serving the Emperor's annexed territories (Dan, 1998). In this period, maintaining harmony within territories was the main task of the noble class, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills by the Scribe-Officials was considered essential for their role in society. As such, education was viewed as for the good of society rather than for personal gain (Wen, 1994), though most were denied access to it.

At the end of Western Zhou Dynasty (770-475 BCE), the collapse of feudal society became apparent. At this time, the followers of the philosopher Confucius urged

changes to the inherited Scribe-Official system and encouraged the ideal of education for all. As a result, by BCE 551-489, more and more civilians were undertaking education in schools built by noble families, and became regarded as the intelligentsia in Chinese society. Increasing numbers of intelligentsia gained their wealth and fame through their service to the nobles, and attained high social status as officials (Yu, 1989).

At the end of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 24 CE), the intelligentsia were encouraging their children to undertake education so as to attain an official position in the Emperors' realm. In return, their position would protect personal and family wealth and social status, and thus expand the influence of the whole family. Education became the path to the wealth and fame, and was regarded as a critical tool to establish and maintain both personal and family position in society (Yu, 1989).

In 609 CE, Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty established an official examination system to select elites to serve the Emperors' Court. These examinations were held regularly every few years, and the elites studied hard to pass them. For the Emperor, examinations became a strategy to control the elites and ensure they worked for him. On the other hand, passing examinations was considered an honour to the candidate and his family. This established the strong link in Chinese society between education and examinations, and ever since, the notion of being educated has meant passing examinations. Indeed the very purpose of learning and knowledge enrichment was to pass examinations. While this form of the examination system was officially terminated in 1905 in the Qing Dynasty (Li, 1990), its influence on education and entrance examinations still remains in modern Taiwanese society. The next section provides further illustration of the examination system in Chinese history.

The Examination System in Chinese History

Official examinations became major events in Chinese dynasties after the year 609 CE. In the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE), the top five successful candidates would be paraded through the streets and receive congratulations and gifts from the crowd. Unmarried young men who were successful in examinations would be able to marry the daughters of noble families. In the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE), the examination system expanded and became a regular selection tool for national political governors or civil officials in the administration bureaucracy (Li, 1990). The function of these examinations was to select educated literati as political governors to help Chinese Emperors control their large territory (Brown, Halsey, Lauder, & Wells, 1997). In return, Emperors would reward these literati with money, position and power (Wang & Lin, 1994; Chiang, 1998). Success in examinations has been related to achievement, social status and good prospects since that time.

The influence of examinations increased rapidly in the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE). Young children were taught poems in school to emphasise the importance of studying hard. The two most popular poems were *The Trimetric Classic* by Ying-Lian Wang (1223-1296 CE) and *The Magic Child* by Zhu Wang. Through these, children were taught that educated elites were given the highest prestige in society, and studying hard could lead individuals to attain ‘a golden house, an attractive woman, and honour for their family’ as cited in *The Magic Child*. *The Trimetric Classic* also pointed out that it was no shame in poverty if a man studied hard for examinations. This idea is illustrated in the following section of this poem:

One opened out rushes and plaited them together, another scraped tablets of bamboo. These men had no books, but they knew how to make an effort. One tied his head to the beam above him; another pricked his thigh with an awl. They were

not taught, but toiled hard of their own accord. Then we have one who put fireflies in a bag, and again another who used the white glare from snow. Although their families were poor, these men studied unceasingly...You young learners, ought to imitate them...Those who work, will also succeed as he did...If foolishly you do not study, how can you become men? (Ying-Lian Wang, 1223-1296 CE, *The Trimetric Classic*) (see Appendix G) .

“No pain, no gain” became the most often used proverb to persuade young children to study hard to pass examinations and thus attain social status. Persistence in learning was a necessary strategy to gain achievement, while the pain was the necessary process for the gain. However access to study was not equally available for all during the Dynastic period. Jya (1995) is one of the scholars who explodes the myth of equity. He points out that the examination gate was not open to everyone, and there was a lack of equity and access to social mobilisation. Jya (1995) argues that it was very hard for people to prepare for examinations stretching over twenty years without any financial assistance, particularly for the poor. This inequity was apparent in the backgrounds of the officials in the Emperors’ court. While most political governors were from rich families, most of lower level civil officials were poor.

Though the examination system lasted for over one thousand years, its limitations and weakness gradually became apparent. Because students needed to study ancient texts to pass, exposure to and acceptance of new knowledge or updated information was hindered. In particular, science and technology were seen as useless by the Emperors and were neglected. It was not until the need to modernise China was realised that scholars urged an end to the examination system and elite selection. This did not occur officially until 1905 during the Chin Dynasty (Li, 1990). Its influence on education and entrance examinations remains in modern Taiwan, though China and Taiwan were divided into two separate political regions after the 1949 civil war. In

the following section, I show how the notion of education and examinations inherited from Chinese history continues to be played out in modern day Taiwan.

Education in Modern Taiwan

As in the traditional Chinese notion of education, the Taiwanese government held that education should contribute to nation building rather than personal gain. In the 1950s, the purpose of education was to train workers to compete against the Chinese communists in mainland China; in the 1960s, the purpose became for economic growth. During the 1970s, Taiwan underwent a period of rapid technological development in order to encourage higher economic growth, and universities became the sites of technical and other training (Huang, 1996). The University became the pool for the training of high-quality employees (Huang, 1994), and thus higher education stood at the pinnacle of the formal education system. As such, universities played a major role in social progress and economic development; their task was to foster learners' capabilities so as to contribute to the nation's development, and to train leaders for industry and government (Wei, 1994).

In contrast to Chinese historical notion of education, the hunger for economic growth influenced students to choose the sciences and technology. After 1965, the percentage of students studying applied science and technology in Taiwanese universities was as high as 50% to 55%, because of their role in contributing to economic development (Shen, 1994). However, not all educators agreed that higher education should be related to economic growth only. Song (1998) proposed that undertaking higher education was a right, an obligation even. Huang (1998) urged universities to offer social services, social critiques, and equal entry for all. Yai (1996) emphasized that the function of a university should be a moral one, to introduce culture and values to

society and to provide knowledge to public bodies in order to carry out social ideals. These arguments provided a different perspective on education, and influenced and fostered the educational trend of life-long learning.

In response, in 1998, the Ministry of Taiwan Education announced a life-long learning policy, and published its vision for developing a more flexible higher education system for a diverse student population in its white paper report “Towards a Learning Society” (Ministry of Taiwan Education, 1998). One of the life-long learning policies was the continuing education policy. The idea of this policy was to encourage people to continue their education after a period in the workplace. Between 1998 and 2000, a total of 61 universities and colleges provided 7591 positions for working students (Huang, 2000). The two-year college program which is a subject in this thesis is one of these programs.

Ironically, after a period of policy implementation, these life-long learning based programs began to attract relatively high social status workers wanting to pursue a degree rather than offering a second educational opportunity for less educated workers, which was their original purpose. It was clearly stated in the white paper report “Towards a Learning Society” (Ministry of Education, 1998), that the main task of life-long learning programs was to enhance the quality of employees by helping working people acquire technological knowledge and skills to cope with a changing society and market competition from globalisation. Wu (2004) points out that most of these college program students are public servants. They do not favour the disabled or poor; on the contrary, their limited number hinders working people from pursuing a second educational opportunity. Also there is no financial assistance for workers who attend these programs.

In short, it appears that the main purpose of higher education in Taiwan is to educate people to contribute to the nation's economic growth. The purpose of knowledge or skill acquisition is for nation building rather than for individual development; learners are regarded as resources to increase the nation's competitiveness in the global market. The preference is for technology and science, and this second opportunity for education in a higher education setting favours already advantaged working people who regard it as an opportunity to pursue a degree. And passing the entrance examination is the means to achieve this goal. In the next section I will describe the examination system in modern Taiwan and discuss its symbolism within the Taiwanese culture.

The Examination System in Modern Taiwan

As discussed above, the idea of literati selection examinations inherited from Chinese history was adopted by the higher education sector in Taiwan and used as a selection tool for university entrance. From the Taiwanese perspective, the University Entrance Examination is not only a gate-keeping device for universities, but also a means to attain qualifications. It was not easy to pass these examinations before the early 1990's due to the limited number of higher educational institutes in the nation. In the 1970's and 1980's, the university entrance examination was stringent, and at least 80,000 candidates were rejected candidates (Lin & Chou, 1994), that is, the rate of acceptance from a pool of 100,000 candidates was no more than 20 % (Iang, 1998). The high pass mark policy made entry difficult, and thus increased academic competition.

As a result, in high schools, the focus became to train students to pass university entrance examinations. Indeed high school teachers' performance was based on the

numbers of successful university or college candidates they had taught, resulting in serious discrimination of low academic achieving students (Huang, 1992). Successful candidates were assumed to be intelligent, competent young men or women who could expect to enjoy good prospects in their careers, so it became common for students to work very hard to pass these examinations.

As I mentioned in Chapter one, “No pain, no gain” was the proverb used to encourage students to concentrate and study patiently. Any reading or activities unrelated to examinations were forbidden, romance being top of the list. Reflecting on my own experience, I remember being told that some parents even forbade younger siblings from watching TV or making any noise in the house. Male high school students would be encouraged to camp in the school during June to concentrate on their examination preparation. One of my high school classmates told me that she kneeled on her chair to study, as falling from the chair from sleepiness would wake her up. She did this for six months. Persistence in learning became an imperative; the longer the students persisted in their learning, the higher the respect they would attain.

It was considered quite natural for all high school students to behave in this way at that time, because everyone around them was doing the same; hence, they believed that was the only way to live. Because of the difficulty of the entrance examination, successful candidates would receive praise and even financial rewards from their family, acquaintances, school teachers and even local government. For instance, the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) of a particular high school awarded cash of \$NT80,000 (\$AUD 3,200) to students whose names were on the successful candidates list for that year (Yang, 2000). A similar story was told by one of my acquaintances. The Mayor of her town sent his congratulations by setting off firecrackers and posting

an official notice reporting that she had successfully enrolled in a top ranking university, a town record.

Over time, the more that people attempted to pass the university entrance examination, the higher the status of being a college graduate became. In eastern Asia in particular, including Taiwan, the notion of the college student, became connected with images of excellence and social mobility (Cheng, 1995; Yai, 1996). In contrast, failed candidates had to deal with all sorts of pressures. Those who could not handle failure would choose different ways to avoid the voices of blame and shame. Some unsuccessful candidates even resorted to suicide (“Suicide”, 2000).

Attending yearly university entrance examinations became the main social activity during summer, as the examinations are held in early July. So in June, experts coach students on examination strategies through daily newspapers or on nationwide broadcast media. However, I also recall that by the end of August, around the time the successful candidates were announced, a different set of experts were counselling students and their parents about how to cope with depression from failing the examination. I recalled most of the newspaper columns would have titles like ‘Look bright. Failing the examination is not the end of the world’ (United News).

The demand for examinations has never stopped, in spite of researchers such as Lin and Yang (1994) who argued that preparing for these examinations hindered students’ imagination and critical thinking, encouraging them instead to compete academically instead of enjoying learning. The awareness that entrance examinations take such a toll on the energy of students and twist educational goals into examination preparation, has seen experts from various educational fields urge the government to consider alternative means of entry to avoid the trauma of failure (Yai, 1996). As a result, in

2002, Taiwanese higher education institutions developed a policy of multiple means of entry. The university entrance examination became just one of the means of entry, and thus lost its authority and monopoly on entry to higher education. In 2005, following the extension of higher education institutions to a total 135, a success rate of 80% to 90% showed that the entrance examination is no longer as difficult as in the past (Su, 2005). This appears to have prevented suicides due to failing the entrance examination, supposedly because multiple means of entry has eased the pressure on students. This may be true but it now seems that the pressure has been transferred to a hunger for qualifications. This situation is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Discussion of the Value of Qualifications Placed in Taiwanese Society

It is clear that the notion of education and examinations in modern Taiwan has its roots in Chinese history. The previous sections examined the importance of education and the rise of the examination system in Chinese history and now in modern Taiwan. The literature review indicates that over time the qualification has become regarded as the indicator, symbol and basic standard for attaining social status (Wang & Lin, 1994; Yai, 1996), as well as the path to higher paid jobs and a brighter future (Iang, 1998; Chiang, 1998; Song, 1998). The situation gets worse as the qualification becomes easier to attain. Brown (1997) refers to this phenomenon as ‘credential inflation’. For Brown (1997), the increase in the number of tertiary level qualifications causes credential inflation. Credential inflation could result in a crowded employment market and lead employers to recruit graduates for jobs which previously did not require a university education. A degree from a high status university would be judged to have greater academic and social worth than one from a little-known university or college in the market for jobs (Brown, 1997). Credential inflation continues, the new goal

being the Master's degree. But the notion of the "criterion" or "standard" of a qualification remains the same.

Participating in higher education becomes a means to attain economic and social capital including income, wealth, power and social reproduction (Huang, 1998). To most mature adults, higher education is generally regarded as a guarantee of a high-quality life, a successful career, and a higher social-economic status than their parents (Gomme & Micucci, 1999). Ironically, providing more opportunity for working adults to attain participate in higher education programs increases the speed of Brown's (1997) credential inflation, deepens people's desire for qualifications, and makes qualifications more valuable than ever before. As the first exploratory study participants describe in Chapter Two, the goal for their persistence was to attain a qualification. Fanny's explanation best expresses their view of the trend of hunger for qualifications. She said "I pay the money [tuition fees], you teach what I need. And all we want is the qualifications".

As I emphasized in Chapter One, culture defines people's knowledge and substitutes itself for what people actually see, hear, and feel (Crotty, 1996); while tradition enters into all processes of understanding and limits viewpoints in the life world (Gadamer, 1993). Both culture and tradition influence and dwell within people's interpretation of the meaning of their experiences. The findings in Chapter Two and this section's literature review support Crotty's (1996) and Gadamer's (1993) arguments and lead to the third area of literature review, a synthesis of the schemas of culture and tradition.

In summary, this section has revealed and explored some notions of education, examinations, and qualifications that are generally taken for granted in Taiwanese society. These notions symbolise embedded beliefs which have been taken for granted

and remained largely unexamined and unchanged for thousands of years in Chinese culture. These notions have endured and deeply influenced study behaviours, educational policy and value systems in modern day Taiwan. Situated within traditional notions of education, the first exploratory study participants' tolerance to barriers, desire for qualifications, and the reshaping of their identities seems perfectly reasonable. The participants interpret their behaviours of persistence, and their experiences of interaction with relevant others through the frameworks or schema constructed by their understanding of these notions. They persist and reshape their identities within the tradition and by the tradition. Their understanding of these notions influences what they have done, what they are working towards what they hope to become. The next section draws from Gadamer's (1993) theory of effective history and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural reproduction to provide a synthesis that explains and illustrates how culture and tradition shape students' action, belief and understanding of persistence in learning.

Literature Area Three: Underlying Theories Contributing to Understanding of Persistence in Learning

In the last two sections, I attempted to explain why individuals persist in their learning and the factors which contribute this within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition. I clarified the notions of identity, education, examinations and qualifications; also I discussed the relationship between identity and persistence in learning, and the relationship between persistence and the value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition.

Identity and the value placed on qualifications in Taiwanese society together construct a grounded foundation to support students' persistence in their learning. The literature review reveals that they perceive and adopt the notions of qualifications, examinations and education from tradition and society. However, this review has not yet answered how these unexamined, take-for-granted notions are generated. This third area of the literature review draws from Gadamer's (1993) theory of effective history and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural reproduction, as I believe these theorists provide insights into how these taken-for-granted notions emerge. Gadamer's (1993) theory helps to understand how tradition shapes what students are and how they understand their world from a philosophical hermeneutic perspective, while Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory provides insight into the why qualifications are considered important from a cultural and economic perspective. The main concept of Gadamer's (1993) effective history, including prejudice, the hermeneutical circle and the schema of effective history will be introduced first. This is then followed by a consideration of the forms of cultural capital, the field of cultural reproduction, and the schema of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Then I will present a synthesis of their relationship to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effect of the schemas to persistence in learning.

The Effect of History

Gadamer (1993) explains that the efficacy of tradition works through our interpretation of the world. Tradition means something that is handed down from the past. It is within us and not an external phenomenon, thus to attempt to step outside of tradition is difficult. For Gadamer (1993), tradition shapes what we are and how we understand the world. Indeed understanding of the world involves participation in

tradition. Any attempt to step outside of the process of tradition hinders an understanding of both the world and oneself.

Gadamer (1993) considers that all understanding derives from our interpretation of our experience which is embedded in tradition. Interpretation is the outward expression of understanding, and understanding is the process of interpretation. Understanding involves fore-conception (preconception of understanding) and the bias of tradition, through which the past plays an effective role in our interpretation of the world. Thus understanding is always under the influence of history. Gadamer (1993) refers to this phenomenon as the “history of effect” (historical effect, effective history, *Wirkungsgeschichte* in his original). He emphasises “whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work” (p.301). For Gadamer:

A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as “history of effect.” Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected. (Gadamer, 1993, p. 300).

Gadamer (1993) further clarifies that all understanding has a circular structure which is never completed. Within this circular process of understanding, the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter constantly interplay, thus a real fusing of horizons occurs. This is known as the hermeneutical circle, and the next section introduces this process as well as the terms used by Gadamer (1993) to develop a clear description of the hermeneutical circle.

The Hermeneutical Circle

Gadamer (1993) indicates that the hermeneutical circle involves improving understanding of circumstances, transposing a historical horizon into the tradition in

order to foreground a temporal distance to distinguish it from prejudice while encountering tradition. His description of the hermeneutical circle is as follows:

The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition. But this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a “methodological circle”, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding” (Gadamer, 1993, p.293).

Gadamer (1993) emphasises that the circle never disappears in understanding; on the other hand, understanding never comes to closure or completeness because nothing that needs interpretation can be understood all at once. Understanding does not require a circular movement from parts to whole and from whole to parts; rather, understanding requires a circulating movement as parts are added to the existing whole, constantly reshaping the content of the whole. Everything comes to be known within a context and this knowing is never in isolation. The knowledge which we already have of the whole constitutes in pre-predicative experience, and impacts on the construction of the meaning of any particular thing. It adds to or reshapes our knowledge of the whole and will go on to condition our subsequent understanding.

Therefore, the hermeneutical circle is never completed, because tradition defines the contexts by which we come to interpret the world. It goes in advance, ahead of us and conditions our interpretations. We always find ourselves within a situation with regard to the tradition which we are trying to understand (Gadamer, 1993). So as Gadamer (1993) points out, we need to transpose an historical horizon into the situation of the

past, that is, to think historically, and let temporal distance (time) act as a filter to distinguish understanding. Thus, an inner fusion between interpretation and understanding can occur and the horizons of the past and of the present will fuse in the process of understanding. The following section discusses Gadamer's (1993) explanation of temporal distance, historical horizon, and fusion of horizons.

Temporal distance

Gadamer (1993) indicates that temporal distance is used as a filter to allow prejudices to die away but also allow understanding to emerge clearly. Prejudice refers to any judgment which has been rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been examined. In the form of prejudice, tradition enters into our understanding of the world we live in. It is this hidden prejudice that "makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition" (p. 270). For as long as our mind is influenced by prejudice, we will not consider it a judgment. To open up other possibilities of understanding and keep them open, we need to fundamentally suspend our own prejudices, and let prejudice be questioned.

Temporal distance thus acts as a positive and productive condition which can enable understanding. Temporal distance is not something that must be overcome; rather, it requires transposing ourselves into tradition and acknowledging its ideas and its thoughts (Gadamer, 1993), because "only when all their relations to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear, so that the understanding of what is said in them can claim to be authoritative and universal" (p.297). As Gadamer says, temporal distance distinguishes the prejudices which hinder our understandings, so we need to transpose ourselves into tradition and open ourselves to the tradition with the

historical horizon (Gadamer, 1993). The next section takes up Gadamer's notion of the historical horizon.

Historical horizon and the fusion of horizons

Gadamer (1993) explains that horizon as a metaphor means not being limited to what is in the foreground, but being able to see beyond it. Horizons change when a person is moving; the horizon is something into which we move and that moves with us. The horizon can be grouped into two categories: the horizon of the present and the horizon of the past (historical horizon). The horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations, and is continually in the process of being formed because we continually test our prejudices. This prejudice testing occurs in encountering the past and in recognising and understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past.

There is no truly closed horizon, because the historical movement of human life is never absolutely bound to any standpoint. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. This historical horizon is necessary to understand dimensions of tradition; if we fail to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon, we will not understand the significance of what it has to say to us. As such, a fusion of the horizon of the present and the past can help eliminate the bias of the circular interplay between tradition and the interpreter.

A real fusing of horizons occurs when a historical horizon is projected and overtakes the horizon of the present. Within tradition, this process of fusion is continually taking place, as the old and the new are always combining into something of living value. Understanding is always related to the fusion of the horizon of present and the horizon

of past. After acquiring the historical horizon, we can then listen to tradition in a way that it makes its own meaning heard. This is the process of “openness to the tradition” (Gadamer, 1993), explained in the following section.

Openness to the tradition

Gadamer (1993) suggests openness to tradition, as well as openness to the future is necessary in the process of understanding. He urges that to avoid being ‘deaf’ through prejudice, we need to be open to the tradition and listen to what it has to say to us. Gadamer (1993) explains that “openness to the other involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (p. 361). This fundamental sort of openness is to open to the tradition, that is, it allow tradition’s claim to validity: “not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me” (p. 361). Openness to the tradition enables a freedom of knowledge as well as making understanding possible. Therefore, in seeking to understand tradition, the historical horizon must to be situated within a tradition and be open to the tradition.

The Effect of History and Persistence in Learning

As Gadamer (1993) puts it, tradition enters into all our understanding of the world in which we live. This view is supported by and provides an understanding of the findings of the first exploratory study and relates to the literature review in previous sections. It appears that notions of education, examinations and qualifications within Taiwanese culture and tradition have been constructed as prejudices, and are used as a foundation to interpret the participants’ world and themselves within it. While the participants in this study operate within these prejudices, the efficacy of tradition works for them, that is the notions of examinations, education and qualifications are

within their understanding and are part of them. They see their world by using the horizon situated in these notions, they take actions as the tradition prescribes, and they interpret their behavioural responses following their understanding of these notions. In this way, I believe that participants have fused their horizon of the past with a horizon of the present in a hermeneutical circle in their own way, as I elaborate on next.

As college students, the participants have perceived themselves as distinct from others because they have situated themselves in the traditional value placed on education and qualifications. Persistence in learning is seen as the way learning is supposed to be. Painful study is to be expected because of the models provided by history and thus tradition. In contrast to using a temporal distance as a filter to let prejudices die away, the participants have added their new experiences, such as recognition by family and the workplace, to their existing understanding. Following the process of their persistence, their fusion of horizons has continued. In this way, a historical horizon overtakes the horizon of present, and the value acknowledged from the past merges with the present. Participants are convinced that it is waiting somewhere for them. While it is obvious that participants pursue qualifications within the frame of understanding of traditional values, it is also clear that they are expecting to enjoy the benefits of their qualification. As a result, participants' prior perceived knowledge about traditional values is continually being reinforced and conditions their subsequent understanding of the notion of the value of education.

In short, the value placed on qualifications in Taiwanese society is not something that just relates to the past, it is critical for the present as well as for the future. The participants in this study are not the only ones who embrace this understanding, rather, the whole Taiwanese society subsumes this understanding. The support from relevant

others, the recognition and encouragement of persistence behaviour, the demand of the workplace for further study - all reveal that we build this understanding by ourselves and interpret each others' behaviour within this understanding. From this point of view, we are all responsible for what we have constructed and we allow this interpretation to be part of us.

As a researcher in this study, it is my task to transpose myself into the historical horizon, and to be open to my participants and listen to what they have to say to me. In the previous two sections in this review I include an attempt to situate myself within the tradition and to recognise what and how the tradition has impacted on the participants in terms of their understanding of persistence in learning. The section relating to the value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition explored the notions of examination, education and the value of qualifications. This discussion has helped me to understand how these notions are imbedded in the fore-concepts of participants as well as their relevant others, and thus foregrounded in their interpretation of the veil placed on the behaviour of persistence. The next section of this chapter focuses on the schema of cultural reproduction which I believe adds further to an understanding of students' persistence from a cultural economic perspective.

Schema of Cultural Reproduction

The previous sections of this review have discussed the relationship between tradition and persistence. As yet however, schema exploring the relationship between persistence in learning and economic considerations remains to be considered. From interview data presented in Chapter Two and as discussed in earlier sections of this Chapter, notions of education and qualifications are also to be viewed in economic

terms, as economic capital such as promotion and salary. Here the contribution of Bourdieu is of relevance. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), a university qualification is seen as a form of cultural capital. This capital has a high value in the Taiwanese workplace: it can be transformed into social status and a good career with a high salary. Thus, participants who attain economic capital can 'upgrade' their social class and can become regarded as one of the new members of the middle class. Because of this, participants are aware of the increasing number of successful candidates, and so they realise that there is a risk for them if they do not persist in their learning and graduate from college. At the same time, the threat of credential inflation enhances their desire for a qualification and thus motivates their determination to persist in their learning.

Bourdieu (1997) was the first theorist to challenge economic theory by claiming that capital can not only be present in a material form, such as economic capital, but also in the immaterial form of cultural capital. Both types of capital hold two essential characteristics: they are transmittable and reducible. Capital takes time to accumulate in its objectified or embodied form and has the potential to produce profits and to reproduce itself in an expanded form. Economic capital can be immediately and directly converted into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights. On the other hand, cultural capital, which is convertible under certain conditions into economic capital, is institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications.

Educational investment becomes the domestic transmission of cultural capital. Conversely, academic ability or talent is itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital. By relating a scholastic investment strategy to cultural reproduction, the education system reproduces the social structure by sanctioning the

hereditary transmission of cultural capital. Thus educational qualifications become the condition for legitimate access to privilege positions, which represent the monopoly of power and privilege in the social world (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). To have a clearer picture of Bourdieu's theory, the forms of cultural capital and the field of cultural reproduction are discussed next. At the end of this section, the effect of the schema of cultural reproduction to students' persistence will be considered to throw further light on the understanding of the phenomenon of persistence within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition.

The Forms of Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), cultural capital can exist in three forms. These are the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state. The embodied state is the form of a long-lasting habitus of the mind and body; the objectified state is the form of cultural goods including art, texts, dictionaries, instruments, machines such as computers and so on. The institutionalized state is the form of objectification which is manifest as educational qualifications presumed to guarantee success (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). I will now discuss each form in order to understand better the notions of cultural capital.

The embodied state

Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) explains that cultural capital in the embodied state is in the form of culture or encultivation. This implies a labour of inculcation, assimilation and time costing. Most importantly, time must be invested personally by the investor; it cannot be done second hand. Through the time needed for acquisition, the link between economic and cultural capital is established. Acquisition becomes an effort requiring personal cost, self-improvement, investment

and a socially constituted form of libido. So the measurement standard for cultural capital is the length of time for acquisitions according to the demands of the scholastic market.

The embodied state of cultural capital is converted from external wealth into an integral part of the person, which Bourdieu terms the 'habitus'. Habitus performs unconsciously as embodied history. It ensures the active presence of past experience which is deposited in each form of schemes of perception, thought and action (Bourdieu, 2002). It not only influences but also constructs each person's social world (Wells, 1997). From the position of the social structure, the social world is seen as a representation or performance. As positions change within fields, so does habitus (Bourdieu, 1999). Habitus includes a person's own knowledge and understandings of the world, which makes a separate contribution to the reality of that world. Thus, it is impossible to merely regard a person's knowledge as a reflection of the real world. Because of this mode of development, habitus is never fixed, either through time or from one generation to the next (Mahar, Harker, & Wilkes, 1990).

Further, habitus cannot be transmitted instantaneously by gift, purchase or exchange. It can be acquired unconsciously, depending on the historical period, the society and social class. The embodied state of capital always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which help to determine its distinctive value. The more frequently holders utilize their embodied state of cultural capital, the more obviously cultural or economic competence will be evident (Bourdieu, 1997).

Because an embodied state of cultural capital is predisposed to function as symbolic capital and recognized as legitimate competence, social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are disguised more than those of economic capital. The initial

accumulation of the embodied state of cultural capital starts in the family and the time needed for its acquisition depends on the length of time the family can provide (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The objectified state

Cultural capital of the objectified state can be in the form of material objects and media, including texts, artworks, or tools/instruments such as computers or dictionaries. These cultural goods can be either regarded as material economic capital or symbolic cultural capital. To possess these goods, economic capital is needed. However, through using these goods for specific purposes and appropriating them by using a particular form of their own cultural capital, holders can derive profit by selling them as production after a necessary period of possession. The more profits obtained from the mastery of objectified capital, the further the extent of embodied capital the holders yield and the larger collective strengths are available to compete with others (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The institutionalised state

The objectification of cultural capital is in the form of academic qualifications. Academic qualifications represent the certificates of cultural competence which confer on their holder a legally guaranteed value with respect to class and culture. The power of the educational institution is to impose recognition of this value. By guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic qualification, cultural capital can thus be converted into economic capital and be exchanged on the labour market (Brown, 1997).

Research also shows that students who are from families with high cultural capital more easily adapt to academic evaluation systems or demands (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). They have more opportunities to undertake education (Zhou, Moen & Tuma, 1998; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998), and produce better academic performance in higher education settings (Gomme & Micucci, 1999).

In short, the transmission of the value placed on qualifications can be seen either as the embodied state or the institutionalised state of cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1997). Thus university qualifications are recognised legally in Taiwanese society and have their value within the Taiwanese labour market. The acquisition of qualifications requires the effort of self-improvement and time: the process of persistence fulfils these two demands. Moreover, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) emphasises that the embodied cultural capital's initial accumulation starts in the family. To understand further how the family is involved in the accumulation of cultural capital, the fields of cultural reproduction are considered next.

Fields of Cultural Reproduction

Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) claims that a capital does not exist or function except in relation to a field; it has to be converted from the field of endeavour into other forms. Two sites are regarded as fields or sites where cultural capital is accumulated: education and the family.

The field of education

Apple (1996) discusses the role of the educational institution in reproducing unequal relations of power and its connection to the complex relationships between economic

capital and cultural capital. For Apple (1996), cultural forms including elite culture, habits and tastes and are bound up with system of habitus, and are characteristic of different classes and class factions through the economic and social conditions which they presuppose. Thus, cultural forms and content function as markers of class. Through official centralised curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation of schools, the granting of sole legitimacy creates a situation in which the markers of taste become the markers of people. The school becomes a class school.

Harker (1990) describes how education systems become an institutionalized classifier which reproduce hierarchies in the social world and transform social classifications into academic classifications:

The dominant habitus is transformed into a form of cultural capital that the schools take for granted, and which acts as a most effective filter in the reproductive processes of a hierarchical society, then is an artefact of the way schools operate. Those with the appropriate cultural capital are reinforced with 'success', while others are not. For an individual from a non-dominant background to succeed, the appropriate cultural capital has to be acquired, with inevitable consequences for the habitus (Harker, 1990, pp. 87-88).

Because this transformation is presented in a guise of neutrality and is grounded in establishing hierarchies as total hierarchies, social value comes to be identified with personal value. Scholastic dignities guarantee a person's identity and human dignity as an accomplished individual as defined by the dominant group. While educational qualifications stand for the value of a natural right and make the educational system one of the fundamental legitimising agencies in the maintenance of social order, the subjective elements of class remain embodied in the objective structures of society (Harker, 1990).

In this way, the education system becomes the means of reproducing social class, as it converts dominant group habitus into high-value competencies and creates the criteria for success. Those who succeed come to accept those criteria which have led to their success. In following this path, students become more like each other, and less like their diverse backgrounds; schooling becomes an extension of the family for the dominant group (Harker, 1990).

In modern industrial states, this cultural reproduction has become more vocationally oriented. The main interplay between the systems of education and production is the conjunction between formal qualifications and employment (Harker, 1990). While employers implicate cultural capital as criteria for bureaucratic entry and promotion procedures, students need to capitalise on their cultural assets via the education system and acquire credentials from educational settings to deploy cultural capital for recruitment in the jobs market (Brown, 1997).

The field of the family

The initial accumulation of cultural capital starts with the family. To appropriate cultural capital as quickly as possible the whole family is required. By providing time for economic necessity, children can acquire maximum cultural capital within maximum free time. Hereditary transmission of capital takes place in families with high cultural capital, and thus shortens the time needed for acquisition. The stronger the cultural capital the family endows, the less time is needed for accumulating further cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Cultural capital also can be seen in the form of the habitus of the cultural fraction (Harker, 1990). Family habitus is incorporated within the habitus of the individual. For children who are born into the dominant class, class habitus is second nature, a

view of the world which they accept readily (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Under the influence of habitus, parents become actively involved in their children's education, and pass their achievement ideology to the children. In this way, parents' views of the social world are incorporated within their children, and this becomes the children's knowledge and understanding of the world (Wells, 1997). Brown (1997) points out that parents who experienced economic dislocation such as restructuring, unemployment and changes in education in the mid-1970s, may have perceived the risks of the uncertainty of success and the consequences of failure, and thus would be more willing to invest in education.

Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural reproduction proposes that cultural products can be transmitted into economic capital and can be reproduced and inherited as habitus in the family or as makers of social and academic classifications in educational systems. His theory has been widely applied in studies relating to education equality and academic performance. Studies reveal that children (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), Taiwanese primary school students (Huang, 1990) and college students in the United States (Gomme & Micucci, 1999) from families with high cultural capital are more likely to produce higher academic performance, receive better chances of education and are more highly valued by teachers.

However, Harker (1990) argues that Bourdieu's concept of education is closely tied to the French system, and suggests that his theory may not explain social conditions in other cultures. In this study, I do not intend to use Bourdieu's theory to explain Taiwanese social conditions, rather I have used Bourdieu's theory to support and explain the value qualifications represent in Taiwanese society. That is, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is useful to explain how qualifications are transmitted into

an economic form in Taiwanese society, and how they can be reproduced within the field of education and family. Next, I will use the findings of the first exploratory study as well as the literature reviewed to discuss the phenomenon of persistence from Bourdieu's perspective.

Cultural Reproduction and Persistence in Learning

Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory applied to the situation in Taiwan offers a useful ground to explain how culture can be transmitted, accumulated and converted into economic capital. The forms of cultural capital include the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state. The fields involved in the process of reproduction are the family and education. Both education and the family play an important role in reproduction of cultural capital. The education system reproduces the value placed on qualifications, and links this value to the markers of the identity of dominant groups and successful recruitment into the labour market. Family, on the other hand, provides the field to cultivate these values and transmit them to educational expectations to urge children to pursue their qualifications.

The findings of the first exploratory study appear to support Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) argument. For the participants in the first exploratory study, gaining legally granted qualifications helped them to mark their social classification, to gain honour as well as recognition either by family or in the workplace, and to insure employment. Undertaking education and studying hard has been the model for pursuing career prospects for over a thousand years in Chinese society. This model, responsive to long established Chinese historical values, still functions well in modern Taiwan. The importance of keeping this model working

effectively was reinforced when participants sensed the risk to their future if they did not persist in their learning and graduate. Qualifications here are seen as safeguards to protect from the pressure of the demands of the workplace and the threat of credential inflation. Persistence in learning was the strategy for achieving the goal of an appropriate qualification.

The successful experience of persistence in learning inspired the participants in this study and thus reinforced their beliefs in the link between career prospects and persistence. In return, they transmitted this belief into educational expectations for their own children, urging them to study hard in order to achieve qualifications and prospects. In this way, the value of cultural capital was reproduced in the participants' families, and I believe, will be inherited by future generations.

Taking my own experience as an example, as discussed in Chapter 1 and also above, I consider myself as a cultural reproduction within the Taiwanese cultural tradition. I learnt the concept and the culturally endorsed value of persistence in learning and its function in career prospects from my parents, teachers and the experience of strict competition in examinations. Recognition from society and support from my family continued to reinforce this value and upgraded it into a kind of belief. This belief influenced me for years. Even at the present time, I am influenced by this belief and I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree to ensure my future employment and to retain membership of a respected social status. My family, my education system and Taiwanese society together reproduced the value placed on qualifications and transmitted this value into economic capital for me to pursue. I believe that as long as the link between qualifications and the symbolic relationship to family honour, achievement and the dominate classification system remains, the schema of cultural reproduction will continue in Taiwanese society for generations.

Summary: Exploring Persistence

This chapter is an attempt to explore the multiple and complex factors contributing to persistence in learning within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. Two factors contribute to persistence - identity construction and the value placed on qualifications. Their intertwined relationship has been discussed from psychological, historical and cultural perspectives. This literature review supports the argument that neither identity nor the value placed on qualifications alone can fully account for students' persistence within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986), Gadamer (1993) and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theories indicate that three schemas - identity construction, historical effect and cultural reproduction, provide an understanding of the interactive relationship between identity and the value placed on qualifications.

The notions of qualifications are transmitted into forms of cultural capital: better jobs with a higher salary and an identity as competent persons with higher social status. These notions, whose historical roots I have traced, are adopted from tradition, reproduced within the education system and the family, and play important roles in students' persistence. For the participants in first exploratory study, these notions have foregrounded into their understanding and habitus, and are used as a medium to interpret themselves as well as the life world they live in. Through these three schemas, participants wove new learnt experience and knowledge into their understanding and thus constructed their concept of persistence.

Here the concept of persistence includes two different meanings. Firstly, the concept of persistence refers to an abstract or general idea derived from dynamic notions of

persistence that reflect an historical value placed on qualifications (Hornby & Cowie, 1989; Mosaic, 2002). Secondly, the concept of persistence refers to the experience of persistence, which is essentially dependent on constant affirmation (Gadamer, 1994). From the findings of the first exploratory study, it appears that participants' concept of persistence is repeatedly affirmed while they observe and experience positive interaction with the relevant others in their life world. Situated within recognition and pride improves participants' confidence in themselves and they in turn become more convinced about the value placed on qualifications. The more frequently they experience positive interactions, the stronger the concept of persistence is foregrounded. As a result, these students persist despite the barriers to their learning until they complete their study. Figure 5 presents the formation schemas of the concept of persistence within Taiwanese tradition and culture.

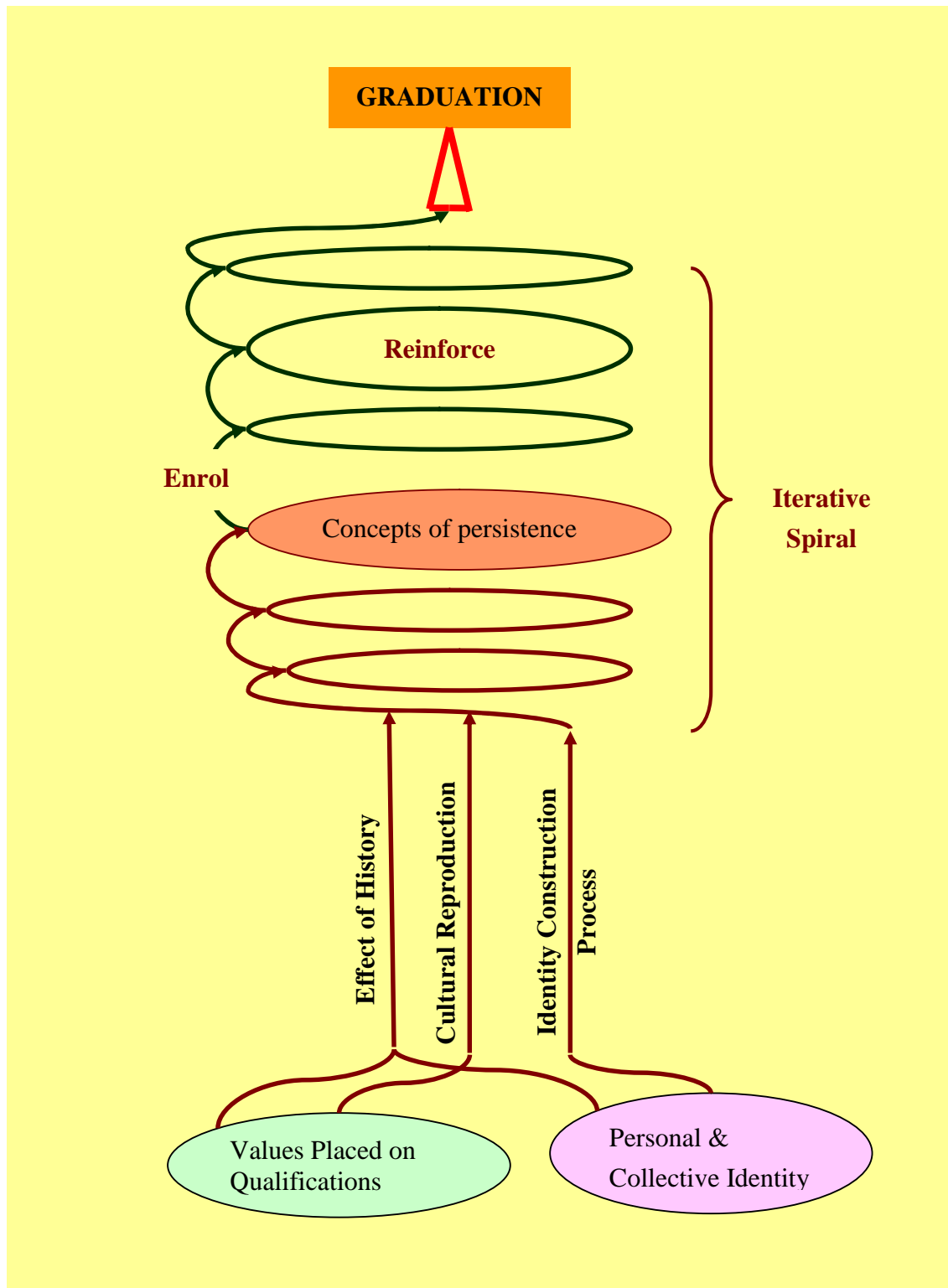


Figure 5. Formation Schemas of the Concept of Persistence

Towards Chapter Five

I have located the concept and schemas of persistence within a number of theoretical frameworks drawn from the literature on tradition and culture, building on the first exploratory study described in Chapter Two. This extensive review of the literature and synthesis of a number of key theories to explain the phenomenon of persistence in learning in Taiwanese college students has provided direction for the next part of this study. This involves the collection of further data that explores the extent to which the theoretical perspectives and directions suggested from the first exploratory study are borne out in real situations. This has enabled me to reframe the research question which now becomes:

How do two-year college program students interpret their experience within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition?

To answer this third research question I now conduct a second exploratory study to provide further insights into the phenomenon of persistence in learning. This is achieved by generating interview questions that are designed to uncover students' experience of persistence in learning. In the light of the theoretical perspectives discussed above and the methodology described in Chapter Three, Chapter Five will present the findings of the second exploratory study.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPLORATORY STUDY II: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The first exploratory study pointed to the emergence of identity and the value placed on qualifications, through the process of persistence in learning in two-year college programs. The second and major literature review in Chapter Four provided a number of theoretical frameworks within which this could be understood. The second exploratory study of this thesis builds on the first exploratory study and the second literature review to provide evidence and further detail of some of the theoretical underpinnings that further explore the complexity of the nature of persistence in learning in Taiwanese society as interpreted by the participants.

Chapter Five presents my interpretation of the second exploratory study by using two different approaches to the data, so that the data can be read and presented in different ways and further contribute to their validation. Together the approaches form an understanding of the phenomenon of persistence in two-year college programs. Approach one draws out the themes identified in Chapter Two and Four that have a bearing on persistence; approach two for the second exploratory study traces the journey in the form of a narrative of four selected participants (two female, two male) before, during and after their college programs as exemplars of these themes. The interpretation of their persistence within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture will be emphasised to understand their concept of persistence. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the concept of persistence in learning through a particular two-year college program.

Analysis Approach One: Thematic Analysis

In the second exploratory study, an interview guide with open-ended questions was used to collect data from four semi-structured interviews. Table 5 shows the new questions used in addition to the first exploratory study, as well as their purposes and their link to the theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapters Two and Four.

Table 5. Interview Guide Questions for the Second Exploratory Study

Questions	Purpose	Theoretical Underpinning
What makes the value placed on qualifications so important in Taiwanese society? why? How do you feel about this situation? How does your family/colleagues feel about this situation? Why? What is your educational expectation for you or your children? Why?	The notions of qualifications from historical and cultural perspective	The value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture The schema of cultural reproduction The schema of historical effect
What has changed for you after attending this program, such as in your family/work setting? What made the difference, do you think? How do you feel about the difference? How do your family/colleagues feel about the difference? Why?	Identity construction process	schema of identity construction within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture

Through the process of thematic analysis as indicated in Chapters Two and Three, synthesised themes drawn from the interviews are presented in the first part of this Chapter to give a sense of the unfolding of the persistence experience. The synthesised themes in this second exploratory study include:

1. Barriers and coping strategies
2. Enabling factors for persistence
3. Construction of the concept of persistence

By way of comparison, the themes synthesised from the first exploratory study were:

1. Barriers and coping strategies
2. Enabling factors for persistence
3. Value placed on qualifications
4. Recognition of the importance of identity

It appears that the findings of the first and the second exploratory studies are similar. As reported in the first exploratory study, the participants in the second exploratory study also confronted multiple barriers to their learning. They adopted diverse coping strategies and were supported by enabling factors to persist. In addition to the participants' view of persistence, the value placed on qualifications and the recognition of identity together contributed to their concept of persistence. To avoid the repetition of the findings, only themes or subthemes not identified previously are described in detail in this second exploratory study.

Theme One: Barriers and Coping Strategies

As discussed in the first exploratory study, most participants had to deal with problems of restricted time due to their multiple roles. Two frequently used coping strategies as noted by Greve and Strobl (2004) were assimilative problem solving (solving problem by planning) and accommodative system adaptation (adaptive re-adjustment of evaluative standards). The new situational barriers that did not show in the first exploratory study included gaining permission to study and lack of money.

Situational Barriers and Coping Strategies

Gaining permission to study

From the data, seeking permission and understanding or approval from spouses or managers at work was a prerequisite for persistence in learning. Sally's role as a house wife and mother within a traditional society limited her opportunity to continue

her study. For her, finding funding, understanding or approval from spouses or superiors are prerequisites for persistence in learning:

My parents are very traditional. They don't think that girls should undertake higher education. My mother used to tell me "you are a married woman now; you should not give up everything because you want to continue your education. You have to discuss it with your husband first...you have to consider your roles and your responsibilities at home [Sally, I].

Because of this, it took Sally ten years to persuade her husband to allow her to continue her education:

I kept persuading my husband, I have fought ten years...finally my husband agreed to let me study further...He told his mother that he had agreed to let me continue my education. So she agreed too [Sally, I].

With her husband's approval Sally felt better about her family duties:

With their approval, you won't feel any guilt if you do not give all your time to your children after work [Sally, I].

It appears that it is difficult for some women in Taiwanese society to continue their education when they have many responsibilities. Similarly, Charlie regarded his manager's permission as an encouragement and jumped at the chance to attend a college program. He was also grateful that his wife was able to take over some of his duties:

"First I asked for my superior's permission, and he approved it at once" [Charlie, I].

My wife encouraged me to continue my education. She said to me "if you still want this experience...though you are over fifty, if you have a strong will to continue"...she felt alone by taking over duties by herself, but she understood [Charlie, I].

For Tina, getting support from her employer was extremely important:

Whether your employer supports you to study or not is very important. I believe it is extremely important. As I attended my two-year junior college program, my employer allowed me to complete my home work in the afternoon as long as I had finished my work. It is very important to have a supportive employer [Tina, Interview I]

As Wlodkowski (1988) and Burns (1995) cited, approval of family members can result in students' making greater efforts to learn and persist. In contrast, Tony's first experience of dropping out showed that the consequences of not persisting in learning were having to deal with anger and disappointment from family:

I dropped out in the middle of the first semester in my first year of study without telling my parents...my father could not forgive me and called me as an "unfavourable child in the family", so I ran away from home and lived with a friend [Tony].

Lack of money and careful financial planning

None of participants in the first exploratory study reported that they needed funds to continue their study. However, lack of funds is one of the institutional barriers reported in the literature relating to within-year non-persistence (Tynes, 1993). Tina, for instance, did not have a highly paid job, however careful planning to cover her expenses was the strategy she used to maintain her learning:

Work is necessary for me. I do not care about how much I earn. I carefully check my expenses and spend what I have saved. All I want is not to let myself starve, that would be enough for me [Tina, I].

The next section presents the findings relating factors which enabled participants' persistence.

Theme Two: Enabling Factors for Persistence

In the first exploratory study, subthemes such as student commitment, interest in subject area or interaction with teacher were not discussed in the interviews. However participants in the second exploratory study, Sally, Charlie, Tina and Tony, showed these subthemes were related to their persistence.

Student Commitment

Sally and Charlie's examples illustrate Tinto (1993) and Mackinnon-Slaney's (1994) point of view that students with a willingness to persist and a clear picture of educational or life goals are most likely to persist:

Someone passed the entrance examination but did not persist and dropped out. So I think whether you have enough strength of will to persist is very important...I intend to persist in my learning...I will keep persisting in my learning no matter what happens. I would not drop out unless some unexpected life change occurred. Yes, I shall persist; I shall [Sally, I].

I will persist, and complete it anyway, and overcome any barriers to graduation. Yes, it is worth it...I have a kind of impulse that I should complete it, if there is a chance for me, if it is okay, if I can [Charlie, I].

It appeared these factors worked effectively the same in different approaches to study. Tony chose to educate himself by reading and learning, and expressed the same strong willingness to persist in his self-education:

You must foster a habit of reading. I do not know whether reading is good enough as formal education, but I feel that if people would seriously read or learn things, they would make progress by putting pressure on themselves...I feel I am seriously maintaining the habit of reading...I know what I am doing, I know what I have...I will use my own methods to continue my education [Tony].

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement can result in more effort in learning and persistence. This may be in the form of affirmation or teacher's attention (Wlodkowski, 1988; Burns, 1995). Tina and Tony's learning experiences demonstrate two sides of such reinforcement.

Interest in subject area

For Tina, interest in her subject area motivated her to persist. Tina's case confirms Brackney and Karabenick's (1995) and Roger's (1986) ideas about the positive effect of motivation on adult learning.

My chosen major is what I like; and I have great interest to devote to this career. Because you have interest in it, you won't feel bored; you would be willing to learn more [Tina, II].

While on the other hand, lack of interest in the subject led Tony to drop out of college:

Because my grade for the University Entrance Examination was not so high, I could only study literature and art. I did not like what I majored in and did not know why I had applied to that college...I dropped out in the middle of the first semester in my first year of study [Tony].

Interaction with teachers

In Tony's case, experiencing negative interaction with teachers led to his dropping out. Tony felt that most of his teachers were using out-dated material. He questioned whether "these teaching materials could be applied to work" and felt that "it was useless to learn these materials". One of his teachers sang songs in class for the whole semester:

He sang in every class. I sat in the classroom and could not help but wonder why I had to spend nearly NT\$ 30,000 (\$AUD 1250) a semester to hear him sing...At the end of the semester, this teacher announced that I got an average grade of 58 (60% is a pass) for that subject...At that time I never missed any classes, and my mid term and final term examination' grades were all over 80%. So I had a kind of feeling that it was not as ideal as I thought to undertake education in university. There was no such so-called free research in that university, so I said to myself leave it and let it go [Tony I]

In contrast to Tony's "unhelpful" teachers, Sally and Tina refused to allow teachers to interfere in their persistence:

I would not drop-out because of the teachers; I think this would only cause trouble. Some teachers might not put their hearts into their teaching. However, if they let me pass, I have no problem with them [Sally, II].

I would not drop out because of teachers...I would not give up because of any words my teacher said to me. It is me who wants to study, this is what I am interested in and you can not hinder what I want. I insist on that [Tina, II].

Tinto (1993), Mayfield (1989), Tynes (1993), Beford and Durkee (1989) have emphasised the importance of institutional resources and support for students' persistence in learning. In contrast to their findings, Sally and Tina agreed that although they might encounter negative interactions with unhelpful teachers, dropping out of college was not an option they would consider. On the other hand, Tony interpreted negative interactions with unhelpful teachers he encountered from a different perspective that led to his dropping out. His experience verified Wlodkowski's (1988) view that lack of attention from teachers can have a negative influence on students.

Theme Three: Construction of the Concept of Persistence

The interview data show that there is a strong relationship between participants' identity and the value they placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. Persistence was an interpretation of their identity and the value they placed on qualifications in their life world. Together, the view of persistence, the value placed on qualifications, and their link to the perception of identity contributed to participants' construction of the concept of persistence. As concluded in the second literature review (see Chapter Four), none of these factors alone fully account for the concept of persistence within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. This concept of persistence is understood as complex and emerging from the intertwined relationship between the value placed on qualifications and notions of identity. The following section discusses the concept of persistence as constructed by participants which emerges from participants' views of the value placed on qualifications, their perceived recognition of identity, and their own explanations of persistence.

The Value Placed on Qualifications

As the participants' interviews in this study illustrates, their views of the value placed on qualifications verified Iang (1998), Chiang (1998), and Song's (1998) notions of qualifications. As indicated, qualifications are seen as the path to higher paid jobs or a brighter future. These notions are also consistent with Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) theory of cultural reproduction: a university qualification can be converted into economic capital and attain a monetary value in the Taiwanese job market (Bourdieu, 1997; Brown, 1997). Tina pointed out the monthly salary gap between different qualifications:

Kindergarten teachers are paid more than associate teachers; the salary gap might be up to NT \$ 10, 000 (AUD \$416) per month [Tina, I].

Gaining qualifications is seen as a social trend as participants in the first exploratory study as well as in the second exploratory study describe. However, being a graduate still did not satisfy Sally. She plans to continue her education to gain a Master's degree, as does Tina:

I thought if I have a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree, I would not be afraid of the influence of changing policies [Tina, I].

The expectation of a Master's degree is what Brown (1997) refers to as credential inflation. As Tina and Sally saw that college qualifications had become easier to attain, they expected post-graduate degrees to be required for higher positions in the crowded recruitment market. Seeking a Master's degree would be the next social trend if the phenomenon continues.

Recognition of Identity

As discussed earlier, identity construction is an evolving and dynamic process that changes over the life span (Whitbourne, 1986; Finalborgo & Dionisio, 1996). The participants in this study appeared to recognise identity construction as a process. "Different" or "changed" were the two most common words used.

My colleagues refer to me as a capable and progressive woman. Yes, they think I am a capable woman who has patience and strength to study further [Sally, I].

Your colleagues would say, "Attending a two-year college program changes you". But I think it is because I studied hard and learnt things with a serious attitude, so my colleagues can feel the difference. Some medical doctors would make jokes with you and say "you are different now". Of course you have to show off your difference to make them feel you are different [Sally, II].

After I completed the two-year college program, everyone says I have changed.
They say I smile a lot and show more confidence [Charlie, II].

This “feeling different” was discussed in Chapter Two. Lin and Chou (1994) and Iang (1998) concluded that students who passed university entrance examinations were regarded as competent and successful candidates within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. Bizman and Yinon (2004) note that people experience a sense of distinction if significant others perceive their importance, which is related to the domain of social self. As Ogden and Hilt (2003) and also Gale and Austin (2003) indicate, this collective identity involves the absorption of cultural traits by an individual in the formation of self-identity. Vaughan and Hogg (2002) explain that part of the self-concept derives from the membership of social groups. The higher the value of the collective identity conferred, the greater the positive image of membership of the social group (Harwood, 2004).

As Charlie described, “a two-year college program qualification is regarded as equal to a college qualification in the field of technology”. Gaining this degree enabled Charlie to feel the equal of other graduates. Tina also sensed a change in attitude during her dealings with her colleagues as well as from the kindergarten children’s parents. While “everybody has decreased their expectation of Bachelors” , Sally felt different now that she held qualifications. She said “holding that credential makes you feel you are valued, you are different; your social status is changed”.

Moreover, collective identity arises through intergroup or interpersonal comparisons, and thus becomes a ranking device (Cremer & van Vugt, 1998). Tony tried to disconnect qualifications from achievement and claimed that people can have high achievement without educational qualifications. However, even he could not deny the value placed on qualifications in Taiwanese society and their power as a sorting tool.

As Tony put it: “undertaking university is a very important milestone for everyone. It sorts people into different groups”. As a result, attending college programs and persisting in learning helped people gain recognition in the family or workplaces.

The recognition by family and in the workplace

The participants reconstructed their identities as, for example, they gained recognition by their family or in the workplace. Tina became “the first Bachelor” in her family despite her father’s view that “it is enough for you to be a junior college graduate, it is enough”. Tina’s brother admired and was influenced by her success. He intended attending a two year college program after retiring from the army. Similarly, Sally’s family was proud of her after she started college:

I am the first college student in my family...Sometimes I could not join a family party because I had to attend classes. My husband took my children to parties. And my aunts asked where I had been. My mother answered “She is attending classes”. “What classes?” then my aunts asked a lot of questions. I can imagine the way my parents answered the questions; they were proud of me [Sally, I].

I shared my scholarship with my family. I treated them to dinner, and then shared the rest of money with them. My husband and my children thanked me and then praised me “Mum, you are super” [Sally, I].

Persisting in a two-year college program helped Charlie, Sally and Tina became regarded as problem solvers and sources of information and advice for their colleagues:

After attending the college program, colleagues would ask me questions whenever they had problems. Superiors considered me as the first person to handle tasks [Sally, II].

Medical doctors ask my opinions and listen to my suggestions...my superior trusts me to handle everything [Interview with Charlie, II].

I learned some teaching methods from classes in my two-year college program. I always share new information or new ideas with my colleagues in meetings [Tina, I].

Sometimes colleagues would turn to ask you if they had the wrong idea about teaching [Tina, I].

Tony did not persist in learning in either of the two colleges he attended, but his largely self acquired technology knowledge and skills made him feel more confident at work:

In fact I do not worry about losing jobs. I am not worried about not getting any job. No...but the main point is, you must have received certain knowledge and technology skills...I don't feel that this is the so-called blind confidence, it is what I have learned from my experiences, I have better chances to find a job than those who have knowledge but lack technology skills. So I am not worried [Tony].

Tony's effort to keep up with new information in computer technology earned him compliments from the son of a friend of his parents. This man was highly educated and worked for an international bank. He praised Tony and said he was an "excellent" young man. However, Tony has not received the same recognition from his family who have compared him unfavourably with his sister: "compared to my sister, I am the son who sits in front of the TV set and does nothing all night long", he says. He describes his parents' view of his identity as negative. Tony's parents clearly felt that educational qualifications were much more valuable than the technology qualifications he had attained:

I dropped out in the middle of the first semester in my first year of study without telling my parents...my father could not forgive me and called me as a "unfavourable child in the family" [Tony].

It appears that in the construction of a positive identity, educational qualifications are more highly regarded than technology qualifications. The third factor identified from

the data relating to the concept of persistence - participants' views of persistence, is discussed next.

Participants' Views of Persistence

In this section, participants' perceived meanings of persistence are identified. Sally saw her behaviour of studying hard for her children as a demonstration of persistence, while Tina related persistence to her study approach and her perceived right to study. To Tony, persistence in learning was a strategy to postpone his military service.

Dreams come true

Continuing her education was Sally's "dream". To her, persistence meant changing her situation and learning what she wanted to learn:

I think it could be that I want to run away from home. I don't know if this is the correct expression, just leave home and not be bothered, so you can continue to learn what you want to learn [Sally, II].

For Tina, persisting in learning helped her to fulfil her desire to be a kindergarten teacher:

While I was in primary school, I made a list of wishes. The top one was self-actualisation. I feel I have achieved this. I made up my mind to be a kindergarten teacher when I was a child. Because of this, I studied hard to fulfil my wish. I did not give up or complain about anything [Tina, I].

Approaches to study and the right to Study

For Tina, persisting in learning and attending all the classes was both her approach to study and a defence of her right to study:

Attending all the classes is what I want. You cannot ask everyone to attend all the classes. Everyone has their approaches to study. But I believe that is their way, their choice [Tina, I].

It is me who wants to study, this is what I am interested in and you can not hinder what I want. I insist on that...I think that was a kind of feeling, you would feel that it [persisting] was the only way to study [Tina, II].

To Tony, persisting in reading was an approach as well as a habit to learn.

I feel I am seriously maintaining the habit of reading...and I hope I can learn more from reading [Tony].

A role model for children

In the first exploratory study, Fanny mentioned that she was proud to be her children's role model of good study habits. In this study, Sally explained more clearly about why she attended most classes and achieved high academic results:

If you miss classes and your grade is low, you cannot explain your behaviour to them. This is my belief, if you want to teach your children to behave well, you have to do everything right...your children are watching you, watching your every move [Sally, II].

Postponing military service

In Taiwan, young men must start their two-year military service at the age of 18 but students are temporally excluded. Because he did not want to be involved in military service, Tony "paid for tuition to buy time" and kept enrolling in courses until he attained technology qualifications. Tony might persist in his learning for a different reason, however, he persisted on his own way.

Discussion of Themes

The first part of the Chapter describes three themes synthesised from the second exploratory study: barriers and coping strategies, enabling factors for persistence and the construction of the concept of persistence. These three themes together contribute to participants' persistence. Data show these three themes interact with each other within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture, and thus support the argument that no one factor alone can account for the phenomenon of high levels of persistence in learning shown by the participants in this study.

The value placed on qualifications was the central element of the concept of persistence. As the literature review shows (see Chapter Four), historically, this value was related to the recognition of identity as well as economic capital including career prospects and salaries. The participants in this study have shown that this value is deeply, profoundly, and extensively incorporated into Taiwanese society. To Sally, Tina, and Charlie, qualifications are their dream, their right, the foundation of their new identity, and the key to career prospects. Sally and Tina followed their desire and intended to attain post-graduate degrees. The new perceived identity triggered the process of identity reconstruction as they entered the college program, and is likely to continue after they complete their study. It was not until participants attended a two-year college program that they began to perceive themselves as competent in the eyes of others.

Gaining a Bachelor's degree resulted in participants feeling they were treated with more respect by significant others in Taiwanese society. Achieving recognition from family or work seemed quite normal and natural for the participants. Tony tried to find a substitute for educational qualifications to bolster his identity but found that

either self-education or technology qualifications were not able to win his family's approval. Tony's experience showed the power of his parents' educational expectations, losing the respect of his family by dropping out of college and not graduating. It seems that ever since the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE), the notion of studying hard and persistence has been associated with symbols of family honour and achievement (Li, 1990), something that does not seem to have changed much for over a thousand years.

In contrast to Tierney's (1992) argument that older students are not likely to persist, Sally and Charlie who were older than their peers both expressed a strong desire to complete their degrees. It seemed that for these students age was not a factor in persistence. Similarly, these participants' persistence is in contrast to the findings of St. John, Oescher, and Andrieu (1992), who claim that part-time students are the least likely to persist in their learning.

The data also suggest that financial aid as well as approval to study were very important to the participants. The participants need to assure family or workplaces that their study will not interfere with other duties; this was the prerequisite for gaining approval and permission to study as well as support from family or managers. On the other hand, Tony was 'unsupported' by his family because he dropped out of two colleges without his father's permission. Data also show that student commitment and interest in subject enabled participants to persist, while negative interaction with teacher could lead to the result of withdraw. However, all participants showed that they have a strong will to persist in their learning in a variety ways.

In summary, in the first part of this Chapter, I explored participants' persistence by generating and synthesising the second exploratory study data into three themes. Firstly,

these themes offer evidence to explain the areas of the research literature I examined in Chapters Two and Three. Secondly, they support my argument that a combined perspective from psychological, traditional and cultural areas best describes the phenomenon of persistence in two-year college programs. Thirdly, the themes demonstrate participants' barriers, coping strategies, enabling factors, and the concept of persistence itself. It was also argued that these factors interact with each other. While common themes can be drawn through thematic analysis to throw light on the concept of persistence in learning, in next section I use the data in another way constructing a narrative for each of the four participants, in order to give a sense of the unique lived experience of each of them as they struggled to persist in their learning in their own particular contexts.

Analysis Approach Two: Narratives Construction

The second approach of analysis for this second exploratory study builds on the first exploratory study (Chapter Two), and the second literature review (Chapter Four), to provide evidence and detail of the participants' experience. In an attempt to present the lived experience through journeys in the form of narratives of four selected participants characterise their experiences of attending a two-year college program.

Each journey begins with profile of the person identified by a pseudonym (Sally, Charlie, Tina and Tony). Their experiences of persistence are woven into narratives with supporting extracts from the interviews. Some social events reported in the first area of this Chapter are described only briefly to avoid repetition. Continuation marks (...) are used where text has been omitted because ideas were repeated or text was redundant. The number of the interview (first or second) is indicated by a bracket []. The narratives conclude with an overview of the journey and the chapter concludes

with an overview of four journeys to explore participants' interpretation and understanding of their persistence experiences.

Journey One: Sally

Sally's Profile

Sally is a 33-year-old mother of three sons. She has been an administrative worker for a district hospital for fourteen years. In the interview, she told me that attending a two-year college program was her "dream". As a traditional woman born to a traditional family, she focused on her family duties and postponed her study for 10 years. It was not until there was a demand for increased qualifications in her work place, and she had passed a two-year junior college entrance examination, that Sally finally got her husband's permission to continue her education.

Sally said that "Taiwanese society prefers Bachelors", and she confessed "it feels different to hold that piece of paper [qualifications]. By persisting in a two-year junior college program and two-year college program, Sally became "the model for her children" and now has her "own position in work place". To Sally, "persistence in learning can let you learn something, really enrich yourself, and makes you want to take further education". Sally is now planning to persuade her husband to let her attend a graduate program.

Before the Program

Fighting for the right to study

Continue education used to be seen as a "dream" for Sally. As one of four children born to a poor family, the privilege of undertaking education was for her brother only, the eldest son in the family. Sally felt this to be unfair and argued with her parents to

be allowed to study further as well. It was not until the family's finances improved through contribution of her two elder sisters' salaries that Sally had the chance to become the first girl in the family to study at high school. She enrolled in a vocational high school because that was what family needed her to do:

I could not take education in the high school. It must be a vocational high school. I took business as my subject area in order to find a better job as soon as I complete my study [Interview II].

Because Sally had struggled with the right to study, she cherished every moment in class, and paid attention to everything the teacher taught her. As a result, she achieved highly academically, and developed the confidence to study further. She described the feeling she had during that time:

I don't know how to describe it. I just felt like to study, and changed the situation. I felt study further can improve my family finance [Interview II].

Unfortunately, work responsibilities, an early marriage and children meant postponing her education despite her conviction that she would have been able to overcome any barriers to her learning. Sally has complied with the traditional belief about women's roles: "get married, raise children and stay close to the family". Taiwanese women should not "be too strong or superior to their husbands" and they have to depend on their husbands "for their entire life span", Sally suppressed her "dream" of ongoing education at that time and focused on her duties at home as well as in the work place. However Sally's desire to study further never stopped:

I think I have been suppressed by my parents and my husband, so whenever the situation allowed me to continue my education, I always wanted to try it [Interview I].

The need to gain a qualification

In addition to her dream of continuing her education, Sally's lack of new knowledge and technology due to a long absence from school was the other factor to motivate her to pursue qualifications. In her work place, Sally felt she was excluded in high ranking colleagues' professional discussions and would have to ask others what they were talking about:

Around you are high educated nurses or doctors, it is not discrimination thing, it is just you do not understand their professional discussions. You know they are discussing something but you can not understand it at all. You have to ask someone to know what they are talking about [Interview I].

Moreover, her workplace began to demand employees with higher qualifications.

Sally started to worry that newcomers might usurp her position:

I used to feel that I lacked qualifications. The demand of the work market and the situation in my hospital has changed...Most of my colleagues graduated from junior college, so the hospital has suggested we continue our education...Everyone is taking courses. Well, I felt I had this need, if I wanted to keep my job [Interview I].

Thus Sally kept trying to persuade her husband to allow her to continue her education.

Finally, 10 years after graduating from vocational high school, Sally returned to school:

I told him that I wanted to continue my education. But he disagreed. Because at that time, the children were young, and he thought my hospital position was steady and did not demand further qualifications. So he disagreed with me...[Four years ago], my good friend and a colleague invited me to accompany her to attend a two-year junior college entrance examination. I tried to persuade my husband. Finally my husband agreed to let me study further if I could pass the examination. And I passed [Interview I].

Starting to feel different

After completing the courses in junior college, Sally started feeling different and her self-esteem was enhanced. The certificate that Sally now held in her hand led her to acquire new social status in her office, that is, a clerk with a junior college degree among a group of vocational high school graduates:

I can be promoted after I graduate, things might change...in front of my colleagues, in my work place, there are few people with Bachelor's degree. So to attain a Bachelor's degree is different...Holding that credential makes you feel you are valued, you are different; your social status is changed. In my unit, there is one Bachelor and two junior college graduates, including me. The others graduated from vocational high school. Being a junior college graduate makes you feel you have stepped forwards...I felt there was a difference after I completed junior college courses [Interview II].

Despite her new status in the work place as a junior college graduate, Sally could not prevent an increasing sense of crisis as she observed her new colleagues' qualifications:

You do not need to be a Bachelor to handle the job well, but you just need it. In your work place, everyone has a qualification, if you...I don't want to be fired because of my lack of qualifications...We felt threatened by new employees with a Bachelor's degree [Interview I].

Sally thus persuaded her husband to allow her to continue her study. Again, she passed the entrance examination and enrolled in a two-year college program.

During Program

Persistence despite the barriers to learning

During her two-year college course, Sally faced time restriction problems due to her multiple duties of work, family and study. Strict time management was needed for her heavy load of duties as she persisted in her learning:

I work six days a week. I can have one day off in the week days. As I come home from hospital, I usually help my husband's part-time work. Then I drive my children home after I finish the help. As soon as I and my children come home, I would ask them to do their homework. I then drive them to paid classes after I checked their homework. After that, I then go to college to attend my classes [Interview I].

After classes, there was no space or time for Sally to review her work or do her homework. It was not until her children went to sleep that she could start writing her assignments. Yet Sally considered herself lucky and blessed by the gods because she felt confronting barriers was not too difficult:

Because I have organized everything, so it seemed to be very smooth to me while persisting...There were some problems but they were solved. Everything was okay for me...It seemed that everything ran well during my process of persistence. I even had my own time. I am lucky. I am blessed by gods [Interview II].

Application to study due to self-expectation

With an attitude of grace, Sally studied hard and performed well academically though she kept complaining "study is hard; preparing for tests is also hard". She attributed her achievement to her own self-expectation:

At this age, my expectations of myself are high. When you have responsibilities, confront with financial pressures and play multiple roles, you come to expect more of yourself. A lot of classmates are at similar situation and have multiple roles, their expectations to themselves are high, so their grades are high [Interview I].

In return, a high academic performance and studying hard helped Sally rebuild her identity and gain recognition from her family as well as the work place.

Reconstructing identity as role of model

Completing a junior college degree helped Sally to gain a new social status in her work place, while her persistence helped her to build an identity as a highly achieving model role. Sally was seen as a capable, worthy and progressive employee in her work place. She was praised by her colleagues, and given the chance of in-service extension courses and big bonuses:

My supervisors like to hand out more tasks to me; they trust me to deal with things well. After passing the college program, I have learnt how to arrange things; I have become more organized and more sophisticated. I troubled my superiors less; in return, they rarely find any problems with my work. Now, they ask me to attend classes whenever there are in-service extension courses...And at the end of the year I would find that my bonus is not a small one...My colleagues now have jokes with me and describe me as one of our superiors' favourite employees [Interview I].

Sally reported that her colleagues noticed her change and described her as different. She no longer felt uncomfortable or uneasy being involved in colleagues' professional discussions. She became the adviser for problems relating to computer technology. Even senior employees such as nurses and doctors would ask for her help at work:

I don't think I understand medical issues that colleagues discuss any better, but I feel that others would come to you and ask you something, such as something referring to computers, as if you really have learnt something [Interview II].

In addition to the work place, Sally's achievements were recognised by her family. She became the topic of conversation of family parties and was regarded with honour. In front of their relatives, her parents referred to her as the daughter who was

attending [college] classes. She also earned respect from her niece for her enriched knowledge and technology skills:

My niece had visited me and lived in my house. And then, I taught her how to use a computer, I could feel her admiration for me. Their admiration is not important to me, but at least, I can show them some examples [Interview II].

For Sally, recognition from her family as well as from the work place has deepened her belief in the value placed on qualifications, and in return motivated her to promote this value to her family as well as with her colleagues.

Duplicating the value placed on qualifications

Sally believes that Bachelors' degrees are becoming commonplace in Taiwanese society:

There are too many universities in Taiwan now, Bachelors are everywhere. So everyone is questioning the quality of the Bachelor's degree. Everybody has decreased their expectation of Bachelors...Upgrading qualifications is the trend in a well-developed society. As the country has raised its expectations of the standards it requires more and more people will undertake higher education [Interview I].

Because she believes in the value of qualifications, Sally has high educational expectations of her children and carefully drawn maps of educational pathways for them:

Do I value my children's education? Certainly I do. I expect they will have a better education than me...In Taiwan, you have to have a Bachelor's degree. If they do not have chances to attend graduate courses, qualifications are the most basic demand. It would be better if they can go abroad for their advanced education [Sally, I]

To encourage her children as well as her niece to persist in learning and to study hard, she has used her own persistence to motivate them to follow her steps:

I used to encourage my children, “Mum is so old yet is still studying hard. You can too, all you have to do is put more effort into your study”...I used to tell my children, “You are young; your only responsibility is to study. You should aspire to a higher grade” [Interview I].

My niece travelled with us before she attended the Junior High School Proficiency Examination. I showed my student identity card to pay for concession tickets. She was surprised that a working adult like me would hold a student card. I showed her my student card, and then she said to me “it is true, you are a student”. At least I let her know, if her aunt can study at her age, it should be no problem for her to study at her age [Interview II]

Sally also shared her successful experience of persistence with her colleagues:

I used to encourage my colleagues, if I can make it, you can make it too. If only you put effort into it. I believe if you make an effort, if you are determined to do it, you can make it. Because I am an ordinary woman, if I can make it, you can make it too [Interview I].

For Sally, it would be very hard to deny the positive results of pursuing qualifications after gaining so much recognition for her persistence. In return, she trusted her persistence would lead her to new achievement and thus would be more willing to continue to follow the path to qualifications.

Sally's Future Plans

Sally has realised that she is a high achiever, and that a Bachelor's degree is now not sufficient. She dreams of studying for her Master's degree because she believes that further education would fulfil her wish to change her job or work environment, achieve self-growth, and enrich her knowledge and skills:

Acquiring a Bachelor is not sufficient for me according to my definition of not consider to be perfect. My friends and family tell me that I don't need it [Master's degree], but I want to...Saying that I don't need it or it is impossible for me to reach the goal drives me to pursue it more firmly. My colleagues ask me "What will you do with it?" I don't know, I just want to learn something. But they think I intend to look for a better job. I replied to them that I don't know, I haven't thought about that, but if you do not consider changing your job, it seems that you do not need to attend any post-graduate program...I think the situation, the wider society, because everyone is continuing their education, well, perhaps it is my need. Also, if I still work at the same hospital, I might change my circumstances [Interview II].

Sally is now looking for a further opportunity to persuade her husband to allow her to continue post-graduate education. And there is no limit to her patience:

Of course, you can not chase your dream without any plan; you have to do it step by step. You should expect to confront a lot of barriers, so, I think, to attend a post-graduate program, I need to plan each step, carefully...I will use the same strategies to persuade my husband to let me attend the graduate institute entrance examination. I used to tell him if I could not pass, I would not continue my education. He always agreed to let me try, and I always passed the examination [Interview II].

Sally's dream has not yet been realised and her determination to persistence in her learning is clearly ongoing.

Overview of Sally's Journey

It took Sally ten years to gain her husband's permission to study. Sally's long wait indicates how hard it is for a woman in traditional society to pursue further education. After attending the program, Sally encountered barriers to her learning due to her multiple duties. A strict daily time table showed that better time management, as well as compliance to her woman's duty helped her cope with the problem of lack of time. Sally did not complain about her busy schedules and heavy load of family duties,

instead, she thanked God that she managed to finish all the duties in time. To Sally, facing the prospect of the pain of being replaced and the appreciation of the educational opportunities enabled her to persist in her learning.

The increasing demand for qualifications in her hospital, recognition by the family as well as by the work place, and her self-expectation of her own academic performance all motivated Sally to persist in her learning. In return, her persistence and her studying hard helped her to reconstruct her identity as a capable, progressive, and studious woman and employee. She made her parents' proud; she became a model for her niece and her children; she enriched her knowledge which enabled her to solve her colleagues' computer problems. And she earned her superior's trust and the opportunity to take charge of more tasks, attend more in-service extension courses and receive bonuses.

Sally's story of persistence reveals the truth in the old proverb from "The Trimetric Classic" (Ying-Lian Wang, 1223-1296 CE) of "no pain, no gain". As a child from a poor family, Sally's persistence in her learning enabled her to fulfil her dream, to change her situation, and to achieve her qualifications by enduring the painful process of persistence. However, from her story, it appears that the effect of the value placed on qualifications has suppressed her 'pain' and influence her to focus on the 'gain'. To Sally, this gain is so important that became her priority to pursue it despite the pain. Put another way, compared with the joy of the gain, the pain of persistence seemed acceptable.

For Sally, the gain of qualifications is something relating to her being. At every social interaction with her family or colleagues, the notions of education and qualifications are converted into the symbols of new identity, social status and future prospects.

Sally's successful experience of persistence is living proof of the value placed on qualifications. It seems that their historical value has not decayed over time and is reiterated in Sally's family as well as her workplace. Through these two fields, Sally duplicated the value placed on qualifications by promoting persistence and by encouraging her children, niece and colleagues to pursue their qualifications. To Sally, identity and qualifications are two sides of the one thing. The process of pursuing qualifications is the process to prove the being of Sally. Her degree represents who she is and who she will be in her future. As long as the intertwined relationship continues, her pursuing and duplicating the value placed on qualifications will never end.

Journey Two: Charlie

Charlie's Profile

Charlie was an administrative clerk in a hospital, a job he obtained after graduating from an evening program at a vocational high school. Not long afterwards, his efforts at working overtime from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. earned his superior's trust, and he was promoted to manager of an executive department. Achieving highly at work did not satisfy Charlie; he expected more of himself and aimed for a Bachelor's degree. Before Charlie continued his education, he "always had low self-esteem". Attending a two-year college program became his "biggest personal expectation" of himself.

Following a workplace policy of enhancing employees' qualifications, Charlie completed his courses at a junior college as well as a college program. He earned his supervisors and colleagues' respect and became a role model of persistence. Charlie attributed his new identity and high self-esteem to his application to study and encouraged his colleagues as well as his son to follow his example. Charlie is now

devoting himself to his work and considering attending some extension courses in a graduate institute, for his own interest as well as for the hospital's benefit. The motifs of his daily life are to spend leisure time with his wife and family and to save money for the hospital. Charlie now is looking forward to his retirement.

Before Attending the Program

Fighting for a low self-esteem

Before attending the program, Charlie had low-self-esteem. He attributed his feelings of inferiority to lack of qualifications. Charlie was aware that his qualification was "lower than others...everyone has a college degree or junior college degree...I was just a high school graduate". Charlie was afraid his business associates would discover his lack of educational qualifications:

As I introduced myself, I would not reveal that I was a high school graduate...I had low self-esteem, I felt I was a person who did not have any knowledge; a person with low self-esteem; a person who dared not express himself with confidence, who was afraid that people would laugh at him and say "you are only a high school graduate, how can you, and so on", because of that, I had low self-esteem [Interview I].

He also felt he had a need to improve his low self-esteem:

I have to enrich my mind with knowledge, to improve my communication skills, and the skills of interpersonal relationships [Interview I].

It was this need and the demand for employee qualifications in his work place motivated Charlie to pursue his qualifications.

The need to gain qualifications

As employee' qualifications are taken into hospital evaluation criteria, senior workers are encouraged to continue their education. For Charlie, it is a trend in the society:

I am a senior employee in my hospital, and I need to upgrade my qualifications. Most of the senior workers have graduated from junior colleges, so they consider it is important to continue their education...[Besides], employees' qualifications are taken into hospital evaluations now...In the E-Society, qualifications are very important, especially in my hospital...therefore my superiors always encourage us to take advanced study so as to enhance our quality [Interview I].

Encouraged by his superior, Charlie "grasped at once" the opportunity to attend a junior college program:

"First I asked for my superior's permission, and he approved it at once. He did not question or examine my application form...He did not even look at my application form. He said 'okay' right away. All he said was "you go and see what you can do". It is his trust that gave me the strength to continue my education" [Interview I].

Starting to feel different

With his superior's permission, Charlie attended a junior college program. Charlie's colleagues regarded his study as "an inspired choice" and he felt pleasure in his enhanced confidence:

I encourage myself, I must improve, that's it, I have started to expect more, and my confidence has become greater...This is a great pleasure to me, great pleasure [Interview I].

Though his self-esteem improved, Charlie was not satisfied with his junior college degree. Four years after graduating from a two-year junior college program, another opportunity to continue his education occurred. At fifty-three, he enrolled in a

two-year college program and became the college student he had always dreamed of becoming.

During the Program

Persistence despite the barriers to learning

While attending a two-year college program, Charlie was confronted with multiple barriers to his learning including the effects of aging, transportation difficulties, and restricted time for work, family and study. His biggest problem in the first semester was limited time for travel between the hospital and college. Back and forth between two cities every week night left Charlie exhausted with no energy for homework or the next day's work. He began to think of dropping out of college:

Of course, I have to cope with the time problems caused by attending this program. I used to finish [my work] at five thirty in the afternoon. However, as a senior employee, on busy days, I might have to work till seven to eight o'clock. So, study might interfere with my work, but I will not let it interfere with the efficiency of my work...I used to work over time, but now, I am attending the program, so I have to leave earlier. In the daytime, there is the pressure to get things done. Though my superior does not put any pressure on me, I still try to keep my department running efficiently in the hospital [Interview I].

To attend classes, I had to find the shortest way to get to College. It was painful for me in the first semester. At first, it took me over an hour to get there. There are traffic jams in rush hour; it is very crowded and you could not drive fast. In the first semester I tried different routes to go home so I would know how to get to College next day. I was exhausted when I came home, so I had no energy for my homework. I was so worried by this traffic issue that I thought about quitting study [Interview II].

It took Charlie four months to find a shortcut to college, and reduce the return trip to ninety minutes:

As the semester progressed, I became familiar with each route and knew which one was the shortcut. You just drive along the seashore. It won't take you more than fifty minutes to get to College, and no traffic jams at all [Interview II].

To finish his homework, Charlie worked late at night:

Sometimes I had to write [a report] until three or four o'clock in the early morning, so I could finish it. My group reports were finished this way [Interview I].

Age was another issue for Charlie. He felt it had influenced his memory and was causing some trouble with his academic performance:

Yes, continuing my education is hard for me. I am over fifty, so it is a little bit hard for me...As to my study, there is no big problem. But I am getting old, so my memory is not so good. I have to re-read material, because of that, learning and memorising materials needs time, so the pressure is higher [Interview I].

To persist in his learning, Charlie had to sacrifice his "leisure time and the time to take care of the family". He was grateful for his wife's support, taking it upon herself to care for his ninety-three-year-old mother. Charlie reported it was his wife's support, self help and time management that enabled his persistence despite barriers to his learning.

Application to study due to self-expectations

For Charlie, self-encouragement and the strong will to complete the degree were necessary for persistence:

Well, you should expect you will complete this stage, at least, complete this stage, this is my self-expectation, and this is my biggest personal expectation... I have encouraged myself and affirmed myself. I have a kind of impulse that I should complete it, if there is a chance for me, if it is okay, if I can [Interview I].

He did not mention that his academic performance contributed to his persistence. However, he had similar self-expectations as Sally, being only satisfied with a grade of over 80%:

Peer competition is okay; it is not so obvious in our class. I am old, I encouraged myself; it is the best to get a high grade, but I would not try to compete with them, to be the top of our class...I always have a great expectation of myself. I pushed myself to reach this goal...though, not the top, at least, I pushed myself to get eighty or eighty-five percent [Interview I].

To Charlie, persistence in learning enabled him to complete the course, and he believed it was worthwhile despite the barriers he had to overcome:

Well, if I could not graduate on time, that would be a great shock to me; but I will persist, and complete it anyway, and overcome any barriers to graduation. Yes, it is worth it [Interview I].

Reconstructing identity as a role model

Charlie's Bachelor's degree will benefit him in his hospital's evaluation of him. After attending the two-year college program, Charlie felt he had enriched his knowledge, and had gained confidence in himself in dealing with issues related to work:

My hospital has one more senior employee with a Bachelor's degree. The program I have taken has been a great help to my work...Being one of the senior employees, my study can upgrade the quality of the executives, so learning is good for me [Interview I].

Charlie felt "proud" and "pleased" to be a graduate and believed that with this qualification, he was the equal of anyone else. He felt he had made progress and acknowledged the honour of his achievement:

After attending this program, I feel I have made great progress, a great achievement, a sense of honour, and a faith to affirm myself...I think I have

reached some of my life goals. I affirmed myself and I have reached the level of a Bachelor's degree. This is a great pleasure to me, great pleasure. In Taiwanese society, I am as equal as others, well, they might have a Master's degree, but at least, I have a Bachelor's degree, at least I have a Bachelor's degree...I am so pleased that I continued my education. I feel so pleased [Interview I].

Having a Bachelor's degree was not so satisfying before but [I think] it is okay now, it is okay now...As I deal with issues in my work, I believe I am as good as others, I believe my achievement is equivalent to others, not a bit lower than others, at least, I am a college graduate...I always remind or correct myself, to show that I'm equal to others. Yes, a little bit, a little bit proud of it, but, you have to affirm yourself [Interview I].

Charlie also reported that he had become a role model for his children:

Being a college student has changed the way my children regard me, more or less, at least, they would regard me as an ideal model.

Being a role model was maintained after Charlie completed his degree. Now he became a role model to his colleagues.

After the Program

Reconstructing identity as a role model

After graduating from college, Charlie had complete confidence in handling his work and earned high respect and trust from his superiors and business associates. He had created a reputation for high achievement, savings on budgets and investment fees for the hospital:

My superior knows me; he knows my characteristics and he trusts me to handle everything. I bought the new building next to our hospital at two thirds of the price. If the owner wanted to sell me that building that was the price I would offer. He agreed. I manage all contracts for my hospital's medical equipment. I always get equipment at the cheapest prices. You don't have to bribe me with presents or money, all I want is good quality with a 20% discount. You don't agree? I will

look for other manufactures. They know my character, they know I mean it, and they will sell things at the discounted price. That is the way I save money for my hospital. Yet everybody prefers making deals with me. They say they even earn more because they don't have to bribe me or anyone else. They know I am strict but straight. I have earned a reputation in this business [Interview II].

Charlie has changed; he smiles frequently. By discussing medical topics with highly educated doctors, and being a model of study and persistence for the staff, he shows that he is pleased with and confident in himself:

Medical doctors ask my opinion and listen to my suggestions. There are few people with Bachelor's degrees among colleagues of the same age; I am one of them. Many of them are not...some of them are attending two-year junior college programs now. And they told me that they envy the fact that I have completed my program. They said to me "You have it easy now, but we still have a long way to go. We should have followed in your footsteps earlier" [Interview II].

Charlie was full of energy and confidence to deal with his work. 'Be strict but fair', was the motto he applied to the people he worked with:

In this hospital, my responsibility is to organize and make things run smoothly and efficiently. I ask my staff to finish their work before they leave. I do not have to say anything; they know my standard. I am strict but I am fair. I do not ask you to do extra jobs, but you have to complete your job before you leave [Interview II].

He claimed he had reached some of his life goals and he believed he would remain confident at work as well as in society as a whole:

I affirmed myself and I have reached the level of a college degree. As to work, I will ask myself to continue at work or in the society, I will go on to affirm myself [Interview I].

Duplicating the value placed on qualifications

Because Charlie was convinced of the value of qualifications in Taiwanese society, he kept persuading his children that they must attain qualifications. For him, a two-year college degree is the minimum goal for his children:

Taiwan is a highly developed society. It has developed up to this stage. It is necessary for everyone to upgrade their degree, and everyone should follow up...everyone has to continue their education; it is the trend of a progressive society [Interview, II].

A two-year college credential is regarded as equal as a college credential in the field of technology. In my family, it is the goal that I encourage my children to reach. I mean, it is my goal [Interview I]. I also expect them [my children] to complete their degrees. At the minimum, they must have two-year college degree...In our society it is regarded as an achievement, and makes people regard you differently [Interview I].

To encourage his children, Charlie used his experience of his application to study as an example. He told his children “Old dad is fifty-three years old and still studies, so you have to study too; this is the only path to go”. Since then, he comments “the spirit of learning has been raised” in his family. Charlie is now enjoying the rewards of his efforts. His son has now completed his degree, and has good prospects:

My son graduated from a two-year college program and found a good job which is highly paid. I told him to get a qualification to find a better job. He listened and got a good job [Interview II].

Charlie claimed if he had his life over again, he would still choose to attend the program, because he felt “it is worth it”.

Charlie's Future Plans

Charlie hopes to retire soon, and is planning to take a few post-graduate extension courses for his own interest:

I would like to attend some graduate courses too. My superior always encourages me to continue my education. If I could continue my education, and could attend graduate school, it would help me to be promoted. I am a senior employee, and I would be upgraded to one of the members of the higher executive group...but I am going to retire, and work only for few more years. If I continue my education that means I have to spend extra time and money for my study; the investment might not be worth it. And to study hard again, [pause], study and work at the same time; the study in the graduate institute must be harder, [pause], I don't know if I still want the whole thing to start again, to rush to class after work for years; I have to think about it twice, I have to think about it twice, [pause], I think I might consider taking a few extension courses at the graduate institute; some courses which can benefit my work, which are for my interest. There is no hurry [Interview II].

Charlie smiled, telling me that his son has got his Bachelor's degree and has found a good job, his daughter has borne him grandchildren, leisure time for his family is not a dream any more, and he takes walks along the river with his wife every day. Charlie appears very satisfied with his life:

I don't need to rush somewhere to study [smiles]. After work, I can walk with my wife, hand in hand along the river side, everyday [smiles]. It is pretty at this time, especially in the evening [smiles]. Exercise makes you healthy; at this age you need to exercise everyday, so I walk with my wife everyday, it can help you keep your shape and look younger [Interview II].

My son has found a high paying job. His job does not cause him too much trouble, so he can leave the office on time everyday. Now he sits on the sofa and watches TV after he comes home...my daughter bore me grandchildren; she brings them to me every night. All my leisure time is spent with them [smiles], and I intend to keep it this way at the moment. My work is going well, no trouble at all; I can spend time with my family, walk with my wife. I am expecting my retirement now [smiles] [Interview II].

Overview of Charlie's Journey

The intertwined relationship between identity, persistence and the attainment of qualifications is clearer in Charlie's narrative. Influenced by the historical and cultural value placed on qualifications, Charlie's experience reveals the effect of history and explains how qualifications can be linked to a person's self-esteem. Charlie's story suggests that holding a qualification is an important way for him to feel a sense of achievement. Compared with higher qualifications, other achievements Charlie gained from his work were relatively unimportant. Without qualifications, Charlie would have felt that his life was not completed.

To gain his qualifications, Charlie followed the notion of the old proverb: 'no pain, no gain'. Barriers to learning might cause pain or inconvenience, however after working hard to overcome the barriers, the goal which Charlie hoped for was attained. Through persistence, Charlie was transformed from a man with low self-esteem to one of confidence. In addition, with his degree and greater knowledge, Charlie won social status and respect from those he respected. With a qualification, he feels that he is equal to others, he has the confidence to handle his work, as well as his relationships with family, colleagues, and business associates.

Convinced and inspired by Charlie's successful persistence experience, his son and his colleagues followed in his footsteps and persisted in their own learning. In return, their persistence and their career prospects after completing degrees will again verify the value of qualifications in Taiwanese society. In short, this piece of paper, the qualification, is evidence of Charlie's dream, future and his being.

Journey Three: Tina

Tina's Profile

Tina is a twenty-five-year-old single woman who works for a kindergarten. She spoke slowly as if was considering each question seriously. During the interviews, she sat straight, hardly changing her position, kept smiling and remained relaxed and calm. Tina was about to graduate and was packing to leave. She said that she used to be regarded as a “quiet” student by her teachers. She believes that a student’s role is to study hard and to learn something from classes.

Tina had wanted to be a kindergarten teacher since she was a child. Attending the two-year college program helped her “acknowledge updated trends and teaching methods”. The reason why she left home to study in South Taiwan was to be more independent. She said, “You can not still be an assistant after ten years. In order to have the opportunity to be promoted or to lead your crews, you need to know how to make judgements or how to deal with relationships”. It did not take Tina “too long to graduate from the two-year college program”. And she commented that “it is worthwhile to spend this period of time for study”. Now she is preparing for next year’s entrance examination at the graduate institute.

Before Attending Program

Fighting for the right to study

Tina explained how she adopted the habit of persistence by fighting for her right to study at a vocational high school. The goal of Tina’s class was to gain access to any college or university. Ten hours of study and eight tests was the class’s daily schedule. As a result, Tina got used to study and adopted the “habit” of persistence. She described the way she studied during this period:

How did I adopt the habit of persistence in learning? It could be related to my learning experience in vocational high school. The goal of my class was to help students to successfully enter junior college. Teachers would tell you what time to arrive at school, how many hours you should study, and so on...We studied at school for more than ten hours every day, including the holidays, you just kept on studying and studying for years...I stopped for one year because I did not want to study in this way. In that year, I did not know what I should do; it seemed that I could only study. So I started studying again. I think this was the general feeling you felt that this was the only way to study. We had small tests everyday, eight tests a day. On top of this, we had to attend classes to design teaching kits to use in our practice. At the end of class, we would have more tests. You just felt this was the only way to study, I think this has become a habit for me [Interview I].

Unfortunately, studying hard did not result in the good academic result which Tina required to continue in that class. She was asked by the class tutor to quit study and to tell her parents that she wanted to transfer to another class because of her poor academic performance. Tina had felt upset on hearing this at first. Then she firmly refused to allow her teacher to intervene in her intention to study and kept this conversation secret. She wanted to study in that particular class. Though Tina's academic performance did not improve significantly, her persistence in wanting to study harder kept her in the class.

I did not study very hard in my vocational high school. My grade was at the rank of the lowest 3% or 4%. At that time, the last 3% of students had to transfer to other classes to avoid interfering with the remaining students' study. My tutor thought I might get worse, so she persuaded me to transfer to other classes. She told me "You don't have to study anymore, you don't need to. You go home and tell your parents that you want to transfer to other classes. Don't stay in my class". I answered "I am this class's student; I still want to study, why are you forcing me to leave this class? I want to study in this class; I will stay in this class until I complete my degree". I then chose to study harder and maintained my grade at the rank of the lowest 4% or 5%. Then I did not have to leave the class. I felt that I wanted to stay in that class, I would not give up on myself because you [the tutor] said so. Because I believe that study was for my own good, I had interests in my

major, you could not take away what I wanted. I insisted. I did not tell my parents, so they did not know [Interview II].

Observing her efforts in study, Tina's father told her that he would not force his educational expectations on her. He said that study was for her own benefit and she had the right to decide whether she wanted to be educated or not:

My father used to tell me that "study is your business. You are fully responsible for your own achievement, not us [parents]. If you do not want to study, it is useless to force you to study, besides, that would make everyone unhappy; we don't want to get angry with you or to argue with you. You have to get whatever degree you want on your own. If you can pass the entrance examination, we will pay your tuition fee. It's your degree, not mine." [Interview II].

Her father's encouragement enabled Tina's to persist in her learning and helped her to complete her high school courses.

The need to gain qualifications

Tina worked for one year before she attended the two-year junior college program. From her work experience, she realized that what she had learned at vocational high school was not enough to apply in practical situations:

From my work experience, I realized that I should study further. What we learned at vocational high school was only limited knowledge which was hard to apply to our work [Interview I].

Moreover, Tina found when she applied for work, people were evaluated according to their qualifications:

When I applied for my job, the employer said that she could only offer me an assistant's position instead of an associate teacher position because I was only a vocational high school graduate. That made you feel that you were underestimated. Who says a vocational high school graduate can not be an associate teacher? After I started work, I found that the abilities of people with Bachelor's degrees were not

superior to ours. However, a majority of employers' beliefs put pressure on us, and we are considering the importance of qualifications [Interview I].

Most kindergarten owners will not consider offering you a position after they evaluate your qualification. Your qualification is associated with your employment. To find a better job, you have to be a graduate. They [employers] say a vocational high school qualification is not sufficient to a kindergarten teacher, so you cannot find a better job if you are only a vocational high school graduate. That's why a lot of people want to continue their education, to hold that piece of paper [the qualification certificate] [Interview I].

Thus Tina decided to attend the junior college program because she felt that a high school graduate was not the ideal qualification for her. Besides, she had passed the entrance examination, so she felt she did not want to waste the opportunity to gain a junior college degree. Unfortunately, the junior college degree had not prevented the children's parents from underestimating her:

Parents believe that associate teachers are assistants. They think it is useless to tell an assistant anything. Teachers are supposed to be the leaders in the kindergarten. So I thought I had better study for a Bachelor's degree...with a qualification, you are able to teach children with a more positive attitude; to clearly understand how you should teach them and how to develop their learning. Besides, you will be more accepted by children's parents [Interview I].

Tina was also aware of the market pressure to raise the level of kindergarten teachers' qualifications:

In my work, the Government keeps raising kindergarten teachers' educational qualifications, which makes you feel insecure without a further qualification. There was a rumour that they intended to change teachers' educational qualification again; they tried to upgrade it to a Bachelor's degree...It appears that there is an increasing trend to hire people with Bachelor's degrees as kindergarten teachers...I was studying in a junior college, so I felt quite insecure. I thought I had better attend a two-year college program in case the policy changed again. I felt that I needed to attend a two-year college program to secure my future work opportunities [Interview I].

Due to this insecurity, Tina continued her study and attended the program to overcome the unpleasant experience of being underestimated and to satisfy the market demand for qualifications.

During the Program

Persistent despite the barriers to learning

As Tina studied, finances became an important issue. She did not have a highly paid job and had to plan carefully to cover her expenses:

Work is necessary for me. I do not care about how much I earn. I carefully check my expenses and spend what I have saved. All I want is to not let myself starve, that would be enough for me [Interview I].

To cope with the academic challenges, Tina was content with a “pass” level grade. She decreased her academic expectations and carefully planned her approaches to study:

It is okay for me to have a pass grade. Examinations mean nothing; it is just a ritual. What you have learned is what you have understood, not something you write down on a piece of paper...My average grade was not so high, it always remained in the rank of 25th of 48 students. An average grade of 70% or 80% would be enough for me. If your grade is lower than 70%, that means you did not manage either your time or your emotions, then you have to do something to maintain that level. You have to set your goals, and reach your goals step by step. Of course, it is not practical to set a high and unreachable goal. So I used to set a low standard goal and then I set a higher goal after I reached the first goal [Interview II].

Tina believed that her employer’s support as well as her father’s belief about learning as a right enabled her persistence. Her persistence was reflected in her full attendance record. Tina believed that attending every class reflected her seriousness about learning and her insistence on the right to study. For her, just sitting in the classroom was enough to learn something. So she persisted in her learning:

Attending all the classes is not just for that piece of paper. It is a feeling, a prize, to show that I have been studied hard for two years, also to show that I have been attending classes no matter whether it rains or it is windy. Because I am convinced that study is my right...I feel I have to attend classes no matter how tired I am. I believe I might lose a great chance to gain insights about myself if I miss any class. I attend most classes. Because I am convinced it is no use holding a piece of paper, a qualification certificate, without enriching your knowledge by studying hard. So I must not miss classes...Listening to what the teachers say is very important, you don't have to concentrate every minute, if you show up you can hear something; you can enrich yourself more or less from what you have heard [Interview I].

Besides, Tina felt that continually attending classes helped her realise the trends in teaching methods in a changing society:

Younger children's education is very important for us. Instead of staying in the past, you have to follow the trend. The only benefit of attending classes is to gain knowledge of the trends in teaching methods. Teachers are aware of teaching trends, and they can show you correct approaches and prevent you from misunderstanding [Interview I].

Tina could not clearly explain why she wanted to persist in learning. She said it was just "a kind of feeling of wanting to". She said that having an interest in children's education and a willingness to enrich her own knowledge were also related to her persistence:

After attending a junior college program, I discovered an interest in enriching my knowledge. I continued my education. My chosen major is what I like; and I have great interest in this career. Because you have an interest in it, you won't feel bored; you would be willing to learn more [Interview II].

To Tina, persistence in learning meant she could control what she wanted to learn:

I am used to persisting. I understand it is not easy to persist, thus I keep learning, I keep reading what I am interested in. My lack of knowledge drives me to expect more from every class. In vocational high school, I did not have any motivation to

study; it was the school that decided what I would learn. In contrast, I am a college student now, I can control what I want to learn, what I don't want to [Interview I].

Because of this, Tina felt she was able to control her own learning, she did not think her teachers were very important. Because, "every teacher has different characteristic or teaching method", so Tina believed students should accept every teacher and let them bring students some knowledge and help them to grow. "What you can learn matters" said she.

Reconstructing identity as a role model

Tina's brother was influenced by her, and "intended to attend a college program" after retiring from the army. Though her father told her "it is enough for you to be a junior college graduate, it is enough", Tina became "the first Bachelor" in her family. The situation was similar in Tina's kindergarten. She became one of the few college students where she worked, and instead of showing off her status as a college student, she shared her new information with her colleagues.

I am a college student now, and I am one of three employees who are studying in college. The others are all vocational high school graduates. People envy you and have a particular attitude about you because they feel you are a college student while they are not. If you treat them sincerely, they understand and would not feel that way they accept you...sometimes colleagues ask you if they have the wrong idea about teaching...I learned about new teaching methods from classes in my two-year college program. I always share new information or new ideas with my colleagues in meetings.

Tina became the model of a progressive woman; persistent and willing to continue her education. She continues encourage her colleagues "to study further" and "continue study" as she did "in order to grow together".

Tina's Future Plans

Tina said that she set and completed goals step by step. She felt it was worthwhile to attend college and was satisfied with the knowledge and independence she had learned at college. She claimed that she was self-actualized and had fulfilled her wish to be a kindergarten teacher that she had since a child. She was now waiting to graduate with a Bachelor's degree:

I remained happy while pursuing my wish. I just wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. It could be because I like children, so I am counting down to my graduation year to go back to kindergarten to teach the children [Interview I].

Paradoxically, Tina was aware that work skills and knowledge enrichment are far more important than qualifications. She now considered that there was only one path to enrich her knowledge and to find a better job: continuing her education and gaining a Master's degree. Her next move was to attend a post-graduate program to prepare for a teaching position in a junior college:

While attending a two-year college program, I thought that work skills were more important than qualifications. Sometimes I would feel confused, I would question if further study was so important. But continuing my education can help me understand how society changes and how our teaching methods should adjust...enriching your knowledge is more important than acquiring a qualification. It is because I want to find a job in a junior college that I feel that having a qualification is essential [Interview I].

I am satisfied with my work as a kindergarten teacher. I would like to study further, to continue my education, to take advanced study...I have completed my two-year college program and I would like to study further. Time flew while I was taking courses in the two-year college program, but I felt substantial, very solid. You just came to college everyday and took classes; you learnt how to write the term papers which is related to your practical work. You have a better sense about what is involved in childcare [Interview I].

A Master's degree allows you to freely choose your career. You can teach in junior colleges or high schools; you can be the director of a kindergarten. You can upgrade yourself. To teach in a junior college, you must have a Master's degree...After I gain my Master's degree, I would like to do some research on some topics of interest. I will encourage my colleagues to continue their education, I will tell them to study with me and we will develop together.

Overview of Tina's Journey

Tina's barriers to learning were the academic challenge and her difficult financial situation. Her coping strategies included time management with the support of an understanding employer, not raising her sights too high and being content with a pass grade, and careful using of her savings. A qualification was regarded as a tool to gain a better job and gain respect from the children's parents for Tina. Persistence in learning until she completed her degree helped Tina to attain that qualification.

Tina's attendance record was excellent. She attributed her persistence to a number of factors: her interest in her major subjects, her father's ideas about education, and her study experience at a vocational high school. To be a kindergarten teacher had been her wish since she was a child. Tina claimed that study was her "right", and attending classes would help her "learn something". Tina refused to let any teacher's comments or irresponsibility hinder her persistence. She believes that her attendance record reflected her dedication and helped her enhance her professional knowledge and skills which could be applied to her work. She also gained trust and respect from children's parents and colleagues, and gained the qualification required for kindergarten teachers. Her goal is now to become a junior college teacher.

Tina once was confused about the value placed on qualifications and argued that work skills and knowledge enrichment should be more important. Interestingly, through the process of persistence she overcame her feeling of confusion and decided to continue

her education to pursue a better job. In contrast to her previous view, she became convinced that it is worthwhile to undertake higher education in a formal setting, and that persistence in learning can lead to knowledge enrichment. Thus, Tina encourages her colleagues to continue their study in college programs so as to develop their knowledge together. She also became a role model of persistence in her family. Her brother was inspired by her persistence and was willing to follow in her steps to pursue his degrees.

Tina's story again reveals the insight behind the old proverb: 'no pain, no gain'. For Tina, a full attendance record, persistently attending every class regardless of weather or unhelpful teachers, proved that she could be transformed into the person she wanted to be, someone who is accepted by her colleagues and family. Being a role model in her life world, that is, her relationship with her work, family and study, she attained confidence to maintain her persistence. From a person who had doubts about the social value placed on qualifications, Tina transformed herself into a person who faithfully supports the system of formal education and follows the path set by the education system. She started to reproduce the value placed on qualifications in Taiwan by encouraging her brother and colleagues to pursue their degrees. The image of the underestimated high school girl was replaced by the image of the competent employee and woman who was in control of her life. Persisting in learning became her habit as well as the strategy used to construct her being and her prospects for the future.

Journey Four: Tony

Tony's Profile

Tony's story is included as an example to provide a possible, disconfirming and contrasting point of view. He is a junior employee who works for a college, and is a work associate of one of my students. Tony came to me to discuss strategies to help my student "overcome his academic problems". Just before we finished the discussion, he told me the reason he was so concerned about my student's problem was that he had problems with his own learning as he had already withdrawn from two colleges. After hearing his story, I invited him for an interview. He agreed and told me that he would like me to record his story and publish it to document his experience of why he had chosen to drop out of university.

Tony told me he hated people preaching at him, saying things like "you have to do such and such", or "you are useless". He felt "whether I am useful or not, it doesn't need anyone to tell me; it is not necessary for me to prove I am useful by fulfilling someone's expectations". He emphasised that "I would rather die than continue my education". All he wants now is "freely to learn something I want instead of studying something I dislike". He does not have "any intention to follow the rules required by the formal education system". Tony does not want to complete his Bachelor's degree. He is aware of what he wants and has a great deal of confidence in himself.

Before Attending the Program

Because Tony's parents have never been satisfied with his academic performance, memories associated with learning was painful and bitter for him:

Since I was a child, the high educational expectations of my parents has result in tremendous pressure. They used to preach at me and kept reminding me that my

tuition fees had been paid by their hard work and they expected me to reward them with high academic achievements...I recall that I got a grade of 88% on a maths test at primary school and got slapped 88 times by my mother because she wanted me to remember that that kind of academic performance was not good for her [Interview I].

Since then, Tony has lived with the pressure of his parents' high educational expectations. He disappointed his parents again at high school. He kept failing maths every semester. This disappointment increased further when Tony withdrew from two universities.

During the Program

Withdrawal due to barriers

Tony was confronted with two main barriers in both universities. These were lack of interest in his subjects, and interactions with what Tony termed: 'unhelpful teachers'. Both led to his dropping out. Tony dropped out in the middle of the first semester in his first year of study without telling his parents, and was not forgiven by his father. His father called him an "unfavourable child in the family", so he ran away from home and lived with a friend.

At that time, Tony found two part time jobs to support himself. It was not until then that he realised that he could not find a decent job without a Bachelor's degree. Qualifications were related to a guarantee of employment. So Tony decided to take another university entrance examination. He passed and began a four-year college program. But he again lost faith in learning in the second university due to negative experiences with unhelpful teachers. Tony believed most of his teachers were using out-dated material for teaching. He questioned how this "applied to work" and felt that "it was useless to learn these materials". One of his teachers sang songs in class

for a whole semester. This behaviour made Tony feel he had wasted his time and money (tuition fees) for his study. Once he knew he failed that subject and had got an average grade of 58% (60% is a pass) because of presenting an assignment without proper dressing, he felt unfair and became angry:

A week after his announcement, as my teacher came into the classroom, I kicked the desk, I was easily annoyed, I was young then I pointed at him with a finger, I yelled at him and argued that I should not have to spend so much money to listen to his singing...I questioned him “What can we learn from you if you come here only to sing?”...Then I left the classroom...That semester, I failed another three subjects with the grades of 56-58% [Interview I].

After that, Tony lost his sense of purpose. He missed most of his classes over the last three years, and only attended his examinations. As a result, some of the students in his class did not even know that Tony was their classmate. He switched his attention to computer technology. Because he did not want to undergo military service so early (Taiwanese young men must start their two-year military service at the age of 18, but students are temporally excluded), he “paid tuition to buy time” and kept enrolling until he attained certificates in computer technology. He dropped out of university in his fourth year of study as soon as he had passed them.

After Dropping out of the Program

Learning persistence from role models

In contrast to his negative experience of persistence in learning in formal education settings, Tony’s work experiences led to an alternative model of persistence. Following his colleagues’ example, he educated himself. After leaving College for the second time, Tony went to Taipei (the capital of Taiwan) and found a job in a foreign computer company. There, Tony noticed that every employee persisted in

self-education in that they kept reading new computer technology information by themselves. Their efforts to self-educate themselves impressed Tony:

Every time you walked through the office, you would notice that there were several new books on each colleague's desk. At lunch time you would hear your colleagues discuss how much new technology they had mastered or new skills they had learnt. It was not about showing-off or competition, but you felt that it was not so good to play computer games any more, and then you started to ask yourself what you had done lately. Because of this, because of the pressure from colleagues, even though I did not have to follow my colleagues' behaviour, you felt that you should find something to do, especially when all your colleagues were making an effort to enrich themselves [Interview I].

Need for technology qualifications

One of his acquaintances had highly paid work despite dropping out from junior high and Tony was convinced that he too could easily be employed without a Bachelor's degree. However in reality Tony could not earn a very high salary though he held a number of computer technology certificates. His monthly wage was two thirds of his colleagues', neither it did cover healthcare insurance or pensions. So Tony decreased his expectations. He claimed he would be willing to accept any job and considered flexibility as one of his strengths. He says he is not worried about losing his job because his technology skills will help him find another.

However, Tony agrees and understands that "undertaking university is a very important milestone for everyone, it sorts people into different groups". To avoid being "unemployed because of a lack of qualifications", Tony studied hard by educating himself to pass professional examinations and attained several technology certificates. For Tony, technology certificates were the alternative guarantee of employment. As such, Tony felt confident in himself.

Reconstructing identity and starting to feel different

Now Tony reads three monthly journals to keep up with computer technology. His efforts to keep up with new information were commended on by the son of a friend of his parents. This man was highly educated and works for an international bank. He praised Tony and said Tony is an “excellent” young man:

As you acquire certain knowledge or information, no matter whether you get it from self-education or from college, you feel solid, you feel that you have something more than others...I feel I am seriously maintaining the habit of reading. I dare not say this is a kind of learning, I choose what I am interested in to read...and I hope I can learn more from reading...I am beyond the stage where I want to learn things so as to compare myself with others. My knowledge of computer technology has resulted in a certain level of skills, so I just read and learn things with an easy attitude [Interview I].

For Tony, fostering the habit of reading was a method of learning which challenged him to make progress:

Education means teachers teach, students learn; study is doing activities such as doing research or reading in whatever way you want; learning is rolling your sleeves up to do something interesting with your hands. I personally prefer learning [Interview I].

With this new confidence, Tony keeps reading to enrich himself and believes that he has achieved “something more than others” from persistence in his learning through reading. He believed that people would seriously read or learn things, make progress. Through his self-education by “intensively focusing on reading” a wide range of books and periodicals, Tony feels “solid” and feels that he “knows more things than others”.

Pain due to lack of educational qualifications

However, recognition at work skill did not help Tony gain recognition from his family. Because he did not persist in learning, he acquired the name “unfavourable child in the family” from his father. Tony admitted that if “my parents did not expect me to achieve so highly, I might persist in my learning...If they did not force me or preach at me so often...I might complete my degree”. Continued comparisons with others’ achievements have caused Tony pain. He does not believe that “people who attain qualifications have high achievements”, however, his sister’s high achievements have convinced his parents that Tony is a relatively low achiever in his family:

My sister found a job in a famous international company after attaining her Master’s degree. She is the secretary of an executive officer. Her monthly salary is nearly NT\$ 60,000 (AUS\$ 2,500), not including pay for her part-time job. My parents always praised her and said “what a progressive child, working so hard to earn money”. Compared to my sister, I am the son who sits in front of the TV set and does nothing all night long. It is really too much for me to be constantly compared with my sister [Interview I].

Tony’s parents believe that high education qualifications result in high achievement and often compare Tony with relative’s or acquaintances’ children. He explained that this “endless” comparison made him “mad” and “frustrated”:

My cousin completed his Master’s degree but did not find himself a decent job. My parents praised him and described him as “a truly good boy who is willing to do a lower level job with a Master degree”. I pointed out to them that my cousin made a lot of mistake at his work, and he did not work hard either. But my parents would selectively forget this fact and then picked other people to continue the comparison. This endless comparison truly made me feel frustrated and mad [Interview I].

Tony's Future Plans

Tony has never considered returning to college to finish Bachelor's degree. He believes that negative learning experiences including what he termed 'irresponsible teachers' have "kept him away from formal education" and he "would rather die" than complete his degree. Tony understands that Taiwanese society values university qualifications highly, but he is the kind of the person who likes to lead a balanced life.

I am happy with what I am and the situation I am in. It is better to maintain what I am and what I have. I really don't think it is a good thing or that you can enrich yourself by studying hard in a formal education setting [Interview I].

Tony agreed that "everyone is looking forward to having a better life", but he would rather work by following his "ideal", thus, he is trying to "develop something to some sort of level" in his workplace. Furthermore, Tony believes that spending his savings on tuition fees is not "practical".

I have a lot of savings; I don't need to worry about my tuition fees. I work hard for my living expenses. If I use my savings to complete my degree and have no money left for living expenses or for doing something I want, I would feel it is not practical. It would be a waste to spend so much money to study something I am not interested in [Interview I].

Tony does not blame his teachers, and he has nothing to say about the Taiwanese education system, after all "it is the cradle of manpower". However, he believes that the Ministry of Taiwan Education should establish a fair system, such as "a professional technology credential system", and "put more value on technology certificates".

Trying not to be influenced by his parents' expectations, Tony's persistence in learning involves self-education by reading instead of being educated in formal

educational institutions. All he wants now is to learn “freely” and to learn something in which he really interested. “I know what I am doing, I know what I have, and I don’t really care about this issue [qualifications]. I will use my own methods to continue my education”. He concluded that “if you can put some pressure on yourself, you can let yourself grow. Nothing is absolute. You can have high achievement without qualifications”.

Overview of Tony’s Journey

Strong pressure from parents’ educational expectations, lack of interest and negative learning experiences have kept Tony out of any formal educational institute. To deal with the negative feelings and frustrations, Tony switched his attention to computer technology, adopting the reading habit of his former colleagues, and studying hard through self-education to attain certificates in computer technology. Experiences encouraging and confirming Tony’s perception that not all education was useful included: his successfully passing the computer technology certification examination by teaching himself; his example of a technician who lacked qualifications but was employed by a big company and was promoted to office director; and an “excellent” comment from the son of friends of his parents because of his up-to-date computer technology information.

While Tony had lost his confidence in persisting in learning in formal educational settings, whereas he regained his confidence and reshaped his identity through persisting in self-education. Being satisfied with this way of learning and having confidence in his working experience and computer technology, Tony intended to continue in this way. Though he was fully aware that Taiwanese society values qualifications, he felt it was not necessary to waste his salary on formal education

from which he might learn nothing. Tony knew he could not change the education system, and did not intend to blame it, his parents, or teachers. He simply argued that Taiwan should value technology certificates more and accept multiple strategies for learning, both formal and informal. After all, reflecting on his own journey of learning, his persistence in self-education seemed to produce better results for him than education at any formal institution.

The proverb ‘no pain no gain’ is revealed in Tony’s story in a different way. Instead of a Bachelor’s degree, the “gain” is computer technology certificates; while he the “pain” is his realisation of his parents’ criticism. Through a process of persistent self-education, he has reshaped his identity and attained achievements to show significant others that formal qualifications are not always necessary for success. From this point of view, Tony can be regarded as persistent in his self-education to gain technology qualifications which have given him a sense of his identity and achievement in recognition of prior learning Taiwanese society.

For Tony, his journey of identity construction was painful and bitter. He gave up on university qualifications which increased his parents’ concerns about his future security and contributed to their loss of confidence in him. This resulted in a negative identity in his family. Ironically, Tony reshaped his identity in other ways to show he is as good as others. Tony chose not to argue with the value of university education in Taiwanese society, instead, he chose another path to prove this value can be challenged: not all education is useful and applicable to the work place, knowledge enrichment can result from self-education and technology qualifications are as good as academic educational qualifications.

Though Tony tried to struggle with the taken for granted value of qualifications, I do not consider he fully succeeded. Though he constructed his identity by gaining the technology qualifications, he still kept being challenged about his identity as a competent person in Taiwanese society which favours university qualifications more than technology qualifications. Seeing Tony was troubled by lack of recognition in his family, it is hard for him to claim that he had found a way to prove that technology qualifications are better than university qualifications. Besides, he also counts on his technology qualifications to increase his salary so as to cover his living expenses. In this way, he has also fallen into the same pattern of pursuing qualifications. Tony's example shows that to change the taken-for-granted value of qualifications is difficult, yet, the experiences of Charlie, Sally, and Tina reveal that following the pattern, enduring the pain, and persisting in learning, individuals can achieve the gain: qualifications and positive identity as well as their position in Taiwanese society.

Summary: Relationship of Journeys to Theoretical Perspectives

The four participants in the second exploratory study expressed insights that demonstrate the acceptance of the proverb “no pain, no gain”. Sally, Charlie and Tina's experiences showed that the prerequisite for gaining qualifications was to overcome their multiple barriers to learning. They all agreed that it was worthwhile to set goals and expectations for completion of their degrees. Persistence became a habit or an approach to gain qualifications. Their strong commitment to study showed the power of effective history as Gadamer (1993) indicated.

Gadamer (1993) explains that tradition in the form of hidden prejudice enters into our understanding of the world we live in and thus influences our interpretation of our world. The notion of qualifications has its roots in the history of China and modern

Taiwan, and manifest well in the systems of education and examinations. Cultural capital as well as collective identity is best characterised as a metaphor of the value placed on qualifications. As such, these notions transform into a fixed set of opinions and values, the horizon of the present, which the participants draw upon, consciously or otherwise, to adopt the phenomenon of credentialism within Taiwanese tradition and culture. Through the process of persistence in learning, the experience of recognised personal identity as well as collective identity from the family and workplace adds into the participants' existing knowledge ground and then is fused into their understanding and interpretation of their concept of persistence.

To the participants, they have followed their understanding of tradition and moved with the wave of the social trend. As they attended the programs, the process of new identity construction as Whitbourne (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) described started and changed their life. They now enjoyed the benefits of their degrees, being respected in their social circles and having more confidence to handle work and relationships with colleagues, business associates and family. Gaining a qualification has secured their futures, constructed their new identities as well as given them a respected social status in their life worlds. To secure the 'gain', the participants ignored or tolerated the 'pain'-multiple barriers-and started to reproduce the value placed on qualifications in their family or workplace as others had in the history of China and modern Taiwan.

Sally, Charlie and Tina were eager to verify the value of qualifications in their social circles, and strongly urged their colleagues and family members pursue their own qualifications. Sally sought to offer her sons better educational environment and resources. It is a reproduction of cultural capital by using the fields of family through which the effect of cultural reproduction, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002;

Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) argued, can be made visible. However, Tony refused to go along the path recognised by Taiwanese society. By risking of losing recognition by his family, he found his well-being in his self-education and pursuing technical qualifications. His experience demonstrates that achievement can go beyond the educational qualifications or formal education.

When viewed from the horizon of the past, the prejudice of educational qualifications has significant meaning in the world that we live in. This prejudice endures through educational qualifications. The two-year college programs were supposed to challenge the perception that formal education favours the young, as part of educational reform to offer opportunities for working adults' continuing education (Ministry of Taiwan Education, 1998). Ironically, these programs have become instead reinforced the value placed on qualifications, and helped students to construct or verify the concept of persistence. From this point of view, the very process of persistence establishes the participants in a world that becomes a field of practice for tradition. In this basic sense, the effect of history, as Gadamer (1993) points out, manifests well in modern Taiwanese society as well as for each individual participant. For the participants, tradition dominates their past, their present being and their future.

Toward Chapter Six

Chapter Five has painted a picture of the synthesised themes as well as the long journeys of four participants' process of persistence. The final chapter of the thesis brings together the interpretations and analyses from Chapters Five and discusses what has been learned about the process of persistence through the two-year college programs. By revisiting the theoretical underpinnings of persistence in learning within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture, it draws conclusions that may be

useful for understanding of adult students' persistence. More importantly, it goes on to consider how the findings of the study inform other aspects of adult teaching and continuing education in particular. It also points to further directions for research in this area. The study concludes with a personal reflection on persistence as a result of writing of this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX

REVIEW, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis presents a review of the study, its conclusions and recommendations. It begins with a summary of the purpose and methodology, and then discusses the findings of the study. Conclusions drawn from the findings are discussed, and recommendations for theory and practice are examined. Finally, the chapter concludes with a self-reflexive discussion of the impact of the study on the researcher.

Review

The purposes of this study were firstly, to explore, describe and thus understand the phenomenon of two-year college program students' persistence within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition. Secondly, to develop a framework for understanding and responding to working adult students' persistence for the education community in general, and thirdly, to guide further research. This study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the experience of persistence and the extent to which the emerging concept of persistence combined the schemas of identity construction, effective history and cultural reproduction to contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon of persistence.

As the researcher, I also drew on my own experience of persistence to enhance my understanding of the experience. During the course of this study, I became aware that for both the students and I, the concept of persistence we held was largely unexamined and taken-for-granted. My involvement in trying to understand students'

persistence as well as my personal interest enabled the research questions to be framed initially as:

1. *What is the experience of two-year college program students in persisting in learning in spite of the barriers?*

To begin answer the research questions, a first exploratory study and a preliminary literature review was conducted. Data were collected by interviewing seven participants. The first exploratory study provided preliminary evidence that began to illuminate the phenomenon of persistence. It suggested that identity construction as well as the values placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition made a significant contribution to participants' persistence.

From the first exploratory study, I again turned to the literature to provide deeper insight into the observations that had emerged. This second literature review generated a number of theoretical frameworks that led to a second research question being added:

2. *What theoretical frameworks underpin the phenomenon of persistence in learning?*

The theoretical frameworks were in the areas of identity theory and its construction process (as exemplified by the work of Whitbourne (1986), the meaning and construction of the value of education and qualifications from Chinese and Taiwanese historical and cultural perspectives, a perspective derived from the work of Gadamer (1993) and Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Together these frameworks allowed a reworking of the data collecting procedures for a second exploratory study which examined participants' concepts and schemas of persistence and provided further insight into the

experience of persistence in learning. As well these frameworks led to the third research question:

3. *How do two-year college program students interpret their experience within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition?*

In the second exploratory study I used the same methodology as in the first one, but used two approaches to display the data. The first was a thematic analysis where the focus was on emerging relevant themes relating to the process of persistence. The second was a narrative construction where the focus was on obtaining insights from the meanings and significance of persistence in the students' past, present and future. This second approach was designed to give insight into the unique personal journeys of the participants as they grappled with the issues of persistence. One of participants in the second exploratory study was a college drop-out who was included as a foil to provide a possible source of disconfirming themes and additional perspectives.

Overview of Findings

In general, the findings of this study suggest that these adult students encountered multiple barriers to their learning but persisted in spite of them. Themes contributing to students' persistence included strategies for coping with these barriers, enabling factors for persistence and their views of the concept of persistence itself. The latter reflected the intertwined and complex relationship between students' views of persistence, the value of qualifications in Taiwanese society and the recognition of their personal as well as their social identities. The concept of persistence is adopted from Taiwanese tradition and culture in the students' families, workplaces and the education system, and provides a foundation for participants to support their persistence in their life world. Enduring the journey of "no pain, no gain" to attain

qualifications is a taken-for-granted response to this concept, which is reinforced through the process of persistence itself, and reproduced through parental educational expectations and role models in the family and workplace. The following section examines these findings in the light of the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

Answering Question 1

What is the experience of two-year college program students in persisting in learning in spite of the barriers?

Participants applied multiple strategies to cope with a variety of barriers to learning until they completed their degrees. Participants relied on assimilative problem solving, accommodative system adaptation and defensive problem avoidance strategies (Brackney & Karabenick, 1995; Greve & Strobl, 2004; Taylor, et. al., 2004) to cope with barriers to their learning and to decrease the pressure from multiple responsibilities. Under pressure from balancing multiple responsibilities and academic requirements, some participants wavered between the decision to persist or drop out. For example, for a married female participant who held a traditional concept of a woman's role, winning her husband's approval and making a commitment to fulfil her family responsibilities were key factors in allowing her to persist in learning.

Most participants reported they had a strong will to persist and while they felt study was painful they still considered it worthwhile. These seemingly contradictory feelings demonstrate the difficulty to continuing to persist despite the barriers. Most positive feelings were associated with the value placed on qualifications and knowledge enrichment, while negative feelings related to the experience of coping with the barriers.

Comparing participants on a range of dimensions revealed a number of differences relating to age. While barriers were present and coping strategies were used by all, older participants perceived themselves to have more problems due to age. They had concerns about 'rusty' learning skills from a long period of absence from education and were more focussed on being good role models for their children. In contrast to much Western literature (Mayfield, 1989; Tierney, 1992) these participants appeared neither to feel anxious during social interaction with younger peers nor worried about their part-time study situation. It was factors including commitment to study or positive reinforcement that enabled them to persist in their learning.

Clearly the teacher's influence was important though in different ways. For Tony, it was negative, and contributed to his dropping out from college. However, this influence was not always negative. Consider the examples of Sally and Tina, who believed that the right to study, to continue to enrich their knowledge and gain qualifications were more important than any negative influence of a teacher. Interestingly, most participants, either in the first or second exploratory study were not concerned about institutional support, in contrast to the studies reported by Tinto (1993).

Answering Question 2

What theoretical frameworks underpin the phenomenon of persistence in learning?

The literature review and the findings suggested three intertwined schemas - the effect of history (Gadamer, 1993), identity construction (Whitbourne, 1986; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986) and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) – appear to be necessary to construct participants' understanding of persistence.

From Whitbourne's (1986) standpoint, participants' feelings of anxiety triggered the state of an assimilation process of identity construction to reshape a new inner equilibrium state. Attending college and being recognised as competent and respected students helps re-establish the balance between experience and identity. This understanding was continually reconstructed whenever recognition by the family or the workplace changed.

As Gadamer (1993) explains, the historical value placed on qualifications and its relationship with identity is inherited from the value placed on education and its transmitted forms as economic capital and social status. To maintain power as well as prospects for individuals and their family, persistence in study is an unexamined necessity. This belief is handed down from one generation to another, and shapes participants' understanding of qualifications and persistence. Indeed it is almost impossible for them to avoid being situated within the influence of this tradition. Even if it were made transparent, the demand of the work place, competition in the labour market and the changing criteria for qualifications force people to follow this social trend in present day Taiwanese society as my own journey demonstrates.

As Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) has described, over time, participants have incorporated this understanding unconsciously and interpret their behaviour on the basis of this understanding to the extent that it has become second nature. It has also been transformed into the desire to become a complete, valued and accepted member of Taiwanese society. As a result, participants continue to reproduce this value in the family and the workplace, and education becomes cultural capital.

Answering Question 3

How do two-year college program students interpret their experience within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition?

Attaining advanced educational qualifications was highly meaningful for the participants. Through them they gained high self-esteem and felt knowledge enriched, self-actualised and distinguished as college students. They had clearly adopted the value placed on qualifications and the notion of persistence from the family, the educational system and Taiwanese society's expectations. Qualifications represented a safety net preventing them from losing employment or being seen as inferior in the highly competitive society that is modern Taiwan. Hence it is not surprising that this value was also evident in participants' families. For the student's family, support, encouragement and permission to study is seen as an honour shared by all family members.

Mature-age students who persist in learning in higher education settings are recognised as positive inspirations and as role models for other members of society. For some participants study enabled them to bring new information to their colleagues and solve problems relating to their professions. Others regarded providing for their children through advanced educational opportunities as a sound validation of caring parenting. As parents, these participants were eager to help their children access higher rungs of the social ladder than they had, and were committed to provide necessary resources or encouragement for their children's study. By highlighting the value of qualifications in Taiwanese society and emphasising the outcomes of persistence - knowledge enrichment and self-growth, the participants unconsciously reproduced the value placed on qualifications in their families and the work place. Hence, the motto "no pain, no gain" was ingrained in the participants' concept of

education and portrayed the concept of persistence as a taken-for-granted process. Nurturing good study habits is seen as a natural means to persist in learning. Any cost required and any inconvenience endured in the process of persistence is worthwhile for this end.

Conclusions

Two-year college program students' experiences of persistence in learning were examined in the light of interview data, theoretical and empirical research on adult learning, retention and persistence. The study has yielded the following conclusions:

Foremost, this study has answered the research questions by showing that persistence in learning is complex, dynamic and developmental in nature, and culturally located. Factors contributing to persistence are integrally related and impact on one another, and are underpinned by coping strategies, enabling factors and the concept of persistence. Taiwanese culture and tradition are involved in the process of persistence, providing the deep values through which qualifications become intimately related to persistence.

The three interactive schemas - identity formation, historical effect and reproduction of cultural capital - intertwine with each other and suggest a way to explain the dynamic process of persistence, best thought of as an iterative spiral rather than a linear progression.

Moreover, this exploration of persistence has yielded new findings about the phenomenon and concept of persistence not so far found in the extant literature. The findings of this study have therefore expanded and enhanced theories and conceptual

frameworks in the fields of adult learning, retention and persistence, particularly in Taiwan. These are:

- The majority of participants persisted despite multiple barriers to their learning;
- Neither age nor part-time study appeared to hinder participants' will to persist;
- The majority of participants persisted without institutional support. However, the data also showed that unhelpful teachers were a factors for withdrawal for some students;
- The majority of participants agreed that social support helped them persist;
- Without permission from superiors or family, the majority of participants could not have continued their education or persisted in their learning;
- Persistence becomes a habit as well as a strategy to pursue qualifications;
- The majority of participants regarded qualifications as cultural capital including increased promotion opportunities, higher pay and higher social status; educational qualifications are more highly valued than technical qualifications in Taiwanese society;
- The majority of participants linked qualifications with identity. Through attending college programs and persisting in learning, the majority of participants constructed a new identity and gained recognition by family and in the workplaces.
- To pursue qualifications, the painful process of persistence was acceptable. This concept was established early in Chinese history and is working effectively in modern Taiwan society. Its effect has endured over time;
- The concept of persistence is duplicated in colleges, families and work places through means of educational expectations, demonstration of role models and encouragement to continue education;
- From a theoretical perspective, the phenomenon of persistence can be understood as a number of intertwined factors that are reshaped through three schemas—the effect of history, the construction of identity and cultural reproduction.

In conclusion, Figure 6 draws out the process of persistence in study programs as well as the formation process of the participants' concept of persistence within Taiwanese tradition and culture.

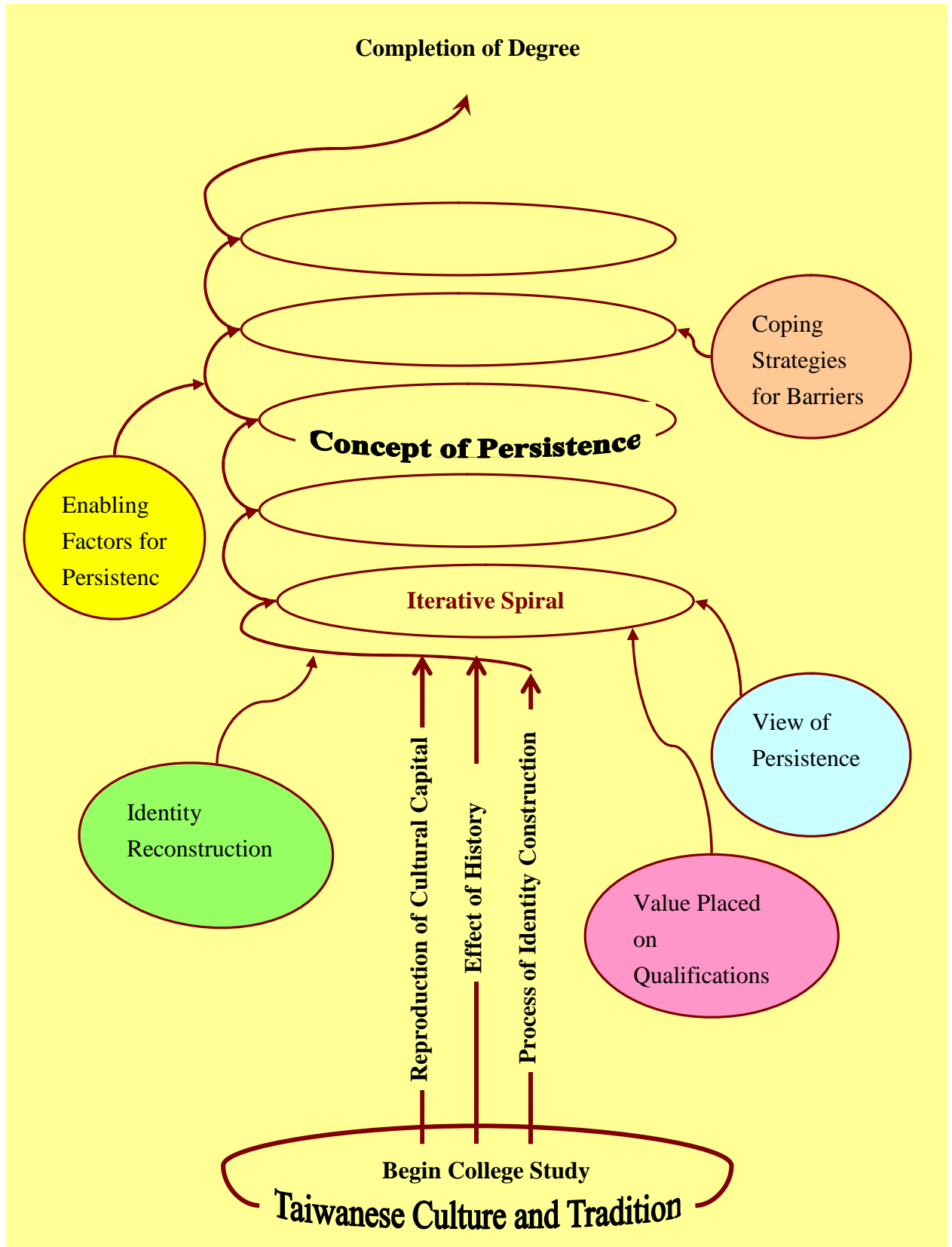


Figure 6. The Process of the Persistence in Taiwanese Two-year College Programs

Implications for Adult Education

In addition to the above findings, this has a number of implications for both the theory and practice of adult education in Taiwan in particular and possibly for education in other settings.

Theoretical Implications

This study has two theoretical implications. Firstly, it has linked the theory of historical effect, identity construction and the cultural reproduction to adult persistence. As such, it brings new insights to adult retention and adult learning in higher education by showing that the issue of adult persistence can be understood from psychological, cultural and historical perspectives. Secondly, this study provided insight into 11 adult students' significant experiences of persistence and allowed their voices to be heard using a hermeneutical phenomenological approach. This insight into the lived experience, the meaning and the concept of participants' persistence will help to increase further understanding of other adult students' experience and thereby contribute to research on adult students and the knowledge base of adult learning.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings have practical implications for adult educators to provide a basis to develop further understanding of adult teaching and learning. One important finding is that educators can positively or negatively influence students' persistence. The implication is that educators can help students to persist by understanding and recognising the issues they have to deal with during their journey as they engage in adult education.

As a tertiary teacher, I have found the themes emerging in this study to be of great significance and value to me personally. The conclusions suggest it is important to understand adult students' various learning characteristics and needs. The study also provides directions for tertiary institutions and the Ministry of Taiwan Education to recognise that difficulties and negative feelings may emerge in the process of students' persistence. While most of the participants in this study succeeded, others may not. Tony's experience points to this. An understanding of the influence of Taiwanese culture and tradition offers insights into how adult students may learn to persist despite encountering difficulties or lack of institutional support. However, it remains the responsibility of practitioners, institutions and other educational organisations to create a sensitive and supporting learning environment for adult students to minimise the impact of the barriers they inevitably will encounter. Recommendations for this are:

1. That the findings of this study be disseminated to practitioners and institution administrators. As a result it is hoped that tertiary institutions would commit to providing professional development for Faculty concerning the particular issues of adult students, and also to offering support for learning, a convenient learning environment, learning resources, better coordination with public transport timetables, child care service and where possible, financial assistance.
2. That practitioners train students in coping strategies to understand and deal with their barriers. They can then respond in a number of ways, such as helping students seek support and information from other peers or other sources and assist them to build up their will to persist in confronting barriers, counselling and guiding students in recognising, clarifying and planning their career and life goals, adjusting teaching

methods to meet students' diverse needs, and acting as a mediator to communicate students' needs with administration within institutions.

That the findings of this study also be disseminated to students themselves to assist them to understand their situation more clearly and thus be reflexive in their actions responses.

3. That the Ministry of Taiwan Education review current educational policies and procedures to identify factors that detract from the persistence of adult students. The review should address taking students' retention rates into account in evaluation for institutional purposes, as well as entrance examinations. Then an advocacy program needs to be designed to add more flexibility to Higher Education programs designed to better meet adult students' diverse needs. The value of self-education and technology qualifications could be promoted as genuine alternatives to a college education to help adult students feel less pressure and feelings of inferiority as a result of the cultural devaluing of other educational avenues.

Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

On the theoretical level, this study reaffirms theories relating to adult students' retention. Broadening knowledge of students' persistence in learning not only adds to the literature in this field but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of adult students' teaching and learning. As such it has the potential to enhance students' educational success for the benefit of Taiwan and even further afield, and may have application to other Asian societies. This study has also raised a number of questions and issues that require further exploration. The following recommendations are made for future research:

1. As this study was conducted with a small number of participants, a similar study with specific groups of working adult learners should be considered from the perspective of producing a grounded theory by saturating categories relating to persistence in learning. This should also include a study of participants who did not persist with their study to provide a different perspective on adult students' persistence. Such research could illuminate understanding of particular adults' learning characteristics. It could also identify factors which lead to non-persistence.
2. The phenomenon of persistence of students from other cultural backgrounds could be explored to develop the basis of a cross-cultural study. This could include participants whose family's primary culture is Taiwanese but no longer living in Taiwan, to determine any cross-cultural differences in patterns of perception and behaviour with regard to persistence in learning.
3. This study suggests that women may experience particular barriers to their learning because of their position in what is still a traditional society. The phenomenon of dominant male power is clearly experienced by some female participants as an additional barrier to their participation in learning, so its inherent qualities need greater clarification.
4. An area of further research that holds a strong personal interest for me and is one of the findings of this study, is the effect of tradition and cultural *habitus* of reproduction in the family. This phenomenon needs to be understood in greater depth, because if in the future the number of adult students increases, it offers potential for reducing the failure rate.
5. Another potential area of research is institutional support and social interaction in relationship to adults' persistence. This study points to a weak relationship between institutional engagement and students' persistence, so exploring the

effects of lack of institutional support might provide insight into ways that institutions can deliver appropriate information or strategies to provide a supportive environment to enhance adult students' persistence.

6. It would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study to follow up the participants to determine if they view their persistence differently as a result of participation in this study. Has their concept of persistence changed? Have their assessments of their own persistence changed? What would they recommend in terms of helping other adult students to learn about their own persistence? Answers to these questions would provide useful data to guide further research and practice.
7. Since there are limited studies researching this phenomenon in Taiwan, further studies need to be undertaken using other methods of data collection. For example, a large sample number quantitative approach based on the themes from this study may throw light on additional factors relating to persistence and point to further ways forward to enable adult learners to persist in higher education.

Enacting recommendations and conducting research in the areas identified above offer a thorough understanding not only of the experience of persistence, but also of retention as well as adult learning and teaching within the context of Taiwanese culture and tradition. This understanding would provide valuable guidance to inform decision-makers and policy makers in higher education. It would be expected that policies, procedures, programs, and services that benefit adult persistence and learning would be the result. .

Epilogue: My Own Journey

As I bring closure to this challenging and time consuming research process I experience a multitude of thoughts, feelings and emotions ranging from joy to

frustration. The feeling of joy comes from gaining knowledge and skills in qualitative research and discovering more about the fascinating concept of persistence as played out in my culture through insights into the participants' journeys as they permit me to glimpse their worlds. But the seemingly endless research process has caused frustration, pain, anxiety, depression and at times even anger. So I end this thesis by reflecting on these significant experiences and how they have led me to examine the concept of persistence in my own life.

During the process of my own persistence in attempting to fulfil the requirements of this thesis, with the effort required and the impact on my own life and my health, I could not help but wonder whether it has been worth it. Certainly, study for an EdD is not an easy path for anyone, yet solitary endeavour is not sufficient to explain my persistence either. I have had to read in areas that have been unfamiliar to me in a language that is not my own, and fulfil my other multiple duties at the same time.

I have shared in the participants' unique experience of persistence. The experience of my own persistence helped me to remain opening to my participants and listen to their voices with empathy. Likewise, their experience deepened my insight which helped me think and react reflectively on my own journey of persistence. Together as partners in the process of research we questioned and examined the perceived values which we had learnt and adopted from our families, our education system, our society and our history, we observed the way we endured the pain of persistence, and we shared our feelings and thoughts through the process. In the years that followed, we began to recognise that our persistence had become a sense of connection to our very being. It brought us recognition from our families, our work and our society. We sensed and realised that persistence was not the only the means to attain the goal of

education - qualifications which conferred a higher social status and good work prospects in the future, but was also the way to prove our value in society.

The experience showed that the value placed on qualifications as well as construction of collective identity through the process of learning was significant to our commitment to persist. On the contrary, my experience of being a practitioner of adult education showed me that being empathetic and giving support to students is profoundly important. It can release feelings of anxiety, depressions or frustration due to studying hard or coping with the barriers to learning, and empower students' intention to continue to persist. I believe that educational institutions need to develop a sense of consciousness that they should play a stronger part in releasing the feeling of pain of persistence and take responsibility to identify and eliminate institutional barriers to adult learning. Stressing studying hard and emphasising the concept of qualifications as the only goal of education can result in greater anxiety, depression and frustration.

It is easy to trace the value placed on qualifications in the sense of cultural capital. However, it is more difficult to understand that these values are inherited and allowed to dominate our worldview and our behaviour of persistence. As the social trend is to continue further education, I believe it is my duty to help students to cope with the process of persistence, to enjoy the pleasure of knowledge acquisition, and to examine reflexively the connection between the recognition of identity and the value placed on qualifications within the context of Taiwanese tradition and culture. By using temporal distance as a filter to keep the emergence of understanding free from prejudice and attempt to open to tradition as Gadamer (1993) suggested, I hope students can develop a greater consciousness about how they interpret their identity, as well as the influence of the concept of persistence in the many spheres of their lives

and thus can uncover the taken-for-granted concept of persistence. It is my hope that through a renewed concept of persistence, students can bring an understanding of their reality and their being, and clarify their life goals. This will turn the pain of this thesis into a real and lasting gain.

REFERENCE

- Ainley, M. D. (1993). Styles of engagement with learning: Multidimensional assessment of their relationship with strategy use and school achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85 (3), 395-405.
- Apple, M. W. (1996). *Cultural Politics and Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Barnard, H. (1990). Bourdieu and ethnography: Reflexivity, politics and praxis. In R. Harker, Mahar, C, and Wilkes, C. (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory* (pp. 58-85). London: The Macmillan Press.
- Barragan, R. (1989). *Examining to needs for student services of adult learners in continuing higher education*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, International University, Florida.
- Beford, M., & Durkee, P. (1989). Retention: Some more ideas. *NASPA Journal*, 27(2), 168-171.
- Berge, Z.L. & Huang, Y.P. (2004, May). A model for sustainable student retention: A holistic perspective on the student dropout problem with special attention to e-learning. *DEOSNEWS*, 13(5). Retrieved June 15, 2004 from the World Wide Web: http://www.ed.psu.edu/acsde/deos/deosnews/deosnews13_5.pdf.
- Bizman, A. & Yinon, Y. (2004). Social self-discrepancies from own and other standpoints and collective self-esteem. *The Journal of Social Psychology*. 144 (2), 101-112.
- Blair, S. L., & Qian, Z. (1998). Family and Asian students' educational performance. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19(4), 355-374.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.(1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). The forms of capital (R. Nice, Trans.). In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, Economy, Society* (pp. 46-58). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002). Structure, habitus, practices. In C. Calhoun, J. Gerteis, J. Moody, S. Pfaff & I. Virk (Eds.), *contemporary sociological theory* (pp. 276-288). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Brackney, B. & Karabenick, S. A. (1995). Psychopathology and Academic Performance: The Role of Motivation and Learning Strategies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(4), 456-465.
- Brenden, M. A. (1985). Retention of undergraduate women on non-traditional age: Patterns, strategies, and services. *Journal of NAWDAC*, 3, 23-46.

- Brown, P. (1997). Cultural capital and social exclusion: Some observations on recent trends in education, employment, and the labour market. In A. H. Halsey, Y. L. J. Lam, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, society* (pp. 736-749). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P., Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., & Wells, A. S. (1997). The transformation of education and society: An introduction. In P. Brown, Halsey, A. H., Lauder, Hugh, & Wells, Amy Stuart (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, society* (pp. 1-45). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burant, T. J. (1999). Finding, using, and losing(?) voice: A preservice teacher's experiences in an urban Educative Practicum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(3), 209-219.
- Burns, R. (1995). *The adult learner at work*. Sydney, NSW: Business & Professional Publishing.
- Cabrera, A. F., Castaneda, M. R., Nora, A., & Hengstler, D. C. (1992). The convergence between two models of college student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 63(2), 143-164.
- Chang, S. M. (2002). *A study of in-service post-graduate students' barriers to learning and their coping strategies for barriers*. Unpublished Master Dissertation, National Chung Cheng University, Yia-yi, Taiwan.
- Chartrand, J. (1992). An empirical test of a model of nontraditional student adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 39(2), 193-202.
- Cheng, K. M. (1995). *Excellence in education: Is it culture-free?* Paper presented at the 9th Annual Conference of the Educational Research Association, Singapore.
- Chiang, P. T. H. (1998). The connected relationship between educational problems of equality and social control. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Equality of educational opportunity during the processes of social change* (pp. 182-218). Taipei: Yang-Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Chiang, T. S. (1998). The study of implementing possibility of the equity of educational opportunity during the processes of social change. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Equality of educational opportunity during the processes of social change* (pp. 220-284). Taipei: Yang Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Clarke, R. (2000). *Disciplined Literature Review*. Retrieved January 24, 2006, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/SOS/DLR.html>
- Clayton, P. M. (2005). *Vocational guidance and inclusion in lifelong learning*. Retrieved September 14, 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.open.ac.uk/lifelong-learning/papers/...> Paper.doc

- Cohen, M. Z., Kahn, D. L., & Steeves, R. H. (2000). *Hermeneutic phenomenological research: A practical guide for nurse researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication.
- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2004). *Result of the 2004 Community College Survey of Student Engagement*. Retrieved August 15, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://inet4.swtjc.cc.tx.us/ir/CCSSE/.../Report.pdf>
- Cremer, D. D. & van Vugt, M. (1998). Collective identity and cooperation in a public goods dilemma: A matter of trust or self-efficacy? *Crisp*, 3 (1). Retrieved July 25, 2004, from the World Wide Web: [//www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/.../crisp.3.1.htm](http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/.../crisp.3.1.htm)
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Crotty, M (1996). *Phenomenology and nursing research*. Melbourne: Churchill livingstone.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Dan, Z. W. (1998). The new Chinese culture and equality of educational opportunity. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Equality of educational opportunity during the processes of social change* (pp. 55-71). Taipei: Yang-Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications.
- Derrick, M. G. (2001). *The measurement of an adult's intention to exhibit persistence in autonomous learning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, Florida.
- Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York :Norton.
- Finalborgo, J., & Dionisio, J. (1996). *Examines self-esteem, gender*. Retrieved August 29, 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.southampton.liu.edu/news/pressrel/pr96/hayesbk.htm>.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1993). *Truth and method* (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Eds. & Trans.) (2nd Ed.). London: Sheed & Ward.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1994) (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Eds. & Trans.). *Truth and Method* (2nd Ed.). New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

- Gale, A. U. & Austin, B. D. (2003). Professionalism's challenges to professional counselor's collective identity. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81 (1), 3-11.
- Garrett, B. (1998). *Personal identity and self-consciousness*. London: Routledge.
- Gaskell, T. (1999). Motivation, process and participation: the effect of context. *Education and Aging*, 14(3), 261-275.
- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.
- Gomme, I. M. & Micucci, A. J. (1999). Class inequality in higher education. *Peace Review*, 11(2), 259-265.
- Greve, W. & Strobl, R. (2004). Social and individual coping with threats: Outlines of an interdisciplinary approach. *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (3), 194-207.
- Grinsberg, M. B., & Wlodkowski, R. J. (1995). *Diversity and Motivation*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.
- Grosset, J. (1991). Patterns of integration, commitment, and student characteristics and retention among younger and older students. *Research in Higher Education* (32), 159-178.
- Hageborn, L. S. (2005). *How to define retention: A new look at an old problem*. (Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students Projects, Grant No. 1415). California: the Lumina Foundation.
- Hall, C. J. (2001). *Retention and wastage in further education and higher education*. Retrieved September 14, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.scre.ac.uk/scot-research/wastage/wastage.pdf>
- Harker, R. (1990). Bourdieu - Education and Reproduction. In R. Harker, C. Mahar, & C. Wilkes (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory* (pp. 86-108). London: The Macmillan Press.
- Harwood, J. (2004). Relational, role and social identity as expressed in grandparents' personal web sites. *Communication Studies*, 55 (2), 300-318.
- Heath, G. (2000). *The self and communicative theory*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Holland, A., & Huba, M. (1991). Satisfaction with college among participants in a campus service program. *NASPA Journal*, 28(4), 342-347.
- Hornby, A. S. & Cowie, A. P. (Eds.) (1989). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (4th Ed.). Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Huang, B. H. (1998). The aspect of Taiwan higher education in 21st century. In 21st Century Foundation (Ed.), *Drawing the Taiwan education in 21st century* (pp. 249-316). Taipei: Yang-Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Huang, C. C. (1992). School and Responsibilities. *Secondary Education*, 43(3), 14-28.

- Huang, F. S. (1994). The significance and implementation of adult education in university. In Asia Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *University for adult education* (pp. 1-24). Taipei: Normal University Press.
- Huang, F. S. (2000). The policies and implication of recurrent education in Taiwan. *Adult Education Bimonthly*(56), 31-38.
- Huang, Y. Z. (1990). Educational inequality in Taiwan. *Thought & Expression*, 28(1), 93-125.
- Huang, Z. C. (1996). Developing trend of higher education in 21 Century: Structure, function and organization. In Tamkang University Educational Research Centre of (Ed.), *The operation and management of universities in Taiwan* (pp. 35-61). Taipei: Normal University Press.
- Iang, I. (1998). An exploration on the issues of equality of educational opportunity in current Taiwan. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Equality of educational opportunity during the processes of social change* (pp. 3-27). Taipei: Yang Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design; Minutes, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 379-399). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jya, Z. I. (1995). *Sueng Dynasty's examination system*. Taipei: Dueng Da Press.
- Kuuppelomaki, M., Sasaki, A. , Yamada, K. Asakawa, N, & Shimanouchi, S. (2004). Coping strategies of family carers for older relatives in Finland. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 13(6), 697-706.
- Lai, L. T. (1998). Problems of recurrent education implementation. *Socio-Education*, 85, 26-30.
- Li, S. Q. (1990). Intelligentsia. In F. G. Xyu (Ed.). *Intelligentsia and China* (pp. 112-156). Taipei: Time News Culture Press LTD.
- Lieblich, A, Tuval-Mashiach, R. & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications.
- Lin, C. C., & Chou, C. I. (1994). The social needs of Taiwan higher education. *Adult Education Bimonthly*(20), 2-6.
- Lin, W. I., & Yang, K. S. (1993). The influence of University Entrance Examination to university education. *Education Research Information*, 1(6), 91-110.
- Liu, R. W. (1998). Educational and career expectations of Chinese-American college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(6), 577-594.
- Lynch K. & O'Riordan, C. (1998). Inequality in higher education: A study of class barriers. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19(4), 445.

- MacKinnon-Slaney, F. (1994). The adult persistence in learning model: A road map to counselling services for adult learners. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 72(3), 268-289.
- Mahar, C., Harker, R. & Wilkes, C. (1990). The basic theoretical position. In R. Harker, C. Mahar, & C. Wilkes (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory* (pp. 1-25). London: The Macmillan Press LTD.
- Mansfield, N. (2000). *Subjectivity: Theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Mayfield, C. S. (1989). *Factors affecting persistence of re-entry women at an urban state university*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The College of William and Mary in Virginia, Virginia.
- McAuley, W. J. (2002). Defining the field of gerontology through introductory texts. *The Gerontologist*, 40 (2), 242-246.
- McMahon, M. (1995). *Engendering motherhood: Identity and self-transformation in women's lives*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Merriam, S. B. & Simpson, E. L. (1995). *Guide to research for educators and trainers of adults* (2nd ed.). Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ministry of Taiwan Education (1998). *Towards a learning society*. Taipei: Author.
- Ministry of Taiwanese Education (2004). *Study year 2004-2005 students' Number of all levels by ages*. Retrieved August, 24 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.edu.tw>.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing :context and narrative*. Cambridge, Mass. :Harvard University Press.
- Mosaic, A. M. (2002). The concept as ghost: Conceptualization of the uncanny in late-twentieth-century theory. *Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 135 (1), 53-68.
- Muilenburg, L.Y. and Berge, Z. L. (2001). Barriers to distance education: A factor-analytic study. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 15(2), 7-22.
- Ofori, R. & Charlton, J. P. (2002). A path model of factors influencing the academic performance of nursing students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 38(5), 507-515.
- Ogden, D. C. Hilt, M. L. (2003). Collective identity and basketball: An explanation for the decreasing number of African-Americans on America's baseball diamonds. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35 (2), 213-225.
- Pascarella, E. & Terenzini, P. (1998). Studying college students in the 21st Century: Meeting new challenges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21 (2), 151-165.

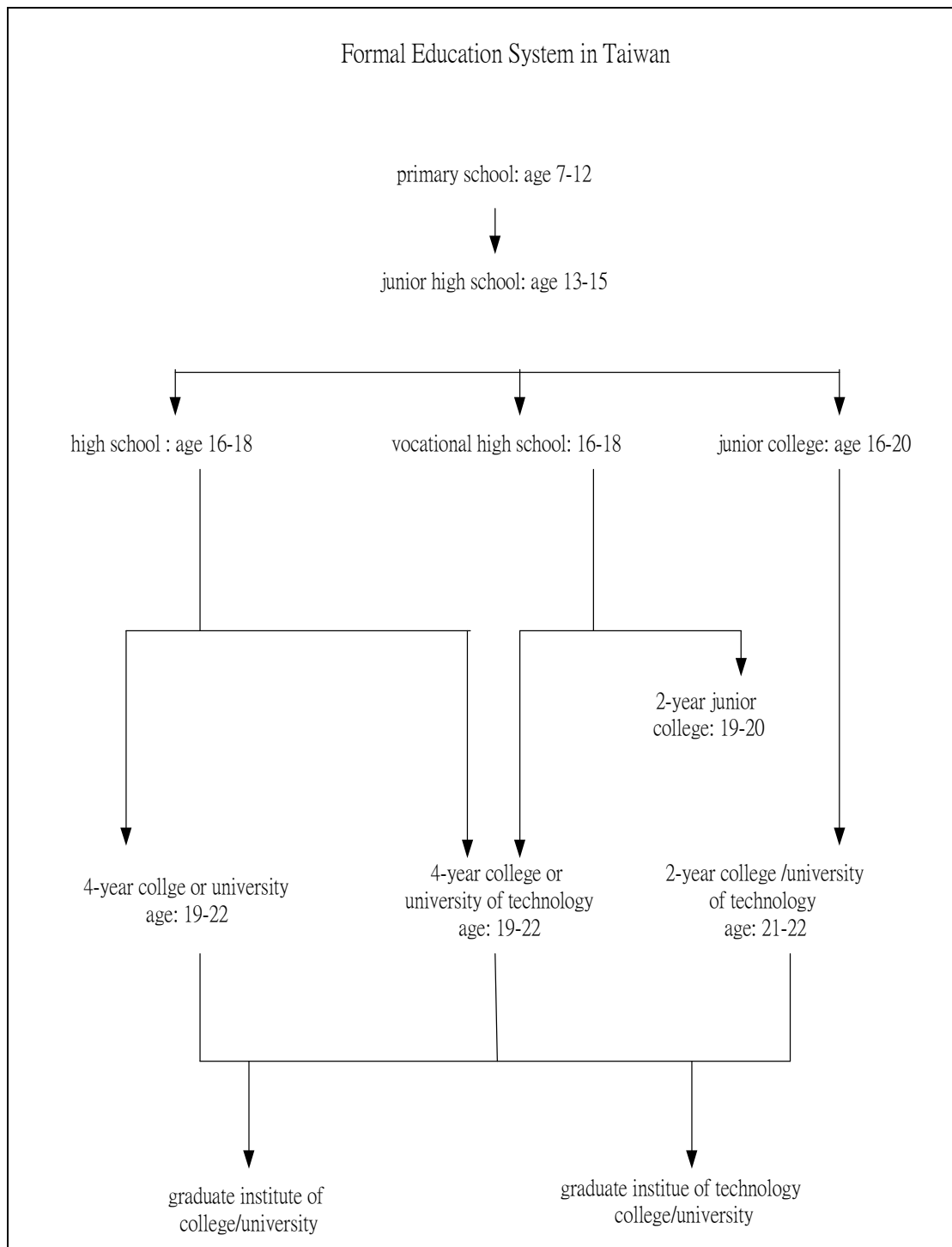
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods* (2nd Ed.) . Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Plager, K. A. (1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology: A methodology for family health and health promotion study in nursing. In P. Benner (Ed.), *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring and ethics in health and illness* (pp. 65-84). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Pong, H. M. (1992). National Distance Education students' barriers to leaning and their influential factors. *Distance Education*, 5, 183-222.
- Roberts, K & Taylor, B. (2000). *Nursing research processes: An Australian perspective* (2nd Ed.). Nelson: Thomson Learning.
- Rogers, A. (1986). *Teaching adult*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Seidman, I. E. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Settersten, R. A. & Lovegreen, L. D. (1998). Educational experiences throughout adult life: New hopes or no hope life-course flexibility? *Research on Aging*, 20(4), 506-538.
- Shen, S. S. (1994). Higher education and labor market. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Traditional culture and education modernization* (pp. 142-172). Taipei: Taiwan: Normal University Press.
- Song, M. S. (1998). Toward learning society and lifelong learning. In 21st Century Foundation (Ed.), *Drawing the Taiwan education in 21st century* (pp. 214-248). Taipei: Yang Zh Culture Cooperation.
- Spanard, J. (1990). Beyond intent: Reentering college to complete the degree. *Review of Educational Research*, 60(3), 309-344.
- St. John, E., Kirshstein, R., & Noell, J. (1991). The effects of student financial aid on persistence: A sequential analysis. *Review of Higher Education*, 14(3), 383-406.
- St. John, E., Oescher, J., & Andrieu, S. (1992). The influence of prices on within-year persistence by traditional college-age students in four-year colleges. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 22(1), 27-38.
- Stevens, R. J., Slavin, R. E., & Famish, A. M. (1991). The effects of cooperative learning and direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies on main idea identification. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(1), 8-16.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publication.
- Su, X. H. (2005, September 14). *The attrition rate in higher education has increased 3.3% in five years*. Retrieved September 14, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://tw.news.yahoo.com/050914/15/2ao1x.html>

- Suicide for failed in the Entrance Examination (2000, July 6). *Sina News* (on-line). Retrieved July 6, 2000, from the World Wide Web: <http://news.sina.com.tw/sinaNews/cts/twSociety/1852-611.html>
- Taylor, S. E. , Sherman, D. K. , Kim, H. S. , Jarcho, J. Takagi, K, & Dunagan, M. S. (2004). Culture and Social Support: Who Seeks It and Why?. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 87(3), 354-362.
- Tierney, W. (1992). An anthropological analysis of student participation in college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 63(6), 603-618.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (1998). College as communities: Taking research on persistence seriously. *Review of Higher Education*, 21(2), 167-177.
- Tsai, Dian Mo (1995) 。 Why he is excellent ? The successful family experience of a Westwood Science Prize winner. *Gifted Education*, 57, 25-30.
- Tsen, D. L. (1998). Task for Recurrent Education. *Teacher's Friend*, 376, 4-8.
- Tseng, T. U. (2000). *The influence of socio-economic status to higher education entry*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Unpublished masteral thesis, Tai-Dong Province University, Taipei.
- Turner, G. (Ed.) (1993). *The Australian oxford dictionary*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Tynes, S. F. (1993). *The relationship of social, economic, academic, and institutional characteristics to persistence on non-traditional age students in higher education: Implications for counsellors*. Unpublished doctoral Dissertation, University of New Orleans, New Orleans.
- Van Manen, K. J. & Whitbourne, S. K. (1997). Psychological development and life experiences in adulthood: A 22-year sequential study. *Psychology and Aging*, 12 (2), 239-246.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- Vaughan, G., M., & Hogg, M., A. (2002). *Introduction to social psychology*. Frenchs Forest, NSW: Prentice Hall.
- Wang, C. W., & Lin, W. Y. (1994). *The dilemma of education and reform*. Taipei: Kuei Kuan Book Cooperation.
- Wei, H. C. (1994). University: The role in adult education. In Asia Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *University Adult education* (pp. 25-54). Taipei: Normal University Press.

- Wells, A. S. (1997). African-American students' view of school choice. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: culture, economy, society* (pp. 422-438). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wen, M. L. (1994). Self-regulation, traditional culture and modernization. In Comparative Education Association of Republic of China (Ed.), *Traditional culture and education modernization* (pp. 95-146). Taipei: Normal University Press.
- Whitbourne, S. K. & Weinstock, C. S. (1986). *Adult Development*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Whitbourne, S. K. (1986). *The me I know: A study of adult identity*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Whitbourne, S. K. (2000). Competence revisited: Life span perspectives. *The Gerontologist*, 40 (1), 115-118.
- Whitbourne, S. K., & Weinstock, C. S. (1986). *Adult development*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Whitebrook, M. (2001). *Identity, narrative and politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Widdicombe, S., & Wooffitt, R. (1995). *The language of youth subcultures*. Hertfordshire: Simon & Schuster International Group.
- Winter, K. (2005). *Motivation of lower educated people for adult basic education in Belgium*. Paper presented in 5th ERDI Expert Seminar Participation in Adult Education at meeting of Consortium of European Research and Development Institutes of Adult Education (ERDI), Bonn, Germany.
- Witte, J. E., Forbes, S. A., & Witte, M. M. (2003). Identity Theory and Persistence: A Tentative Synthesis of Tinto, Erikson, and Houle. *Journal of Integrative Psychology*, 12, from the World Wide Web: http://www.integrative-psychology.org/articles/vol2_article2.htm.
- Wlodkowski, R.J. (1988). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wu, Iao Ming (2004). The influence of family to children's learning effect. *Friends of Teachers*, 439, 31-34.
- Yai, C. Z. (1996). Research on the correlation between higher education and culture. In Tamkang University Educational Research Centre (Ed.), *Developing trend of higher education in 21st Century: Structure, function and organization* (pp. 391-430). Taipei: Normal University Press.
- Yang, C. C. (2000, September 24). Nan-Kuang High School give money rewards to encourage increasing university enrol rate. *Liberty Times*, p. 13.
- Yang, I. J. (2000). Education. In J. H. Wang & Guo, H. U. (Eds.), *Sociology and Taiwan society* (pp. 323-354). Taipei: Ji-Liou Publish.

- Yang, K. T. (1996). Winning strategies in information society: Recurrent Education for human resources. *Adult Education*, 31, 8-16.
- Yang, Y. (1994). *Education equality*. Taipei: Shi-Da Publish.
- Yu, Y. S. (1989). *Classification of Chinese intelligentsia*. Taipei: Lian Jing Press.
- Zhang, S. N. & Huang, Y. Z. (1998). Taiwanese aborigines' language learning experience. *Aborigines Education*, 11, 31-49.
- Zhou, X. G., Moen, P. & Tuma, N. B. (1998). Educational stratification in urban China: 1949-94. *Sociology of Education*, 71 (3), 199-222.

Appendix A: Taiwan's Formal Education System



Note: age indicates normal age at enrolment

Appendix B: Interview Guide Questions for the Exploratory Study I

1. What makes you want to attend the two-year college program?

How did the idea of attending a two-year program first arise?

2. Was there any barrier to your learning?

What was it like to meet the barrier(s) to your learning?

How did you decide to persist in learning despite the barriers to your learning?

How do you deal with your “barriers to learning” in your family / work setting?

3. What helped you to persist in your learning?

What is it like to persist in learning?

What does the term “persistence in learning” mean to you?

How does your family/work setting feel about your persistence in learning?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



Australian Catholic University Limited
ABN 15 050 192 660
Melbourne (St Patrick's Campus)
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065
Telephone 613 9953 3000
Facsimile 613 9953 3005
www.acu.edu.au

Title of Project: An investigation of the concept of persistence in
learning in a Taiwanese college program
Name of Supervisors: Dr Caroline Smith, Dr Lyn Carter
Name of Student Researcher: Ms Lichi Pan

CONSENT FORM

(participant's copy)

I (the participant) have read (or have read to me)
and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions
I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this
activity, realizing that my interview will be audio-taped, and be signed by both the
supervisor and the student researcher. I realize that I can withdraw at any time. I
agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided
to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:

Appendix D: Information Letter to Participants



Australian Catholic University Limited
ABN 15 050 192 660
Melbourne (St Patrick's Campus)
115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065
Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065
Telephone 613 9953 3000
Facsimile 613 9953 3005
www.acu.edu.au

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Title of Dissertation: An investigation of the concept of persistence in learning in a Taiwanese college program

Name of Supervisors: Dr Caroline Smith, Dr Lyn Carter

Name of Student Researcher: Ms Lichi Pan

Dear Participant

This research project aims to explore the concept of persistence in learning among college students in Taiwan. The potential benefit of this study is to enhance the knowledge of persistence in learning experience in higher educational settings.

Invitations to participate in this study were distributed in the cafeteria and notice boards inviting you to complete two-time 45-minute interview during a scheduled time at your convenience. The interviews will be audio-taped. Confidentiality will be maintained, as no identification of you is required. In this study you will be addressed by a code name, the transcript and recording tapes will be kept in locked cabinets at ACU premises. All written and electronic data will be destroyed after five years.

As a participant in the study, you are free to withdraw your consent to be interviewed and to discontinue participation at any time without giving a reason. It is important

to note that any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice your future care or academic progress at all. Any questions regarding this study can be directed to Lichi Pan on 886 (+6) 2362714 in the Health Care Administration Department, Chung-Hwa College of Medical Technology, 52, Wen-Hwa First Street, Rende Shiang, Tainan, Taiwan 717, and/or Dr Caroline Smith on 61 (3) 9953 3281 in the Faculty of Education, St. Patrick's Campus, 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065.

The University Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University has approved this study. In the event that you have any complaint about the way you have been treated during the study, or a query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Ethics Committee at the following address:

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
C/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115, FITZROY VIC 3065,

Tel: 03 9953 3157, Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and the participant informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this study, you need to sign both copies of the Informed Consent Form, retain one cop for your records and return the other copy to the researcher.

Thank you for your assistance in this research activity.

Sincerely

Lichi Pan _____

Dr. Caroline Smith _____

Appendix E: Excerpt from Interview Transcript (Fanny, Exploratory Study I)

Q1: What made you want to commence this two-year college program?

Q1: 是甚麼因素讓你想讀二技？

A1: Demands of my job. And my kids have enriched their minds with knowledge, so I would like to do it too.

A1: 可能是，工作的需要吧。嘿，工作。還有，因為小孩子都一直在成長啊，你自己也想說來讀個書，可以成長這樣子。

Q2: Why do you want to enrich yourself in the same way as your kids?

Q2: 為什麼會想跟孩子一樣繼續成長呢？

A2: The Kids compared themselves with others, and they would ask “what is your father’s degree? What is your mother’s degree?” Well, as they were comparing, they felt their parents are inferior to others. They often made these kinds of complaints. My daughter is in high school now..., and she kept asking me questions which I did not understand at all. So, well, I thought I should go back to school, to enrich myself too.

A2: 小孩子他們總是覺得說，因為小孩子都會比來比去嘛，跟小朋友都會比來比去，那就會覺得說，你的媽媽是讀什麼這樣子，啊，好像他們在 talking 的時候，總是會覺得說，爸爸媽媽的學歷不如人，那會常常，有時候有這種抱怨吧。因為我女兒今年讀高中了啊，還有就是，她問我什麼問題我都不會啊，就覺得，是不是必須再回來學校，再自己來充實自己一下，這樣子。對。

Q3: Is this the main reason why you want to attend this program?

Q3: 這是最大的理由嗎？

A3: The main reason, yes, I believe so. The main reason why I want to take this program is my children. And I always ask my children to study, keep on studying. But, she always saw me around the house not doing anything. She said to me “You have nothing to do; you do not know how hard it is being a student. You always ask me to study, but you do not study at all”. She argued with me often, and made a lot of complaints. So I felt, right, I should return to twenty years ago, to feel the same way as she feels now, to feel how hard the study is. But, in fact, I am old. It is really hard for me to study.

A3: 我來讀二技應該是我的小孩關係比較大。而且我一直要求我的小孩說，你要讀書，你要讀書。可是她就常常和到我在那邊閒著沒事幹，她總覺得說你都沒事，你都不知道讀書人的辛苦，一直叫我讀書，你自己不讀，她常常就會有抱怨，這樣子。我覺得說的對啊，我應該再回去，我應該再回去 20 年前我讀書的時候，我才能感同身受的去了解說，讀書到底有多辛苦，這樣。可是，事實上真的年紀大了喔，讀起來真的蠻辛苦的。

Appendix F. Interview Guide Questions for the Exploratory Study II

1. What makes you want to attend the two-year college program?
How did the idea of attending a two-year program first arise?
2. Was there any barrier to your learning?
What was it like to meet the barrier(s) to your learning?
How did you decide to persist in learning despite the barriers to your learning?
How do you deal with your “barriers to learning” in your family / work setting?
3. What helped you to persist in your learning?
What does it like to persist in learning?
What does the “persistence in learning” mean to you?
How does your family/work setting feel about your persist in learning?
4. What makes the value placed on qualifications so important in Taiwanese society?
Why?
How do you feel about this situation?
How does your family/colleagues feel about this situation? Why?
What is your educational expectation of your children? Why?
5. What has changed for you after attending this program, such as in your family/work setting? What made the difference do you think?
How do you feel about the difference? How do your family/colleagues feel about the difference? Why?

Appendix G. The Digest of 'The Trimetric Classic'

「三字經」宋朝王應麟（字伯厚）

The Trimetric Classic (Ying-Lian Wang, 1223-1296 CE)

讀史者，考實錄。Ye who read history must study the Annals,
通古今，若親目。whereby you will understand ancient and modern events, as though
having seen them with your own eyes.

口而誦，心而惟。Recite them with the mouth, and ponder over them in your heart
朝於斯，夕於斯。Do this in the morning; do this in the evening.

昔仲尼，師項橐，Of old, Confucius, took Hsiang T'o for his teacher.

古聖賢，尚勤學。The inspired men and sages of old, studied diligently nevertheless.

趙中令，讀魯論，Chao, president of the Council, studied the Lu Test of the Analects.

彼既仕，學且勤。He, when already an official, studied and moreover, with diligence.

披蒲編，削竹簡，One opened out rushes and plaited them together, another scraped
tablets of bamboo.

彼無書，且知勉。These men had no books, but they knew how to make an effort.

頭懸梁，錐刺股，One tied his head to the beam above him; another pricked his thigh
with an awl.

彼不教，自勤苦。They were not taught, but toiled hard of their own accord.

如囊螢，如映雪，Then we have one who put fireflies in a bag. And again another who
used the white glare from snow.

家雖貧，學不輟。Although their families were poor, these men studied unceasingly.

如負薪，如掛角，Again, there was one who carried fuel, and another who used horns
and pegs.

身雖勞，猶苦卓。Although they toiled with their bodies, they were nevertheless
remarkable for their application.

蘇老泉，二十七，Shu Lao-Chuan, at the age of twenty-seven,

始發憤，讀書籍。at last began to show his energy, and devote himself to the study of
books.

彼既老，猶悔遲；Then when already past the age, he deeply regretted his delay.

爾小生，宜早思。You little boys, should take thought betimes.

若梁灝，八十二，Then there were Liang Hao, who at the age of eighty-two,

對大廷，魁多士。made his replies to the great hall, and came out first among many
scholars.

彼既成，眾稱異；When thus late he had succeeded, all men pronounced him a
prodigy.

爾小生，宜立志。You little boys, should make up your minds to work.

瑩八歲，能詠詩；Jung at eight of age, could compose poetry.
 泌七歲，能賦碁。Pi, at seven years of age, could make an epigram on wei-ch'i.
 彼穎悟，人稱奇；These youths were quick of apprehension, and people declared them
 to be prodigies.
 爾幼學，當效之。You young learners, ought to imitate them.
 蔡文姬，能辨琴；Ts'ai Wen-chi, was able to judge from the sound of a psaltery.
 謝道韞，能詠吟。Hsieh Tao-yun, was able to compose verses.
 彼女子，且聰敏；They were only girls, yet they were quick and clever.
 爾男子，當自警。You boys ought to rouse yourselves.
 唐劉晏，方七歲，Liu Yen of the Tang dynasty when only seven years of age,
 舉神童，作正字。was ranked as an "inspired child" (child prodigy) and was appointed
 a Corrector of Texts.
 彼雖幼，身已仕；He, although a child, was already in an official post.
 爾幼學，勉而致。You young learners strive to bring about a like result.
 有爲者，亦若是。Those who work, will also succeed as he did.
 犬守夜，雞司晨。The dog keep guard by night; the cock proclaims the dawn.
 苟不學，曷爲人？If foolishly you do not study, how can you become men?
 蠶吐絲，蜂釀蜜。The silkworm produced silk, the bee makes honey.
 人不學，不如物。If man does not learn, he is not equal to the brutes.
 幼而學，壯而行。Learn while young, and when grown up apply what you have learn;
 上致君，下澤民。influencing the sovereign above, benefiting the people below.
 揚名聲，顯父母。Make a name for yourselves, and glorify you father and mother.
 光於前，裕於後。Shed luster on your ancestors, enrich your posterity.
 人遺子，金滿籬；Men bequeath to their children, coffers of gold.
 我教子，惟一經。I teach you children, only this book.
 勤有功，戲無益。Diligence has its reward; play has no advantages,
 戒之哉，宜勉力。Oh, be on your guard, and put forth your strength.

Appendix H. Approval Form of Human Research Ethics Committee

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Supervisor: Dr Caroline Smith Melbourne Campus

Associate Supervisor: Dr Lyn Carter Melbourne Campus

Student Researcher: Ms Lichi Pan Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

An investigation of the relationship between identity and persistence in learning among college students in Taiwan

for the period: 11/08/04 - 28/02/05

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V2003.04-68

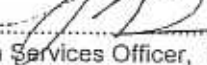
The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
 - security of records
 - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
 - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
 - proposed changes to the protocol
 - unforeseen circumstances or events
 - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed:  Date: 11/08/04
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)