



Learning Patterns in Higher Education: Dimensions and Research Perspectives

Gijbels, David; Donche, Vincent; Richardson, John T. E.; and Vermunt, Jan D., eds.

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Book Review

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Researchers and teachers will find this book a useful resource on student learning and enhancement. Based on twelve international collaborative research units' seminars sponsored by the Scientific Research Network of the Research Foundation Flanders at Antwerp in December 2011, the volume reports empirical research and theories on educational practice to support studies of learning pattern development in higher education. Thirteen of fifteen essays are multi-authored, and the contributors are mostly higher educational specialists from Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, and Spain. A few essayists are from Ireland and United Kingdom. Though written from the European continent, many of the learning concepts, strategies, and patterns – cognitive strategies, factors for learning patterns, and learning-learner characteristics – are transposable in higher education. A few essays explore pedagogy in global contexts. One article in particular compares multidimensionality and learning differences between students from the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Spain and Latin America, and Hong Kong.

Six chapters in Part I examine dimensions of learning patterns. Given the twenty-first century's multifaceted learning environment, educators face the challenge of presenting learning integratively and creatively so as to motivate learners in their respective contexts and learning patterns. The authors claim that individual learner-oriented approaches and student subgroup orientations in learners' cultures affect learning presage, perceptions, processes, patterns, and outcomes. The book claims that research continues to validate self-directedness among mature adult learners amid other reasons for facilitating effective adult learning.

Nine chapters in Part II engage aspects of measuring student learning patterns and

development. Core measurement issues include (a) learners' academic achievements, (b) motivations and cognition on measuring achievements, (c) student teaching experience as a process for their deeper learning, (d) transition from higher education into the workforce and professional service, and much more. Teachers may be interested to discover that learners' self-confidence and self-directedness are crucial to inspire their performance. Even so, perceived workload, task complexity, working memory capacity, and attention span directly affect learners' degrees of engagement. The effectiveness of a pedagogical mode – whether it is lecture-based, case-based, an immediate mixed-learning model, or a gradual mixed-learning model – will depend on the student's motivation and learning profile.

The empirical settings and the theories presented are not directed at the teaching of religion and theology. Students of religious studies are not among the human subjects identified in the reported empirical investigations. Thus, for *Teaching Theology & Religion's* readership, the book is not as relevant as other edited volumes including: Andrea Sterk's *Religion, Scholarship, and Higher Education* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Richard Devine, Joseph Favazza, and Michael McLain's ***From Cloister To Commons: Concepts and Models for Service Learning in Religious Studies*** (Stylus, 2002); Sherry Hoppe and Bruce Speck's *Identifying and Preparing Academic Leaders* (Jossey-Bass, 2004); and David Smith and James Smith's *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Eerdmans, 2011). Several essays in *Learning Patterns in Higher Education* allude to the importance of learners' contexts for constructing effective pedagogical models. However, the book does not examine the many sociopolitical aspects that have impacted learning (for comparison, see Liam Gearon and Sue Brindley's *MasterClass in Religious Education*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Nonetheless, this book is well researched. Readers will profit from its extensive treatment of learning theories, and it will enhance an educator's overall teaching competence. Educational psychology and theories of human development are embedded in many of these theoretical explorations, and therefore, the findings in this book may be transferrable to the practice of religious studies or theology.

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