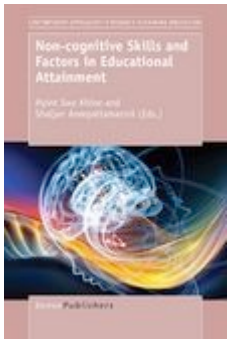

Non-Cognitive Skills and Factors in Educational Attainment

Khine, Myint Swe and Areepattamannil, Shaljan, eds.
Sense Publishers, 2016

Book Review

Tags: higher education | non-cognitive skills | pedagogy | student learning

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Editors Khine and Areepattamannil contribute to the series Contemporary Approaches to Research in Learning Innovations with volume nine, Non-cognitive Skills and Factors in Educational Attainment. The premise for the volume is that non-cognitive skills are equally important, or are even more important, than cognitive skills for effective educative processes and student success (3). Examples of non-cognitive skills include resilience (grit or toughness), well-being, social awareness, curiosity, creativity, work ethic, self-evaluation, collaboration, self-regulation, self-confidence, and motivation (16). The book is organized in three parts: I – Introduction, II – Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings (on non-cognitive factors), and III – Evidence from Empirical Research Studies. In Part II, six chapters are devoted to the relationship between non-cognitive success in learning and the educational process. A key question is: "Why are non-cognitive constructs important?" (17). Research shows that the cognitive development of persons should be accompanied by intentional non-cognitive development for positive democratic citizenship and personal and social well-being. Authors call for teachers and policy-makers to be aware of the research that clearly shows the significance of non-cognitive learning, thereby challenging current curricula, teaching methods, disciplinary policies, student evaluations, activities, and utilization of assessments (chapter 3). Subsequent chapters in Part II focus on understanding roles of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence, a repertoire for educators based on their attention to non-cognitive factors, attitudinal changes regarding assessment and correlating interventions, and non-cognitive learning tied to academic performance. Part III provides evidence from empirical research studies that support non-cognitive factors being highly significant for student success both in school and after graduation. For example, self-confidence is a greater predictor of achievement than measures of socio-economic status (166). Passion, perseverance, and self-control contribute significantly to success as well (chapter 9). Chapter 13 provides

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recommendations for greater student success: provide self-regulation knowledge support for students to improve their preparedness; provide information about available supportive environments; evaluate creativity and practical skill sets equally to cognitive ability; and redesign education from a “fixed intelligence” foundation to a dynamic intelligence focus (311). Chapters 14 and 15 initiate a tested “mental toughness” curriculum for students, and analyze attributes required for such toughness. In contrast, the next chapter recommends socialization through school in early childhood that educates children in social norms and mores through the lens of justice, beneficence, faith, hope, and love rather than with fear, negativity, and external control (370). Issues of future wellness, performance in mathematics, and the impact of culture on non-cognitive skill sets follow in the final chapters. This volume provides exhaustive evidence for its premise. Yet, these studies challenge educators to think pedagogically about what we expect in the classroom and how we intend to educate the whole person in a dynamic learning conversation rather than in a “fixed” curriculum. This book is worthy of attention, and is likely best suited for faculty exploration in broad strokes rather than an essential read for all teachers.

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