

Book review

EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD: IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

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The book *"Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success"* published by the *Learning policy institute* consists of five chapters (with an *introduction* at the beginning, and *conclusions, bibliography and notes on the authors* at the end of the book). The authors Darling-Hammond and Channa M. Cook-Harvey have translated a part of their long-term experience in educational work into the content of this book with an emphasis on the school climate, as an important factor in optimal children's development, children's learning and academic success. According to them, the school climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life, and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures. Throughout the book, the authors put forward the thesis that a positive school environment encourages students' development in all areas (physical, psychological, cognitive, social and emotional), and that a positive school climate is the core of successful education. Accordingly, they provide an overview of the elements of school culture and provide guidelines and recommendations on what schools can do to maximize each child's learning potential.

The first chapter - *Key Lessons From the Sciences of Learning and Development* presents summarized, interdisciplinary knowledge about human development, as well as important factors involved in this development, emphasizing how an individual develops under the influence of experience and relationships with others.

The authors point out that the brain in children develops most fully in the pre-

sence of positive emotions, primarily warm consistent relationships, empathetic back-and-forth communication, feeling safe, supported and accepted. Warmth and security in the established relationships are of fundamental importance for healthy development, but also for learning. Such relationships have a positive effect on building self-confidence in children. The school should provide the opportunity for positive emotions to reign in it, by showing students how it is possible to achieve positive interactions with peers, and to direct them to peaceful conflict resolution. By encouraging and teaching students the skills of empathy, awareness of one's own and others' feelings, quality relationships and peaceful problem solving, the school itself creates a positive atmosphere and climate that is conducive to student growth and development, and gives them support for success. In addition, while students should be enabled to actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, for optimal development it is necessary to nurture the individual potential of each child, thus, the authors attach great importance to the principle of uniqueness, as a key way of looking at child development.

The second chapter of the book - *Implications for Schools: The Critical Importance of a Whole Child Framework and a Positive School Climate* brings with it more detailed descriptions of a positive climate in school through the context of important factors for child development. Realizing that encouraging all students to reach their full potential is the primary goal of education, the authors point out that the school climate, enriched with positive attitudes and adapted to the students' needs and their learning can reduce stress in students. The authors see (continuous) stress as a great barrier in the development of students, i.e. they view it as a hindering factor in children's learning. In contrast, schools need to create a climate on the pillars of safety and support for all students, regardless of any differences (race, economic status, etc.).

Reflecting on the relationship between school climate, learning and chil-

dren's development, the authors point out that by investing and developing social and emotional competencies in students and school personnel, the school climate directly improves, which further creates an atmosphere within which social and emotional learning can take place. They endorse their thinking with the results of research published since 2000, which shows that a more positive climate in school is associated with greater academic achievement of students, and conclude that the key elements of school climate that contribute to increasing student achievement are related to the teacher-student relationships based on warmth, acceptance, teacher support to students.

In the third chapter of the book - *Strategies for Developing Productive School Environments*, the authors present four main domains, so that schools as educational institutions can encourage full development in students. Describing in detail the elements of: a) building a positive school climate in both classrooms and the school as a whole; b) shaping positive patterns of student behaviours through social and emotional learning; c) Developing productive instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning and d) development of different support systems that address student needs, the authors give clear guidelines on how schools can create a stimulating and motivating environment for children's growth and development.

In the fourth chapter, *Policy Strategies*, the authors continue the content of the previous chapter and present the strategies of educational policies and their necessary vision to enable and create a school climate that helps students grow healthily and ensure their current and future success. Considering that some schools need a redesign in the organization and implementation of educational work, they list the key elements that need to be addressed if they want to create a stimulating school environment. The authors note that, through surveys of students, parents and teachers, it is possible to shed

light on the dimensions of the school climate that can and should be improved. Emphasizing state and local governments - as important factors in providing resources to foster positive school environments, they note that (among other things) it is primary to provide competent teachers for teaching students, as well as their further professional development. It is also necessary to provide adequate counsellors and social workers to provide intensive support where needed. Emphasizing that the educator workforce should be racially and socioeconomically diverse, the authors conclude this chapter.

In the last, fifth chapter - *Recommendations*, the authors give suggestions on how the education system should be guided in order to encourage the proper growth and development of children and youth. The focus is primarily on developing support for children and young people, which is achieved by adopting educational standards for social, emotional and cognitive learning, then encouraging the development of responsibility in students, developing the necessary competencies, providing funding for research on school climate, and for the necessary reforms in the area. In addition to developing support, it is necessary to provide support to all students, with the aim of a holistic approach to development - to enable learning of social, emotional and cognitive skills, learning assistance, and design outreach to families, so that they are informed about their children's progress. In addition, at the end of the recommendations, the authors emphasize the need to ensure the competence of all those who will participate in fostering a positive school climate and optimal, holistic development of children and youth.

With this book, the authors have contributed to understanding the importance of the school climate for optimal growth and development of students. Due to the simple way of writing, as well as the extensive list of relevant literature related to the factors of child development, especially the culture of the school, this book is very recommended to all who are in any way

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involved in upbringing and education; educational policy makers, school staff (teachers, professors, professional associates, governing bodies, administrators,...), but also parents, because they all actually have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a positive school environment for students.

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