Chapter 3
Dispositional Factors Influencing College Success: Personality, Character, and Mindset

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ABSTRACT

Attending college can be difficult for some students. Fong and Loi (2015) noted that these challenges may be the result of attending school in a different city/town away from home, missing family or friends, or balancing the requirements of school with work. Because of this, some students “experience substantial distress” while in school (Fong & Loi, 2015). So, why do students handle stress differently? Perhaps personality, character dispositions, and mindsets impact a student’s ability to manage stress. More specifically, a student’s grit, self-control, resilience, and self-compassion may impact the student’s ability to handle challenges while in college. The authors also discuss how these character dispositions impact a specific audience – preservice general and special educators enrolled in coursework to become K-12 teachers.

INTRODUCTION

College can be challenging for some students for various reasons including being away from home and balancing the demands of work and school (Fong & Loi, 2015). Because of this, some students “experience substantial distress” while in school (Fong & Loi, 2015). Distress may include negative emotions, stress, depression, or burnout (Fong & Loi, 2015). An abundance of stress from these challenges can impact your well-being (Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009), which is described as how you function (Fong & Loi, 2015).

There are two types of well-being: (1) hedonic, and (2) eudaimonic (Fong & Loi, 2015). The first type is also often referred to as subjective well-being. Zessin, Dickhauser, and Garbade (2015) described this type as “how people evaluate their life, including emotional and cognitive judgments” (p. 341). Cognitive evaluation refers to your satisfaction with your life, while the emotional judgements evaluate pleasant versus negative affect (Zessin, Dickhauser, & Garbade, 2015).

The second type of well-being is eudaimonic, which is referred to as psychological well-being. That is, the ability to personally grow and have self-acceptance (Fong & Loi, 2015). This is the type of well-being you often read about in literature – it often refers to flourishing or non-flourishing well-being. According to researchers, this type is the “pursuit of realization of one’s true potential and focuses on the optimal functioning of the individual” (p. 341; Zessin, et al., 2015).

Although much of the research related to well-being describes subjective and psychological, Zessin and colleagues (2015) also noted other types. They posited that happiness, your relationships with others, and your spiritual beliefs impact your ability to function. To the lay person, this makes sense. If we have conflict with a friend or partner, we may have a negative affect, which can ultimately impact other parts of our life (e.g., work or school). We may not be as focused (or are distracted) and have difficulty managing or balancing all parts of our life. This may, also, impact our happiness. If there is a chronic conflict, we may become unhappy, which, again, can lead to negative results in other areas of our lives.

As Fong and Loi (2015) noted, college can be challenging for students. But, let’s face it - we all have stress. Perhaps our stress is not continuous (or chronic), but rather situational (or acute). Additionally, we do not all
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