

Blue-Collar Brilliance Summary [Sample]

When he was a child, UCLA research professor Mike Rose's mother waited tables. Now, Rose argues that all of the skills his mother mastered while waiting tables need to be appreciated as meaningful and valuable forms of intelligence. These skills include things like positioning her body and remembering orders. She also practiced holding multiple conversations with customers, cooks, and managers. Failing to understand and value these skills can have dire consequences: "When we devalue the full range of everyday cognition," Rose argues, "we offer limited educational opportunities and fail to make fresh and meaningful connections among different kinds of skill and knowledge" (Rose, "Blue-Collar Brilliance").

Formal education is seen as the benchmark of intelligence, but Rose wants his readers to question that assumption. Blue collar jobs like waiting tables and railroad work involve tasks that call for problem-solving, fine motor skills, and responding adaptively to the environment. There are also social aspects to these jobs, like working with a team to move a piece of heavy machinery down a flight of stairs, or communicating with chefs and line cooks about a customer's dietary needs.

Failing to appreciate the skills and intelligences built up in blue collar jobs, Rose argues, leaves us blind to the "fresh and meaningful connections among disparate kinds of skill and knowledge." This can have the further effect deepening cultural divides. It starts with recognizing and affirming diverse intelligences, or what Rose calls "cognitive variability." This is a necessary first step to bridging cultural divides, and preserving democracy.