Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education

By Mike Rose
Published by The New Press, 2012, 206 pages

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Adding to his illustrative library of books highlighting the failures of the US education system and those who are left on the boundaries, Mike Rose shines a spotlight on those students he calls "second chancers," nontraditional college students who do not take the traditional path from high school to college. As the college student pathway diversifies, it is important to understand how these students are showing up in our classrooms and what makes their educational experiences unique.

Rose uses his extensive history researching remedial and occupational/vocational educational programs. He shares the stories of a variety of students who successfully navigated multiple barriers that keep out students who lack social and cultural capital to enroll and persist through college. As educators, these stories speak to us. Rose recalls the stories of students who have to choose between a bus ride to campus or eating for the day, students who must decide between watching their younger siblings or attending a class, those who get wrapped up in a legal system, international students who have degrees and significant language barriers, and all of their successes and failures as they attempt to make better lives for themselves and their families. Rose focuses mainly on community colleges and vocational training institutes to argue that educators must take notice of our nontraditional students who are at the most risk of being left in the margins.

The book is divided into seven chapters, and the first three set up what going "back to school" means, defining "second chancers," and rallying readers to the cause of supporting these students at our universities. The next two chapters tell the stories of students who attend community colleges and occupational/vocational colleges. The next chapter provides practical tips for changing our campuses to better support student success. The book's concluding chapter provides six broad principles for successfully supporting second chance students on our campuses.

In the introduction, Rose lays out his thesis for the book, noting that he champions second chance because "when well executed they develop skills and build knowledge that can lead to [student] employment but also provide a number of other personal, social, and civic benefits" (p. 28). He urges all educators to conduct and support qualitative research and to push back against education policymakers, who are mainly concerned with the bottom line budgets, and quantitative reports, which leave many voices unheard. Throughout the first chapter, Rose reminds us that the US population is a mosaic, and all pieces must be attended to through educational programs which provide uplift. According to Rose, educational programming (particularly wrap-around programming that combines social services and education), curriculum, and better-trained teacher/administrators are the key to a better understanding of the 40 million people who don't have high school diplomas or GEDs.

In Chapter 2, Rose takes a critical look at who should go to college. He argues that not every person needs to go to traditional 4-year colleges and that supporting students through occupational/vocational training is an appropriate way to allocate scarce fiscal resources to the education sector. Challenging our normative understandings of intelligence and how society defines an intelligent being remains a significant theme throughout this book. There are also warnings that, even though we should support students who wish to go to occupational/vocational schools, we should not default to

sending students to those institutions just because they think they are not smart enough or because our hegemonic structures push students from particular backgrounds in that direction.

A vignette describing a vocational welding school opens chapter three. In this vignette, Rose describes the many reasons students come back to school, including the desire for more income, personal hobby, job change, to be a role model to others, and because of illiteracy or innumeracy. This program is an example of a wrap-around program, introduced in the earlier chapter. This chapter stands to illustrate that students are not only dropping out of college because of academics, but because of personal reasons such as childcare, housing issues, financial issues, and also because of poor basic skills such as illiteracy and innumeracy. He points the finger at many societal ills, but urges higher education administrators to pick up where others have left off. Closing out this chapter, Rose makes the argument that vocational schooling is just as valid, liberal, and enlightening as a liberal arts college education, an argument that sets up his next two chapters.

Chapter 4 describes the setting of a community college classroom, a professor, and his students. In particular, Rose writes about remedial education, occupational education, and the transfer process. Rose has spent much of his career researching remedial education and directing a variety of remedial education centers, and here he intertwines his research with a practical example corroborating persistence research, which often undergirds our programming. He advocates for the creation of first-year programs, orientation programs, and learning communities within the community college setting, especially for at-risk populations.

Back to School not only tells stories of students, but also campaigns for educational reform. In chapter five, an argument is made for linking together both academic and vocational training. A collaborative, meaningful educational partnership between math and welding teachers, for example, not only expands student's creative and technical skills, but also prepares them for real-world applications of math. Many students never learned math in a practical manner, often learning through rote methods. By learning math in an applied setting, Rose argues that students begin to move beyond remedial education, while gaining significant vocational tools for occupational success. Lastly, Rose makes it clear to the readers that remedial class students are more likely to be from a lower socio-economic status and of an underrepresented racial group. He asks the reader, what is intellect? What is education? How will we define and understand remedial education in the US?

Walking the reader through his visit to a college campus, Rose uses Chapter 6 to discuss the practicalities of running a campus with an eye towards nontraditional students. Specifically, campus programs, physical layouts and signage, administrator and support staff customer service, curriculum, and the interconnectedness of campus services are discussed. Addressing all major areas of the student experience, Rose argues for better customer service to assist students with less capital and understanding of college culture, better academic advising, and curriculum design that is intuitive, purposeful, and useful. The chapter outlines many specific ways in which college administrators can improve the student experience.

Lastly, six principles for success complete *Back to School*. As recaps of the previous chapters, Rose uses these principles as a call to arms for all educators. Rose aims to reconceptualize the philosophy of education to include "intellectual, social, civic, moral, and aesthetic" motives. He urges closing the gap between academic and vocational education, a re-working of thinking around remedial education, better training for teachers, and the integration of technology. Finally, an argument is made that education is not just a debate about funding, but that it has major moral implications related to race and socio-economic class and says much about the US in regards to discrimination, our history, and our potential future.

Back to School is a quick, engaging read, which reinvigorates the social justice minded reader to analyze how they understand all aspects of education. Oftentimes, community colleges and vocational/occupational education is left behind as debates over the role of education, budgets, mis-

sion, and value persist in the four-year college. Over 40 million students do not have a high school diploma or GED, and Rose methodically argues that we cannot forget this population of students. This book highlights an oft forgotten segment of our educational institutions, and Rose's spotlight is enlightening and needed.

The book has many stories that draw the reader into the chapter and provide context for his arguments. His many years of experience researching these institutions and their students and programs gives Rose license to make statements which may seem controversial to a more conservatively minded reader, but are substantiated by his prior works, his experience, and his stories.

This book paints a very clear picture of the many pathways a student may take to arrive at the doorsteps of a university and explicitly and completely provides practical ways in which those professionals can assist these students. His explicit use of persistence theory is evident throughout the book, which drew this author to begin applying Rose's arguments to his previous work in orientation and the first-year experience. This book would be most beneficial to new to mid-level orientation professionals, those working with remedial students, those working in community colleges or vocational colleges, those who are counseling students who think that the traditional college experience is not for them, or those interested in social justice issues. It is especially useful for those who may not have as much experience working with a heterogeneous group of students and those working in institutions with large populations of students who may require additional support.