Clarion Review

Education

Motivating People to Learn…and Teachers to Teach
Gregory Pastoll
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Three Stars (out of Five)

"The most fundamental requirement for an educational system is the ability to motivate learners," writes Gregory Pastoll, a native South African teacher and teaching consultant, in this indictment of what he calls the "Western schooling process," and its tendency to produce complacency and feelings of inadequacy in students. Because of its reliance on judgments of "failure" and "success," the Western schooling tradition creates the possibility of failure. In other words, students are motivated to perform well on tests, at the expense of learning for learning's sake. The test results (and extrinsic motivations like scholarships, prizes, and exclusivity) have little to do with what a student has actually learned or what she or he will retain.

And so, Pastoll investigates the relationship between motivation and meaningful learning: "The key to getting students to be energised by their learning experiences is an understanding of intrinsic motivation," which comes with its own rewards, namely "the joy of learning," "satisfied curiosity," "increased confidence," and "gaining control."

The strengths of Pastoll's work is to be found in its inspiring identification of these intrinsic rewards, which are not limited to such criteria as a willingness to learn, a sense of humor, and the ability to take each learner seriously. Pastoll goes on to suggest intriguing strategies for creating learning environments based on intrinsic motivation, but while he promises that his techniques are applicable for all ages (preschool to adult), the examples he provides are mostly set in a high school or college engineering classes, leaving the reader without a fleshed-out picture of how his methods might be applied to younger students.

Motivating People is finished off with a discussion of the traditional letter-grading system and the harm that could be prevented if educators used a portfolio system: a strategy that prepares the student for entry into the workforce or higher levels of education, rather than

authenticating their exit from an educational institution.

His subject lends itself to research, but Pastoll's references to studies are improperly referenced and anecdotal, and will leave his audience a bit empty handed when it comes to verifying his claims. Still, his diagnosis of the failings of the Western school system are insightful and provocative, and is likely to leave teachers and school administrators with a useful framework for the assessment of student learning.

Heather Weber