

Cathryn Hennes
ENG 308
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Book Review

Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared

The author, Mike Rose, came from a poor neighborhood in Los Angeles. While growing up, his English teachers in high school realized what potential Rose had. By the time he was ready to graduate, he was given the opportunity to go to college. Living in a poor neighborhood, he would not have had the opportunity to go to college. His mother was poor, living as a single mother after his father left them. His high school teacher helped him achieve the ability to go to a good college, Loyola University. He commuted back and forth to school, but was able to achieve his Bachelor's Degree. His first year, he was accepted conditionally based on his grades from high school. He worked hard and showed his professors his potential to go further. What he didn't realize at the time was where he would end up.

After receiving his degree, he had been given an opportunity through a Fellowship to continue his studies, researching writers in English. He realized, after his first year, that he wasn't in the right place. He changed his major, studying Psychology. Eventually leaving the fellowship altogether, he decided that teaching was important. He entered the Teacher Corps, learning about being a teacher in South Los Angeles. Being from a poor area, like where he would be teaching, he learned that his teaching could make a difference. He taught children in this area who were struggling with the curriculum because their teachers just didn't have the patience to help them. Some of the children he taught had learning disabilities while others were tested into the lower levels of learning for other reasons. What he found out was that

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these children were smart. With time, they had the ability to write their feelings and write stories. They just needed more individualized learning.

After his time with the Teacher Corps, Rose had the opportunity to teach the military, working for the Veteran's Administration. He worked as a Tutor to soldiers who returned from the Vietnam War. These soldiers, who just returned from war, came back with problems from being in the war. However, being that many of them were also poorly educated, Rose had the opportunity to work with them, preparing them for high school equivalent exams and future employment opportunities.

This book, written by Rose, explains how he came out of poorness, but returned to make a difference in the lives of poor children and adults who had fallen through the cracks of education. Education today is about evaluation and "pigeon-holing" from those results. Rose worked to teach these people that there is a difference and a different way for them to learn. He had worked for 20 years prior to writing this book.

"This is a book about those who fail." (Rose, xi) This book is a coming-of-age book that talks about how Mike Rose was given the opportunities from his high school teachers and college professors to achieve what he might not have achieved on his own. He enjoyed writing and researching, but also gave back to his community, teaching those people who were considered failures by those in charge. He presents stories within this book explaining that every person needs the opportunity to learn. No matter what issue they may have, with patience, everyone can learn. With the criticism students get every day, he showed how, with

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specialized teaching, these people, who were labeled failures, could achieve. He learned how to teach through his own process of learning. "The stories of my work with literacy interweave with the story of my own engagement with language." (Rose, xii)

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Works Cited

Rose, Mike. Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared. New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1989.