



Book Review: Purpose-Driven Learning: Unlocking and Empowering Our Students' Innate Passion for Learning

Associate Professor Sarah Yu^a

^a University of Canberra, Australia

Abstract

This book review on Adam Moreno's book titled *Purpose-Driven Learning: Unlocking and Empowering Our Students' Innate Passion for Learning* aims to explore the intentional framework of Purpose-Driven Learning (PDL), which advocates that the primary goal of education is to empower students' innate drive to learn. This book review summarises and evaluates the book with the hope that it can help readership decide if this is a book readers would like to purchase that might prove beneficial for student learning. Based on a first-person narrative, a "connecting to my story" section in each chapter, the author explores strategies of inclusion, social-emotional learning (SEL) and self-assessment. This book review assesses the keys of PDL – the ten SEL skills which unlock and empower students' passion for learning: Confidence, Enthusiasm, Focus, Creativity, Initiative, Dependability, Curiosity, Empathy, Resilience and Effort. Moreno's book is significant as it challenges the purpose of formal education that it should not focus on content knowledge, cannot be demonstrated through standardised tests and is not reflected in grades. Formal education must serve to help students explore the innate drive to learn, discover the key skills needed to unlock their potential for growth, and empower them to embrace this passion for learning during and beyond their time in school and university. This book proves a worthy contribution in any educational context by sharing heartfelt stories, intriguing research and effective action steps. These guide on how PDL explored and utilised to intentionally unlock and empower one's innate drive for authentic, holistic lifelong learning.

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Practitioner Notes

1. Unlock and empower students' innate drive for authentic, holistic lifelong learning.
2. Create a learning space of belonging to make students feel safe, affirmed, celebrated and empowered.
3. Use consistent and intentional language of learning to articulate students' social-emotional learning (SEL).
4. Motivate, develop and assess students' SEL skills through purpose-driven learning (PDL).
5. Develop students' ability to effectively self-assess their social-emotional health and well-being, their struggles in learning, their confidence in specific skills.

Keywords

Purpose-Driven Learning (PDL), social-emotional learning (SEL), innate drive to learn, language of learning

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Moreno, A. (2023). Purpose-Driven Learning: Unlocking and Empowering Our Students' Innate Passion for Learning. Taylor & Francis. 228 pp (Paperback). ISBN: 9781032279138

Written for educators in any educational context, Moreno (2023) presents purpose-driven learning (PDL) as a pedagogy to unlock students' key social-emotional learning (SEL) skills in his book, *Purpose-Driven Learning: Unlocking and Empowering Our Students' Innate Passion for Learning*. The author promotes PDL by claiming "The purpose of school [formal education] is to unlock and empower the drive for authentic, holistic lifelong learning that is innate in every person" (Moreno, 2023, p. 3). The aim of this book is to explore how PDL, through the ten SEL skills intentionally unlock and empower our students' passion for learning. The book is comprised of 13 chapters: Chapters 1 and 2 start with emphasising the importance of creating a learning space of belonging where our students feel included and affirmed; Chapters 3 to 12 introduce inspiring stories, intriguing research, and effective action steps of the keys of PDL – the ten SEL skills; Chapter 13 completes PDL by stating the necessity of developing students' own self-assessment.

Each chapter is consistently structured with four sections: Connecting to My Story, Reflecting on Your Story, Exploring Our "WHY", and Unlocking and Empowering Purpose-Driven Learning. Moreno believes that "stories reveal who we are, allow us to share our experiences that make us similar, and affirm the differences within our experiences that make us unique" (Moreno, 2023, p. 11). After sharing his personal stories and stories of his students in the first section, the author poses questions for the readers to reflect on their own stories in the second section. The author then moves to a deeper exploration of "our why", which builds upon experiential learning with research and data. In the final section, the author offers practical advice and action steps – languages to use, techniques to implement, and strategies to explore.

The majority of chapters in Moreno's book explore the keys of PDL – the ten SEL skills. It makes one wonder why these skills are so important. SEL is "an integral part of education and human development" and is defined as:

The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020).

The key to PDL is the establishment of an intentional language that students can use to assess and articulate their learning. Moreno's language of learning uses ten words to reflect the SEL skills students need to acquire: Confidence, Enthusiasm, Focus, Creativity, Initiative, Dependability, Curiosity, Empathy, Resilience, and Effort. With a consistent and intentional language, it reduces confusion, misunderstanding, frustration, and apathy when students express their growth and share their learning with the world. Furthermore, readers are forewarned that the keys of PDL do not have to be the same ten words listed above. Educators should explore an effective language of learning with their students that suits their context. The success of PDL relies on the intentional implementation of the language.

Significantly, Moreno's book advocates moving the focus of formal education away from content knowledge, standardised tests with grade results, and towards development of SEL skills. It is recognised the importance of content knowledge as the means to explore SEL skills and testing

as one of the tools with which to demonstrate these SEL skills. Formal education must serve to help students explore the innate drive to learn, discover the key skills needed to unlock their potential for growth, and empower them to embrace this passion for learning during and beyond their time in school and university. Moreno shares how removing grade-based language and practicing PDL language can help students become aware of the SEL skills needed in their learning:

Instead of encouraging students to work together to get a better grade – remind them that their classmates are depending on them to contribute to the group. Instead of asking students to revise their paper for a higher grade – express that taking the initiative to revise offers them the opportunity to demonstrate their best effort (Moreno, 2023, p. 196).

This book proves a worthy contribution in various educational context by sharing heartfelt stories, intriguing research and effective action steps on how PDL can be explored and utilised to intentionally unlock and empower one's innate drive for authentic, holistic lifelong learning. Educators are encouraged to shift the focus of their teaching from content, testing, and grades to the discovery, development, and demonstration of holistic learning. The philosophy behind the book is captured in the following excerpt:

If we are honest, for most of us, the vast majority of content knowledge we “learned” in school has long since been forgotten ... If the content we were taught has not lasted ... what was the purpose of [formal education] in our lives? ... For me, I remember the curiosity needed to build a marble roller coaster in Physics and the focus required to tackle the challenging problem-solving of Trig. I recall the confidence needed to get up in front of the entire middle school as Elvis ... It is not the content, testing or grades that I remember and value from my days in school, but rather it is the life skills, the “soft” skills, the employable skills, the PDL skills (Moreno, 2023, p. 210).

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