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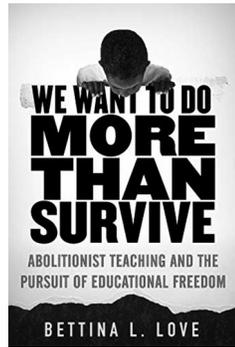
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We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom

by Raven Jones Stanbrough

Love, B. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Routledge: Beacon Press, Boston, MA. ISBN: 978-0-807-02834-6



This book is about mattering, surviving, resisting, thriving, healing, imagining, freedom, love, and joy: all elements of abolitionist work and teaching. Abolitionist teaching is the practice of working in solidarity in communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools. (Love, 2019)

In seven of the most beautifully-written chapters filled with hope, love, educational critiques, and aspirational goals for inspiring new ways of educative thinking and teaching, Bettina Love's *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* is intersectional joy meets sustaining freedom. Her words are an ode to children of color everywhere, reminding them that they matter and that they deserve to be educated by teachers and educators who love them and will fight for them, regardless of what they look like or where they come from. This body of work is about action, fighting for humanity, and enacting abolitionist teaching. To do so, Love states, "To begin the work of abolitionist teaching and fighting for justice, the idea of mattering is essential in that you must matter enough to yourself, to your students, and to your students' community to fight. But for dark people, the very basic idea of mattering is sometimes hard to conceptualize when your country finds you disposable" (2). This sentiment resonates with me as an educa-



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tor-activist, mother, partner, and woman of color. Even during my K-12 experiences when certain teachers chose not to see me, validate my educational inquiries, or value my dark skin, my parents and community of caretakers affirmed my multiple identities and intelligences – in classrooms and elsewhere.

I was in elementary school when I first heard the term 'abolitionist.' My teacher at the time shared with my classmates and I that it was an important word and that abolitionists were individuals who desired to end slavery and other harmful and unlawful practices. Connected to this, at home, my parents also explained to me that abolitionists were special and sometimes did the work that others were too scared to participate in. My mother named Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. And my father named Harriet Tubman. From their sharing, I learned that they each were activists committed to improving the lives and conditions of Black people and sometimes risked their own lives to achieve this. Their names and noteworthy deeds are still echoed in classrooms across the globe. Their works will not be forgotten and they, in addition to others, have paved the way for such abolitionist activism to continue. And the abolitionist baton has been passed on to Dr. Bettina Love through her penning of *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching*

and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom. The precision of her words, the pacing of her thoughts, and the power of her love is indeed the baton we need to win this educational race. Collectively, we must see ourselves as an abolitionist relay team – learning from and passing on social justice and equitable knowledge throughout generations to come for the betterment of children and their futures. We cannot afford to fumble with the baton. And we definitely cannot afford to drop the baton.

In seven chapters, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* offers infinite wisdom that encourages its readers to reflect on their experiences, unearth their biases, and seek compassion when teaching “other people’s children.” In chapters 1 and 2, “We Who Are Dark” and “Educational Survival,” Love challenges us to imagine a more socially-just world inclusive of revolutionary teaching and thinking. Additionally, she calls for us to understand why children should matter to us. With questions such as: “...How do you matter to a country that rips children out of the hands of their parents and locks them in dog cages for seeking a better life? How do you matter to a country that measures your knowledge against a ‘gap’ it created? How do you matter to a country that labels you ‘model minority’ in order to fuel anti-Blackness?” (p. 3). It is clear that Black and Brown bodies have not mattered in various academic, institutional, and other spaces. To address such inquiries, Love outlines the longstanding history of inequities in education and welcomes us to consider pursuing freedom in our work, in an effort to thrive together. Next, chapters 3 and 4, “Mattering” and “Grit, Zest, and Racism (The Hunger Games)” highlight Love’s own home, educational, and classroom experiences, while unpacking the importance of human dignity and refusing to compromise for anyone. Likewise, Love recalls lessons she learned from her first Black teacher, Mrs. Johnson – a woman who loved her students and showed them that they mattered. Similarly, in chapters 5 and 6, “Abolitionist Teaching, Freedom Dreaming, and Black Joy” and “Theory Over Gimmicks: Finding Your North Star,” Love describes how there is not one way to be an abolitionist teacher. Instead, she reveals

abolitionist teaching could look like protesting in the streets, fighting standardized testing, and restoring justice in classrooms, standing with students to end gun violence, welcoming new struggles, setbacks, and disagreements. Likewise, Love implores us to work to dismantle racism, sexism, ills that plague dark communities, and to know that theory does not solve issues – only action and solidarity. Finally, chapter 7, “We Gon’ Alright, But That Ain’t Alright” addresses how racism is killing Blacks at alarming rates, and provides examples of how centering wellness needs to be a common practice for healing and participating in abolitionist teaching.

Reading Love’s text has enabled me to recommit to teaching and learning in ways that will allow me to affirm all of my students’ diverse experiences and center my own Black joy. Abolitionist teaching is an act of joy, resistance, creativity, and so much more. Abolitionist teaching and thinking is necessary for speaking truth to power. The time is now for us to keep passing this abolitionist teaching baton to all. In order to win a relay race, a team must be on one accord. They must run. They must practice the passing of the baton. Although this act can be difficult at times; it can be accomplished. The baton cannot be dropped or the team will be disqualified. Love’s *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* is a blueprint for helping us to envision not dropping the baton. To assist us with becoming lifelong relay racers in the quest for revolutionary change. I am ready to lace up my shoes, run, and encourage others to do the same.

Author Biography

Raven Jones Stanbrough is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Her teaching, research, and publications focus on literacy, culture, race, equity, and the educational and lived experiences of students of color in urban contexts. Dr. Jones Stanbrough creates and facilitates debate education programs to promote and expand the educative and creative engagement that debate offers. She is also the Co-founder of *The Zuri*

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