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Rankine-Landers, M., & Moreno, J. B. (2024). *Do your lessons love your students? Creative education for social change*. Routledge.

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In Do Your Lessons Love Your Students?

Mariah Rankine-Landers and Jessa Brie Moreno utilize arts-based education and students' cultural assets to chart a more humanistic approach to the classroom grounded in social justice. Social justice in education entails a commitment to fairness and equity for all students, particularly those belonging to marginalized communities. A classroom grounded in social justice actively uses inclusive practices to address systemic and instructional inequalities in schools. In a

culturally responsive and asset-based approach, the rich diversity of students' backgrounds, experiences, and cultural heritage are valuable resources for learning and empowerment. Additionally, humanistic approaches in education underscore each individual's intrinsic worth and potential, emphasizing empathy, respect, and personal growth. By conscientiously integrating these principles into teaching methods, teachers can cultivate a nurturing and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered to achieve their full potential.

With more than 20 years of combined teaching experience, the authors of this volume are committed to the principles of liberation, equity, and social justice in education. Rankine-Landers has worked as a leadership coach to promote justice in education and currently designs creative inquiry curricula. Moreno has worked as an adjunct faculty member at the California Institute for Integral Studies and San Jose State University. Both authors have worked with the California Alliance for Arts Education.



Creating a classroom that promotes fairness and equality is all about ensuring that every student feels accepted and valued, no matter who they are. The authors suggest teaching methods like talking openly, using art in lessons, and teaching good character to get students interested in learning. To help teachers create classrooms where students feel like they belong, can express themselves, and make their own choices, they suggest hands-on activities like writing and storytelling to start conversations, challenge unfair ideas, and unite students. These activities help students connect and foster supportive learning communities. The authors note it is important to let students choose what they want to do for art projects so they feel ownership of their work. While exploring different types of art like drawing, music, acting, and writing, students share their thoughts and grow as people. When students reflect on what they have done and learned, they understand themselves better and find ways to improve.

The book contains 21 chapters organized into four major sections:

- Part One urges educators to integrate love into education and underscores that when teachers recognize students' potential in an asset-based approach, this is an expression of love. They propose reforming the educational system to include the LOVE (Love, Observe, Value, Expand/Evolve) protocol as a self-assessment method for students where their growth and progress are evaluated in terms of what their work means to them and how they value it, rather than right or wrong outcomes.
- Part Two centers around how studio-based classroom environments foster student collaboration and personal growth, allow teachers to showcase creative inquiry, and use culturally sustaining instructional activities.
- Part Three presents the Core Four themes of their SPIRAL framework: (1) Power, (2) Narrative, (3) Lineage, and (4) Embodiment. These themes highlight the transformative power of embracing diversity and promoting equitable education. By incorporating culturally responsive practices into teaching, educators can foster a positive learning environment where students feel valued, empowered, and motivated to learn, leading to improved academic outcomes and social-emotional development.
- Part Four offers educators practical implementation strategies, including ready-to-use lessons and alternative assessments. The authors stress using art and arts-based learning activities to promote self-expression, belonging, critical thinking, and social justice.

Throughout this volume, Rankine-Landers and Moreno emphasize the critical connection between acquiring knowledge and emotion. When students see their cultural identities reflected in the curriculum and teaching methods, they are more motivated to participate actively in learning.

According to the authors, contemporary education often lacks these crucial elements of emotion and love, which they believe are integral to learning.

The book is written in easy-to-understand language and provides classroom activities that can be implemented quickly across grade levels and content areas. Activities include visual arts, writing prompts, storytelling, dance and choreography, and theater. Examples of student work are shared throughout the text, offering real-world applications and showcasing the potential outcomes of applying the concepts. A few examples include:

Parts, Purposes, and Complexities: Look at an image, a painting, a drawing, or a photograph, and write down everything you see. Be specific. (*Parts*) Then, list the purposes of each item. (*Purposes*). Lastly, free-write the meaning that is personally yours and what the title implies, and describe what you understand and do not. (*Complexities*).

Love Letters: Have students write themselves a love letter that celebrates who they are, their dreams, and their achievements. They can include family history and their experiences. Students can reflect on how they see themselves. A sharing activity can follow up.

Verbatim Theater: Students work in pairs. As one student shares their story, the other takes notes word for word, verbatim, as best they can, noting their partner's facial expressions and body movements. The students then narrate their partner's story to the class.

Do Your Lessons Love Your Students? paints an idyllic picture of classroom dynamics, a vision or representation of an ideal, perfect, or harmonious atmosphere within a classroom setting. Creativity permeates the environment in an ideal classroom where arts-based practices thrive, fostering inspiration and innovation. Colorful artwork adorns the walls, reflecting diverse perspectives, while flexible seating arrangements promote collaboration and movement. Abundant art supplies and creative tools invite students to explore various forms of expression freely. The teacher is a facilitator, guiding students through open-ended projects across mediums such as visual arts, music, drama, and creative writing, encouraging experimentation and self-discovery. Peer collaboration and constructive feedback cultivate a sense of community, while critical thinking and problem-solving are nurtured through hands-on experiences and reflection exercises.

The authors promote such a classroom environment, where teaching and learning unfold seamlessly, characterized by positive interactions and engagement and educational lessons incorporating culture, diversity, and the arts. In the authors' view, meaningful teaching through narratives, creativity, culture sharing, creative inquiry, and art-based lessons will lead to social justice in education.

Rankine-Landers and Moreno describe teaching as a "great leap of faith and a great act of love" (p. 4). Yet, they argue, the evolution of teaching from mentorship and apprenticeship to the banking model (Freire, 1996) has stifled classroom creativity and joy. According to the authors, the goal for

teachers is to empower students by challenging traditional, oppressive educational structures and working to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. This approach is deeply intertwined with the belief that education should not perpetuate existing power structures but rather dismantle oppressive systems and promote a more just and equitable society (Freire, 1996; hooks, 2014).

The authors emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching but do not acknowledge potential challenges from administrators who prefer a more structured, traditional learning environment. This resistance often stems from a reluctance to deviate from mandated curriculums or directives, compounded by factors like standardized testing and time constraints. Overcoming this pushback requires fostering open dialogue, highlighting the positive impact on student engagement and success, and showcasing the long-term benefits of preparing students for a diverse world. Additionally, inconsistent teacher training and support can hinder the implementation of culturally responsive teaching, making it crucial to maintain a consistent emphasis on creativity and cultural responsiveness in the classroom.

A helpful addition to this book would be a section addressing school administrators as a target audience, discussing how teachers might navigate resistance by demonstrating the link between arts-based instruction, state standards, and expected learning outcomes. This section should focus on potential challenges from administrators who prefer a more structured, traditional learning environment and offer strategies for overcoming this pushback, such as fostering open dialogue and highlighting the positive impact on student engagement and success. Furthermore, the authors focus heavily on theoretical and often idealistic concepts, so greater clarity on implementing this work would have enhanced the book's application to real life. Including real-world examples and case studies would provide practical insights and demonstrate how these concepts can be effectively applied in diverse educational settings. This section should offer strategies for overcoming pushback, such as fostering open dialogue, providing professional development for teachers, and highlighting the positive impact on student engagement and success. These additions would make the book more practical and actionable, helping educators navigate challenges and implement arts-based instruction more effectively.

Do your lessons love your students? offers a compelling vision for transformative education rooted in arts-based instruction and cultural responsiveness. The authors passionately advocate for a shift from traditional, rigid educational models to a more humanistic approach that nurtures a sense of belonging, self-expression, and autonomy. Through exploring narratives, creativity, and culture sharing, Rankine-Landers and Moreno urge teachers to infuse love and emotion into the teaching and learning process to foster a more compassionate and socially just school environment.

References

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About the Reviewer

Susan Redfield is currently pursuing a PhD at Rowan University. She combines a deep academic interest with practical experience as a learning disabilities teacher-consultant in a public school setting. Her research and professional focus on enhancing educational outcomes and support for students with learning disabilities.



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