

Abolitionist Teaching Theory

Abolitionist teaching theory is about changing schools so they no longer keep inequitable systems alive. This approach comes from the same energy that fought to end slavery, but now has its focus on education. Dr. Bettina Love is one of the key voices in this concept, she says that education should not just help students from marginalized groups survive in the system, but help them thrive and be free (Love p.2). Abolitionist teaching drives classrooms to show honesty, consideration, and community for teachers to work beside students to dream of a better future.

Why We Need Abolitionist Teaching

Schools in the United States often ponder the same biased systems we see in the nation, test-based learning, strict discipline, and Eurocentric lessons that disregard plenty of students' histories. The lecture notes explains that this is not just about individuals being racist, but about the way institutions keep racial gaps in place (Abolitionist Teaching and Racism in Education, Lecture). Dr. Love chides ideas like “zest” and “grit”, which frequently puts the blame on students instead of addressing barriers like racism and poverty (Love, p.7-9).

Advocate teaching also empowers learners and their society by giving them a voice within their education. It inquires teachers to listen and create spaces where students can question unfairness and speak up. Love talks about finding the “joy in the struggle..”, keeping hope alive all while working against oppression (Love, p.4), which connects to Dr. Octavio Pimentel's idea of “making future matters..”, meaning that education should help build a better future for those often left out (Pimentel, Introduction: Making Future Matters). A major part of this is what Paulo

Freire would call critical consciousness, that helps learners understand why things in civilization are one-sided and feel able to do something about it. When students start developing this awareness, they begin to imagine solutions for problems more clearly.

Challenges and Pushbacks

Many educators and schools are used to traditional ways and worry that mentioning injustice and racism would be too political. Schools that focus solely on test scores often see abolitionist teaching as excessively different. And without good support and preparation, these modifications can be difficult to keep up with (ASCD).

Some leaders and parents believe that abolitionist teaching is too radical, often tying it to discussions about critical race theory, making some think that it's more about politics than education. Despite this pushback, these contentions establish space for important conversations about why schools have unfair outcomes and how to fix the problem (ASCD). If education is in fact about developing students for democracy, then it's crucial to include honest discussions about the injustice that shapes students' lives.

Community Responses

Families and communities that have been mishandled by the current system may see advocating teaching as a good method because it values their voices and culture and can form trust between both families and schools. On the contrary, some conservative groups and parents believe that abolitionist teaching pushes political ideas or divides the people. This is the reason why open discussions about what it actually means is important.

Lecture notes highlight that real civics education should go beyond memorizing facts and truly help students see how to resist prejudice systems and take part in democracy (Abolitionist Teaching and Racism in Education, Lecture). Including abolitionist teaching into schools can trigger needed conversations about what education is significant for and what it means to prepare learners for the future.

Implementation Strategies

To make abolitionist teaching work better, teachers need strong training that addresses anti-racist teaching, culturally appropriate lessons, and using restorative justice instead of harsh rigor. The curriculum should incorporate more stories and voices, especially from underrepresentative groups, and link learning to students' own experiences. Schools should also collaborate with local organizations and leaders to make education more significant and show that communities and schools are working together for the better. These steps can really help students feel respected, supported, and capable of shaping their own futures.

CONCLUSION

Abolitionist teaching offers a way to make schools a place that not only prepares students to live in an unfair society but actually helps them change it. By challenging systemic inequities, building critical thinking, and empowering students, it moves education towards freedom and fairness.

Ultimately, this whole thing is about believing that students deserve more than survival guides in a flawed system, they deserve to thrive. As Love stated, the goal is to dream of a better future and make those dreams a reality. Education can be more than just preparation for the world, it can also be a foundation for a more inclusive and just future.

Works Cited

ASCD. "Equity in Action: Strategies for Schools." ASCD, www.ascd.org/resources
. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

Lecture Notes. Abolitionist Teaching and Racism in Education. Course materials, 2025.

Love, Bettina. "Abolitionist Teaching, Freedom Dreaming, and Black Joy." Lecture notes from uploaded document, 2025.

Pimentel, Octavio. "Introduction: Making Future Matters." Making Future Matters, CCDigitalPress, 2019, ccdigitalpress.org/book/makingfuturematters/pimentel-intro.html.

"Bettina L. Love on Abolitionist Teaching." YouTube, uploaded by Haymarket Books, 19 June 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuyMuLGXxTs

"Freedom Dreaming and Education." YouTube, uploaded by National Education Association, 15 Oct. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJZ3RPJ2rNc