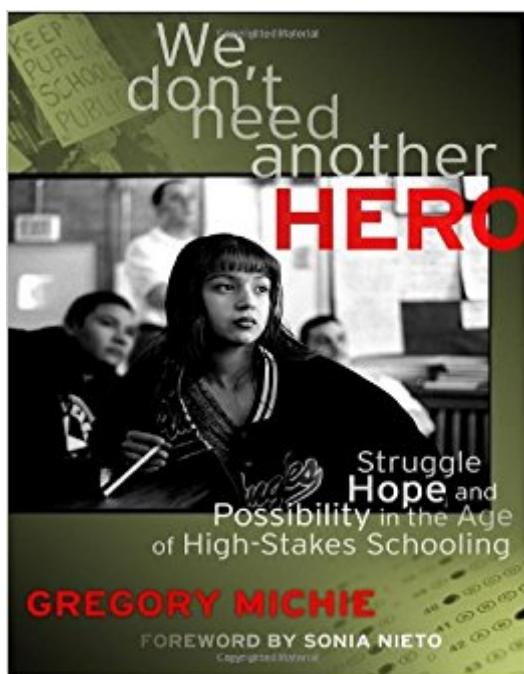


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# We Don't Need Another Hero: Struggle, Hope, And Possibility In The Age Of High-Stakes Schooling



## Synopsis

"Greg Michie is right: we don't need another hero. The heroes are already there: they are our students, as well as the teachers and administrators who have a passion for justice. Those are the voices we must heed." --From the Foreword by Sonia Nieto, professor emerita, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

"There is no writer working today who captures the excruciating complexity of a life in teaching with as much grace and clarity as Gregory Michie. These everyday heroes are the heart of teaching and the soul of democracy." --William Ayers, educator and bestselling author of *To Teach*, Third Edition and *Teaching the Taboo*

Gregory Michie's experiences in the classroom and his purview post-teaching make this a good peek into the thoughts of a man willing to challenge the current notions of education reform. Rather than sit in frustration over the current tenor surrounding these so-called reforms, Michie seeks meaningful progress and solutions." --Jose Luis Vilson, NYC Public School lead teacher and writer at TheJoseVilson.com

In his latest book, bestselling author Gregory Michie critiques high-stakes schooling and provides a powerful alternative vision of teaching as a humanistic enterprise, students as multidimensional beings, and schools as spaces where young people can imagine and become, not just "achieve." Drawing on his experiences over the past two decades as a classroom teacher, community volunteer, researcher, and teacher educator in Chicago's public schools, Michie offers compelling accounts of teaching and learning in urban America. Mindful of the complex realities educators face, he portrays urban schools as they really are: sites of struggle, hope, and possibility. At a time when others relentlessly trumpet a competitive, data-driven, corporatized notion of education, the essays in *We Don't Need Another Hero* challenge the dominant images of failing urban schools and bad teachers. Like Michie's now classic *Holler If You Hear Me*, this book gives much-needed hope to new and seasoned teachers alike. It is also an important resource for school administrators, policymakers, parents, and anyone who wants to better understand what is really happening in American schools.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gregory Michie teaches in the Department of Foundations and Social Policy at Concordia University Chicago. He is the bestselling author of *Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students*, Second Edition, and *See You When We Get There: Teaching for Change in Urban Schools*.

The missionary zeal, born of the "White Man's Burden", seems to have returned home to roost right in our own major cities. Highly educated, generally quite well off, often (although not always) well-intentioned white people have decided that inner city children shouldn't be left to founder at "failing" schools. School reform (measured almost exclusively by increases in standardized test scores) "can't wait". Education is, according to these modern missionaries, "the civil rights issue of our time." Fortunately, these missionaries know just what to do. They think. Like foreign missionaries, these bright-eyed young urban missionaries overlook the role of their own dominant culture in creating the "need" for their help in the first place. Elephant-in-the-room issues like race, class and poverty get swept aside as mere "excuses". What's needed are higher expectations, more "rigorous" demands, and greater "accountability". I suspect, although I admit I don't know, that Gregory Michie was originally one of those starry-eyed, rather blind missionaries. As a young, white, professional male, he took advantage of a truncated career change education program which places proven professionals into urban classrooms without going through a complete, accredited teacher certification program. The theory behind most such programs is that people with proven management and other professional skills can bring their experience in to transform urban education, often along business model lines. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out as planned, as many of these transplants realize that teaching in an urban environment is a bit more complicated than balancing spreadsheets and many don't stay in the classroom for long. As I indicated, I don't know Gregory Michie's motivations for getting into urban education. But it turned out that he was one of the good guys. He realized that perhaps things aren't so simple as they seem. He appreciated the disconnect between his affluent white male privilege and the

disadvantage his predominantly poor and minority students came from. He was willing to not only acknowledge, but also explore and confront issues of race, class and prejudice, including listening to his students and allowing himself to learn from them, even about his own biases and blind spots. It takes a great deal of strength and security to be that vulnerable, but it has paid dividends in terms of Michie's deep understanding of the educational needs of urban kids and the disconnect with the methods more and more being used to "educate" them - the "pedagogy of poverty" as Michie quotes Martin Haberman. There is a distinct and growing divide between how children of the rich and elite are educated vs. children of the poor (middle class kids are somewhere in between, but slipping toward the poor end). Barack Obama sends his daughters to Sidwell Friends School, while Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel sends his kids to the University of Chicago Lab Schools. Both schools keep class sizes small. Direct instruction in reading and math make up only a small part of the curriculum and are integrated across disciplines to connect with science and social studies. Both schools further enrich their curricula with arts, music, languages, electives, P.E. and recess, and both have well-stocked libraries and athletic and arts facilities. The type of education that both Obama and Duncan envision for the rest of the country, however, is increasingly impoverished and stripped down to bare-bones basics. Long blocks of reading and math time focus heavily on drilling for skills and rote memory to be measured by regular standardized tests. Minimal time is left over for arts, physical education or other enrichment. Both Obama and Duncan favor expanded use of charter schools, especially "no excuses" type schools like KIPP which use "drill-to-kill" techniques, and extended, highly structured days with little room for individual expression, exploration or creativity. These "no-excuses" schools are supposed to address the so-called "achievement gap" between whites and minorities by focusing specifically on basic skills and necessary facts. But in fact, in all important ways, educational "reforms" are actually widening the gap because poor and minority kids are increasingly denied opportunities to be connected to and involved with meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Research has repeatedly shown that humans - especially children - simply cannot learn large bodies of facts or skills in isolation from experience. Yet educational policy leaders continue to focus on the model of children as empty vessels who need to be filled up with "knowledge". Poor and minority students especially get turned off and demoralized by "educational" experiences which in no way connect to their actual lived experience. The solution, Michie argues, is not to have more affluent whites dictating what urban children should learn, how they should learn it, and how they should be assessed on their learning. The solution is to return control to the local level - individual schools and teachers - and to teach for "social justice". Poor and minority kids don't live in a vacuum. They see injustices and discrimination all around them.

Pretending that all is well and that they too can succeed if only they "work hard, be nice" alienates kids (and is, frankly, offensive), especially teenagers who see the reality most clearly. Teaching for social justice acknowledges the real life struggles kids face on a daily basis, explores the history behind them, and encourages kids to develop their own meaningful solutions to correct injustices and overcome challenges. Kids still learn all the basic academic information and skills that they need, they just learn them enfolded in a meaningful, engaging curriculum that invites their participation rather than excluding them from the conversation at all. Throughout the book, Michie gives several examples of how he himself struggled to implement such a vision and how he now encourages his teachers-in-training to view and implement such ideas. He also gives several examples of other teachers, principals and schools which are bucking the standardized trend and "educating against the grain". The key for Michie and the other educators is to view the kids as people rather than data. Building relationships and inspiring true learning are more important than test scores. Ironically, both Obama and Duncan agree with Michie, at least for their own children's education. Too bad they have other ideas for other people's children. The title of the book is a direct refutation of the movie "Waiting for Superman" which celebrated "reformers" such as Michelle Rhee and all the failed notions they have advanced over the past decade or more. It's not about getting a bunch of "highly effective" cloned teachers using identical canned lessons. It's about teachers putting themselves into their teaching and relating to their students on a personal basis. I recommend this book strongly to anyone and everyone, but especially to those who believe that privatized charter schools are preferable to "entrenched" unionized public schools. Don't be fooled by the "for the children" rhetoric. If it were about the children, their voices, along with the voices of those who know them best - their teachers and parents - would be heard, rather than the corporate interests who currently control the debate. If I thought he'd read it, I'd personally send a copy of this book to President Obama.

This is a compelling book about the state of American education. As a former classroom teacher in Chicago Public Schools and a teacher educator, Greg Michie has been on the front lines of the struggle that is happening in schools across our country. He has seen the impact of huge social issues, of bureaucracy and regulation, and of the inspiring work of everyday teachers. Throughout the text, Michie inserts stories of children, families, and teachers that uplift and inspire. It is easy for the reader to feel as though they're right there in the classroom with him. His common sense perspective, that we don't need more regulations or even more heroes, rings true in the stories he tells. He convincingly proposes the idea that we need to support, not attack, the people and

relationships of the people that inhabit our schools. His call for a more humanistic approach to education should not fall on deaf ears. Development of creativity and a love of learning are the key targets we should be seeking for our children. While the foreword and cover information present this book as a collection of essays, it's much more than that. This book is a tapestry of vision and hope for the future of schools in America. *We Don't Need Another Hero* is a must read for anyone who cares about schooling in America.

Excellent book that tells the struggles and victories in urban schools.

Fantastic Book!! I think anyone going into teaching should consider reading this! Michie has a lot of helpful advice for teachers who are just starting out and just as much for those with experience.

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