

THE CONVERSATION



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The 50 great books on education



Haven't you read Plato? Abee5, CC BY

I have often argued that I would not let any teacher into a school unless – as a minimum – they had read, carefully and well, the three great books on education: Plato's Republic, Rousseau's *Émile* and Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. There would be no instrumental purpose in this, but the struggle to understand these books and the thinking involved in understanding them would change teachers and ultimately teaching.

These are the three great books because each is sociologically whole. They each present a description and arguments for an education for a particular and better society. You do not have to agree with these authors. Plato's tripartite education for a just society ruled over by philosopher kings; Rousseau's education through nature to establish the social contract and Dewey's relevant, problem-solving democratic education for a democratic society can all be criticised. That is not the point. The point is to understand these great works. They constitute the intellectual background to any informed discussion of education.

What of more modern works? I used to recommend the "blistering indictment" of the flight from traditional liberal education that is Melanie Phillips's *All Must Have Prizes*, to be read alongside Tom Bentley's *Learning Beyond the Classroom: Education for a Changing World*, which is a defence of a wider view of learning for the "learning age". These two books defined the debate in the 1990s between traditional education by authoritative teachers and its rejection in favour of a new learning in partnership with students.

Much time and money is spent on teacher training and continuing professional development and much of it is wasted. A cheaper and better way of giving student teachers and in-service

teachers an understanding of education would be to get them to read the 50 great works on education.

The books I have identified, with the help of members of the Institute of Ideas' Education Forum, teachers and colleagues at several universities, constitute an attempt at an education "canon".

What are "out" of my list are textbooks and guides to classroom practice. What are also "out" are novels and plays. But there are some great literary works that should be read by every teacher: Charles Dicken's *Hard Times* – for Gradgrind's now much-needed celebration of facts; D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* – for Ursula Brangwen's struggle against her early child-centred idealism in the reality of St Philips School; and Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* – for Hector's role as the subversive teacher committed to knowledge.

I hope I have produced a list of books, displayed here in alphabetical order, that are held to be important by today's teachers. I make no apology for including the book I wrote with Kathryn Ecclestone, *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* because it is an influential critical work that has produced considerable controversy. If you disagree with this, or any other of my choices, please add your alternative "canonical" books on education.

Michael W. Apple – **Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age** (1993)

Hannah Arendt – **Between Past and Future** (1961), for the essay "The Crisis in Education" (1958)

Matthew Arnold – **Culture and Anarchy** (1867-9)

Robin Barrow – **Giving Teaching Back to the Teachers** (1984)

Tom Bentley – **Learning Beyond The Classroom: Education for a Changing World** (1998)

Allan Bloom – **The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students** (1987)

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron – **Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture** (1977)

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis – **Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life** (1976)

Jerome Bruner – **The Process of Education** (1960)

John Dewey – **Democracy and Education** (1916)

Margaret Donaldson – **Children's Minds** (1978)

JWB Douglas – **The Home and the School** (1964)

Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes – **The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education** (2008)

Harold Entwistle – **Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics** (1979).

Paulo Freire – **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** (1968/1970)

Frank Furedi – **Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating** (2009)

Helene Guldberg – **Reclaiming Childhood** (2009)

ED Hirsch Jnr. – **The Schools We Need And Why We Don't Have Them** (1999)

Paul H Hirst – **Knowledge and the Curriculum**(1974) For the essay which appears as Chapter 3 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge' (1965)

John Holt – **How Children Fail** (1964)

Eric Hoyle – **The Role of the Teacher** (1969)

James Davison Hunter – **The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil** (2000)

Ivan Illich – **Deschooling Society** (1971)

Nell Keddie (Ed.) – **Tinker, Taylor: The Myth of Cultural Deprivation** (1973)

John Locke – **Some Thoughts Concerning Education** (1692)

John Stuart Mill – **Autobiography** (1873)

Sybil Marshall – **An Experiment in Education** (1963)

Alexander Sutherland Neil – **Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing** (1960)

John Henry Newman – **The Idea of a University** (1873)

Michael Oakeshott – **The Voice of Liberal Learning** (1989) In particular for the essay "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration" (1972)

Anthony O' Hear – **Education, Society and Human Nature: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education** (1981)

Richard Stanley Peters – **Ethics and Education** (1966)

Melanie Phillips – **All Must Have Prizes** (1996)

Plato – **The Republic** (366BC?)

Plato – **Protagoras**(390BC?) and **Meno** (387BC?)

Neil Postman – **The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School** (1995)

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner – **Teaching as a Subversive Activity** (1969)

Herbert Read – **Education Through Art**(1943)

Carl Rogers – **Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become** (1969)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau –
**Émile or “on
education”** (1762)

Bertrand Russell – **On
Education**(1926)

Israel Scheffler – **The
Language of Education**
(1960)

Brian Simon – **Does
Education Matter?** (1985)
Particularly for the paper
“Why No Pedagogy in
England?” (1981)

JW Tibble (Ed.) – **The Study
of Education** (1966)

Lev Vygotsky – **Thought and
Language** (1934/1962)

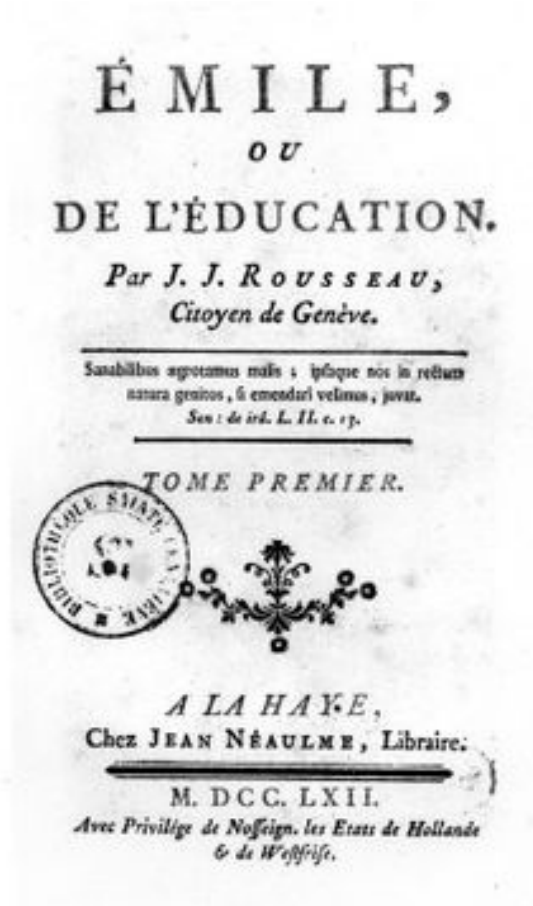
Alfred North Whitehead – **The
Aims of Education and
other essays** (1929)

Paul E. Willis – **Learning to
Labour: How Working
Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs** (1977)

Alison Wolf – **Does Education Matter? Myths about Education and Economic Growth**
(2002)

Michael FD Young (Ed) – **Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of
Education** (1971)

Michael FD Young – **Bringing Knowledge Back In: From Social Constructivism to Social
Realism in the Sociology of Education** (2007)



At the top of the reading list for centuries. Wikimedia
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