FIFTY MAJOR THINKERS ON EDUCATION

In this unique work some of today’s greatest educators present concise, accessible summaries of the great educators of the past. Covering a time-span from 500 BC to the early twentieth century, the book includes profiles of:

- Augustine
- Dewey
- Erasmus
- Gandhi
- Kant
- Montessori
- Plato
- Rousseau
- Steiner
- Wollstonecraft

Each essay gives key biographical information, an outline of the individual’s principal achievements and activities, an assessment of their impact and influence, a list of their major writings and suggested further reading. Together with Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education, this book provides a unique reference guide for all students of education.

Joy A. Palmer is Professor of Education and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Durham, England. She is Vice-President of the National Association for Environmental Education and a member of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication.

Advisory Editors: Liora Bresler is Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. David E. Cooper is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Durham.
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CONTRIBUTORS

Apple, Michael W. is John Bascom Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Baker, Eva L. is Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, USA
Batho, G.R. is Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Durham, England
Bergin, David A. is Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Toledo, Ohio, USA
Bewley, William L. is Assistant Director at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
Chung, Shunah is Lecturer at Sookmyung University, Seoul, Korea
Cizek, Gregory J. is Associate Professor of Educational Measurement and Evaluation at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA
Clarke, James A. is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Durham, England
Cooper, David E. is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Durham, England
Dickerson, Adam B. is Research Affiliate of the Philosophy Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
Dutta, Krishna is a freelance scholar based in London, England
Ellis, Nancy C. is Research Professor of Education at the University of Vermont, USA
FitzPatrick, P.J. is Reader Emeritus in the Department of Philosophy, University of Durham, England
Harris, Violet is Professor at the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Hart, Thomas E. is a Doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy, University of Durham, England
Hobson, Peter is Associate Professor in the School of Education Studies, University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia
Knight, David is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Durham, England
Laird, Susan is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Oklahoma, USA
Martin, Jane Roland is Professor of Philosophy Emerita, the University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA
Monk, Ray is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton, England
Noddings, Nel is Lee Jacks Professor of Education, Emerita, Stanford University, and Professor of Philosophy and Education, Teachers College, Columbia, USA
Oelkers, Jürgen is Professor in the Institute of Education at the University of Zurich, Switzerland
O’Hagan, Timothy teaches philosophy at the School of Economic and Social Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk, England
O'Hear, Anthony is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bradford, England
Palmer, Joy A. is Professor of Education and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Durham, England
Peprnik, Jaroslav is Professor in the Department of English and American Studies, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic
Pickering, William is General Secretary of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford, England
Prasad, Devi is educationist, artist and worker for international peace, based in New Delhi, India, Visiting Lecturer Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, USA and Visiting Professor, Visva Bharati, India
Rack, Henry is formerly Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of Manchester, England
Ridgway, Jim is Professor of Education at the University of Durham, England
Robinson, Andrew is Literary Editor of The Times Higher Education Supplement, England
Rowe, Christopher J. is Professor of Greek and Leverhulme Research Professor at the University of Durham, England
Russell, Joan is Assistant Professor and Director of Music Education at McGill University, Faculty of Education, Montréal, Canada
Seraphine, Connie Leean is Director, First Call Theological Education, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Sevilla, Diego is Professor in the Department of Education, the University of Granada, Spain
Shen, Jianping is Assistant Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership, College of Education, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, USA
Smith, Louis M. is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Education, Washington University, St Louis, USA.
Smith, Richard is Professor of Education at the University of Durham, England
Steitieh, Dalal Malhas is Professor in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan
Tawil, Hani A. is Professor in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan
Teitelbaum, Kenneth is Professor and Chairperson, Department of Teaching, Leadership and Curriculum Studies, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, USA
Thompson, Christine is Associate Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University, USA
Torre, Carlos Antonio is Professor of Education at Southern Connecticut State University, and Fellow, Yale University, USA
Tröhler, Daniel is Oberassistent at the Institute of Education of the University of Zurich, Switzerland
Tufekci, Aysel is a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Villarini Jusino, Angel is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Puerto Rico
Walsh, Daniel J. is Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Willis, Arlette Ingram is Associate Professor at the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
PREFACE

The twin volumes Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey and Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present are together intended to provide a valuable and fascinating resource for readers with an interest in ‘influential lives’ relating to critical thinking, action, and in more recent times research, which has influenced policy and practice in the field of education. As a pair, the two volumes consider influences upon educational thought and practice from the very earliest times through to the present day. In the first volume we examine the lives and influence of fifty individuals from the time of Confucius to the era of Dewey. The second volume continues where the first ceases, examining the contribution of a further fifty individuals from the time of Piaget to the present.

Each volume and each essay within it follows a common format. An opening quotation sets the scene at the start of each essay. Then, readers are provided with an overview of the subject’s work and basic biographical information. Each author then engages in critical reflection which aims to illuminate the influence, importance and perhaps innovative character of the subject’s thinking and, where appropriate, research and actions. In other words, authors have moved beyond the purely descriptive and have provided a discussion of the nature of the intellectual or practical impact that the life, thinking and works of each figure made or is making upon our understanding or practice of education.

At the end of each essay, we have provided information that will lead interested readers into further and more detailed study. Firstly, there are the references for the notes to which the numbers in the text refer; secondly there is a cross-referencing with other subjects in the two books whose thought or influence relates in some obvious way to that of the subject of the essay; thirdly there is a list of the subject’s major writings (where applicable); and finally, there is a list of references for those who wish to pursue more in-depth reading on the subject.

By far the hardest task in assembling these volumes was deciding on the final list of 100 thinkers on education to be included. How can one begin, in a field so extensive as education, to select 100 individuals from over 2,000 years of thought? Inevitably, my advisory editors and I were inundated with suggestions and ideas for influential people who, for the obvious reason of lack of space, had to be left out. The 100 subjects finally decided upon include some very obvious ‘great names’ such as Plato, John Dewey and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, alongside some less well-known yet clearly influential people. In making our choice we also aimed to provide coverage of a range of fields within the vast and complex arena of teaching and learning—philosophy, psychology, thinking on the early years, on testing, evaluation and so on. Most importantly, we emphasise that this pair of volumes is certainly not exhaustive. As already mentioned our choice of subjects proved to be extremely difficult. Furthermore, the combined work certainly does not pretend to be an overview of the lives of the 100 greatest educational thinkers the world has ever known. We believe that it includes some people who would fall into the category...
of those who have had arguably the greatest global influence on educational thought and practice, but most importantly, all people in the books have made very substantial contributions to educational thinking in some form or another. It is hoped that some readers will derive great benefit and pleasure from the books because they introduce them to previously unknown lives. As a whole, I hope that the books will be of interest to all who would like to find out more about the lives of individuals past and present who have influenced thinking about knowledge and the education of the people of our world.

Joy A.Palmer
CONFUCIUS 551–479 BCE

If one loves humaneness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is folly; if one loves understanding but does not love learning, the consequence of this is unorthodoxy; if one loves good faith but does not love learning, the consequence of this is damaging behaviour; if one loves straightforwardness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rudeness; if one loves courage but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rebelliousness; if one loves strength but does not love learning, the consequence of this is violence.¹

Confucius was the Latinized name for Kong Qiu where Kong was the family name and Qiu was the given. He is often revered as Kong Fuzi, with Fuzi meaning ‘master’. Confucius was born into an impoverished aristocratic family. His father was a low-level military officer. It was said that Confucius was only three when his father died and that Confucius did not even know where his father was buried.

Confucius was married at the age of 19. He accepted public employment as a storekeeper and later on as a superintendent of parks and herds. He established his private school when he was about 30 years old (522 BCE) and gradually gained his reputation for his expertise in ‘rituals’. He then used his prestige to gain access to the political arena, acting as an adviser to the princes and nobility of the Kingdom of Lu as well as other neighbouring states. His political agenda was to restore the ‘Zhou rituals’, which meant the political and religious system established by the King of Zhou, founder of the Western Zhou dynasty 500 year earlier.

At the age of 50 (502 BCE), Confucius became an official in the Kingdom of Lu and about one year later became the Minister of Justice. He organized a campaign to weaken the power of three aristocratic clans. The campaign failed, and he lost his political future in the Kingdom of Lu. He was then a political exile in the neighbouring kingdoms for fourteen years before one of his former students, who was a high ranking official, helped him to resettle in Lu. He was then 60 years old. The next five years before his death were the most prosperous for his private school. During his lifetime, the private school he established had enrolled 3,000 students. He died in 479 BCE where he was 73.

There was no reliable evidence to point to the work written by Confucius himself. However, it is generally agreed among historians that Confucius’ philosophic and educational ideas are recorded in, among others, the following so called ‘Four Books’—the Analects of Confucius (Lunyu), the Book of Mencius (Mengzi), the Great Learning (Daxue), and the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong). In Chinese society, prior to the twentieth century, these four classics were among the textbooks for those who planned to take the imperial examination which selected officials for the imperial government. Among these books, the Analects, a book compiled by his disciples after his death, is a collection of conversations with Confucius, containing many of his most important
sayings. Contemporary historians agree that the *Analects* is among the most reliable for his remarks and activities. Therefore, the following will draw heavily on the *Analects*.

The psychological foundation of Confucius’ educational thought is that human nature is neutral at birth. He observed that ‘By nature, people are close to one another; through practice, they drift far apart.’ Because of the neutrality of human nature at birth, the environment, including education, plays a very important role in raising the young. It was said that Mencius’ mother moved three times in order to find a good environment for bringing up her son, who became one of the most important spokespersons for Confucius about one hundred years after his death.

Confucius’ private school has been extolled as an institution which provided educational opportunity to the elite as well as the common people. He said: ‘I instruct regardless of kind.’ He also said that ‘To anyone who spontaneously came to me with a bundle of dried pork, I have never denied instruction.’ Although there have been debates as to the value of ‘a bundle of dried pork’ at that time and the extent to which his school was open to everyone, the students who had conversations with Confucius as reported in the *Analects* came from various social backgrounds.

However, the educational purposes for the elite and the common people appeared to be different. Confucius said that ‘If the gentleman acquires the Way, he loves men; if the small man acquires the Way, he is easy to command.’ Confucius said children of the nobility, and ‘the small man’ those of the commoners. Therefore, there appeared to be differentiated educational purposes for those who came from various social backgrounds. Although his notion of educational opportunity was primarily to maintain the status quo, some of his outstanding students from poor family background did become important officials in the government. In Confucius’ words, ‘Those who excel in office should learn; those who excel in learning should take office.’ The notion of the scholar-official was the primary justification for the later imperial examination.

Confucius was heavily involved in teaching; and there are several texts about his ideas and practice related to teaching method and instructional content. Confucius paid attention to students' individual characteristics. In the *Analects* it was reported that Confucius commented on his students’ individual differences and suggested that they were suited for various kinds of jobs. In his own words, ‘To people above average, one can impart higher things; to people below average, one cannot impart higher things.’

Confucius also expected his students to be motivated and active learners. In his words, ‘No vexation, no enlightenment; no anxiety, no illumination. If I have brought up one corner and he does not return with the other three, I will not repeat.’ According to this quote, Confucius urged his students to take the initiative in learning. They should be eager in and dedicated to learning. When students were taught something, they were expected to draw relevant inferences from it.

In terms of instructional contents, Confucius tended to disregard practical knowledge. The following was recorded in the *Analects*: ‘The Master said, “Inspire yourself with Poetry, establish yourself on The Rituals, perfect yourself with Music.”’ Among others, Confucius used the so-called Five Classics—*The Book of Odes* (Shijing), *The Book of History* (Shujing), *The Book of Rites* (Li), *The Book of Changes* (Yijing), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu)—as the primary instructional materials. One of Confucius’ students, Fan Chi, requested to learn farming: Confucius responded ‘I am not as good as an old farmer.’ When Fan Chi requested to learn vegetable gardening,
Confucius said: ‘I am not as good as an old vegetable gardener.’ After Fan Chi left, Confucius commented that Fan Chi did not have high aspirations. His emphasis on studying classics rather than acquiring practical knowledge also has had significant influence on the history of Chinese education. During the imperial examinations, the test items were almost solely based on the classics.

In addition to intellectual education, moral education also played a very important role in Confucius’ educational theory and practice. One of his students commented that ‘The Master instructed in four aspects: culture, moral conduct, wholehearted sincerity, and truthfulness,’ with the last three aspects pertaining to moral education. According to Confucius’ ethical theory, humanity is the supreme virtue and the total of all virtues, and it was manifested in many aspects of our lives. For example, Confucius said the following: ‘To restrain oneself and return to the rituals constitutes humanity’; ‘For a man of humanity is one who, wishing to establish himself, helps others to establish themselves, and who, wishing to gain perception, helps others to gain perception’; and ‘A man of humanity places hard work before reward.’

Confucius emphasized the importance of humanity in daily life in the way one treats parents and others. He said that ‘What you do not wish for yourself, do not impose on others.’ Confucius also stressed the importance of humanity in governing. Confucius observed that ‘If you yourself are correct, even without the issuing of orders, things will get done; if you yourself are incorrect, although orders are issued, they will not be obeyed.’ In another place in the Analects, he made a similar remark: ‘If you can set yourself correct, what difficulty do you have in conducting state affairs? If you cannot set yourself correct, how can you correct others?’

Confucius and his followers have had a tremendous impact on Chinese society in general and education in particular. The influence can also be felt in many other East and Southeast Asian nations. Although there have been ups and downs for the Confucian school in history, scholars from the school enjoyed high prestige in society and in the political arena. During some of the dynasties only scholars from the Confucian school could advise political leaders, a phenomenon called ‘suppression of the hundred schools and the exclusive recognition of Confucian techniques’.

As to the influence of Confucianism on Chinese society, the following two aspects are the most obvious. First, many of the traditional values advocated by Confucius, such as filial piety, respect for the elderly, and moderation, still play a very important role in Chinese people’s life. Second, Confucius and his followers emphasized education and learning, a tradition which can still be felt in China and many other neighbouring nations.

As to the influence of Confucianism on education, the following are the most important. First, the principle that ‘Those who excel in office should learn; those who excel in learning should take office’ has guided Chinese education. This principle and the corollary notion of scholar-official became the justification for the imperial examination that selected officials based on individual merits, a system which was not abolished until 1905. In order to prepare the most able and virtuous rulers, Confucius held that education should be available to all, irrespective of social class. He was a pioneer in providing education to the common people.

Second, the Confucian school produced a large body of literature which formed the primary instructional materials for many centuries until the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905. There is no reliable evidence to indicate that the work was written...
by Confucius himself. Confucius was said to have edited *The Book of Odes*, one of the Five Classics. However, the orthodox works of Confucianism, such as the Four Books and the Five Classics, became the basic texts for preparing for the imperial examination. Because of Confucius’ exclusive focus on classics to the extent of totally disregarding practical and scientific knowledge, Confucius and his followers are criticized for impeding China’s progress in science and technology.

Finally, Confucius’ purpose of education focused more on social rather than individual development. The moral values he advocated were ultimately related to governing and regulating social relationships. Confucius depicted a developmental path for his students—to achieve self-cultivation first, then family harmony, then good order in the state, and finally peace in the empire. Therefore, the real emphasis was on the social rather than private purpose of education. The emphasis on the social dimension is usually related to the instrumental purpose of education, i.e., to use education as a vehicle to achieve a purpose other than education per se. The training of talent loyal to the government was the fundamental principle of the official Confucian education. The instrumentality of educational purpose is still one of the most serious issues in current Chinese education.

**Notes**
3 Ibid., p. 158.
4 Ibid., p. 87.
5 Ibid., p. 166.
6 Ibid., p. 180.
7 Ibid., p. 83.
8 Ibid., p. 88.
9 Ibid., p. 97.
10 Ibid., p. 133.
11 Ibid., p. 91.
12 Ibid., p. 125.
13 Ibid., p. 85.
14 Ibid., p. 84.
15 Ibid., p. 125.
16 Ibid., p. 134.
17 Ibid., p. 135.
18 Ibid., p. 180.

**Further reading**

There is no reliable evidence to point to the work written by Confucius himself. Readers could consult the following to learn more about Confucius’ thoughts in general and his educational idea and practice in particular.


JIANPING SHEN
SOCRATES 469–399 BCE
The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.

These words are spoken by Socrates in Plato’s *Apology,* a largely fictional account of his speeches at the trial that led to his conviction and execution. We have no guarantee that Socrates actually uttered these words, or any others—or indeed that he thought anything in particular, since he wrote nothing himself, and we are forced to rely on numerous and often conflicting reports about him by those who did write: people like Plato, or Xenophon (to name what are probably our two most voluminous contemporary ‘authorities’). But the eleven words quoted—six in Plato’s original Greek—form an essential part of one highly plausible account of Socrates’ thinking which we can put together, mainly from Plato’s works. Since this is an account that makes Socrates a particularly interesting figure from the point of view of educational theory—since, that is, it would give him a theory of outstanding interest for educationalists—there would be good reason for considering it in the context of the present volume even if it turned out that the real Socrates had no such theory at all (why prefer to discuss a duller person than a more brilliant theory)? In any case, since there is hardly any chance of a definitive solution to ‘the problem of Socrates’, as it is sometimes called, short of his returning from the dead, what will be presented here may as well represent what he stood for (and I believe that there are good, if less than conclusive, arguments for supposing that it was).

Here are the main things we appear to know about the historical Socrates. Born in Athens, son of Sophroniscus—probably a stonemason—and Phaenaretē—a midwife—he served with great distinction as a heavy-armed infantryman on several campaigns, but never held any command; he generally avoided ordinary political involvement, but did serve on the executive committee of the democratic Council, a committee which also organized the business of the Assembly. On one occasion, in this role, he notoriously chose to stand out alone against the popular will. But he also—peacefully—resisted the bloody oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants in 404, at the risk of his own life. Military service apart, he hardly left Athens, and spent most of his life talking, perhaps especially to the young. He was tried for impiety—or, more specifically, for not believing in the city’s gods, but different ones, and for corrupting the young. He was sentenced to death, and executed. He left a wife and young children.

Socrates tends in modern discussions to be associated with a particular idea of teaching: one that is based on questions, and involves no direct transfer of information but rather allows the pupil to see the truth for himself or herself. In fact, Plato’s Socrates typically denies that he is a teacher at all. He knows nothing, so that he actually has nothing to impart to anyone; if he is wiser than anyone else, it is because he is aware of his own ignorance, and so realizes that he needs to do something about it. So he goes about asking other people questions, in the hope (so he says) that he may find someone who possesses the knowledge that he himself is aware of lacking. But, in the event, none of the people he questions ever turns out to know anything worth knowing, unless it is
some particular kind of expertise, like shoemaking or medicine; so all that he succeeds in
doing is showing himself, and the other person too, if he’s prepared to listen properly,
that the other person doesn’t know what he thought he knew. However, there is always an
invitation, whether explicit or implicit, for the newly self-aware person to continue the
inquiry along with Socrates; and this does at last begin to resemble our notion of Socratic
method—the only difference being that we introduce it into a context which assumes that
there are determinate truths to be learned, which we could mostly list if called upon to do
so. Socrates, by contrast, not only says he knows nothing, but means it; he is not merely
waiting for the other person to catch up with him, and gently prodding him or her in the
right direction with supposedly neutral questions, but is himself actively involved in the
search. (We do in fact find Plato’s Socrates endorsing the idea of education as turning the
soul towards—literally converting it to—the truth, but this is entirely compatible with the
idea of learning as searching, and mainly serves to emphasize the idea that there are
truths out there, as it were, waiting to be discovered: one idea that is surely Socratic.)
This is very far, however, from being the whole of Socrates’ position; and it is the part
that still needs to be supplied which is the more interesting. Socrates may not know
anything much, but there are certainly plenty of things that he believes, and believes quite
passionately. One such thing that he believes in is the importance of *reasoning things out.*
This, of course, we might have derived immediately from the proposition about the
unexamined life; but we might be inclined to object that that is to put it in a rather
extreme way—why should life actually be *unliveable* if it is unexamined? Plenty of us do
in fact live lives like that, and perfectly to our own satisfaction (we may say); what is
more, surely most people would not be capable of examining anything rationally, let
alone their lives? Socrates, it seems, would not be much bothered by the second point,
since on the whole he seems prepared to talk to anyone (though if they are young, he
evidently prefers them to be attractive). As for the first point, he would challenge it
directly: if we all want to be happy, which he takes to be axiomatic, then how are we
going to know if what we are doing now is contributing to that, unless we think it
through?

‘We all want to be happy’: for Socrates, it is the desire for the good—our own good—
that drives us all. That is, he is a ‘psychological egoist’; he believes that what in fact
motivates us, always, is desire for our own happiness. But Socrates’ brand of egoism is
an unusual one. Whereas egoism immediately suggests selfishness, Socrates’ notion of—
his conviction about—what is good for the agent (any agent) actually turns out to include
a central concern for others. So, for example, he gives *justice,* and indeed the other
recognized virtues, pride of place in his conception of the good life. One should do
nothing at all, he repeatedly insists (again, this is Plato’s Socrates), unless it is just—
though one should also, when circumstances demand it, act courageously, with restraint,
with due respect to the gods, and so on. This already means an absolute commitment to
safeguarding the rights of others (as we might put it), or being prepared to die for one’s
friends and fellow-citizens, if the circumstances demand it. His own behaviour also
suggests an immediate and direct concern for others’ welfare: his philosophizing is not
merely for the sake of caring for his own soul—whatever the ‘soul’ may be, for him—but
for the sake of others’ souls too, i.e. those of the people he philosophizes with.

‘Caring for the soul’ seems to mean, essentially, not being misled by the obvious
attractions of so-called ‘bodily’, i.e. material, pleasures. Here again justice enters the
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