Guided Bibliography for the Traditional Teacher

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First Edition

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Cover: Jean Creton, Histoire du roy d’Angleterre Richard II, 285 x 210 mm, c. 1405,
Archbishop Arundel preaches about wrongs done to Henry of Lancaster, illuminated by the
MASTER OF VIRGIL, Harley 1319, f. 12
http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourFr1400.asp
Preface

This paper is a work in progress that I intend to update from time to time. In some ways it is related to my Bibliographical Guide to History Education, which aims to provide readers with a guide to what has been written about the teaching of history, though with a more general focus. In contrast to that guide, however, which aims to be broadly comprehensive in scope, this guide is far more selective, for it would be impossible to pull together into one document everything that one might want to know about education. The paper thus starts with the question ‘what would I, as a traditionally-inclined teacher, wanted to have known at the start of my career?’ This bibliography is my answer to that question.

Many will find it uncomfortable for a reading guide to be described as ‘traditionalist’, not least because the broad terms ‘traditional education’ and ‘progressive education’ are highly contested, though it should be noted that teachers who define themselves as traditionalists are often happy to do so explicitly, whereas others often prefer to reject a ‘false dichotomy’. I have some sympathy for those who do not wish to describe their educational philosophy as ‘progressive’, not least because it encompasses positions as varied as Rousseau’s romanticism, Dewey’s emphasis on inquiry and the various incarnations and iterations of ‘twenty-first-century skills’. Although I would argue that all these philosophies share a set of common axioms (about the purpose of education, about the psychology of learning, about the role of the teacher, etc.) I am nevertheless happy to respect the fact that many are not comfortable with the term ‘progressive’. This reading list is thus aimed primarily at teachers and schools who are comfortable using the term traditionalist to describe themselves, though I hope that even those who reject the distinctions might find this paper intellectually stimulating.

I would define a traditional educational stance as follows. First, it places an emphasis on the transmission of culture from one generation to the next, which is not to suggest that a traditionalist curriculum consists solely of dead white men, nor that it seeks to limit the future horizons of children to what has been said before. Rather, a traditionalist believes that the future flourishing of both the children we teach and our wider culture is built on the foundations of a legacy left to us by previous generations. For us to see further, we must stand on the shoulders of giants. Secondly, and
consequently, a traditionalist places a strong emphasis on the authority of the teacher as the means by which pupils learn knowledge. This means that subject expertise and strong classroom discipline are treated as paramount. Thirdly, a traditionalist’s teaching style tends to be teacher-led, with the emphasis placed on whole-class teaching and questioning, although more recently traditionalists have drawn enthusiastically on some of the principles of cognitive psychology to furnish a theory of learning that emphasises the role of committing knowledge to memory, particularly in terms of fluency in reading and writing. Fourthly, a traditionalist makes a distinction between schooling and education, and does not seek to attribute all that might be included under the latter to the former.

This bibliography exists to guide readers through some of these ideas. The selected texts are my own choices, although I think many traditionalist teachers would agree with my selections. I have also included several blog posts which, while invariably being more limited in scope than full articles or books, are often nevertheless one of the easiest means by which teachers can access the ideas set out in the previous paragraph, and of course come with the benefit of being free to access. In general, reading lists are hard to come by in education: many university education departments refuse to publish their reading lists, and schools do not generally see it as their job to provide teachers with reading lists, or to stock the books and articles that such a reading list might contain. This bibliography aims to fill that gap, and I would be grateful for (a) comments on changes for future editions and (b) examples of where this bibliography has been used in schools or universities.

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Starting points

Particularly for new teachers, though even for experienced professionals, it can be daunting to launch oneself into some of the broader questions about education, and it may well be that a ‘top-down’ approach, in which the more practical concerns of teachers are learnt from first principles, is not best. This said, it is helpful to have some initial guidelines as to the field, and the following two books are my recommended stating points.


Both Hirsch and Holt are erudite and well-informed, though they have very distinctive views of what education ought to be. Hirsch is clearly the traditionally-minded of the two and he brings together in *Cultural Literacy* both a vision of the purpose of (particularly early) schooling with insights from the psychology of education. Both Holt and Hirsch are pessimistic in their account of the current state of affairs, but they offer very different views of the way forward.
The purpose of education

If you found Hirsch (1988) and Holt (1990) helpful introductions, then you may at this point want to immerse yourself more fully in the wider philosophy of education. The philosophy of education has ancient roots (Plato’s Republic went into some detail on education), but for a number of reasons I would recommend the ‘liberal’ philosophers of the 1960s as the best starting point.


- P. Hirst and R.S. Peters, *The Logic of Education* (out of print)

Perhaps what it most helpful in these two texts is the conceptual clarity that their form of analysis offers. Traditionalists are often fond of parsimony, stripping away at an idea to get to its essence. For recent commentary on Peters’ educational thought, the following is a good critique.


In opposition to the ‘liberal’ philosophy of education one would normally begin with Rousseau and Dewey. Both are highly complex philosophers whose interests went well beyond education and schooling. Of the two, Rousseau’s light has somewhat faded in recent years, though Dewey’s work remains widely used, cited and advocated.


For a sympathetic account of Dewey see

Some of the ideas advanced by Rousseau, Dewey and Holt (amongst numerous others, including the ‘twenty-first-century skills movement’) are challenged in

- Daisy Christodoulou, *Seven myths about education*, (Routledge, 2014)


Both Christodoulou and Peal attempt to demonstrate the influence of progressive educational ideas on schools, particularly in terms of government policy and the role of the inspectorate.
Curriculum

Traditionalists tend to favour a subject-based curriculum, at least in secondary schooling, and the kinds of subjects taught tend to be based on the academic disciplines. Perhaps one of the best starting points for this is

- P. Hirst, *Knowledge and the curriculum*, (Routledge, 2010)

Hirst’s thesis (which he himself later rejected) is criticised, amongst other theses, in


For those more sociologically-minded, a series of recent works have been published under the banner of ‘social realism’ which seeks to reject genericism and the collapse of curriculum into a more general notion of ‘pedagogy’, although it is not at all clear that this group would consider themselves traditionalists, preferring instead to position themselves as a ‘third way’ that goes beyond the uncritical learning of facts and the rejection of factual knowledge. For an introduction see

- M. Young, *Bringing Knowledge Back In*, (Routledge, 2007)


Hirsch takes a different approach to forming a theory of curriculum design, and the most recent publication on this is


Some of these principles have been brought to bear on the practicalities of curriculum design in

One critique of the subject-based curriculum is that it should be based on more ‘generic’ skills and competences, such as critical thinking. Perhaps the best response to this argument is


The idea of knowledge sequencing has become all the more popular amongst traditionalist teacher bloggers, and a good account of approaches to this can be found at


- J. Kirby, ‘Five Year Revision Plan’, 3rd May 2015, [https://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/a-5-year-revision-plan/](https://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/a-5-year-revision-plan/)
Classroom teaching

Two broad themes have characterised traditionalist approaches to classroom teaching over the last few years. One is a desire to reduce the emphasis on ‘pedagogy’ and to focus more on curriculum and assessment. For those in this camp, how you teach is less important than what you teach. An alternative approach has been to develop a model of teaching that is heavily informed by the practices of other teachers and the insights offered by cognitive psychologists. A growing body of research in the field places a premium on some approaches to teaching that are dear to the heart of the traditionalist, especially the focus on committing knowledge to long-term memory. At the same time, cognitive psychology has provided traditionalists with a range of ideas about the learning process, and this fusion is perhaps as near to a definition of ‘neo-traditionalism’ as you are likely to find. The most accessible introductions to cognitive psychology for teachers are:


- David Didau & Nick Rose, What every teacher needs to know about psychology, (John Catt, 2016)


In all three cases, these books draw together principles from cognitive psychology to reach conclusions about teaching practice, with a particular emphasis on strategies such as interleaving, retrieval practice, deliberate practice and elaboration. Two of these books are from the USA and it is here that cognitive psychologists have been most outspoken in commenting on classroom practice. Two organisations in particular have received some attention in the UK: Deans for Impact, and the Learning Scientists. Deans for Impact have released a summary of their ideas in this pamphlet:

The Learning Scientists, which is a relatively new organisation, already has a wealth of information on its website, which can be found at

• [http://www.learningscientists.org](http://www.learningscientists.org)

For putting these principles into practice, a good starting point is


Ideas for how knowledge sequencing might be used to encourage pupils to remember what they have learnt have been published on a number of blogs. For some particularly good examples, see


• K. Boulton, Why is it that students always seem to understand but then never remember?’, 6th May 2013, [https://tothereal.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/why-is-it-that-students-always-seem-to-understand-but-then-never-remember/](https://tothereal.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/why-is-it-that-students-always-seem-to-understand-but-then-never-remember/)


Part of the traditionalist revival has involved a rejection of earlier theories of learning, and social psychologists have come under the heaviest fire, particularly the Vygotsky and Bruner. As with Dewey, the best recent sympathetic handling of the psychology of these thinkers can be found in the Bloomsbury Library of Educational Thought, though again this should be read alongside the critique advanced in Christodoulou (2014).

• R. van der Veer, *Lev Vygotsky*, (Bloomsbury, 2014)
Teaching practices based on a social constructivist theory of learning are popular and varied, but often have at their core the principle that children learn better when they work things out for themselves without explicit instruction from a teacher. The classic critique of this position is offered in


A number of the ideas raised in this paper have been explored further by

- G. Ashman, Filling the Pail, https://gregashman.wordpress.com

Reading and Writing

Reading, writing and arithmetic are of course the trinity of traditionalism and it is noteworthy that ‘literacy’ has become a key interest of traditionalists, not least because it is fluent reading that is the key to accessing further knowledge. All school takes reading seriously, and the following book is a good recent summary of approaches to reading that traditionalist teachers find appealing.


In particular, it should be noted that these works emphasise the role of knowledge in reading, and steers clear from ‘generic’ literacy techniques. The use of structured synthetic phonics is widely associated with the traditionalist agenda, although this tends to be associated more closely with primary education. For a summary on the efficacy of phonics teaching, see


Once a child can decode, it is the acquisition of knowledge that creates fluency. For more on the relationship between knowledge-growth and vocabulary-growth and reading fluency, see


• K. Ashford, ‘How can we increase a child’s vocabulary’, 3rd April 2015,
  https://tabularasaeducation.wordpress.com/2015/04/03/vocab/
Assessment

It would perhaps not be correct to attribute some of the more pernicious approaches to assessment in the 1990s and 2000s to a progressive of philosophy of education. The National Strategies and the National Curriculum Level Descriptions can perhaps better be linked to a technocratic model of education in which the school curriculum was reduced to a set of ‘learning objectives’ that could be taught and assessed discretely. Indeed, the more progressively-minded of commentators resisted this development on the grounds that education should not be a technocratic phenomenon. Traditional teachers, who have perhaps always placed more value on the role of summative tests, have thus tended to be more interested in turning assessment into something more rigorous, whilst at the same time rejecting practices such as deriving learning objectives and assessment criteria from generic taxonomies such as Bloom’s. The distinction can perhaps best be summarised by saying that traditionalists reject layering a progression model on top of the curriculum, seeing instead the curriculum as a progression model in its own right.

For some of the principles of testing, including key ideas such as ‘samping from the domain’ and ‘standardised testing’ the best starting point is:


Although yet to be published, the following is likely to be one of the most important publications on assessment in recent years:


In the meantime, Christodoulou’s work on assessment is easily accessed via her blog

- [http://wingtoheaven.wordpress.org/assessment](http://wingtoheaven.wordpress.org/assessment)