



CORK DEMOCRATIC
SCHOOL
A SPACE FOR SELF DIRECTED LEARNERS

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: READING LIST

This list is constantly being updated. Please email your recommendations to marcinszczerbinski@gmail.com

WHY DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION? PSYCHOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Gray, P. (2013). [*Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*](#). Basic Books

This passionate defence of free play as the foundation of happiness and true learning. Much of theoretical rationale for democratic education comes from this book. Peter Gray is psychologist, emeritus professor at Boston College.

[*Freedom to Learn. The roles of play and curiosity as foundations for learning*](#). Peter Gray's blog

There are many topics on this regularly updated blog, but the importance of free play, and the (democratic) future of education are the main themes. Here's a couple of entries that caught my attention:

[Education's future: what will replace K12 and college](#)

[Biological foundations of self-directed education](#)

[Children teach themselves to read](#)

[Children educate themselves IV: lessons from Sudbury Valley](#) [a succinct introduction to the Sudbury model of democratic education. Mentions Peter Gray's research on the lives of Sudbury Valley graduates).

Peter Gray is also [very active on Facebook](#)

Gopnik, A. (2016) [*The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children.*](#) Bodley Head

“... Love doesn't have goal or blueprints, but it does have a purpose. The purpose of love is not to change the people we love, but to give them what they need to thrive. Love's purpose is not to shape our beloved's destiny, but to help them shape their own. It isn't to show them the way, but to help them find a path for themselves, even if the path they take isn't one we would choose for ourselves, or even one we would choose for them. ... Loving children doesn't give them a destination; it gives them sustenance for the journey” (page 10).

“Drawing on the study of human evolution and on her own cutting-edge scientific research into how children learn, Gopnik shows that although caring for children is immensely important, the goal shouldn't be to shape them so they turn out a certain way. Children are designed to be messy and unpredictable, playful and imaginative, and very different both from their parents and from one another. The variability and flexibility of childhood allow them to innovate, create, and survive in an unpredictable world. "Parenting" won't make children learn - rather, caring parents let children learn by creating a secure, loving environment” [from the book's dust jacket]

Alison Gopnik, a professor at University of California, Berkeley, is one of the most eminent contemporary developmental psychologists (for more information on her work, see [here](#))

This book, which focusses mostly on parent-child relationship, resonates with many themes discussed by Peter Gray ([who praised Gopnik's book on his blog](#)).

Rogers, C. R.(1986). [*Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become.*](#) Merrill Publishing Company.

This book emphasises the importance of student-centered education from primary up to 3rd level. He introduces the concept of the educator's role as facilitator of learning. As a renowned humanist, he focuses on creating a caring environment where students develop a love of learning and enjoy coming to school.

Holt, J. (1964; revised edition 1982). [*How Children Fail.*](#) Da Capo Lifelong Books.

This book provides insights into how children enquire about the world and why the traditional school methods of learning, testing and grading may not support that. [*How Children Learn*](#) (1967/1983) is the companion volume.

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS: HISTORY AND PRINCIPLES

Neill, A.S., & Lamb, A. (1992). [*The New Summerhill*](#). Penguin Education

The most recent and updated edition of the most famous book on democratic education: *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, first published in 1960. The author — Alexander Sutherland Neill — was the founder, owner and first principal of [Summerhill school](#); arguably the first democratic education project that enjoyed long-term success (it is still going strong as it is approaching its 100th birthday).

While the book may be dated in some respects (e.g. in its references to psychoanalysis) it is beautifully written and, in my opinion, essential to understanding what democratic education is all about

Hecht, Y. (2012). [*Democratic Education: A Beginning of a Story*](#). AERO

Yaacov Hecht is the founder of the [Democratic School of Hadera](#), Israel. The book presents its history and philosophy. For more information about the author, and his current work, see [here](#).

Jim Rietmulder (2019) [*When Kids Rule the School: The Power and Promise of Democratic Education*](#). New Society Publishers

In the words of Peter Gray "This book is the clearest, most complete explanation of self-directed democratic schooling that I have seen. Whether you are brand new to the idea of democratic education or have long been immersed in it, you will find much to think about here".

SUDBURY VALLEY MODEL OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

Sudbury Valley School website — [Theory](#) and [Practice](#) links

A collection of articles and blog posts by people associated with the Sudbury Valley school. They explore various facets of democratic education from the perspective of Sudbury model

[Daniel Greenberg's blog](#)

A blog by one of the founders of Sudbury Valley school. Some of its entries are chapters from some of Greenberg's books (see below).

His relatively recent (2018) entry [on the radical difference between democratic schooling and unschooling](#) seems particularly important. While many people will see this differently, the potential tension between at-home unschooling and democratic schooling is definitely worth reflecting on

[Sudbury Valley School Press](#)

Over the years, Sudbury Valley School has published a wealth of resources on the theory and practice of Sudbury-style education – so it is worth browsing this page.

The most comprehensive resource available there is [Planning Kit for Sudbury Schools](#) — an entire library of books, handbooks, manuals, DVDs, and other materials collated for those who wish to open a Sudbury style school. Positions from that list can also be purchased individually. The following three may be a good place to start:

Greenberg, D. (2016). [The place to grow: the culture of Sudbury Valley School](#). Sudbury Valley School Press

Greenberg, D. & Sadofsky (2008). [Starting a Sudbury School. Summary of experiences of fifteen start-up groups](#). Sudbury Valley School Press

Greenberg, D. (2000). [A clearer view. New insights into the Sudbury School model. The thirtieth anniversary lectures](#). Sudbury Valley School Press

Sadofsky, M., & Greenberg, D. (eds.) (1998). [Reflections on the Sudbury School concept](#). Sudbury Valley School Press

Greenberg, D. (1995). [Free at last. The Sudbury Valley School](#). Sudbury Valley School Press

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION ON FILM

[Sudbury Valley youtube channel](#)

Several short videoclips from the original Sudbury Valley School (Framingham, MA), documenting various aspects of school life

Schools of Trust (dir. Christoph Schuhmann, 2014). 63 mins

A series of interviews with staff, students and academics involved in democratic education. Snapshots of school life in several democratic school in Europe, USA and Israel. The DVD version [can be purchased from the publisher \(Tologo-Verlag\)](#). A free version is available online: [Part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#).

Sudbury Schools: Interviews with Students, Staff, Parents and Graduates (dir Henning Graner, Martin Wilke, 2005). 187 mins

An in-depth exploration of the life and governance of Sudbury schools. The DVD version [can be purchased from the publisher \(Tologo-Verlag\)](#). A free version is available online at [Sudbury Schools Youtube channel](#). For the purpose of online presentation, the film is divided into 27 short clips ('chapters').

School Circles (dir. Charlie Shread, Marianne Osorio, 2018) 89 mins

A documentary exploring democratic schools in the Netherlands, showing footage of proposal discussions, conflict mediation and decision. The full film can be rented on Vimeo ([where you can find a trailer, too](#)); a free screening can be organized via Videocamp (please follow the trailer link)

Class Dismissed: A film About Learning Outside of the Classroom (dir. Jeremy Stuart, 2015) 90 mins

A documentary exploring alternative education solutions (mostly homeschooling) from the US perspective. See [here](#) for a trailer and purchase options

Self-Taught: Life Stories From Self-Directed Learners (dir. Jeremy Stuart) 139 mins

Exploration of self-directed education from the perspective of successful adults who experienced it. See [here](#) for a trailer and purchase options

Doing Nothing All Day (dir. Margaret Hentze, 2015) 63 mins

The concept of democratic schooling presented from the perspective of a fictitious mother, searching for the ideal school for her son. See [here](#) for a trailer and purchase options

Being and Becoming (dir. Clara Bellar, 2014) 99 mins

A documentary exploring the concept of trustful parenting and alternative education. See [here](#) for a trailer and purchase options

[The Land](#) (dir. Erin Davis, 2015).

A very short documentary about the adventure playground movement, risky play etc. A panel discussion about said film with excerpts from it can be found here: [part 1](#), [part 2](#).

Online lectures and TED talks

Logan LaPlante (2013) [Hackschooling makes me happy](#).

A TED talk given by a 13-years-old that became an inspiration for some young people to join Wicklow Sudbury school

Finn Cahn (2019) [My Love Letter to Listening: How it Changed My World](#).

Finn is a 17-years-old student of Wicklow Sudbury School. The talk touches on his experience of democratic education

Peter Gray (2016) [Self Directed Education. What Is It, How Does It Work?](#)

A recording of a talk Peter Gray delivered at the 2016 Alternative Education Resource Organisation conference in Portland, OR, 4th – 7th August 2016. It summarizes many themes of his 2013 *Free To Learn* book. Exceptionally clear and thorough, this talk is arguably the best short (relatively speaking: 1h 23mins) introduction to the concept of self-directed learning there is