

Great books for learning, growth, and education

by David Wilson

It would be in the best interests of school teachers, administrators, parents, and community members everywhere to take a good look at some insightful books on education, because we all need to hear something of the message they provide.

With that in mind, what follows is a short list of some of the very best books about learning available, and each is recommended not just for educators, but for anyone with even a slight interest in personal growth or school improvement.

1. ***It's Not Us Against Them*** by Raymond J. McNulty. This book is, by far, the very best one that I have ever read on what is needed in education.

The author wrote that we should be asking students for input, and explained that in the very best schools, teachers and students work in a partnership of learning. One student described the relationship between young learners and the faculty by simply saying, "It's not us against them."

McNulty contends schools should prepare young people for the road ahead. "The future belongs to learners who can take knowledge and adapt it to the changing world," he wrote. "Our task is to educate our children for the unknown."

2. ***Life's Greatest Lessons, 20 Things that Matter Most*** by Hal Urban. You should read this book whether you are affiliated with education or not. It has plenty to think about, and is one of the greatest tools available on character education. But in a larger sense it is a book about good character, and it is needed in today's world.

Urban wrote that schools do a good job with the curriculum, but not as well at helping students understand life itself. He said he wrote *Life's Greatest Lessons* to help children "understand what's important, what good character is, and what it means to be successful in life."

3. ***Writing to Learn*** by William Zinsser. The book by Zinsser called *On Writing Well* has inspired thousands and thousands of people for almost 40 years. But his book entitled *Writing to Learn*, even though relegated to the shadows of *On Writing Well*, is one that speaks a clear message about the importance of having students practice writing skills in every single subject. Zinsser wrote that writing is a crucial skill in life and an important tool to enrich the learning process. "Writing organizes and clarifies our thoughts," he wrote. "Writing enables us to find out what we know—and what we don't know—about whatever we're trying to learn."

4. ***What Works in Schools*** by Robert Marzano. Tons of educational research is available about what is most effective in helping students achieve success, and Marzano has examined much of it in producing various books. In *What Works in Schools*, we find some extremely practical ideas for schools to implement. Marzano carefully outlines what students need, and when schools utilize his recommendations, they can see great gains in academic performance. His book explains providing timely feedback to students, strengthening a student's background knowledge,

providing student motivation, and implementing ways to encourage parental and community involvement. Marzano mentions many other practices, but the bottom line is that school districts have a moral obligation to do what the research says is best for students.

5. ***Leading Change in Your School*** by Doug Reeves. Generally speaking, people are not comfortable with change. That is true in schools and it is true almost anywhere you go. In the case of education, Reeves provides statistical evidence that tells how teachers (sometimes reluctantly) will make changes when it is necessary for the good of the students.

There are, however, about two percent who will be defiant towards a change effort, even to the point of being actively and openly opposed to it. Reeves calls them the "toxic two percent" and explains that they can be very vocal. But loudness does not translate in to numbers, and because they are only two percent, Reeves said the leaders in schools should spend more time supporting the majority of individuals who are actually doing those things that help students the most.

To spend too much time on the "toxic two percent" is emotionally draining, and Reeves wrote that it is better to spend one's energy communicating an uplifting message about the importance of the work. "You are so valuable and worthy," he says to the teachers, "our mission so vital, and the future lives of our students are so precious, that we have a joint responsibility to one another to be the best we can be."

The notion of the "toxic two percent" is only one sample from Reeves' work, and *Leading Change in Your School* has much, much more to contemplate. It's worth an open-minded look.

Finally, we should not pretend that there are only five good books on this topic. There are, literally, scores of great volumes to consider. But for now, here are five more, worth an honorable mention:

Mindset by Carol Dweck – A great book about learning, growing, and success.

Drive by Daniel Pink – Explains how people are motivated by work that is interesting, by having a sense of autonomy, and by feeling that they are doing something that matters.

Creative Schools by Ken Robinson – Excellent outside-the-box thinking.

Coaching in the Classroom by Grant Teaff – Immensely practical and down-to-earth.

Learning Every Day by me – If I thought my ideas weren't extremely helpful, I wouldn't have written them down. And as always, any time that I write it is done to stimulate more thought in others.



Dr. David Wilson of Springdale, Arkansas is a former high school principal, an author, and a communications director. His book, *Learning Every Day*, is available on Amazon. You may order it at:

<https://www.amazon.com/author/dwilsonnotes>