

VOLUME 6

Introduction

Charlotte's introduction to *A Philosophy of Education* is a good overview of the entire volume. She introduces ideas that she will discuss in more detail in later chapters.

THE WAR: Throughout the course of the book, Charlotte frequently mentions “the War,” which was WWI. She wrote *A Philosophy of Education* in 1921, just a few years after the war had ended. The effects of WWI were quite staggering for England. More than 900,000 British soldiers were killed, and more than twice that number returned home maimed or disabled. Citizens faced extreme hardship at home as well, including famine, illness, and shortages of materials. This is the lens from which Charlotte writes about education.

Charlotte makes the argument that one of the causes of the Great War was Germany's distortion and misrepresentation of certain theories by Charles Darwin. She explains that the German education of the time was strictly utilitarian which marked the beginning of the country's moral downfall; that nothing mattered but physical fitness and vocational training; that the utilitarian education freed German citizens from any ‘moral restraints;’ and that this is what can happen when education does not nourish and inspire the spirit of a person. Charlotte cites the book *German Philosophy in Relation to the War* by John Henry Muirhead as well as a book-burning incident in Germany. You can find links to both of those references on the [Volume 6 Resources Page](#) on The Plenary website.

EDUCATION: Education means preparing a child for *life*, not just for making a living; it means feeding a person's mind and spirit with ideas that will inspire them.

“Knowledge is the necessary daily food of the mind” for “it is the man who has read and thought on many subjects who is, with the necessary training, the most capable whether in handling tools, drawing plans, or keeping books. The more of a person we succeed in making a child, the better will he both fulfill his own life and serve society ... We want an education which shall nourish the mind while not neglecting either physical or vocational training.”

Charlotte gives a list in which she describes how her method of education is different from the usual education of the day:

A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: STUDY GUIDE

- Students do the work themselves
- Teachers are only there to help if asked – except in certain subjects such as math and grammar; *“Teachers Shall Teach Less and Scholars Shall Learn More”*
- Much reading is assigned
- Nothing is selected based on a student’s interest
- Students do not seem to be confused or mixed up by the reading of so many books simultaneously
- Students delight in their studies
- Books used are literary in style
- Marks, prizes, and rewards are not used to secure attention
- No stray lessons - lessons are planned to be consecutive in order

LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL: This education is beneficial for ALL students, not just those of the upper classes and gifted students. This is an education that nourishes children from every walk of life and every ability.

Charlotte says her theory is based on certain Principles that are usually unrecognized or disregarded. Some of which are:

- Children are persons and have the same needs as we do
- The mind needs ideas just as body needs food
- The Desire of Knowledge is the chief instrument of education and that “this desire might be paralyzed or made powerless like an unused limb by encouraging other desires to intervene between a child and the knowledge proper for him”

Charlotte will discuss these Principles (and others) in more detail in later chapters.

STUDY QUESTIONS: INTRODUCTION

1. What is education?
2. How should education serve a person as well as a society?
3. How did education go wrong in Germany and what was the result?
4. What is knowledge? How does one become educated?

LINKS TO RESOURCES: [Volume 6 Resources Page](#)