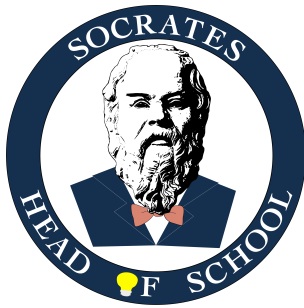


The Case Against Education by Bryan Caplan



Think you might want to read this book?

Have you ever wanted an economist to break down the traditional perceptions of the value of an education? Well if so... you are in luck! Bryan Caplan does just that in *The Case Against Education*. Statistical analysis of the human capital vs. signaling theories is done with his theory that education is primarily about “signaling” to the world that someone is suitable for the workplace. This book is a great skim for those somewhat interested and a dream for anyone who is highly invested in this question and loves statistics and research.

What would Socrates ask?

- What percentage of the high school curriculum is truly essential knowledge?
- Why do we graduate students without the skill to write a resume or cover letter?
- If the purpose of education is the development of human capital, how come virtually no one attends university lectures for their own growth/for free?
- Should teachers focus more on developing talent or assessing growth?
- Should the focus of early schooling be content and later schooling be analysis?

Research

- Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman shows that statistical illiteracy underpins many foolish real-world choices. Yet only 7.7% of high school students pass a stats class.
- There were over 34,000 newly minted history graduates-and only 3,500 working historians in the entire country.
- Researchers also generally find that education fails to durably improve critical thinking outside the classroom.
- 66% of high school students say they're bored in class every day. Seventeen percent say they're bored in every class every day. Only 2% claim they're never bored in class.
- ...a major Gates Foundation study ranked boredom the most important reason why kids dropout of high school.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the United States has roughly 900,000 carpenters, 700,000 auto mechanics, and 400,000 plumbers. Classic college-prep classes like literature, foreign language, and history fall short because they prepare students for rare jobs. The whole U.S. employs only 129,000 writers, 64,000 translators, and 3,800 historians.
- Today's Americans spend about four times as much on tobacco and five times as much on alcohol as they do on reading.

Concepts

- Human Capital Purism: the view that (a) virtually all education teaches useful job skills and (b) these job skills are virtually the sole reason why education pays off in the labor market.
- Signaling- the idea that getting a college degree does nothing more than alert the world that you completed college.

Quotes from the author

- “Geometry is the most common of all math courses: over four-fifths complete it in high school. Yet the subject, featuring countless proofs of congruent triangles, is notoriously irrelevant.”
- “If you fail Spanish, you don’t finish high school, you can’t go to college, and the labor market punishes you - even though most B.A.s are equally monolingual.”
- “My claim is that education is mostly signaling. Given all the evidence, a 20/80 human capital/signaling split seems reasonable.”
- “Layman’s arguments almost never confront the questions, ‘At what point would education spending be excessive?’ ‘We’ve done enough for education’ is a heretical as ‘We’ve done enough for paralyzed veterans.’”
- “Fans of college love to contrast the average college graduate to the average high school graduate. Fans of vocational education love to contrast successful plumbers, electricians, and mechanics to debt-ridden baristas with English degrees.”
- “As society evolves, teaching the young different occupations is common sense. Teaching them no occupations and hoping they adapt to the job market after graduation is not. It doesn’t matter how futuristic our society becomes. Making kids study irrelevant material for a decade-plus is timelessly dysfunctional.”
- “... if we weren’t used to our education system, who would wish for it?”
- “If educational force-feeding worked well, most educated adults would adore these nerdy realms-and eagerly tap the Internet to revisit them. To understate, they rarely do, ‘Kim Kardashian’ gets about twenty times as many Google hits as ‘Richard Wagner’ and about two hundred times as many as ‘David Hume.’”
- “... the humanist case for education subsidies is flimsy today because the internet makes enlightenment practically free.”
- “Kids have more fun and learn vital lessons when adults give them their space.”
- “... people rush to embrace theories that praise education and reject theories that criticize education.”
- “Every education system navigates between two evils: Overlooked Potential and False Hope. The evil of Overlooked Potential: the stricter your standards, the more qualified students you fail to teach. The evil of False Hope: the laxer your standards, the more unqualified students you teach to fail. Why are we so obsessed with the first evil and so indifferent to the second?”
- “Look at sales of poetry books. Almost everyone has to study poetry in school. Almost no one voluntarily continues to study poetry in adulthood. Poetry is an acquired taste that almost no one acquires.”

- “In the real world, teachers rarely teach practical skills they can’t do. They teach impractical skills they can do.”

Quotes from others

- “From the standpoint of most teachers, right up to and including the level of teachers of college undergraduates, the ideal student is well behaved, unaggressive, docile, patient, meticulous, and empathetic in the sense of intuiting the response to the teacher that is most likely to please the teacher.” - Richard Posner
- “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” -Mark Twain
- “As anyone who has ever taught high school will attest, even among teens who attend the very best high schools, many simply hate school.” - Kenneth Gray
- “Motivating volunteers to engage in human improvement is very difficult, as any psychotherapist can confirm, but motivating conscripts is quite another thing altogether. And it is conscripts that teachers face every day in the classroom. - Stanford education professor David Labaree

Gateways to further learning

- [The High School Survey of Student Engagement](#)
- [Trends in College Pricing](#)

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Arum & Roksa	<i>Academically Adrift</i>
Wolf	<i>Does Education Matter?</i>
Huemer	<i>The Problem of Political Authority</i>
Caplan	<i>The Myth of the Rational Voter</i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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