

Calendar

Today

Hispanic Chamber Workshop: 5:30-7 p.m. "Primeros Pasos Para Comenzar un Negocio." Midland Library, 805 S.E. 122nd Ave.; free; www.multicolib.org/events or 503-988-5392

Tuesday

Portland Business Alliance: 7:30-9 a.m. 2010 annual meeting; Moving Business Forward. Register in advance. Oregon Ballroom. Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.; \$95, \$950 table of 10; www.portlandalliance.com

Oregon City Area Chamber of Commerce: 11:30 a.m. Tuesday Lunch Bunch. Reservations suggested. Tacho's Mexican Restaurant, 515 Molalla Ave., Oregon City; free; no-host lunch; www.oregoncity.org or 503-656-1619

Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce: 2-4 p.m. Job Seekers Support and Networking Group: "Hillsboro Area Companies, Organizations and Agencies." Rosings Center for the Healing Arts, 5215 N.E. Elam Young Parkway, Suite A, Hillsboro; free; www.hillchamber.org or 503-726-2151

Job Hunting Workshop: 6 p.m. Human resources expert Rich Koflik presents these events for job seekers. Topics include coping, résumés, presenting yourself to employers and much more. Register at 503-644-9111. Beaverton City Library, 12375 S.W. Fifth St., Beaverton; free; www.beavertonlibrary.org or 503-644-2197

CITYWIDE

School, qualified at Portland Public Schools Science Expo with a project titled "Using Thermal Infra-Red Satellite Imagery to Measure Water Surface Temperature in Large Rivers."

Daniel Scott, a sophomore at Franklin High School, qualified at the Portland fair with a project titled "Generation of Electrical Energy from Organic Compounds via Algae."

Akash Krishnan and Matt Fernandez, sophomores at Oregon Episcopal School, qualified at the Aardvark Science Expo with a project titled "The Classification and Recognition of Emotions in Prerecorded German Speech: Using MATLAB 7.8 Student Edition."

Matthew Nugent, a junior at Oregon Episcopal School, qualified at the Aardvark Science Expo with a project

10
29 April 2010

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Gruppenarbeit



Coastal cookery

A couple of Cannon Beach class offerings pamper participants as chefs ladle out lessons and tasty creations



By **ALEX PULASKI**
THE OREGONIAN

We didn't drive to Cannon Beach for the usual reasons: the art galleries and quaint shops, the wide and welcoming beach, or even for iconic Haystack Rock with its tide pools and seabirds.

No, we came for a couple of intimate dinner classes — a two- or three-hour chance to listen to chefs, watch them work their magic with sizzle and spice, then feast on their handiwork. One class, at EVOO cooking school with Bob Neroni and Lenore Emery, takes place several times a week; the other, at the Stephanie Inn's dining room under Aaron Bedard, is a chance offering that arises every few months.

Both classes cost \$99 per person. Both included wine pairings. But they're quite different in presentation and personality.

Bedard, working over a couple of butane hot plates and around a pile of pots and pans, held court in the middle of the Stephanie Inn's elegant dining room. He overcame some early nerves — in only his second such dinner class at the inn — and finished strongly in presenting some of the dining room's greatest hits.

After 20 years of marriage and hundreds of classes together since opening EVOO on Aug. 14, 2004, Neroni and Emery have their act down. Neroni maintains a constant patter of conversation and comedy; Emery slows down the pace and occasionally engages in some friendly spousal sparring. They work in a gleaming stainless-steel kitchen that looks ready to host a television show.

Whether you're hungry to learn about cooking or just plain hungry, either possibility will

Please see **COOKING**, Page T3

ABOVE | Chef **Bob Neroni** carefully adds a touch of olive oil to plates of wild salmon before serving them during an April dinner show.

LEFT | One of the ways to work up an appetite is to take a long walk on Cannon Beach's wide expanse of sand.

Photos by **TORSTEN KJELLSTRAND**
THE OREGONIAN



To see a photo slideshow from EVOO, go to oregonlive.com/travel

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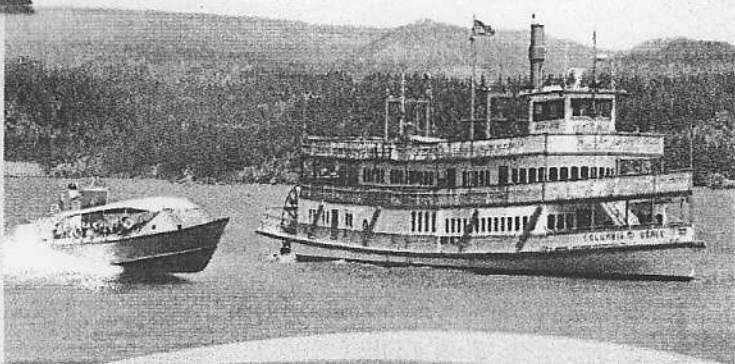
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Moving in(to) Imaginary Worlds: Drama Pedagogy for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Susanne Even
Indiana University

Introduction: The Flying Classroom

The Flying Classroom by the German author Erich Kästner is a children's book from the 1930s in which an almost prophetic play of the same name is performed at a boarding school: The students of the geography class get on a plane with their teacher and fly to the places they are learning about. The lesson combines traditional teaching interspersed with whimsical moments. After having lectured the class about the nature of volcanoes, the teacher lights his cigar at the flames of Mount Vesuvius. Having learned in situ about the building of the pyramids of Gizeh, the class encounters the mummy of Ramses. After having confirmed by direct observation at the North Pole that the earth is indeed an oblate spheroid, the students listen to a polar bear sing a song about solitariness in an icy world. Due to a defect in the aircraft's altimeter, the last stop on their journey is heaven, which, apart from St. Peter, remains invisible to them.

The Flying Classroom is a humorous fantasy that, albeit dated, seeks to leave traditional instruction behind and to exchange the boredom of purely theoretical lessons for authentic experiences. From the vantage point of the present, aspects of this fantasy have become virtual reality. Nowadays, people do not even have to board planes anymore; a mere succession of mouse clicks will take them all over the world. Students research websites, have access to photos and webcams, write their own weblogs, listen to podcasts and collaborate in wikis.

¹ For changes in the world of language learning regarding the role of the teacher and teaching insti-

They read newspaper articles, study advertisements, answer personal ads online, and can engage in a whole plethora of interactive activities. Only heaven remains out of reach.

Virtual Worlds in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Foreign language instruction has undoubtedly been influenced to an enormous degree by the technological revolution of the last decades. With the internet, we have access to worlds in ways that would have seemed like science fiction only a few decades ago. Foreign language students are no longer limited to the textbook or to the few authentic materials that the motivated teacher has collected abroad.¹ They can study current weather maps, compare sales offers, separate virtual garbage into virtual garbage bins, plan trips complete with authentic train schedules and prices, and explore foreign cities through virtual maps such as Google Earth. They can enter virtual shops and, via voice recognition programs, check whether they are understood by the avatar-salesperson and how close their pronunciation is to that of a native speaker. Similarly, they can attend 3D-events in virtual worlds such as Second Life.

Faced with this wide array of technological achievements, one might wonder whether the statement "true communicative competence is rarely possible in our current instructional settings" (Magnan 251) is still valid. A closer look, however,

tutions, as well as sociopolitical settings and perceptions about what constitutes learning, cf. de Bot.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY, 1965–2005

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Patrick J. McGuinn



University Press of Kansas

How to Save the Schools

E. D. Hirsch Jr.

The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education
by Diane Ravitch.
Basic Books, 283 pp., \$26.95

Diane Ravitch is without rival as a historian of modern American schooling. She has written trenchantly about the history of New York City schools, and in *The Troubled Crusade* (1983) about the progressivist takeover of the nation's schools after World War II. Her 2003 book *The Language Police* described ongoing attempts by publishers to sell their textbooks to all ideological factions by insisting on bland language in them. Her major work, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (2000), is considered by many to be the best study of the subject. It might be read with profit by policymakers, who would learn, for example, that the current movement in American schools to instill "twenty-first-century skills" is little more than a patched-up version of failed moves to instill twentieth-century skills.

But policymakers are far more likely to read her newest, most recent book, *The Death and Life of the American School System: How and Choice are Undermining Education*. In it she considers the most recent round of unsuccessful school reforms, including some that she herself championed and that the Obama administration supports, such as charter schools and universal testing. She criticizes several highly praised models of the 1990s and 2000s: Diego, New York City, and others. She also discusses the enormously influential *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). She's critical as well of reform efforts by the Gates Foundation and philanthropies. Yet she has something to say in praise for some long-standing practices of the educational reform, including teachers' unions, some reformers of education, and the current reviewer. Written with verve, the book takes aim at imposing targets. It won't be ignored.

The general renewal of American public education is Ravitch's chief aim. Chester E. Finn Jr., the distinguished educational writer and reformer, caught well the tenor of her purpose when he said that he

shares Ravitch's pessimism about the record of education reform. "We agree it's not very encouraging," [Finn] said, "and then we come to opposite views of the way forward." Ravitch, he said, wants to "re-empower" the public school system. "The same evidence has turned me into a radical who wants to blow up the system."¹

¹I have known and admired Ravitch a long time, and have supported many of her positions. She is a trustee of the Core Knowledge Foundation, which I started, and I once invited her to give the keynote address at the annual Core Knowledge conference of school teachers and administrators.

²Nick Anderson, "Business Principles Won't Work for School Reform, For-

Diane Ravitch



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1930s, under the enduring influence of European Romanticism, educational leaders had begun to convert the community-centered school of the nineteenth century to the child-centered school of the twentieth—a process that was complete by 1950. The chief tenet of the child-centered school was that no bookish curriculum was to be set out in advance. Rather, learning was to arise naturally out of activities, projects, and daily experience. A 1939 critic of the new movement, Isaac Kandel, described it this way:

Children should be allowed to grow in accordance with their needs and interests.... Knowledge is valuable only as it is acquired in a real situation; the teacher must be present to provide the proper environment for experiencing but must not intervene except to guide

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century of the Republic was the result of deliberate policy by political leaders in the aftermath of the Revolution. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration, thought American schools should offer a common curriculum designed to create "republican machines." His sentiments were similar to the educational views of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and the most important early schoolmaster of all, Noah Webster. The schools were to be institutions for inculcating democracy, designed to develop critical thinkers and able citizens in a setting of loyalty to the national common good. Early schoolbook authors began a long tradition of texts that aimed, in the words of one author,

to exhibit, in a strong light, the principles of political and religious freedom which our forefathers professed, and...to record the numerous examples of fortitude, courage, and patriotism, which have rendered them illustrious.

mer Supporter Ravitch Says," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2010.

school in the nineteenth century, built upon a combination of thrilling ideals and existential worry. By the end of the century we were educating, relative to other countries, a large percentage of the population, and this forward movement continued well into the twentieth century. In the post-World War II period, the US ranked high internationally according to a number of educational measures. But by 1980, there had occurred a significant decline both in our international position and in comparison with our own past achievements. Two decades ago I was appalled by an international comparison showing that between 1978 and 1988 the science knowledge of American students had dropped from seventh to fourteenth place. In the postwar period we have declined internationally in reading from third place to fifteenth place among the nations participating in the survey.

The root cause of this decline, starting in the 1960s, was a by-then-decades-old complacency on the part of school leaders and in the nation at large. By the early twentieth century worries about the stability of the Republic had subsided, and by the

many and yet at the same time schools are being required to make measurable progress on year-by-year tests.

This contradictory and self-defeating situation has arisen because of a quirk in child-centered educational theory. Though it is opposed to imparting facts in a definite curriculum, it is not against inculcating all-purpose general skills—such as reading strategies and critical thinking. "Rote learning" and a set curriculum are to be regarded with scorn, but students may be subjected to drills in how-to skills that will prepare them to pass tests. Many of the weekly hours that are assigned to language arts in the early grades are now being devoted to practicing reading strategies such as "questioning the author" and "finding the main idea." Ravitch describes in detail a highly touted reform in New York City and San Diego called "balanced literacy," which requires students to spend a lot of time practicing such reading strategies but does not prescribe any particular books, poems, and essays to practice them on.

She shows that the claims made for the success of "balanced literacy" have been disputed by researchers. This is a consistent pattern of her new book. Some researchers assert that a given

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The New York Review

May 13, 20

reform has worked, yet other researchers (whom Ravitch tends to credit) question the claim. This pattern of conflicting conclusions has led to skepticism regarding the use of educational research in deciding large-scale educational policy. If the effect of a reform is so ambiguous, it cannot have been very significant. Only big improvements in schooling are going to restore public education and the well-being of the country.

Many of the reforms Ravitch describes have yielded ambiguous results because they were not sound. The "balanced literacy" project in San Diego and New York City yielded uncertain results because no literacy program can be effective if it is not accompanied by a curriculum that builds up in children the background knowledge necessary for reading ability. Similarly, in the case of research on the effectiveness of charter schools, where researchers line up in opposing ranks, there is a good reason for ambiguity. "Charter school" is not an intrinsic educational category that is inherently correlated with any particular curriculum or educational effects.

Another basic reason why educational research has been unhelpful is that the various school experiments have, of necessity, been incompletely controlled. School experiments are very unlike laboratory experiments. Many key classroom variables remain unmonitored and unknown. This black-box problem of educational research is supposed to be ameliorated by the device of random assignment of students to control and experimental groups. But in one very expensive randomly assigned study—the famous Tennessee study of class-size effects—the finding that class size is important proved to be inapplicable in California, a discovery made at a cost of billions of dollars. There is a straightforward solution to the problems of small or nonexistent outcomes and of hidden variables. We need to institute reforms that are so soundly based that they will yield large, unambiguous educational effects.

That can only be done on the basis of reliable basic research. Ravitch points out that early in balanced literacy reform, the researchers P. David Pearson and Janice A. Dole warned:

"We have to consider the possibility that all the attention we are asking students to pay to their use of skills and strategies and to their monitoring of these strategies may turn relatively simple and intuitive tasks into introspective nightmares." They suggested that "what really determines the ability to comprehend anything is how much one already knows about the topic under discussion in a text." Knowing reading strategies is not enough; to comprehend what one reads, one must have background knowledge.

Ravitch is right to be skeptical of the latest panacea, "teacher effectiveness," as the solution to the disappointing performance of our schools. (Until recently the term was "teacher quality.") She does not doubt that good teachers are supremely important, but argues that reformers are guilty of an oversimplification when they isolate this variable from the many factors that have made schools ineffective. She believes

that, in general, good teaching is chiefly a matter of good training and having a coherent school setting in which to teach, based on a coherent, multiyear curriculum. She concludes that many public school teachers are currently ineffective partly because they have been poorly educated.

They have, after all, passed through a second-rate school system based on ideas they were subsequently taught to perpetuate. In school they learned little about literature, history, science, and art, and later were instructed that "mere facts" and "rote learning" are to be scorned. Ravitch believes that the teachers we already have would be much more effective if they participated in a cumulative, grade-by-grade system in which they could depend on their students having gained needed

knowledge and skills in prior grades.

She also challenges the claim by economists, and taken up by influential writers such as Malcolm Gladwell and Nicholas Kristof, that if only students were exposed to excellent teachers for three to five years in a row, the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students would be overcome. It is true that some math teachers have been able to make up as much as 33 percent of the lag for some students in a single year—whence the economists' extrapolation to the three-to-five-year figure. That is not an entirely surprising result. Math is affected much less than language by experiences outside of school. Moreover, schools are beginning to agree upon a year-by-year sequence of study in math, which will enable good teachers and

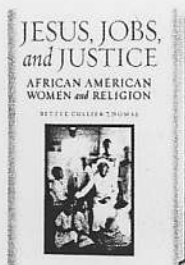
diligent students to make big strides in that subject.

But on theoretical grounds alone, some of which are touched on by Ravitch, it is simply impossible for most disadvantaged students to catch up in verbal achievement in three to five years. Take, for example, the excellent results of the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)—the largest network of charter schools—with its superb teachers, long hours, and hard-working students. Between grades six and eight, KIPP schools consistently raise the math scores of disadvantaged students some thirty-nine percentile points, as contrasted with a rise of twenty-four percentile points in their reading scores. Verbal gains are slow and cumulative. Overcoming the verbal gap between advantaged

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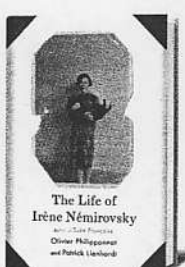
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and disadvantaged students cannot be accomplished by three to five years of intensive work by brilliant teachers and hardworking students. It will depend on the slow and persistent enhancement of students' general knowledge, beginning in preschool.

The ambiguous results that Ravitch finds in the reforms sponsored by the Gates Foundation and other philanthropies are partly due, she says, to the unwillingness of reformers to seek and follow the advice of experienced educators. She emphasizes the lack of educational experience and expertise among what she calls "The Billionaire Boys' Club." Her point is telling, given the unsuccessful or uncertain outcomes of their overconfident and often heavy-handed interventions. I agree with her that schooling is not directly amenable to consumer-based business principles, and I too have been critical of the Gates Foundation, because of its overemphasis on high school and its neglect of the elementary grades. In those early grades, because of the glacially slow growth of verbal skill, the problems of high school originate and are uniquely to be solved.

Yet I do not agree with Ravitch that we should chiefly rely on experienced educators. We certainly should consult them and win them over, but we have been relying on them, and they have failed us—not least in their response to the No Child Left Behind law. Ravitch strongly criticizes NCLB for its narrow emphasis on reading and math and its reduction of schooling to preparation for tests. Her analysis is factually accurate. But to understand why the law failed we need to imagine what might have happened had our experienced educators responded differently to it.

The law would have had a much more beneficial effect if educators had reacted with more insight to its provisions. NCLB was quite right to place a dominant emphasis on the development of language ability and reading skill. Verbal skill is known to be a chief constituent of adult success and effectiveness. But verbal ability is not, as the schools wrongly assumed, simply a how-to skill. It is largely a knowledge-based skill. NCLB did not, after all, mandate that the schools must practice reading strategies at the expense of a strong curriculum in literature, history, science, and the arts—the very kind of schooling that, according to the findings of cognitive science, would raise reading abilities by systematically building background knowledge.³ The decision to teach strategies instead was made by experienced educators who had been indoctrinated by education schools into an anticurricular point of view, emphasizing "how to" read, and giving quite inadequate attention to what should be learned to build up needed knowledge.

If teachers and administrators cannot be relied on to carry out the aims of No Child Left Behind effectively, and if highly able but inadequately informed educational entrepreneurs, sponsored by well-intentioned philanthropists, have also shown themselves unable to attain uniformly good results

³See, for example, Daniel Willingham, "Knowledge the Next Frontier in Reading Comprehension," *American Educator*, Spring 2006.

(though I would not simply give up on well-meaning people who have millions to spend), where now should we turn for guidance? Ravitch argues that the recent nostrums of "choice" and "accountability" have not worked very well. What new ideas will?

She makes strong arguments in favor of a widely shared core curriculum. This reform, she asserts, would carry multiple benefits. It would assure the cumulative organization of knowledge by all students, and would help overcome the notorious achievement gaps between racial and ethnic groups. It would make the creation of an effective teaching force much more feasible, because it would become possible to educate American teachers in the well-defined, wide-ranging subjects they would be expected to teach—

Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Several states have already committed themselves to following these new standards, which carry the promising title: "Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science." This title makes it clear that language mastery requires knowledge of history and science (music and fine arts will, I hope, be included in due course), and not just fiction and poetry. The standards mandate the teaching of nonliterary subjects during many of the long classroom hours devoted to literacy.

Another improvement over existing state standards is the recognition by the authors of the "Common Core" of its own limits—they devote a section to "What is *not* covered by the



Dianna Agron, front left, and Cory Monteith, front right, in the television series *Glee*

thus educating students and teachers simultaneously.

It would also foster the creation of much better teaching materials, with more substance; and it would solve the neglected problem of students (mostly low-income ones) who move from one school to another, often in the middle of the school year. It would, in short, offer American education the advantages enjoyed by high-performing school systems in the rest of the world, which far outshine us in the quality and fairness of their results.

Ravitch recognizes that consensus on a core curriculum would not be automatic and that "any national curriculum must be both nonfederal and voluntary, winning the support of districts and states because of its excellence." She continues:

If it is impossible to reach consensus about a national curriculum, then every state should make sure that every child receives an education that includes history, geography, literature, the arts, the sciences, civics, foreign languages, health, and physical education. These subjects should not be discretionary or left to chance. Every state should have a curriculum that is rich in knowledge, issues, and ideas, while leaving teachers free to use their own methods, with enough time to introduce topics and activities of their own choosing.

In arguing for a core curriculum Ravitch should feel encouraged by the new Standards for English Language Arts recently released for comment by the National Governors Association

Standards." The omissions turn out to be major, among them both teaching methods and the curriculum itself. Such acknowledgment of limits is very important. The new multistate document is unique in conceding that it is neither a curriculum nor a curriculum guide, and insisting at the same time that proficiency in reading and writing can be achieved only through a highly specific curriculum—still to be developed—that is "coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades." If these admonitions are taken seriously by the states, Ravitch will have powerful allies in advocating a core curriculum.

To teach that curriculum Ravitch evokes a vision of good neighborhood schools (often destined for closure by the new reformers):

Neighborhood schools are often the anchors of their communities, a steady presence that helps to cement the bonds of community among neighbors. Most are places with a history, laden with traditions and memories that help individuals resist fragmentation in their lives. Their graduates return and want to see their old classrooms; they want to see the trophy cases and the old photographs, to hear the echoes in the gymnasium and walk on the playing fields. To close these schools serves no purpose other than to destroy those memories, to sever the building from the culture of its neighborhood, and to erode a sense of community that was decades in the making.

One is reminded of James C. in the 1980s hood school, an often troubled but thus impractical outgrowth for the street. Ravitch's book, *Jane Jacobs: American Concrete*, is detailed, re-actually has recent decades.

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One is reminded here of the work of James Comer of Yale, who showed in the 1980s that strong neighborhood schools can be a positive presence in the lives of poor children with often troubled home environments, thus improving both social and educational outcomes.⁴ In her appreciation for the strength of neighborhood life, Ravitch's book lives up to its allusion to Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The humaneness and concreteness of Ravitch's book, with its detailed, real-world stories of what has actually happened under the reforms of recent decades, make it indispensable.

Yet if Ravitch's proposals for a coherent, cumulative national—or at least widely shared—curriculum are to carry the day, she needs to put forward a more effective critique of the intellectual and scientific inadequacies of the anticurricular, child-centered movement. Her vision can hardly be put into effect while an army of experts in schools of education and a much bigger army of teachers and administrators, indoctrinated over nearly a century, are fiercely resisting a set curriculum of any kind. Ravitch has roundly attacked the entrepreneurs' invisible-hand business model as not corresponding with the reality or the fundamental purposes of education. She needs to expose in greater analytic detail the inadequacies of the invisible-hand theory of child-centered schooling.

For an exposé of the deeper intellectual shortcomings of the ideas that have dominated American schooling in recent decades, one needs to turn to her distinguished predecessors, the historians Arthur Bestor and Richard Hofstadter. The latter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), especially its chapter “The Child and the World,” offers a deeply illuminating analysis of what is questionable in the ideas of John Dewey and his associates in replacing the community-centered school with the invisible hand of the child-centered school:

To believe that Dewey's synthesis was successful required a certain credulity about the pre-established harmony between child nature and democratic culture which not everyone could share. It seemed... that one would have to give up either the emphasis on child nature or the emphasis on educating for democracy.

One can be sure that Hofstadter's book is not widely assigned in schools of education.

What is the message we can take away from Ravitch's important book? Her own summary in the subtitle is that “Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education.” Her critiques of these two chief efforts of recent educational reform—accountability and competition—are causing her former allies in the school reform movement to respond to her book with some acerbity, complaining that she has offered no realistic policy alternatives. Ravitch is not opposed to testing per se but rather to the distortions of schooling induced

⁴James Comer, “Educating Poor Minority Children,” *Scientific American*, November 1988.

by the responses of the states to the NCLB requirement of yearly testing in math and reading, starting in grade three.

Linda Perlestein, whom Ravitch cites, has shown in distressing anthropological detail, based upon many hours of classroom observation, how preparation for reading tests has taken the joy as well as the substance out of public schooling, without significantly raising scores on reading tests. More intelligent legislation might rectify that response to NCLB and its successor law. If, following Ravitch's recommendations, a state were to define a grade-by-grade elementary curriculum, then early reading tests could be based upon defined subject matters, giving the schools a strong incentive to impart substantial knowledge rather than waste time on how-to drills.

The second object of criticism in Ravitch's subtitle—choice—is probably the most important subject of her new book. Her former allies (and now harsh critics) have placed large bets on the principle that parental choice of alternative schools with its grassroots energies will shake up and even replace the failed public system. But the average results of charter schools have been a disappointment to every disinterested observer. Many charter schools follow the same child-centered principles as the regular public schools.

The defenders of choice, moreover, have not yet effectively answered Ravitch's important observation that the very best charter schools, which benefit from heroic teacher efforts and large infusions of intense private support in addition to public funds, cannot plausibly be replicated on a large scale. I would add that if one is in favor of the principle of parental choice, one shouldn't limit one's reforms to charters and vouchers but should also devote a major effort to restoring the neighborhood school to excellence. Researchers have found that parents will often choose the neighborhood school even when a much better, more distant charter school is available to them. If the neighborhood school were an equally good one, almost all would make that choice.

One effect of Ravitch's criticisms, however, is to make her seem dismissive of the successes of charter schools. The effective ones have helped thousands of students. Moreover, it is hard to see how the intellectual monopoly of the educational world—which Arthur Bestor called an “interlocking directorate”—can be broken unless there is resistance from below in the form of charter schools as well as from above in the form of intelligent legislation that will improve regimes of instruction and testing.

More persuasive, in my view, is a middle position between Ravitch, who wants to rely on better teacher education and school-by-school improvement in the hands of experienced, well-trained teachers and administrators, and such a critic of the public schools as Chester E. Finn Jr., who wants to “blow up the [public] system.” The system certainly needs to be shaken up. But we mustn't surrender the inspiring ideal of the common school, that is, the good, community-centered neighborhood school. As Ravitch convincingly argues, a brighter future for the country depends on realizing that noble ideal for our public schools. □

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