



## *League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces*

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Unit Meeting – July 25, 2011 – 10-11:30 a.m.  
Unitarian Universalist Community Room, 2000 S. Solano Dr.

### **EDUCATION REFORM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO OUR LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

1. Introduction
2. Emerging Charter Schools – Jane Asche
3. Impact of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top – Erika Graf-Webster
4. Role of Parents in Successful Student Programs and Education – Sue Cain
5. Book Review – Bonnie Burn
  - a) *The Death & Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choices are Undermining Education* by Diane Ravitch
  - b) *The Flat World & Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* by Linda Darling-Hammond

The Education Study Committee chose to use these two books to learn about issues in the current U.S. education system. They were published in 2010 and are considered scholarly works. Dr. Ravitch is recognized as a renowned education historian, and Dr. Darling-Hammond as a preeminent researcher and practitioner in education.

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#### ***Summary Review of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choices are Undermining Education* by Diane Ravitch (2010)***

**Diane Ravitch, Ph.D.**, is a research professor of Education at New York University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. She served as Assistant Secretary of Education from 1991-993 under President George H.W. Bush. She was appointed by President William Clinton to the National Assessment Government Board that oversees federal testing. After a forty year career in education, Ravitch in this book repudiates some of her strong stands on school choice and testing.

#### ***Summary Review of *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity will Determine Our Future* by Linda Darling-Hammond (2010)***

**Linda Darling-Hammond, Ed.D.**, educational advisor to Candidate Barack Obama, is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University. She launched the School Redesign Network, has been involved in the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

Full copies of these reviews are on the League's web site, [www.lwvglc.org](http://www.lwvglc.org).

- Each author takes a different approach to reinventing the public education system in the United States.
- **Each believes it is important that the public education system be redesigned not only to provide employees for the 21<sup>st</sup> global workforce but also to have literate, responsible people to carry on the functions of a democratic society.**

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### Diane Ravitch Discussion:

A true believer in charter schools and test assessment to achieve reform, Ravitch does a 360 degree turnabout.

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): 1965 passed under President Lyndon B. Johnson is the basic act upon which No Child Left Behind was reauthorized in 2001 and Race to the Top, a competitive grants program is based.
- A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education raises the idea of "American schools are failing," and started public education on the road to reform.
- **A major concern for Ravitch is that the attempts at school reform are efforts to dismantle the current public education system that focuses on universal education for all residents as the corner stone of our democracy.**
- The attempts at reform
  - **set impossible deadlines for achieving goals** that do not assess the skills of the students but do have serious consequences for students, who may not be successful, teachers and principals who may be fired and schools may be closed.
  - **may create a two-tiered education system for students:** basic skills for lower socio-economic students and a higher quality education involving more critical thinking curriculum for more affluent students.
- In depth discussion about school reforms:
  - Superintendent Anthony Alvarado, District 2, NYC – Balanced Literacy and math Constructivism
  - San Diego (1998) – Alan Bersin, a former federal prosecutor, hired Anthony Alvarado as chancellor for instruction in San Diego, who brought Balanced Literacy and math Constructivism to San Diego.
  - Michael Bloomberg, elected as mayor of NYC, introduced in 2003 the "Children First," reform. A Corporate model was adopted that included hierarchical, top-down control. The curriculum was Balanced Literacy and math Constructivism.
    - **Balanced Literacy:** whole language (e.g., phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation, or linguistic analysis) replaced by blocks of time set aside for shared and independent reading, word study, writing and reading aloud.
    - **Math Constructivism:** focus was on processes and social interaction among students. Students are supposed to think deeply, work collaboratively, and discover their own ways of solving problems.

- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary School Act (1965) and the age of accountability and teacher performance reform begins. In lieu of NCLB, Ravitch suggests two existing tests that test student achievement and the quality of student education:
  - **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**, measures the progress over time of students in the nation, state, and a number of urban districts.
  - **International Assessment test** is used to compare students to their peers in other countries.
- Philanthrocapitalism: private foundations and corporation involvement:
  - Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation 1967: schools in impoverished neighborhoods would improve if parents and members of the local community governed them.
  - Annenberg Challenge grants (1993): established a network of small schools, promoted schools within schools, small learning communities, leadership, professional development of teachers, engagement of parents, social services for students.
  - Bill & Melina Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.
    - All of these efforts are targeted investments in education reform and as part of the corporate model, a “return on investment” is expected.
    - Accountability becomes a major issue for the students, teachers, and schools.
    - Foundations are not public agencies, are not subject to public oversight or review, and are accountable to no one.
    - When funding is withdrawn, how is it replaced?
- Choice: Charter Schools and Vouchers: represent a market model, and these reforms are based on the belief in the power of competition and in the value of deregulation. In the years since these reforms have become a reality, there is no evidence of dramatic improvement for the neediest students or in the public schools they left behind.
- What can we do? Ravitch suggests that
  - National core curriculum standards like that being developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers should be adopted.
  - Test scores cannot be the sole measure of student or school quality.
  - Effective teachers are the lynch pin of education—vetted before hiring, evaluated for performance afterwards, and paid a professional wage. Ravitch devotes a chapter entitled, “What Would Mrs. Ratliff do?”—a favorite, memorable teacher for Dr. Ravitch.
  - Children must be prepared for school – families are responsible for developing self-discipline, good manners, and cooperative skills in a group environment.
  - Parents must be involved—ensure that children attend school regularly, are in good health, and do their homework.
  - **The diversity among us must be assimilated in a universal, free public education system that respects the private and religious schools within the system.**

## **Linda Darling-Hammond Discussion**

Roberta Gran, Education Study Committee member who read the book and wrote the summary report asked that these points be emphasized:

1. The style of educating student must be changed from a factory/assembly line model to a focus on critical thinking, research, teamwork, reading, math, and science.
2. We must seriously focus on **bringing the poorest schools up to the quality standards of the highest** performing schools.
3. The **focus must be on each student as a whole person** with a life outside the classroom that impacts his or her performance in the classroom, and students have to be provided with resources that level the playing field for those underprivileged/at-risk students.
4. **Teacher training to a much higher level is needed.** Focus on more precertification training and student teaching. Have opportunities to obtain advanced degrees, to team work with other teachers to learn from each other about pedagogical methods that work, and to provide the most appropriate learning style for individual students who are behind.

### **Her premises are:**

- The entire U.S. public school system needs to experience a major redesign:
  - Replace the current factory-assembly line, repetitive, memorization system with one that focuses on critical thinking, research and analysis.
  - Focus should be on science, technology, English, and math (STEM).
  - Employees must be creative and innovative, easily generate and work with new ideas and abstractions, analytical, self-disciplined, well-organized, work in teams and adapt to frequent change.
- The public education system must meet the needs of **students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.**
- Public schools in this country are unequal and inner city school children are at a great disadvantage because of their school's physical plant, the lack of concern from administrators, and the poor preparation of the teachers who teach them every day.
- **It is far more cost effective to educate all of our children effectively than it is to lose billions in wages, taxes, prisons and social costs.**

### **What needs to be done.**

- Reform has to be student-focused.
- Funding: Provide funding throughout the public school systems so that there is parity throughout the system, especially in the inner city schools.

- Administrators need to be supportive and encouraging of teachers. They must be advocates for adequate funding, professional development of teachers, and tools necessary to ensure that students are successful.
- Teacher training: build infrastructure in our teachers colleges that will produce quality teachers capable of being successful with **all** students. Increase pedagogy education so that teachers can work with students from different cultural and socio economic backgrounds.
- Throughout working life of teacher include well designed professional development—this has been shown as the single most important actions that can be taken to improve student performance.
- Students:
  - invest in quality preschool and early literacy, and before and after school programs.
  - ensure that students acquire skills on grade level in science, technology, English and math (STEM).
  - Revamp No Child Left Behind testing so that tests show that students are prepared to live and succeed in a global economy.
- General education issues:
  - Ensure the physical plant is updated and provides a clean, congenial, safe environment for everyone involved with education
  - Use incentives and structures that motivate students through collaboration not coercion.
  - Build strong relationships and norms in the learning environment rather than relying solely on rules for governing behavior.
  - Encourage quality by organizing teams that can take responsibility for children’s overall success.
  - Create information-rich environments that support widespread learning among students and meaningful self-assessment
- School practices that work:
  - Creating small units within schools
  - Keeping students together over multiple years
  - Forming teaching teams that share students and plan together
  - Ensuring common planning time for teachers
  - Involving staff in school-wide problem solving
  - Involving parents in their children’s education
  - Fostering cooperative learning

Darling-Hammond gives examples of six California schools and how they organized using these strategies to drastically improve student achievement in their schools. Throughout the book she sites improvements that have been organized and achieved by many of the states.

Linda Darling-Hammonds provides a wealth of information that supports her themes. She examines three nations (Finland, Singapore, and South Korea) who, in one generation, moved from near the bottom to the top international ratings by improving their school system.

- Common featured shared by these countries:
  - **Secure housing, food, and health**
  - Supportive early learning environments

- Equitably funded schools
- Well-prepared, supported, and equipped teachers and leaders
- Standards, curriculum, and assessment focused on contemporary learning goals
- School structured to provide in-depth student and teacher learning

She argues that for students to be successful, they must have the criteria above in their education system.

She gives statistical information:

- 70% of U.S. Jobs require specialized training
- U.S. college attendance rates have slipped from 1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> in the world
- 46% of African American high school graduates are now enrolled in college and are employed full time by age 21
- European and Asian countries are graduating on average over 50% of their college students.
- **Only 1 in 10 low-income kindergartners in the U.S. graduate from college.**

She reviews the topics of teacher pay, tenure, laws, and the importance of true professional development.