

Left Back – A century of failed school reform  
 Diane Ravitch

2000

This is not a review. All I could find after Amazon deleted my reviews was these reading notes. Hope they are helpful.

	“The educational ladder” – progression from elementary to college, standard curriculum but dropping out along the way.
15	Progressives back the idea of non-liberal (ie, non-academic, practical) education for students of lesser ability. Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century.
17	With progressives, no longer any general consensus on the purpose of schooling. All needs perceived to be equal
17	Ravitch view of school unique mission: Develop intelligence (?) Develop character (?) Teach knowledge and the value of knowledge, how to organize, how to discern truth from propaganda. Appreciate enduring value vs. ephemeral, transient pop culture.  Note contrast with “New Basics”. Those authors look for minimal training to be acceptable in the workplace. More in step with NCLB.
28	Herbert Spencer “social Darwinism” vs. Lester Frank Ward. Utilitarian education – preferably private – vs. public education, liberal. Ward’s purpose: equality. Spencer was laissez-faire. Ward: Lower classes are intellectual peers of the upper. Same across race.
30	1890 Charles Eliot of Harvard. Improve the intellect through schooling. Offer more challenging courses by age of 14: foreign language, lab science, algebra & geometry.
32	W.T. Harris US Commissioner of Education. Called conservative. Against rote memory. Egalitarian. Good habits and discipline important. Anti Rousseau – for structure, importance of teacher, structure.
42	Committee of 10, Modern subjects, academic excellence for all. Not vocational. 1893. Attacked by classicists from the right, progressive/vocational training from the left.  Attacked by G. Stanley Hall, Pres. Clark Univ., for advocating liberal academic education for all “as long as they choose to pursue it.” All are not equal. Equally attacked by Sen Butler/Mass for postponing slotting of individuals into their position in society.  verdict of time: reactionary, elitist, ignoring individual differences and social needs.

	Results in est. of college board.
52	Columbia Teachers College. Founded in 1880s, progressive from the beginning. Nicholas Murray Butler. Sociologists, psychologists, admin teachers. No traditional academics on staff except three.
56	John Dewey. Starts teachers college at U. Chi in 1894, to Columbia in 1904. Philosopher. Importance of psychology in schools. School must represent life. Not academic subjects, but “childs own social activities.”
67	<p>Thorndike. Educational psychology – scientific foundation of learning. No substance to teaching “mental discipline.”</p> <p>At this point there is still no formal science of intelligence. They say that developing an ability to learn in one area has no bearing on learning in another. This is uninformed by concepts of innate ability, the g factor, which posits a relatedness among abilities to learn that is independent of past learning or practice.</p> <p>Used IQ tests in 1920 to confirm that what students study doesn’ matter; smart ones learn the most anyhow.</p> <p>Ultimate verdict: the very notion of formal education assumes the development of skills that are transferable to solving new life problems. (Kolesnik, 1950)</p>
78	Social Utility – Industrial education. Educate children to fill the needs of society regardless of their own preferences. Opposed to Eliot, the lonely advocate of academic education for everyone. Supported by Theo. Roosevelt 1907.
80	“the masses” of immigrants. Theory that they cannot & should not be expected to absorb an academic education. Same of course for blacks.
80	Edwin A. Ross, disciple of Lester Frank Ward. “engine of social control”.
81	David Snedden, father of “social efficiency” movement. Student of Ross. Slot each child into appropriate position in society. Algebra has no use in society. Ditto Latin. Advocating totally separate schools put him out of sync with Dewey and H. Gordon Hullfish, another progressive educator.
86	Charles W. Eliot (Harvard) defects to progressives in 1908. Agrees with differentiated curricula, change from his “committee of 10” stance.

93	William Bagley, a lone conservative, psychologist at U. of Ill. 1915. Differentiation is “radical step away from our democratic institutions”
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	<p>in that it tracked kids early in life according to their supposed stations in society.</p> <p>Opposes junior high school, which is introduced partially in order to advance decision point from 9<sup>th</sup> grade back to 7<sup>th</sup> for most student tracking.</p>
94	William Hughes Mearns progressive caricatured traditional education in Saturday Evening Post, “are we educating for 12 <sup>th</sup> or 20 <sup>th</sup> century?”
95	Dean James E. Russell, Teachers College of Columbia. “No other nation that I know of thinks it worthwhile to train everybody for everything – and nothing! – and to do it at public expense.” Critique of “educational ladder”
96	Ellwood P. Cubberley. Immigrant threat, dilution. Dangerous to educate children beyond their station. Foments disappointment and discontent. Schools are powerful tool the state must use to assimilate immigrants. “each year the child belongs more and more to the state and less to the parents.” Also, need ed schools to indoctrinate teachers.
99	High school growth. 10.2 %, 14.3% and 31.2% of eligible students enrolled in 1900, 1910 & 1920.
104	John Franklin Bobbitt, U of Chi. “educational engineer” “cost accounting” Too much time on academic subjects. Survey movement.
108	“negro education” by us govt in 1917 by Thomas jesse Jones. Few and poor high schools. Accept segregation as inevitable, but lament quality. Recommend vocational training.
111	WEB DuBois outraged at suggestion of vocational training, insists on academic. At odds with Booker T. Washington, A Phillip Randolph & others on this issue. Practical vs. theoretical.
113	Wm Henry Maxwell, NYC, is one of the few voices raised against progressive education, surveys and social efficiency.
116	Abraham Flexner. Crusade against Latin.
117	Paul Shorey, U of Chi, classicist, supports Latin & Greek, sees an attack on cultural literacy and history. Without a common point of reference we have no connection to our roots.
122	Bagley – talent is distributed fairly equally among the masses
123	CSRE – Committee on Reorganization of Secondary Education. 1918. Downplay math, convert history to social studies. Philander T. Claxton. Social studies = “immediate interest” vs. history, national interest.
130	IQ Thorndike 1921. Able to measure ability to learn. Predicated on Army tests in WWI. Adopted in schools in 20s, From Galton, 1880s, and Binet.
132	Yerkes heads Army testing. Terman leads movement in schools in 20s.

	<p>&lt;70 = unskilled  70-80 = semiskilled  80-100 = ordinary labor, skilled  100-115 = semiprofessional, skilled  &gt;115 professional  frequent transfers between tracks is imperative.</p>
144	Bagley. IQ testing is antidemocratic if too deterministic. Lippmann found them to be used by nativists.
157	College Board introduces SAT, intelligence-like test, in 1926
158	Liberals Franz Boaz, Otto Kleinberg argue that IQ has cultural aspect.
161	Ravitch conclusion on IQ testing: more harm than good, endorses fatalism.

166	1918 John Franklin Bobbitt “The Curriculum” utilitarian education
166	w.w. Charters “activity analysis” – nature of jobs determines needed education.
168	1920 Dewey “child centered” education. Let child’s desires define what the child learns. Cites J.J. Rousseau’s “Emile” Founded Lab School at U of Chi in 1896; ran to 1904. Followed kids, but selected books for library, etc. Exceptional teachers.
178	James Heard Kilpatrick. 1918, Project Method. Dewey disciple.
185	Lincoln School – lab school of Teachers College est. 1917. All activities and projects until high school, at which time students need academic courses to prepare for college admission.
187	William Hughes Mearns, Teacher sCollege, creative writing. Ignore spelling and punctuation; kids will “pick up what they need later.” OK for high SES students of Lincoln; not so public schools
187	Harold Rugg, Teacher’s College, social studies. Best selling social studies books. Curriculum reform. In Depression, theory of schools as drivers of social change. Victim of right-wing red hunts in late 30s. Opponent – Bagley again, saying we cannot prepare kids for a specific vocation because they move and times change.  Freedom becomes license insome child centered schools
197	Burlington, Ia replaces separate subjects with 4 activity units: Language Activities, Health & Happiness, Social Science (living together), And Mathematics and Construction.  LA offers 18 curricula in 1923-4, mostly non-academic.
197	Boyd C. Bode OSU – inside critic of progressives. Even Dewey eventually says that activity is not enough; content is essential, as is adult leadership.

203	Social Frontier: depression. Dewey saw education at forefront of social reform. Socialist.
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204	George S. Counts, leading progressive who recants in late 30s after Russian pogroms. Russian model impressed Dewey, many others. Disillusion when commissars of education are liquidated. Counts ships a Ford to Russia, drives 6 mos. & sees country. Enthusiasm “must be seen in the context of the deepening economic depression in the US” Wanted to reconstruct society, apologist for liquidation of Kulacks in USSR, advocated radical changes in US as well.  Close friend of Chas. Beard “Economic History of the Constitution.”
226	Isaac Kandel ridicules idea that schools can or should remake the social order. These had been the most vociferous advocates of individuality in child-centered education in 20s.
230	Teachers College launches “The Social Frontier” magazine Oct 34. All shades of leftists. Need for planned, collectivist order.
233	Chas. Judd, U Chi, resists radicalism.
234	1934 Bagley announces that USSR abandons progressive education. 1936-7 Counts recants in face of purges, denounces “rigid dictatorship.”

241	Virginia “core curriculum” is anything but. Totally utilitarian. 1931.
244	Activities movement becomes mainstream.
253	Dick and Jane = Elson Readers, William S. Gray
258	“integrated curriculum” and “subject curriculum” vs. “experience curriculum.” Jesse Newlon of Lincoln School, also L. Thomas Hopkins, dir of curriculum at Lincoln.
259	Big shift in progressive thought with advent of Depression. From individualism to collectivism. Thus, child centered to socialization focus
261	“Core curriculum” Has very different meaning in 1990s than 1930s. Now it is basics. Then it was fully integrated curriculum with little definition of individual academic subjects.
272	Journal of Negro Education. emphasize the practical; at odds with WEB DuBois.
281	College admissions still require specific courses even in 30s.

284	Bagley regrets continuing waves of “fads and reforms”
291	Demiaskevich, Russian émigré supports use of books, academics. Book “An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education” was a sharp critique of progressive education.
299	Robert Maynard Hutchins, “Great Books.” Pres of U of Chi in at early age. Supported by Mortimer Adler. Elicits strong reactions from all progressives. Critical books by John Dewey & Boyd Bode
310	Boyd Bode “Progressive Education at the Crossroads” 1938. Critique of excesses.
314	Isaac Kandel. Chief problem with high schools is “vague aims,” lack of priorities, and unwillingness to hire teachers with subject expertise.

	Supports National Teachers Exams in 1940. Fought by teachers colleges who feared alternate means of certifying teachers. 1943 book “The Cult of Uncertainty” Critiques educators’ unwillingness to acknowledge the value of centuries of accumulated wisdom, instead letting each generation figure it out on their own, from scratch.
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322	<p>CCC and NYA offered high school equivalencies. Teachers colleges &amp; unions resent the competition &amp; the implication that it can be done using only common sense. NEA reacts in 1944 with “Education for <u>All</u> American Youth.” Redefines school role to be primarily career guidance. Test students, then direct them appropriately towards a trade or academics.</p> <p>College admissions based on recommendations, standard tests and intelligence, not on academic prerequisites in school. Public schools then become custodial institutions, keeping kids until they go to work or college. Recommend 4 years of “common learnings.” combining all curricular materials into a single course.</p>
327	Postwar “life adjustment” movement. Fit kids to society as it is. Major advocate is Charles Prosser, longtime advocate of industrial education. Supported by Harl R. Douglass.
342	David Riesman “The Lonely Crowd” 1950. Change from inner-directed to other-directed. People largely driven by what others think of them. Children learn that it is not hard work that matters but what others think of them.
345	Needs change. In 30s the issue was fitting people into a society with few jobs. In 50s it was providing enough knowledge workers for a growing economy. Architects, accountants, engineers, The west was not settled by people who took courses in “hot to be a pioneer.”
352	NEA response
353	Rudolf Flesch “Why Johnny Can’t Read.” Blame “look say” fom Dick & Jane readers. Need phonics.
355	1961 study Jean Chall of Harvard. No panacea, phonics necessary part of any program. Need to “break the code” of alphabetic representation of ideas.
361	Sputnik and NDEA. Hyman Rickover 1959 “Education and Freedom” says we need book learning.
362	James Conant, Harverd, defends status quo in 1962. “The American High School Today.” is whitewash of progressive education. Advocates consolidation into big schools; from 21,000 to 9000 high schools. Endorses social promotion. Only 15% smart enough for rigorous math, science & foreign language.

369	James Coleman, sociologists, finds kids in late 50s to be conformist, superficial, consumerist.
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370	“Hamilton High” by Gerald Grant.
375	7x differences in black and white student funding under Jim Crow in La and Ms. Life adjustment school meets kids with low expectations.
379	Psychologist Kenneth Clark study of Harlem. Low expectations, low predictions based on IQ tests, lead to slotting kids into lower rung occupations. Advocates putting best teachers in ghettos.
383	1960s collision: NDEA – Sputnik emphasis on academics, courts and legislature on desegregation. Student discipline dissolves in Free Speech, etc. Black studies programs, etc. In loco parentis goes out the window.
387	Summerhill abandons form and restructuring. A. S. Neill.
391	Neil Postman “Teaching as a Subversive Activity”. All classes should be elective.
395	Open education. Schools without walls. Activity centers. Disaster for minority children. Parents expected more, kids needed discipline.
403	1975 SAT investigates declining scores.

408	Standards question raised in 1975, when expectations are at a low.
411	<p>“A Nation at Risk” Terrell Bell &amp; the US Dept of Education. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war.” 1983</p> <p>“All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost.”</p> <p>REcommend the “new basics” 4yrs English, 3 yrs math, 3 yrs sci, 3 social studies, 1/2 computers. For college, 2 yrs foreign language.</p>
414	<p>2 schools of thought. James S. Coleman “Coleman Report” in 1966 thought that school academics had little influence on life chances. Environment did, and hence busing was a good idea. Others said no; under the right circumstances schools can do much better with kids they have. John B. Carroll repudiates notion that “aptitudes are as fixed as IQs”</p> <p>Mastery learning idea. Learn till you get it; just a matter of time.</p>
418	TheodoreSizer “Horace’s Compromise.” Coalition of Essential Schools. New progressives, though they held to Hutchins Great Books idea. minimalist – small is good. Favors teachers over bureaucracy.
419	E. D. Hirsch “Cultural Literacy” emphasized knowledge, not just skills.
420	<p>Multiculturalism.</p> <p>Notion of history, learning styles belonging to races.</p>

426	Self-esteem. Theory that racial gap in scores was esteem related.
430	Standards. Albert Shanker AFT advocated standard tests for students to progress and to graduate. Should be able to compare results. Ability grouping needed; can't hold all students to same low standard.  Turns out that the AFT and teacher-written standards are vague and hyper-liberal. Anti-American, anti-content.
441	Constructivist movement. Students "construct their own knowledge." Child centered notions redux, with frequent quotes of Dewey and Piaget.
443	Whole language. Frank Smith of BC and Kenneth Goodman of U of Ariz. 1985 National Academy of Education "becoming a nation of readers" comes out for phonics. However, NCTE rebuts, supporting whole language. Bill Honig of California becomes whole-language dupe. 1996 NAEP shows "whole language" states falling behind.

My own thoughts.

- 1) None of this "science" is tested in the laboratory. Moreover it cannot be, because results cannot be truly measured. Cannot be isolated, and have no endpoint in time.
- 2) Objectives of education are never agreed and cannot be agreed. Not only is there no measurement, but there are no standards by which to measure.
- 3) The notion of children belonging to the state was part of the zeitgeist of the 20s. It informed Nazism, Communism and socialism in Europe.
- 4) The new social sciences – anthropology, sociology, psychology and the like – were equally unscientific in their approaches. They were characterized by good insights by bright people but a lack of statistical analysis, laboratory method and measurement to back them up. Ravitch doesn't put education in a historical/cultural context.
- 5) Knowledge grows by building on each other's thoughts. Need to know history, others' developments in different fields.
- 6) Much knowledge would be alien to an ape, still alien to homo sapiens. We work against our nature to learn writing and arithmetic. These are evolutionary adaptations that are very useful but not fully embedded in the species. We are kind of likelungfish – half in and half out of water. The progressives would put us all back in the soup.
- 7) Consistent finding: smart kids, smart parents, smart and/or driven educators make the difference more than their philosophies.

High school growth

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