Review of Reign of Error: The House of the Privatization Movement and the Danger in America’s Public Schools


If you’ve been teaching for a decade or more, you probably have had that little nagging voice in the back of your head that teachers have been warning schools are in bigger trouble than we used to think they were. High profile documentaries like "Waiting for Superman," showing tears runnning around the country, and government policymakers acting on standards tests have all had a demoralizing effect on our profession. And as we were realizing that there was more at play than typical educational sorting, Diane Ravitch’s newest book, "Reign of Error," makes clear that all of these things are part of a deliberate, organized, and well-funded effort by the school privatization movement to make public schools appear broken. By tracking years of data on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), Ravitch convincingly puts out, that despite all the rhetoric and hand wringing of politicians and policy makers, scores are steady and have not been steadily rising and that most currently have the highest graduation rates in US history.

Ravitch’s voice, because of her own decades-long association with the accountability movement she has become an outspoken opponent against, is the perfect one to tell this story of reality—Williamson, Teach for America, Michelle Rhee, Arne Duncan, Joel Klein, and others—are all adding fuel to the growing privatization fire at the expense of the public schools. While the book was three-quarter of this highly readable book identifying the problem and connecting the dots, the distinction of the program is neatly at the conclusion level and not of many teachers’ touch screen or iPhone addiction, but then that should be the case if the public was willing to read about the problems faced by teachers at Sunflower Elementary School. Elsewhere, Ravitch points out, that despite the rhetoric and hand waving of politicians and policy makers, scores are steady and have not been steadily rising and that most currently have the highest graduation rates in US history.


As a classroom teacher often called on at dinner parties and family gatherings to defend the profession. And in case you thought that these were part of just a few-against-the-world problem, you might want to read this book about the ever escalating battle to make sense of our world.


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In a way, Ravitch’s recent book, "Reign of Error," is the best book on the problem of education the United States has ever produced. The book points out that despite all the rhetoric and hand waving of politicians and policy makers, scores are steady and have not been steadily rising and that most currently have the highest graduation rates in US history.


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Using Literary Debate to Encourage Deeper Reading

To incorporate a student's interest in literature beyond the traditional scope, one 8th grade language arts team at Lake Oswego Junior High asks students to read a novel for the purpose of debate. To begin this unit, small groups of students select a prominent topic or concept within the book to debate. The topics support a deep understanding of the text and range in difficulty. For example, one group selected the theme, “Vagrants, Apes and Superstars: More than meets the eye,” as their book theme. The group then reads a novel, student collects quotations to both support and counter their assigned statement, and then creates an argument to be used in the debate. As the class studies the novel, students collect quotations to both support and counter their assigned statement in a formal debate. The debate as an activity encourages a deep reading of text and functions as an alternative to an essay. It provides an authentic context for students to engage in multiple strands of the Common Core Standards.

The Pearl
by John Steinbeck

Students become passionate about positions, furiously defending their statements and engaging in rebuttals, against the opposition in a formal debate. Each group collaborates in presenting its strongest arguments, then refines their arguments in preparation for the final debate. As the class studies the novel, students collect quotations to both support and counter their assigned statement in a formal debate. The debate as an activity encourages a deep reading of text and functions as an alternative to an essay. It provides an authentic context for students to engage in multiple strands of the Common Core Standards.

Eighth Grade Teachers, Lake Oswego Junior High School

Kimberly Campbell, Lewis and Clark College

Karen Johnson, (New Teacher) Tweddy Middle School Teacher

“Poetry, Nonfiction, and Masterpiece

Among the Presenters:

Margaret Perrin, Southern Oregon University

Lea Matthews, Linfield High School Language Arts Teacher

Jerry Stones, Teacher Trainer, Time to Teach!

Dan concatenate: Oregon Spirit Book Awards Authors:

Sue Fatchett, April Howl, Cat Winners, Deborah Hopkins, Chuck Reid, H. Joseph Hopkins, and Elizabeth Kushi

For more information