

Second Wednesday Night

Reading Assignment:

Chapter 32, *Privatization of Education Is Wrong*

Chapter 30, *Protect Democratic Control of Public Schools*

Chapters 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

Beginning Questions to Refresh People's Memories and Help Summarize for Those Who Haven't Read

1. There are a number of principles that underpin our society's historic provision of public education: that public schools have a civic as well as a private purpose; that public schools are publicly owned and publicly accountable, that public schools are free and universally available, that attendance is mandatory, and that public schools provide access for all and education equitably for all children. We have not always fulfilled each of those ideals, but they are widely held.

In Chapter 32 and throughout the specific chapters we read for tonight, Diane Ravitch explores the principles that underpin the privatization of public education: creative disruption, cutting costs for efficiency, accountability and data, competition, education as personal job preparation, and deregulation.

Who will give some examples of how the principles of privatization that Ravitch names have affected public education and how they improved or undermined public schools? Where do you see the principles of privatization being used to justify the expansion of privatization through charters, vouchers, e-schools, parent trigger? And what kinds of problems are resulting?

2. Who is pushing privatization? Ravitch writes: "The issue for the future is whether a small number of very wealthy entrepreneurs, corporations, and individuals will be able to purchase educational policy in this nation, either by funding candidates for local and state school boards, for state legislatures, for governor, and for Congress or by using foundation 'gifts' to advance the privatization of public education." (p. 310) **Who are some of the individuals, philanthropies, and other groups pushing privatization? What is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and how does that organization pursue its agenda?**
3. In Chapter 30, "Protect Democratic Control of Public Schools," Ravitch discusses the role of democratically elected school boards for protecting the public interest: "The reformers are correct when they say that school boards are an obstacle to radical change. They move slowly. They argue. They listen to different points of view. They make mistakes. They are not bold and transformative. They prefer incremental change. In short, they are a democratic forum. They are a check and balance against concentrated power in one person or one agency." (p. 287) In other chapters, Ravitch describes Michelle Rhee's tenure as the appointed chancellor in Washington, D.C., the role of New York City's Mayor Bloomberg in appointing a series of chancellors, and Arne Duncan's tenure as the appointed superintendent who brought *Renaissance 2010* to Chicago. **Will someone describe what happened with these appointed school managers? What are examples where privatization was expanded? Do you agree with Ravitch that democratic governance of public schools is important?**

Broad Questions to Open Wide, and We Hope, Very Safe and Non-Threatening Conversation

What surprised you or made a really strong impression in what you read and what we have discussed tonight?

(Need to make time for a very safe conversation here, not letting anyone correct or reject what surprised each person and ensuring that all participants at the small table have plenty of time to speak and reflect.) After each person who wishes to speak has described the surprises or take-aways, **ask whether there are one or two other surprises we haven't covered.** Cut it off after two.

What has struck you in our reading or in our conversation tonight that seems relevant to what you may have noticed happening in Ohio or in our CH-UH school district? (Need to make time for a very safe conversation here, not letting anyone correct or reject what surprised each person and ensuring that all participants at the table have plenty of time to speak and reflect.) After each person who wishes to speak has described what seems most important and timely to him or her, **ask whether there are any additional relevant points we haven't covered.** Cut it off after two.

As we come back together, the overall moderator might want to surface two or three surprises/strong take-aways and two or three of the most relevant issues to Ohio and CH-UH from among the small groups.