

Diane Ravitch

Video 1

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I am Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, Associate Professor at Arizona State University. I am the very fortunate host of a show titled, *Inside the Academy*, during which we interview outstanding academics in the field of education. Today I'm speaking with and in admiration of, Dr. Diane Ravitch. It is a pleasure honor you, and thank you for having us here today.

DIANE RAVITCH

Thank you, and welcome to Brooklyn.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Thank you. It's beautiful. Tell us about your family and childhood. Where you were born and where you grew up.

DIANE RAVITCH

I was born in Houston, Texas. I was the third of eight children. It was a very interesting household, to say the least. Neither of my parents went to college, and my father was a high school drop out, and my mother was a proud, although she was an immigrant from Bessarabia, she was a very proud graduate of the Houston public schools. They owned a mom and pop liquor store, worked very hard, six days a week. It was, you know, (1:00) a fun childhood. Lots of friends and lots of freedom—unstructured time for play, out riding bikes everywhere. A typical American childhood, I guess, of the late 40s and 1950s. Then I went from Houston public schools, I had went to public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade and graduated from San Jacinto High School, which no longer exists. I was very fortunate to be guided by, although we were not a religious family, I did go to Sunday school, and my Rabbi was a New York, a New Yorker, whose wife was a graduate of Wellesley; and I so admired him that I went to Wellesley. I wasn't sure that I could get into Wellesley, but I did, and that's where I went to college.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Were you a good student in public school?

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, I always made good grades. I worked very hard. (2:00) I didn't always work very hard. But I, I've always felt that getting grades was important to me. My siblings were not terribly interested in school, but I was. I was very different. I would climb a tree just to read a book, just to find quiet. You know, in a family of eight children, it's very noisy. So one of my favorite things was to get up as high as I could in the tree with a book that I wanted to read. And just to have a book, that was a big thing too because that was not a big deal in our household. We didn't have a library or lots of books around. That was, I forgot the question now. What did you ask?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What was it like growing up in Houston?

DIANE RAVITCH

Growing up in Houston was, it was a wide open town, lots of horses around, oil wells out on the periphery, lots of open spaces, kids rode their bikes everywhere, would go once a week on Saturdays to ride the ponies, (3:00) television didn't come around until sometime in my high school years, so, we'd get to go to the movies once a week. So we had lots of time for things that kids do, playing, playing ball, breaking a window now and then, things like that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

How did your experiences in public school influence the educator and scholar that you've become?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I found school, to me it was, I loved school because I loved being there. That's where our friends were. I had some wonderful teachers. I had some ordinary teachers. I had some mediocre teachers. I had some really, really bad teachers. And I always thought if I worked hard in school, that would be a way for me to fulfill some ambitious, which was very undefined at that point. I loved to write. I always loved to write. I started writing in junior high school, and I wrote, I think I got 10 dollars a week to write for a junior high school, (4:00) not a junior high school paper, a community newspaper. I'd write about what the kids were doing in school, and they'd pay me 10 dollars a week, and I'd immediately take the 10 dollars and send off to a great books club, which was located in some very faraway place called Roslyn, Long Island, New York, which I had never heard of. So I would get, every week, a new classic would arrive; and that would be the book that I would take with me as I would climb into the tree and read someone like H. Rider Haggard, whom I had never heard of. All of these authors who we were not reading in school. But the thing about school was, I always thought that if I worked hard, I would do well. It never occurred to me that it would be the teachers' responsibility to make me work hard, or that the teacher would be held accountable if I were a slacker. So this is one of the things that I find very odd about today's educational debates is that the assumption is that if the student does well, it's because the teacher did it; and I always thought that if I did (5:00) well, I did it. And if I did poorly, I didn't do it—it was something that I did that would lead to good or bad results. But I went to very ordinary public schools. The high school I went to, in retrospect, I realize was unusual in only one sense, and that was we had a program of inclusion. That was so unusual at any place in that time. I don't think we had children who had extreme disabilities, but we certainly had lots of children in wheelchairs, and children with muscular dystrophy, and other children other disabilities, but I think they were all physical disabilities. The other thing about school in Houston was that it was racially segregated, and I was aware of that, and I was, this was during the era, I graduated high school in 1956, so the Supreme Court decision in the *Brown* case was 1954, and I read the papers, and I remember going in and speaking to our principal and saying, "Why aren't we (6:00) integrating? I mean, didn't the Supreme Court make a ruling?" And getting a lecture from because why this was a very bad idea and how it would hurt, it would hurt black teachers, they would lose their jobs, you know, and so forth and so on. But I already had this keen sense of injustice, and at home I would get into trouble because I would raise these issues, and my father who grew up in Georgia said, "You just don't get into issues like this. You don't raise controversies. It's a bad thing." Because he had grown up in a small town in Georgia as a Jew. And he grew up with the memory of something infamous case, a case called the Leo

Frank Case, where a Jewish man in 19, in the early part of the 20th century accused of having murdered a little Christian girl in order to get her blood to use in the Passover ceremony. This was like the old Jewish blood libel. I think the governor of Georgia tried to commute his sentence because the evidence against him (7:00) was nonexistent. And a crowd took him out of jail and lynched him. So that memory was vivid to my father because he was a young boy at the time that happened. The story that he learned, and the message that he took away was don't make waves. Don't call attention to yourself, and, you know, keep your political opinions to yourself. Obviously I didn't learn that lesson.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Of your background and your family, who do you think has inspired you to become the person you are today? Your father by saying that?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, I would say it probably was teachers. No one in my household was a learned person. No one in my household had any scholarly interest. I had no one in my family who was, I think my oldest brother went to college, but he had no interest in academe.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Nobody else was reading books in trees with you?

DIANE RAVITCH

I was up there alone in the tree. I love my brothers and sisters. (8:00) We're, they were great play companions, but they were not people with whom I discussed political issues or the things I was reading. I was, I guess the person who had the most influence on me was my Rabbi, and not for religious reasons, but he was a man that read books, a man that loved music. I was taken with that. But I didn't know very many people like him.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Then you went to Wellesley. What did you study at Wellesley?

DIANE RAVITCH

I majored in political science, and I took a lot of history courses. But political science was my major because interestingly enough, or at least interestingly to me, was that the first paper I ever wrote at Wellesley was a study of the politics of the Houston public schools. I already had this fascination because during the time that I was in high school, the public schools were a battleground; and they were a battleground between the very far right and I guess what you (9:00) would call the center. There was no left. And the very far right was the John Birch Society and a group very much like the John Birch Society called the Minute Women. The Minute Women believed that any mention of racial segregation, segregation or desegregation, or integration, or any mention of human rights, any mention of the United Nations was evidence of communism. So they periodically, every two years there'd be an election for the school board, and they would win control, and then they would lose control. Then they would win control. The schools went back and forth of whether you were allowed to mention the U.N., whether you were allowed to discuss current issues. I remember even when I was in high school I worked one period, I forget if it was a day or a week, but I worked in the school library, and I remember that

under the circulation desk was a stack of books about Russia, and I said to the librarian, “Why aren’t these books shelved?” And she said, “Oh, we have (10:00) to keep them off the shelf. Somebody might read books about the Soviet Union, and that would be, you know, we’re not allowed to have these books out.” So I read them. But they...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Under the desk.

DIANE RAVITCH

It didn’t seem to have had any huge impact on me, but I just got really fascinated with the idea of this battle of, for control, the control of the minds of children, the fact that there were teachers who felt intimidated, and I became very aware that once in a while, something would drop. I had a social studies teacher whom I admired very much, Nelda Davis, she was my ninth grade world history teacher, and she was invited to go to a National Council of Social Studies meeting, and the school board denied her the funds. They said it was a communist organization, but then everything outside of the U.S. seemed to be a communist organization. So this was the highly politicized atmosphere in which I grew up, with my father’s saying, “Don’t get involved in anything political (11:00).” And meanwhile, all this kind of happy duty political stuff was going on about racial segregation and racial desegregation, is the U.N. an allowable topic for discussion, or not? And on and on the issues that were off the table. I remember at one point a guy was up for consideration for superintendent of schools, and it turned out that he had belonged to the Urban League, which is not exactly a radical organization. Well the Minute Women just jumped all over him and said, “That’s a communist dominated organization, and he’s a pinko.” That was the atmosphere. So, when I got to college, my first political science paper was about the political struggle to control the public schools. So there was already the germ of my interest, and I had some wonderful professors in political science, psychology, and history, in Greek drama. I mean, I loved everything at Wellesley—it was such a liberation for me. I loved being in a single-sex women’s school. (12:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

There you met your friend, Linda Gottlieb. She says you were a wild girl from Texas. You were hilarious, and warm, and utterly outrageous. She recalls you climbing out of the window of your dorm one night in your blue jeans, although she doesn’t remember what your certainly worthy goal was. What was that about? Do you remember that? Oh, I think, at one point we, they gave us because we lived in old buildings that had been built in most cases in the early part of the 20th century, we all had a ladder. In case there was a fire, you could use your ladder. So I guess I was testing the ladder. Although I did other things that were equally ridiculous. I always liked to test, they had laws about when, you had to be in class on the day before vacation. It was called a calendar day. If you didn’t show up for class, it meant that you were trying to make a longer vacation. So I would test my limits, trying to see how late I could arrive on calendar day and still not be counted as...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

There’s a recurring theme here.

DIANE RAVITCH

No, I just was... (13:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A rebel.

DIANE RAVITCH

I was something of a prankster. They took very seriously having high tea at a certain time, and a group of friends and I all went to this thrift shop, and we bought silly hats and arrived at high tea with silly hats. But we did a lot of foolishness. But, you know, that was 1950s foolishness. It was completely harmless. It wasn't dangerous. We didn't do drugs, and we I don't think anybody was doing anything like alcohol, so it was the most innocent kind of foolishness.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She also says that she was responsible for introducing you to your former husband, who was then her boyfriend at the time. Tell us about that.

DIANE RAVITCH

Well Linda went off to a, something called the Vienna Youth Festival. The Vienna Youth Festival was one of those things they used that Minute Women would have called communist dominated. But she was part of a youth contention that went to see the world, and I (14:00) asked her to introduce me to people in Washington because I was spending the summer as an intern. I worked, this was the summer before my second year in college, and I worked at the Washington Post, and that was a story in itself, how I got a job at the Washington Post. I was a copy boy. So she said, "Oh, my friend, Dick Ravitch, is terrific. He'll introduce you to people." So he set me up with these series of dates, all of which were totally unacceptable for one reason or another—too tall, too short, too this, too that. And then he invited me to have lunch at, he was working at the House of Representatives for some congressman from California, and he invited me to lunch and discovered that I was very hungry. I was working for something like 30 dollars a week and didn't eat a lot. So he just got, I don't know, we started dating, and by the end of the summer, Linda came back and he was my boyfriend. She had found a new boyfriend, and she married the guy she had met in Vienna, who is a wonderful, wonderful man, who eventually (15:00) became the publisher of the Abrams Art book company. She's always been a great friend. Within a year we were both married to the men we had met in the summer of '59.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your children.

DIANE RAVITCH

My oldest son, Joe, is brilliant. He works in the financial sector. He has some equity fund where he is involved in media, and sports, and he's fluent in Russian. He worked in Russia for a year or so when he was, right after he, he went law, college, law school. He has two sons. Then my younger son, Michael, is a writer. He lives not very far from me in Brooklyn, and he writes essays. He's always working on the great American novel. But mainly at this moment, he's the proud father of a five-year-old son. Michael and his partner have a (16:00) boy who is just wonderful, and they're great. So, I had a son between them who died of leukemia, so I had three children. Stephen died of leukemia in 1966 when he was two years old.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He was two. That was tough.

DIANE RAVITCH

That was a terrible tragedy in my life, and even now when I go out lecturing, I often ask that instead of them paying me that they make a contribution to the chair that my ex-husband created at Mt Sinai Hospital, which is a chair in Pediatric Hematology and Oncology. The doctors there not only do research on curing these diseases, but also dealing with the aftermath. They told me when Stephen got leukemia that there was no cure, and there was a 100% chance of mortality, and all the kids died very quickly. He died after six months after his diagnosis. (17:00) There was, no one survived when they got it at the age of two. Today the survival rate is about 80%, and it may even be better than 80%; but the kids who survive have tremendous psychological damage physical problems. They have tremendous problems in terms of, well they were telling me about bone issues, hip issues, and a huge suicide rate. 20 to 25% of survivors commit suicide, which I just found horrible.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Shocking.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah. So these are the kinds of issues they're dealing with, both the physical, and emotional, and mental support for the kids.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I can't imagine anything worse than losing a child. Tough.

DIANE RAVITCH

Oh, it is terrible.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your son, Michael, the writer, says that you passed on to him your love of books and words. He remembers you reading him poetry as a child, "The Child of the Ancient Mariner," and W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats." (18:00) You liked to teach him old fashioned things, like how to diagram sentences that went out of fashion pedagogically, but, nonetheless, you did that.

DIANE RAVITCH

Oh, Stephen Krashen would be just horrified to hear this. We occasionally have online discussions about the fact that I do love grammar and diagramming sentences, and he thinks I'm just wrong.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He also says that one thing that you have always shared is a great sense of the absurd. What does that mean?

DIANE RAVITCH

Oh, I don't know. We just enjoy doing silly things. Monty Python humor. Monty Python was something actually my older son brought into our lives. He became such a Monty Python fanatic that he can recite entire sequences, and all you had to say was, "dead parrot," and he'd be off into the routine of "Dead Parrot," or any kind of phrase of that kind would set him off. But we always had a great appreciation for to able to find humor in every situation. (19:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Who was the Creeping Licker?

DIANE RAVITCH

We had a dog that I got our children one Christmas, and as I said, we were non-religious Jews, although Michael is very involved with religious life these days. But I got them a dog one year, and he was a shelter dog. He had been abandoned, and he was a Tibetan Terrier, and he had horrible breath. But he was a wonderful dog. We loved him so much, and he liked nothing better than to jump on the bed and quietly, quietly advance and lick you on the face with his disgusting breath, so we called him the Creeping Licker, but his name was Shag.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Cute.

Video 2

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In 1975 you earned your PhD from Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. What did you study there and research for your dissertation?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I had an unusual academic career. I, after I graduate college I went to work for a magazine called *The New Leader*. It was a small, it's no longer in existence, but it was a small magazine founded by decedents of the Russian Revolution, Mensheviks. I worked on and off there for a few years as an editorial assistant and had children. You know, I was very engaged in raising them, but also in trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life, which I hadn't figured out. But I came to the idea after the loss of Stephen, and that was in 1966, now I graduated college in 1960. In 1966, when Stephen died, there were two things I really wanted, (1:00) one was to have another child, and Michael was born a year later. The other was I needed to figure out what to do with my mind, which I couldn't just stay home and be a housewife. I couldn't do that. So, I had been writing pieces and sending them off and getting rejections. I didn't know enough about anything to be a writer. But then I, actually it was through Linda Gottlieb recommended me to a friend of hers at the Carnegie Corporation, and the Carnegie Corporation was seeking someone to do, I guess, research for them. But not real research as you would understand it, but to, they got a request, for example, from the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation said, "We're underwriting a series of experiments in Ocean Hill Brownsville and in two other districts in New York City. They're experiments in community control, and would you join us and help us fund it? Well what we would like (2:00) you to do is go out and visit these communities, interview people, talk to them. Sort of like a journalist really, not a researcher.

Then write up what you think.” Why they trusted me to do this, I had no idea because I had no experience doing anything. I wrote—I did that. I went to these districts that later became the center of the 1968 teachers strike in New York City. They closed the schools down for two months. So I interviewed people, went to classrooms lots of, met with community leaders, and had a variety of other experiences that made it possible for me to write something up for them. I did other similar kinds of journalistic quick takes on certain things that they wanted to know about. Why they didn’t have anyone on staff to do it, I don’t know, but they didn’t. I started think particularly because of my interviews in Ocean Hill Brownsville at I.S. 201 in Harlem. (3:00) I started thinking, “You know, this is so interesting what’s happening in New York City. There are all these demands for decentralization for community control. It seems so odd that the New York City public school system would all be controlled by one organization, and I wondered why. So I went to the library, and I began to look for a history of the New York City schools to explain it. The latest one that I could find, this was in late 1960s, the latest one I could find was written in 1905. And I thought, “Wow, that seems kind of odd. Nobody has explained anything between 1905 and 1968.” I guess my inquiry was taking place right before the teachers strike. Then the teachers strike happened, and it was, as you can imagine, two months without school in New York City. This was incredible. This was like the event of the moment, of the day. And so I learned a little bit from reading the history from 1905, and I thought, “Gee, this is a really good article. I could write this article (4:00) about how schools used to be centralized, *decentralized*, and why did they become centralized.” So I sent to someone I had met socially, who worked as an editor of the New York Times magazine. I said, “Would you be interested in an article on this?” And he said, he wrote me a very kind of brush off response, saying something like, “No, no, we’re not interested. He said if you ever write an article called ‘I Danced with my Dentist,’ then I might be interested.” I mean, talk about a put-down. Today we would say that was writing sexism. So, I thought, “Wow, this is such a good subject. I can’t let this go.” So I went back to the library, and I read some more, and I had talked to my friends who had been sending me to do these journalistic jobs for five dollars an hour. I said, I said, “You know, this really interests me, and I think I want to write a history of the New York City schools.” So they’re like, “Uh-huh. (5:00) Okay. That sounds interesting.” They said, “Why don’t you go see Lawrence Cremin, who’s at Teachers College. He’s one of our grantees.” They had given him very large grant, at that time, of 100,000 dollars to write the definitive history of American education, not American public education. Cremin’s view of education was very broad. There were schools, but there newspapers, and there were families, you know, every institution, the plantation in colonial, everything had something to do with educating the people. So he had this very broad latitude in area view of education. I was interested in the public schools. At their suggestion, I went to see him, and he was just great. I saw him, and I still have the date on my calendar, January 10, 1968. We spent two hours talking. I said, “This is what I want to do.” And he said, “Well have you read this?” “No.” “Well have you read that?” Then he started making a reading list for me, and he said (6:00), “I really don’t think you should attempt to write a history of the schools. Do you have a master’s degree?” I said, “No.” He said, “Have you ever written a book?” I said, “No.” He said, “Have you written articles.” I said, “Well, I’ve published a few in *The New Leader* because I was working there and doing book reviews there.” He said, “No, I think a book is going to be too overwhelming. Write some essays and see how that goes. When you’ve got an essay or two, get back to me.” Well we had a great talk. I was so inspired. I went, and I read all the books that he assigned to me, and they led to more books, and then I went to New York and spent lots of time in the New York Historical Society, digging through the

archives, and that led me to other places and other archives and other things and more. It was like one thing leads to the next thing, leads to the next. I said, "I love this stuff." Of course I had to work it in while having young children. In this case, you know, because Stephen was born—not Stephen—when Michael was born, then I had two children (7:00) to take care of, five years apart. So I kind of had to work around taking care of them and doing what needed doing. So how did I get my PhD? What did I do? First I wrote the book. I came to see Cremin, and I said, "I don't have an essay for you. I have the first quarter of my book." He was like, "Oh, okay." He said, "I'll read it." It was 125 pages. Then he got back to me a couple weeks later. He said, "Keep going." He said, "This is okay." You know, he didn't say, "It's the greatest thing I ever read." He didn't say, "Forget about it—you're no good." He said, "Keep going." So I saw him probably four times, and each time I saw him I brought him the next quarter, which would be in like three chapters or two or three chapters. And he said, "You know, it's looking good." Then I found a publisher. Then Cremin went off to summer, he did every summer, he went to Stanford (8:00) to the Center of Social Behavior Sciences. He came back from that summer, and he said, "I was in the swimming pool, and I saw Bruno Bettelheim. Do you know who he is?" And I said, "Oh, yeah, I've read some of his things. He's great." He said, "And he asked me what you do." Because I had written an article then in *Commentary Magazine* about the New York City school strike. Cremin had given me some kind of non-paid sort of fellowship so I could use the library. So I was a fellow of the Institute of Philosophy and Politics of Education at Teachers College. I got to write their newsletter, and I would be able to sit and listen to the meetings. "So he asked me what you were doing, and he asked me if you were working on your degree. And I told him you were not. And he said, 'Why not?' And he said because," Cremin said, "Because she doesn't need a degree. We're too degree conscience in this society," and "You should just keep writing." (9:00) Bettelheim said, "Tell the young lady that I disagree with you. Tell the young lady that she needs to get her doctorate or she will hit the glass ceiling very quickly." So he said, "I'm bringing you news that Bruno Bettelheim doesn't agree with me." I said, "I agree with Bruno Bettelheim. I don't agree with you. I'm going to get a doctorate." So I started taking courses. I took a French exam—studied up something. I had taken French in college many, many years earlier. Then I was, I guess 32 or so, and I remember running into a historian at Columbia. We were at a child's birthday party. Like our kids were in nursery school together, so I said, "I'm thinking I want to get a PhD, and I wonder if I should apply to Columbia." He said, "Well, how old are you?" I said, "I'm 32." He said, "You have three strikes against you. First of all, you're too old. And second, you're a woman. The Columbia history department doesn't really want women. And third, (10:00) you're studying a field that is not of the Columbia history department. Go to Teachers College." So I went back and told Mr. Cremin, who had a joint appointment both in Columbia and Teachers College, and he said, "Well you will work towards the PhD in the Columbia Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and you won't have your degree from the Columbia history department. It will be from Columbia, and it will be a PhD, not an EdD. You know, but you'll work for it." I said, "Okay." So eventually I did the coursework. I did the seminars. But when it came time to do the dissertation, I had just finished...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your book.

DIANE RAVITCH

The Great School Wars, and it was published. It had just come out, and I said to Cremin, "Can I use this as a dissertation." He said, "No." I was having dinner, and all these kinds of interesting things come back as we're talking, I was having dinner one night with Patricia Graham. Pat Graham was another student of Cremin's, who went on to become (11:00) the president of the Spencer Foundation, the dean of the graduate school at Harvard, and I said to Pat, "Do you know, what do you think? Larry says I can't use this as my dissertation." She said, "Oh, that's ridiculous. Dan Bell got his published work accepted at Columbia." She said, "Actually there have been probably a half a dozen books accepted at Columbia because they were respectable, scholarly works." So she said, "Here's the process you go through." So I went to Cremin, and I said, "I'm going to do this." He said, "I told you not to." I said, "I don't agree with you." So I went through whatever the hoops and hurdles were, and he said, "Okay, here's what we do. We haven't ever done this at Teachers College, we convene a committee." And the committee was Donna Shalala, Kenneth Jackson from Columbia, Douglas Sloan from Teachers College and history, Cremin, and there may have been one other person, but definitely those four. And he said, "You will present your book. (12:00) They will read it. You will present it as your dissertation, and you will not have an opportunity to revise because it's published. So you will get a vote of up or down. If it's down, you'll have to start from scratch." I said, "I'm willing to take my gamble," because I had been going through the library reading dissertations, many of the dissertations, and I thought, "This is as good as all of these things. It's certainly in that league." So, I got voted up. I got the doctorate, but I did all the necessary coursework, took the language exam, took the statistics course, although I'm not good at statistics, so, you know, that was then and this is now. That's how I got my doctorate, and it was *The Great School Wars*.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The Great School Wars was your dissertation. At that time did you know what role you would eventually play in the federal policy or educational policy landscape?

DIANE RAVITCH

Absolutely not. I really didn't know much about federal policy. (13:00) I wasn't, you know, I had the political science background, but I didn't see, I didn't know where I was going with it. I just thought I loved doing historical research. This is so much fun. But I was also, you know, trying to be a good mother. So I had a lot of pulls, and very often while I was writing *The Great School Wars* I would write from the time the kids went to bed until midnight or one in the morning. It was tough on my husband, but I tried to make sure that it wasn't tough on my kids.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure. Finding balance. From 1991-1993, you served as the Assistant Secretary of Education under the administration of President George Bush Senior. How did that come about?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, it came about because I was recommended to the position by my friend, Checker Finn. Checker had served in the same role in the Reagan administration, and Checker and I had been friends, I guess since the early 1980s. (14:00) We had created something called the Educational Excellence Network, which was just a news bulletin about stuff that was happening around the country to do with tests, standards, curriculum, and we were sharing a common view about how education needed to be far, far better than it was. So we were very much in sync. He worked, he

was at Vanderbilt, and while he was at Vanderbilt, he worked a lot with Lamar Alexander, who was the governor. And they created things like career ladders, and I don't know if they did testing, but he was very close to Lamar, and when George Bush Senior was President, he changed Secretaries of Education in the middle of his term and switched from Lauro Cavazos to Lamar Alexander, and Checker recommended me to have the position that he had heard earlier in the Reagan administration as the Assistant Secretary for Research.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Francie Alexander, (15:00) your friend, noted that you almost turned down the position. She said that as brilliant as you are, you felt fashion challenged.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yes. It's always been the great joke that I'm like the worst dresser in the world.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I think you look lovely today.

DIANE RAVITCH

Thank you. I try harder now. I've always liked working from home. I've never been able to write in an office. So whether it was working at home in the back room when I was living in Manhattan, or working at home now that I'm living in Brooklyn. I like working from home. I like being able to get up, or to stay up until two in the morning, wake up at five in the morning, whatever it is. I can go to my, used to be my typewriter, now it's my computer. I never work in pajamas, but I do like to wear blue jeans and sweats.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And sweatpants.

DIANE RAVITCH

So I remember when I was invited to work in D.C., I said, "But, I would have to get dressed everyday. I wear blue jeans." And they said, "Oh," (16:00) I remember Lamar saying, "You can do it. Everyone else manages to put on heels and a skirt. You can too." And I thought, "Well, I'll think about this." And I did think hard about it. First of all, because I was not a republican. Secondly, because I didn't know that I was up to the job. Checker assured me that I was, and that when you move in there, there are lots of people around you that know what you're supposed to do, and who'll help you. Then there was this issue of, my god, I've got to go out and buy some clothing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She also says that you wear a sheriff's badge. Very lovely.

DIANE RAVITCH

Going back to your comment about Michael saying I had a certain sense of the absurd, I periodically would put on cowboy boots, or wear a sheriff's badge, or just do things to shake people up. At one point, you know, when I got there, I realized that the office came with two speech writers, and I said, "I don't know what you guys are going to do. I don't, people don't

write my speeches for me.” (17:00) But I tried to make the place more fun for people. But I often would close the door and just write because there was a lot of writing to be done. I wanted to review everything that came out of our office in terms of policy statements, in terms of explaining what we were doing. I got very involved, and I told, when I accepted the job, I met with Lamar Alexander and his Deputy, David Kearns, who was a wonderful, wonderful man, who was, had been the CEO of Xerox. I said to them that I was really interested in things like standards and curriculum. So they, “We are too.” There was no authorization to do anything at the U.S. Department of Education. In fact, there was a specific ban saying the U.S. Department of Education can do nothing about curriculum. But we were interested, or I was interested in promoting the idea of voluntary national standards. So during the time I was there, (18:00) I worked very closely with Francie Alexander. And Francie is, I am so disorganized, and Francie is like the most organized person I have ever known in my life. You can walk into her desk, into her office, and you would never see a piece of paper on her desk. You’d walk into mine and you’d try to find me behind all the pieces of paper stacked up on my desk. But we worked very hard on the idea that if you could bring together all the relevant professional groups in any field, they might be able to reach consensus on what kinds of aspirational standards to create. The idea for it being, for instance, and we were very involved, for example, on promoting standards in the arts; so all the arts educators got together and came out with a document about what children should know and be able to do in different grades. And a part of it is there were resource standards saying you can’t do this. You can’t teach music unless you have musical instruments, unless you have people who can teach music and art and the other things. (19:00) So this, in a way, the template had been set by the people that did the math standards. They had started this at the time was quite controversial. The math was out of there. The U.S. Department of Education had helped promote the National Academy of Sciences in developing the science standards, and we went off to work with other fields to say history standards, art standards, civic standards, economic standards. Arnold Schwarzenegger went to go see President Bush and said, “And why not physical education standards?” And so President Bush called Lamar Alexander, and viola, we have physical education standards in the works too. So we ended up through, promoting, not directly, but indirectly supporting professional groups that developed standards of what children should know and be able to do at different grade levels. We never had a mechanism to make it happen. Our thought was that, if they were good, (20:00) states would follow and use them. And then it subsequently turned out that after we left the office, there was a great flop over the history standards, and the whole thing blew up. So, it didn’t work out as planned, but it probably had something to do with advancing the whole idea of standards, but not, as I explained in my last book, not in the way that I had envisioned. I mean, No Child Left Behind turned out to be quite different from what we were talking about. There was nothing about the arts, and civics, and all of the different, the sciences, all of the different things that we saw as bringing in the people, and working with the people who actually know what they’re doing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Hijacked the standards.

DIANE RAVITCH
Mhmm.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So we have you to thank for the national state standards. What do you think about the Common Core?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I've been agnostic. I have neither written for them or against them because my, I've had this experience with standards. Before I got into the federal government, I worked, one of the things (21:00) that I did that was very rewarding was that I worked in California, which is where I met Francie Alexander. I worked in California for maybe it was a period of two years, developing the state history/social science standards. That was a really fascinating experience, firstly for the people that I met, and also seeing the process where teachers, administrators, subject matter experts, professors from different universities, sat together and talked about what you would be doing in different grades. I got particularly interested in the early grades because I felt that they were an empty area that could be filled with wonderful stuff that kids could love reading and doing. But I saw how the process works, how important it is to bring in different views and get people to meet and talk together. But also, after you get a document, how important it is to extend it out to teachers to try out, and it's through the tryouts you discover whether the written documents work or not. You find (22:00) out the teacher feed back. The teacher tells you this doesn't belong in this grade, it belongs somewhere else, or it doesn't belong anywhere—it's not workable. And so you learn through the implementation. So if you haven't done the implementation, having the words on paper is not enough. So where we are now with the Common Core is we have words on paper that have never been tried anywhere. So my feeling about it is, they may turn out to be wonderful. They may turn out to have huge problems that have not been adequately anticipated. But how do we know until they've been tried? Last year I met with some people in the administration in Washington, and when they asked the same question that you ask, I said, "Why don't you pilot them? Why don't you pilot them and give a few states money and try them out. You're going to learn things you don't know now. They'll tell you what works and what doesn't work. But you don't know that now. And you're doing it in, what, 45 states?" So we're going to have a pilot where everybody is doing it at the same time. So, it could be wonderful, but on the other hand, if it's rigorous, really rigorous, it could increase the achievement gap. It could make it that much harder for the kids who are behind and who enter school with learning difficulties, they'll fall further behind. So, that's a possibility, and I don't think that's been adequately thought out. I would just love to see a pilot test. I think the FDA would not send a drug out to everybody with the same illness without having done clinical trials. So I think the clinical trials, we will regret that we didn't have them because it'll be implemented in a million different ways, and there'll be no way to fix whatever the errors are.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah, fidelity of implementation.

N:

Right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You also were responsible for the development of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, OERI, at the U.S. Department of Education. Of all the initiatives that (24:00) you were in charge of, of what are you most proud?

N:

Oh, gosh, we really didn't have very many initiatives. I was there not a long time. It was probably about 18 months, and I was pleased with the work on promoting standards, although now I think it's certainly, definitely a mixed legacy. I'm not even sure it's a legacy. And there was no time for initiatives. We had no money. We had probably 10 million dollars in discretionary funds. I look at that in the context of five billion dollars for Race to the Top, and I think, "10 million dollars. We had the departments discretionary money, and it was nothing." And we used it all to promote these voluntary efforts to develop standards. So what we, we had another initiative called, *How to help your child do XYZ*, which were parent guidebooks that were written very directly to parents about how to help their children in school. How to help your child learn to read. How to help your child learn science. Those were good. But, you know, in 18 months (25:00) with no money, and with a congress that was certainly unfriendly to anything coming from that administration. I don't think there were any other initiatives that I can point to and say, "Look what we accomplished there." One of the congressional aides, a very high level guy, said to me when I first arrived, and I came to say hello, he said, "You're not going to accomplish anything here." So maybe he was right. But you know what I did accomplish? Nothing for the public, I learned a lot. I learned, first of all, I met lots of people who are still now in the same jobs, very little changes in Washington.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And what you learned eventually hit the public, and everything you've done since.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, well it's like everything that, I mean, maybe it was part of my learning process. It certainly didn't do anything for the country. But I met lots of people. I got to understand the organizational landscape of D.C. I got to understand the think-tank world. And I got to understand how the legislative process works. Before, all I knew was what I read in the textbooks (26:00). And then I got to understand how Washington works, and, you know, I guess that's something you can spend your life learning. But I learned so much in the two years that I was in D.C. When I left, right before I left the government, the head of Brookings came to see me, Bruce McLaury, and he offered me a chair at Brookings. And I said, "I don't want a chair. I want to go back to New York." And he said, "Would you like to have, you know, a senior position and write a book here?" I said, "Sure. I'd love to." Because I needed time to decompress. So I stayed on in Washington for another 15 or so months, and wrote a book at Brookings called *The National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*. It's hard to say what side I'm on there because it's just trying to lay out lots of information about the pros and cons. I'm sort of for them, but I'm also concerned about some of the side effects. Anyway, that was my next (27:00) step after D.C. Then while I was at Brookings, I called up the president of Teachers College, no longer Cremin, who had died, I probably wouldn't have done anything if Cremin had remained alive, but he died in 1990, and I called up his successor, with whom I had co-taught courses at TC, and I said, "My books are still on file at TC, I'm ready to come back." And he said, after a long pause, and then he kind of gasped or giggled or something and said, "Actually, your colleagues don't want you back." So I didn't go back to TC.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You went to NYU, is that right? You're still there today?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, you know, saying that I'm at NYU is saying I'm affiliated with NYU. I have an office at NYU, but I do all my work here.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Here, in your sweats.

DIANE RAVITCH

You know, I don't teach, I've taught some courses there, I've never been tenured. I was not tenured at TC, and I'm not tenured at NYU. So I've occasionally taught courses at NYU, but at this point in my life, I'm 73, I'm not going to be (28:00) teaching anymore.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Did you ever have a desire to be a tenured professor?

DIANE RAVITCH

Briefly, many, many years ago. At that time, nothing was available, and I realized what I really wanted to do was write, and I need a doctorate in order to write. I'll teach courses if, you know, whenever anybody wants me to. So I taught courses in like history of urban education or issues, contemporary issues in education. Mike Tempone at Teachers College and I would debate back and forth over a variety of issues. But I've never had a regular teaching position, and I've always wanted to do in junior high school, which was to write. I've been doing that since I was fourteen.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I think that's the common denominator in all of this. Write a book and Diane Ravitch will come.

DIANE RAVITCH

I have 60 years behind me of writing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you were offered that position again would you take it?

DIANE RAVITCH

Which one?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Back in D.C.?

DIANE RAVITCH

As Assistant Secretary of Education?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Or Secretary of Education? (29:00)

DIANE RAVITCH

You know, there was a point in my life where I would have liked to do it. But, first of all, I'm way too old, and second of all, I don't have any ambition to serve in any public office at this point. I mean, I've passed that point.

Video 3

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your life partner, Mary Butz.

DIANE RAVITCH

Well Mary is a wonderful person. She has had a great career in the New York City public schools. She was a teacher for many years. She was a principal and founded her own high school. It was part of the Deborah Meier Network, the coalition of the central schools. You know, she's very focused on kids. So we never really talked about big issues. I mean, the kinds of things I always had my head wrapped around was not what she cared about. What she cared about was Maria's having a problem. Raheem doesn't have a shirt to wear. His grandmother kicked him out. Let's go to Costco and buy him some clothes. She was focused on the kids. She was focused on the faculty, making sure that her staff was had the support that they needed. She created a terrific school. Her school was Manhattan Village Academy had, (1:00) she created a slogan: "Reason, Respect, and Responsibility." Those were, that was her school's mission statement. The kids all took college preparatory classes. Even though it was a small school, I think she only had a little over 300 students, maybe 320 students, she started offering three languages, Spanish, French, and Latin. She eventually had to cut it down to, I think, Spanish and Latin. But she insisted that she had to keep the Latin. She wanted the kids to have that opportunity. She's a product of 16 years of Catholic school. Through her I've become a great admirer and supporter of Catholic education, which always seems inconsistent to my friends who know that I'm a great supporter of public education, but I've evolved a principle. It makes it consistent to me. And that is public money for public schools, and private money for nonpublic schools. And if all the private money now pouring into public schools were there to help Catholic education, (2:00) we'd be in great shape.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She says you are best friends who can depend on each other through thick and thin. You are life partners whose lives and families are totally intertwined. Tell us about your intertwined family.

DIANE RAVITCH

We just spent Thanksgiving with her family in Upstate New York. We'll spend Christmas with her family in Cranford, New Jersey. She's my youngest grandson's now five years old, totally adores her. He, I wanted him to call me Grandmas, he couldn't say that, so I'm Ama. She wanted to be called Oma because it's the German word for Grandma. So we're Oma and Ama, and when we go play with Elijah and babysit for him, I sometimes don't have the energy, but she plays with him, and so he adores her. She was there, we were both there when he was born in San Jose, California, and (3:00) we share family events. Our families are, indeed, intertwined.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She says you're a family gal. She also notes that while you make great breakfast food and salads, as a rule, the kitchen is not your area of expertise.

DIANE RAVITCH

This is definitely true. I mean, there are limits to what I can do, and this is definitely one of them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What happened to the vegetable soup to which you added barley?

DIANE RAVITCH

That was one of my great stories, which she remembers, but I usually don't remember it because it was so humiliating.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You blocked it out?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I tried to make dinner one night when I had some college friend whom I hadn't seen in, I don't know, 20 years, was coming for dinner. I said, "Don't worry, I'll make dinner." And I was going to make this wonderful barley soup, which I guess I had never made, or I was remembering from maybe my childhood. But then when I made the soup, the barley started expanding, and expanding, and expanding, and when I dished it out, you could put your spoon in it, and the spoon would stand up. So it wasn't exactly a soup. I'm not sure what you would call it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Did you serve it?

DIANE RAVITCH

It was all we had. (4:00) And I never saw that friend again.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your friend, Richard Rothstein, notes that he has learned a great deal from you over the many years. Even when you both did not see as eye to eye on many issues as you do today. You notes that your prior works have influenced him greatly, specifically *The Great School Wars*, *The Troubled Crusade*, and *The Language Policy*. Of the books that you have written...

DIANE RAVITCH

Language Police.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Language Police. Of the books you've written, of which are you most proud?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I'd have to say that the book that has changed my life is the *Death and Life of the Great American Public School System*. I never expected, that book came out in March of 2010, and I was then, I don't know, like 72 years old, something like that, and I did not expect at that point in my life what would happen to me, which has been a dramatic life change. I mean, it's been like nothing I've ever experienced. But the book that was the most fun for me that I absolutely (5:00) loved writing was *The Language Police*. The Language Police was a, I remember when I went out to meet with different publishers, and it was eventually published by Knopf, and I sat down with their, they said, "Well, tell us about the book. The PR people want to know how would you describe it." And I said, "Well this is the closest thing to automatic writing that I've ever experienced." This idea of automatic writing was popular in the 1920s where people would just sit down and do stream of consciousness. Well of course you know you have to have lots and lots of background in order to do what's called stream of consciousness. And in this case, I had been working on the national assessment governing board, and President Clinton and Secretary Riley had appointed me to it and reappointed me to it, so I while I was serving on the board, we had responsibility for a while for what was might or might not, and did not become a national (6:00) test. But there was a 50 million dollar contract that went out to a group of publishers. All the publishers, they all combined into one and said, "We will develop the voluntary national test." And so Nagby was overseeing this, and I remembered when we met with the publishers, and they were telling us about what the guidelines would be and what they would do. They gave us a written document, it was about maybe 40 or 50 pages. And I sat down to read this, and it said words you can't mention, phrases you can't mention, ideas you can't mention, and I looked at this, and I thought, "Good grief. This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen. Why can't you say 'Halloween?' I mean kids have Halloween. Why can't you mention a dinosaur? Why can't you have a story with disobedient children?" So all these things were just kind of amazing to me. And then I began, you know, given my love of research and my (7:00) historical bent, I began searching around, and I discovered McGraw-Hill had actually published guidelines, and they look remarkably like the ones I had just been given by test publishers. And then I began contacting other test publishers and saying, "Do you have guidelines?" And sometimes they would say yes, and sometimes they would no. If they said yes, they would send them to me. Most of them said no, but I knew they had them and they wouldn't send them to me. Or they'd say, "Yes, we have them, and you can't see them."

Then I didn't, I went through I don't know how many months of just gathering guidelines from all over, and in some cases I had to do it because I had a tip that somebody was able to get them for me. I accumulated all this stuff, and then I began reading about the history of censorship, and I thought, "Wow, this is amazing." The thing is, like so much of the historical work that I typically do, all this stuff was just fascinating." (8:00) I mean, there wasn't anything I read that didn't make my eyes pop. Sometimes they would be funny stories, and sometimes it would be, "I can't believe we're doing this." You know, saying that children can't ever encounter a story about death. I mean, why death? Part of the cycle of life is death. But you can't ever mention it. And the more I got into it, the more people would come on board and offer me new stories. So I had an editor at Time for Kids say, "Let me show you the photographs we're not allowed to print." And he sent me a whole group of photographs of things like a rainbow. I said, "Why not a rainbow?" He said, "Well, that suggests gay." I said, "Oh, okay." Then there's another picture of a guy with his hands in his pocket, and he said, "What's his hand doing in his pocket?" And there's a picture of a child in poverty, and somewhere in some third world country, and he said, "You're not allowed to show poverty in a third world country." But I said, "Poverty exists (9:00)

in a third world country. It even exists here.” “No, no, we can’t show poverty. That would make children feel bad.”

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

These are all the things we should care about.

DIANE RAVITCH

But you can’t show it. You can’t depict it. So I had this whole bunch of stuff from him and other sent me, and so I just accumulated this wonderful archive. I wrote the book, and it got a lot of attention, and I had so much fun talking about it, and it was the kind of book where you don’t know whether to laugh or to cry. And even after it came out, I kept getting even more stuff that I had wished I had had the first time around. But how pervasive this is. I guess what struck me then was, we live in this absolutely untrammled, unrestrained culture, popular culture, where kids can turn on T.V. and see, you know, virtually pornography, and certainly death, and terrorism, and poverty, and suicide, and, I mean, abortion, and everything. Everything that you can think of that they’re (10:00) not allowed to see on a test, or in many cases in textbooks, like the word *e* will hardly ever exist in a textbook, the word *e* is evolution. But, anyway, I tried to bring both some history into it and also the guidelines. I loved doing that book. And as I say, by the time I had gathered all that stuff, I just sat down and I was like writing, writing, writing, and boom, it wrote itself. But that was fun. *The Death and Life* was a different kind of book because it was a book that I, where I really had to kind of examine myself very deeply and kind of scrape down to the bottom and say, “Hey, you know what? I try to know what I’m talking about, and I have to admit I was wrong. I have to say that a lot of things that I thought would work, didn’t work, and I have to make up for it.” (11:00) I have since writing the book had just amazing experiences. First of all going out and speaking and getting this incredible reaction, particularly from teachers, also parents, but mostly teachers, and also administrators. Anybody who works in schools where I have, you know, at the end people just jumped to their feet, and I’d get a standing ovation, and I think, “I’ve just told them a terrible, depressing story. Why are they applauding?” But that’s been amazing. And then the kind of pushback has been, I’ve gotten a lot of really angry, vicious responses of, “How dare you? How could you? You betrayed your principles. You have no principles. You used to say this, now you say that. You’re a hypocrite.” So there was a lot of that. So both the very high and the very low. I, you know, “You’re not even a good historian, and your credentials are no good.” (12:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Wow, I didn’t know the other side of that. Many recognize you as the former No Child Left Behind advocate turn critic. According to Linda, this has been your greatest triumph because you dared to speak truth to power, and you had the courage to change your mind publicly. Your son, Michael, noted this as your most significant accomplishment, as well as your writing. Americans today tend to be divided into camps, this is according to Michael, and there’s an enormous pressure to not betray solidarity with your fellow partisans. You looked honestly at what was happening around the country under the rubric of education reform and acknowledged that it was nothing like the vision of good education you had been advocating for your entire life. That’s profound. It’s phenomenal what you’ve done there. What are your thoughts on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, and what was your bet with Richard Rothstein?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well my thoughts about No Child Left Behind are that, first of all, that they're tinkering with a very bad law. (13:00) I supported No Child Left Behind, but then so did more than 90% of the congress, including Senator Ted Kennedy and George Miller of California. The people who supported it then have never been able to say what I've said. I've said the law was a disaster. They don't say that. They say it just needs fixing. It needs tinkering around the edges. And I think, I'd say that if you step back, here's a law that by the year 2011 has caused 80% of our public schools to be labeled failures. If it stays as it is, by the year 2014, virtually every school in the country will be called a failure. So you have to say, "Is it the schools that are failing, or is it the Congress's law that is failing?" And I think it's the law that's a disaster. I've been criticized for saying that it's the death star of American education. I think it is the (14:00) death star of American education. It is dragging down every school into a test comply or die. I think that's wrong. I think that's a way, way overreach of what Congress knows and can do. And a federal authority, I think that it's caused, brought about federal control of schools in a way that was never intended when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965. And the law doesn't work. It doesn't. It has had so much collateral damage and so much negative stuff that it has generated and incentivized, and it has everybody now, almost everybody focused on data and numbers, regardless of the validity in the numbers themselves, but treating data as though the data itself is the purpose of schooling, and if we can just get the data right, then everything else is okay. (15:00) Forgetting that, gosh, pick up the business page almost any day of the week to see how often the data is played with, manipulated with, distorted, in order to hit the numbers, and forgetting what the purpose of the organization is. So I think that we have NCLB has caused us as a nation to lose sight of the meanings, the meaning, the purpose, the goals, of education. The way it should be reauthorized is, first of all, to restore it as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, not of 1965, but let's say of 2012 or for 2013. And remove from it all of the accountability provisions because it is totally inappropriate in my view for Congress to set any kind of accountability goals. I just think that if you can't trust the states to want to have better schools, then we're a very sorry nation, indeed. If the only body that can establish (16:00) accountability goals is the Congress of the United States, that's a tremendous statement of let's say, a repeal of federalism. So I think the states should control their own definitions of accountability. And we need to change the definition of accountability. Accountability today has become a synonym for punishment. So what I would like to see with the reauthorization is to eliminate everything that's called No Child Left Behind. Eliminate the idea that the federal government should mandate testing, mandate testing goals, and leave the states to control their own testing programs. And make the federal role what it ought to be, which is to level the playing field, direct sources to the neediest kids, to make sure that the children who are poor, the children with disabilities, the children with language needs might have the resources they need, and that their schools have the resources they need in order to help them, to make sure that there is a strong research program, (17:00) and that the national assessment stays strong as kind of an overall accountability measure with no stakes attached to it. I think that if the federal government were to keep those as their K-12 goals, that would be, that would be a huge role for it to fill. It's overreached its capacity. The bet that I had with Richard Rothstein, several years ago we made a wager. I said that NCLB would be reauthorized with the testing left intact; and he said, "No one will support that because, first of all, the republicans don't like," what is it that they don't like? I can't remember. He said that, "the republicans don't support NCLB because it's too much federal intrusion, and the democrats don't support it because they don't

like all the testing.” But I think that he was wrong. I won the bet. He does agree that I won the bet, but he doesn’t agree that I was right. (18:00) I was right because Washington today, whether republican or democrat, shares the same narrative. And this has been my, one of the things that I find most frustrating, and that is, there used to be back in the 90s, the years I was most involved in D.C., there was a clear party decision. This was true from, let’s say from the 1960s up until No Child Left Behind. The democrats on one side were the party of equity, equitable funding, and support for professional development. The republicans were the party of testing accountability and choice. Today, democrats and republicans support accountability and choice. There is no partisan divide anymore. So this what I think is most frustrating to the people I speak to, to the teachers, to the parents. They say, “Who do we appeal to in Washington? How do we get this country back on track so that the federal country can do what it can do best, which is to redistribute resources (19:00) to where they’re needed most, and so that states and localities can take responsibility for improving their schools because they’re closest to them, and they know best what their needs are?” And there’s no leadership. I don’t know where to turn.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What about your thoughts on school choice?

DIANE RAVITCH

Pardon me?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On choice. Why is school choice bad for American public schools?

DIANE RAVITCH

Why is school choice bad?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah.

DIANE RAVITCH

I don’t think that school choice in itself is bad, but I think that if you break it down into vouchers and charters, vouchers have not worked. They promised vouchers if you go back and look at the advocacy for them in the 1980s and the 1990s, and I had a period of time where I flirted with the idea of vouchers for poor kids and failing schools. It hasn’t worked, and we have now had a 21 year experiment in Milwaukee that shows that the low performing kids, or the low-income (20:00) kids, in voucher schools don’t do any better than the low-income kids in the Milwaukee public schools. And both sectors, both the voucher schools and the Milwaukee public schools are doing terribly. And if you look at the scores of black students in both schools, whether you look at black students or low-income students, they’re doing terribly, whether it’s voucher or public schools. So all of this money in Wisconsin, and they’ve spent over a million dollars on voucher schools, just think of the same amount of money and a tremendous amount of energy have been put into improving the public schools in every neighborhood, it might have made a difference. The vouchers have not made a difference. So, you know, voucher advocates at this point don’t even seem to be saying that they expect to see better education. They look for other things. They

say, “Parents are more satisfied.” Okay, or they say, “Okay, but it’ll save money.” And now with the expansion of vouchers in Wisconsin they’re saying it’ll save money. That’s the real goal.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So in *Life and Death*, in your book, you really took issue (21:00) with the two tenets of No Child Left Behind—the testing and the school choice pieces?

DIANE RAVITCH

In No Child Left Behind, school choice was very weak, and republicans were very critical of that. Actually, the choice provisions are far stronger in Race to the Top because Race to the Top, this is where the republican and democrat lines become the same. Race to the Top requires the states to remove or lift their caps on charter schools, and there will be a dramatic expansion of charters. This is probably the most controversial position that I take because I had supported charters. In 1998, I went to Albany and testified on behalf of New York State’s charter legislation. I wrote articles in support of charters. I met with Albert Shanker when he was first coming up with the idea of charters, and he tried to explain it and persuade me that this would be a great way to help the neediest kids. What he didn’t realize until five years later, and what I realized (22:00) later than that, was the charter sector would become not just for the neediest kids, but particularly under No Child Left Behind, it would be a sector that would not collaborate with public schools to make them better, but would compete with them to try to take away their resources and their students.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And their students.

DIANE RAVITCH

And that we now have charter chains that are incredibly entrepreneurial, and the CEOs are paid 300,000, 350, 400, 500,000 dollars a year, and most of the charter schools in Michigan are for profit charter schools. I read the other day that 80% of the charter schools in Michigan are for profit. Now we have cyber charter schools where the amount of money to be made is staggering because the charter gets the same state tuition aid, but they don’t supply anything but a computer and somebody monitoring a screen somewhere else. They don’t have the cost of a brick and mortar building, no library, no playground, no nurses, no guidance (23:00) counselor, none of that. And their making tons of money, and the people involved in the cyber charter industry see this as an enormously profitable investment, and it is. So I have become critical of the charter movement because it has gone away from its original purpose. I could envision supporting charters that could serve neediest kids, but that’s not what charters are doing today. There are some, but that’s not what most of them are doing. Most of them are wanting to be able to say, “We have the highest scores. We are better than you are, and we want your space.” Particularly in places where they are given public space, and part of their appeal is, “We’re better.” So there, there’s a city in California that I read about recently, Inglewood, California, which had typically been pointed to be the right and said, “Look, here’s a poor district and poor kids. Look at their great test scores.” But Inglewood is now on the verge of collapse because they have had such a large charter (24:00) explosion. But they’ve lost a third of their enrollment. The district can’t survive. They haven’t, they still have the same capital cost, and a third of their enrollment is gone. So there, and with California’s fiscal crisis, they’re in terrible trouble. So there’s lots of

problems with the charters have introduced where they are actually in many communities, at war with public education, competing with public education, and I would rather see a different scenario where charters exist to be laboratories of innovation to help public education, and especially to enroll the neediest and lowest performing students. Not to compete with and boast of their great scores. In fact, this story just came out the other day about Chicago, it was just yesterday I got several emails, Chicago charters are doing no better than regular public (25:00) schools. That's the story almost everywhere.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah, that's happening across the country.

DIANE RAVITCH

And I think the public is finally getting to get it that just because the school has a different management, just because the teachers don't belong to a union, that doesn't mean those kids are going to do better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You know Mary admits that you call yourself the forgetful professor sometimes, you sure don't sound like that. You've got your statistics and all your dates just like the back of your hand.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, but I forget ordinary things having to do with...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The house or whatever...

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, right.

Video 4

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

As an education historian, you have written that our present day problems have roots in the past. What do you believe we as educators most need to understand about our past?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, I have to think about what I've learned, the main thing that I've learned as a historian is the value of having a free public education system, of how important that is in the context of a democratic society. And that competition doesn't make schools better. One of the things we can learn from looking at history is that every time we turn to business ideas, and invoke competition, and things like paying teachers to work harder, we've tried that, as I point out, since the 1920s—it's never worked. And we just keep, in effect, reinventing the wheel, and trying again and again (1:00) to say if only we could offer a bonus. Then when it's tried, it fails. Then we'll say we'll offer a different bonus. We'll offer a bigger bonus. We'll offer it school-wide. We'll offer it to individuals. And it's like, it almost becomes like a Dr. Seuss book, you know,

“how do you want your green eggs and ham?” So at Vanderbilt University, National Center on Performance Incentives did the ultimate merit pay test, which they reported on in 2010, and they said, “Well, we haven’t had a big enough bonus. Let’s make it 15,000 dollars.” It made no difference. Then within a few days, the U.S. Department of Education announced they were releasing almost 500 million dollars for merit pay. So, I mean, the thing that’s so frustrating is, even when we have evidence, no one’s paying attention to it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The pendulum swings.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, and I think the other thing that I would want to point out as one of the lessons in history is the importance of two things. First of all, (2:00) we need so much to improve the teaching profession. We need to build respect for the teaching profession. I think we need much higher standards for entry into the profession. I think it’s appalling that policymakers now are absolutely obsessed with the idea that we can get rid of high cost, experienced veteran teachers and replace them with young college graduates with just a few weeks of training. That’s not a profession. That’s not building a profession. That’s getting rid of the whole idea of professionalism. So I think that’s something that we can, should be able to learn, not only from the past, but from looking at what the other countries are doing. What high performing countries are doing, they are not going in that direction. And I think that history teaches us that when we talk about education, we have to look at different disciplines. We have to pay attention to knowledge (3:00)—what did we learn? Right now, our entire national debate on education is driven by only one kind of knowledge, and that’s what the economists say. Not all economists, just some economists. In fact, just a few economists who happen to be, in most cases, very conservative economists, some of whom I know and like, but I don’t agree with. The voice of the economist has today drowned out the voice of cognitive psychologists, sociologists, people who study how children learn, people who understand how children live, how families develop, how families help their children learn, how communities help or don’t help their children, people who study poverty, people who look at all the different aspects that affect learning. We don’t even look at the issues have to do with the philosophy of education, let alone the history of education. (4:00) So we’ve got right now this incredibly narrow tunnel vision focused only on test scores, and the test scores are taken as genuine, real measures of learning. And yet, they’re so disappointing because even when the scores go up and up, the remediation rates are not going down. So we’re preparing a generation of test takers, who are not necessarily more knowledgeable or better at even the things they’ve been tested on year after year. And all of the talk, at least of the rhetoric level, is that we need to have innovation, we need to have ingenuity, these are the things that will drive our economy in the future. The one thing I would say with a certain amount of surety, is this focus on standardized testing will not promote this sort of innovation, ingenuity, creativity. The idea (5:00) that at the end of the year you can ask children to choose a bubble of four possibilities, is almost a guarantee that you will punish those who think differently. The child who over thinks the question will often not choose the right answer because the obvious answer might seem to obvious. So the child who thinks a second time, in another few minutes might say, “Wait a minute, the other answer seems better because,” and he’ll have a perfectly good explanation. So I would think that if we wanted to incentivize creativity, and originality, and innovation, we would, we would worry more about having kids

think about the questions. Are these the right questions? Is this what we really studied? Why do we need to know this? Why is this important? Why does it matter? How could we ask the question differently so that it'll elicit a more interesting response?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Are the other options (6:00) considered distracters for a reason? They're built in as distracters to think critically on that test. I agree with you 100% on that.

DIANE RAVITCH

Right. And the other thing is I've noticed with the distracters that of three distracters, you know, one right answer and three distracters, two of them are ridiculous, and then it's the third one you have to worry about. I recently, on the national, on the NAEP history test, this is the one that bothered me: there was a question that said, "Who influenced Martin Luther King the most?" Then there were two ridiculous answers, and there was Gandhi, which was the obvious answer because that's what the textbooks all say, and then there was Jane Adams. I looked at that, and I thought, "Wait a minute. He must have known Jane Adams. She won a Nobel Prize. She was a pacifist. Their lives must have intersected in some fashion. He certainly knew of her work. How can I be sure that he was more influenced by Gandhi than by Jane Adams?" Because the textbook says Gandhi. It doesn't say Jane Adams; but how do I know? (7:00) So maybe Gandhi was the right answer. I don't know. But that's the kind of question where I would want a student to think about it, and then go and do some research, and read some more about Jane Adams.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And question the reality. Sure.

DIANE RAVITCH

And how do you know? That's what you really want kids to think about. But I think about this. The other thing I think is hugely important with creativity and originality is having a really, really wonderful arts program. All these schools are losing their arts programs. They're being sacrificed to the goals of testing and test preparation. This is one of the worst fall outs of No Child Left Behind is the narrowing of the curriculum, the loss of the arts. The reduction of time for, the reduction of time for almost everything that's not tested, even including physical education.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And recess. What do you predict for our future?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well I guess there are two different scenarios, maybe there are 12 different scenarios. (8:00) But one of them is things will go along as they are, and people will, every time there's another test scores come out, people will say, "See, the schools are worse, and we have to keep privatizing, and we have to keep cutting the budget. You can't give the schools more because look how badly they're doing, and I'm not going to give them anything more until they improve. So let's cut their budget again." So I see, this could be like the very worse scenario. Would be more vouchers, more cyber charters, more money to be made by entrepreneurs, and picking off students and putting them online, and having them learn at home on computers, and more

privately managed schools, and the lowest performing kids left to a dwindling and impotent public sector, teachers with no job rights, teaching is at-will employees, where young people are reluctant to even go into this as anything other than a stop gap before they find their real career. (9:00) That would be the most negative scenario. The most positive scenario would be that as these ideas play out, the public would get wise, and they'd say, "Wait a minute. These cyber charter guys, they're not producing better education, and they're making millions, and we're not going to allow this in our state." So if they want to do virtual learning, that's fine, but it has to be done in a context where there's no big profits, and where it's for distance learning, it serves real educational needs, and it's not for the profit drive of the corporation. Where the public says, "You know, charter schools are not the magic bullet because we've seen the test results year after year, and they're doing no better than our regular public schools. Why should we hurt our regular public schools to allow other people to be able to pay themselves big salaries or to just have the fun of running a school?" Our public schools are our public trust. We need (10:00) to have a good fire department. We need to have a good police department. We want to have good public facilities. So there's a possibility that with growing evidence and just kind of pushing, pushing, pushing, and this won't happen automatically, it'll only happen because people work at it. This whole thing could implode, and there could be, not this election cycle, I don't see it happening, but maybe the next one, somebody coming along and saying, "We're ruining our education system. We have to do much better. Public education is a vital institution in this country, and we can't let it die by attrition." So that could happen. That's the hopeful scenario. We have to value our teachers. We have to change the teaching profession to make it more respected, more honored, to attract people who see this as a lifetime commitment, and bring in well-prepared, well-educated people so that it's almost competitive (11:00) to get into this wonderful field. That would be the bright scenario. So I've given you the dark scenario and the bright scenario. It's probably something in between, but I would hope that it's the bright scenario.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You have been a member of the National Academy of Education since 1979. You are currently ranked as the number one most influential educational scholar in the country. You have earned honorary degrees from multiple colleges and universities. You have delivered honorary speeches around the world. You have received countless other awards, designations, and honors, including many Friend of Education awards. You were also invited by the Library of Congress to deliver lectures in honor of Thomas Jefferson's 250th birthday. What do you think Thomas Jefferson would have to say about the current state of our education system?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, of course when Thomas Jefferson lived, there was no public education system. And he had very strong belief in meritocracy. (12:00) His most famous, well he had many famous lines, but one of which I quoted as the title of one of my books where he says, "Preach your crusade against ignorance," and that's why I called that book *The Troubled Crusade*. But he believed that education was so crucial to a democracy, that the ability to read and to make your own judgment was the most important ingredient in democratic citizenship. Of course, having the ability to read in our society is not enough because of so much of what people read and so much information that they have access to is not filtered through a very small number of powerful corporate media, so one needs to have in thinking critically, the ability to search out other sources. I mean, you

can't just go by what you hear on cable, or on the major networks, or in the major documentaries because these days they're often saying the same thing. (13:00) It's like a big echo chamber, so it becomes an essential ingredient of what Jefferson would recognize as democratic citizenship, to have the ability to step back and shape an independent view. But one of Jefferson's other famous lines was that, when he proposed a school system for Virginia, he talked about raking from the rubbish. Of course he wasn't thinking about integrated schools, but he talked about raking from the rubbish the best qualified. So at each level of the school system, only the best would rise to the top. We've been trying to expand the base, not to have this narrow pyramid, rather to broaden it. And we know that there is a tremendous fall off from the time that children start school to the time that they finish high school and then from the time they finish college. I think we continue to have this enormous challenge, and it's a double challenge, (14:00) not just expanding access to schooling, but actually improving schooling, and this is why I come back to my kind of passion, which is having a vision of what good education is, not just a vision of what good data is, but a vision of what a good education is. But, at the same time, the other half of the challenge is to meet the social issues that drag down achievement, and that drag down families, and drag down children. That's why I have come in my in these years of my life to think that we must meet the double challenge of both improving schools and reducing poverty because where the U.S. almost does lead the world is in child poverty rates. You know when we compare ourselves to a place like Finland, where less than 4% of the children are in poverty, while our child poverty rate is somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 to 22%. It should be considered a scandal, and we should be talking about it everyday, but we tend not even to (15:00) think about it or mention it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Or censored out of our books.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, or censored out of the books so that we don't even confront it. You know I did see a documentary the other day, or rather on *60 Minutes* about child poverty, but that was pretty rare. We've pretty much thrown up our hands and said, "We tried to fix it, and we couldn't. So let's just focus on the schools." But the schools are so, school results are so correlated with socioeconomic background that it's pretty hard to avert your eyes from how poverty hurts children and reduces their chances of in schools.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's inconvenient to look at it for us. With all of your accomplishments, what is next for you? What haven't you accomplished that you would still like to achieve?

DIANE RAVITCH

You know, I guess what I want to accomplish is to get into better physical shape. The past two years I have been running around so much, and traveling so much, that I haven't taken care of myself. So my goal is to try to be (16:00) healthy, to continue to provide support and encouragement for people that I think are trying to do the right thing for children, and to, I don't have any professional, I have no big professional goals. I would like, if I had the time, I would very much like to write a memoir because I've read several different lives, you know, in Houston, and then in my 25 years as mother, and getting my life as a scholar, and these past 25 years have been very different and very interesting. So I'd love to put it all together, and that, I

think, would be my last writing challenge. But I have absolutely no ambitions for being any kind of public appointment office position. And I think in some way, having abandoned all that ambition has freed me, and it's allowed me to say what I think. You know, I've discovered (17:00) that some people like you to say what you think, and a lot of people don't. But...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

There it is.

DIANE RAVITCH

There it is. I have, this is what I'm free to do, and maybe when they're 73, they can do it too.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Who has helped you become the person you are today the most?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well it would be many people. I could go to many points in my life, I'd say that in terms of my educational thinking, I really have thought for myself, I mean, I certainly was influenced by Richard Rothstein. I'd have to say that at the time when I was over on the right, Richard and I would take long walks. We would argue, and he was great because I'd have to say that he never gave up on me. He always thought that there was something there that he would grab hold of and turn around. I can't say that he was responsible for turning me around, but he was, he was a friend as I was beginning to see the world differently was important to me. (18:00) My partner, Mary, has been very important, not because she influenced me on any of the big ideas. We never discussed No Child Left Behind. We never discussed testing, or accountability, or charters, and she probably, she would be in favor of vouchers probably because she is such a strong advocate for Catholic education. But she also, having spent 30 years in public school system, understands the challenges. What I've learned from her was about the bringing together my kind of a theorical theories and my ideas that were not grounded, and she grounded them, about how hard it is to do the work, how many problems the kids have, how hard their lives are, how when you have a few hundred children in your care, or a thousand kids or 2,000 kids in your care, each one of them comes with a different set of issues, problems, needs, the ones who have been kicked out of their homes, the ones whose father died the night before, the ones whose mother (19:00) has AIDS, the girl who becomes pregnant. It just goes on and on and on. There's not a day where some kid is not in a crisis. And then learning all this from her, seeing the day-to-day grittiness of running a school has grounded me. So that's been important for me. But at the idea level, I have to say that I have been shaped, and I've come to realize this by having so many different experiences, and at the time I couldn't appreciate what it meant, first of all having grown up in Houston in a big family, having gone to public school, going to Wellesley and having the kind of wonderful intellectual stimulation there, and the lifelong friends that I don't have really from Houston, but I have from college, and then my experiences, having Lawrence Cremin as my mentor, (20:00) I mean gosh, you don't get any better than that in this field. He was the best. He never gave me false praise. He was always very encouraging, but he would also be critical when it was necessary. He was a wonderful mentor, and I always felt like I had this little voice in the back of my head saying, "You haven't read enough. You haven't thought enough. You haven't this. You haven't that. You know, take more books with you on vacation." It's not, it was never good enough, and he kind of created that in a voice, so he was certainly a huge influence. Then I had, I

think, a wonderful experience working on the curriculum in California, which taught me so much. And going to Washington, it wasn't, you know, between the federal government and then Brookings, that was great experience. And even today when I read about what's going on in D.C., I usually know most of the players, and I think, "That was really good." I was there, what, now 20 years ago, (21:00) and that was really good. And then I had lots of other sort of experiences over the years that have brought me in touch with key people all in different states. And with this last two years as I've traveled around, I have email friends all over the country with people I've never met, and we're like best buddies. I've never seen their face, so, you know, it's the age of the Internet, and you develop these friendships. You knows? But, but it's been, this is what I like to somehow find a way to pull together in a memoir if I ever find time to write it, and I hope to. I'm not going to do any travel in June, July, and August, and so that'll be a time to reflect and think about...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What might come.

DIANE RAVITCH

What might happen next. But I have no other professional goal at this point in my, I'm not going to write anymore histories. I don't have enough years to do that. Each of my books, other than *The Language Police*, they usually took five to seven years to write. I don't have enough time for that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you?

DIANE RAVITCH

(22:00) I have to say that I have a sense of outrage.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Outrage.

DIANE RAVITCH

Yeah, and I see things happening, like right now what keeps me going is I think so many teachers are being so badly treated, and it makes me really upset for them. And very often, always when I go out and speak, teachers come up to me, and they thank me, but then some of them cry, and they tell me about how hard it is and how hard they work. When I was in Washington state last week, I met with a group of teachers from across the state, and the last speaker, they were talking about what do we do, and the last speaker got up, and he began talking about the kids that he teaches, and he said some of them are carried in, some of them I have to catheterize, some of them I have to push medicine. He's teaching the most disabled children. He's a big burly guy like a football player, and I almost cried as I was listening to him, and I thought, I said, "Maybe (23:00) what you need to do is do some Youtube videos, and let people know this is what teachers do." I could see it, and I, I was so moved by what this man does. He says, "I have people that can't even come into my classroom because they would be horrified at the condition of the children, and I live with these kids everyday, and I love them." How can you not be inspired by people like that, but also outraged at the people who go on

television and movie documentaries and say that these people are paid too much? These people don't work hard enough? They don't deserve any good job protection?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

DIANE RAVITCH

I don't have a favorite word.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What's your favorite curse word?

DIANE RAVITCH

Oh, I don't curse. In fact, I avoid people who curse. I do occasionally curse, but I never do it in public.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession (24:00) other than your own would you have liked to attempt?

DIANE RAVITCH

You know if I were to do it all over, I jokingly say to myself, "I wish I had been a film historian." That would have been fun. I mean, I think about how hard it is. What I'm doing is hard because it's so controversial. You know, people either love what you're doing, or they hate what you're doing. There's kind of a charge in that. But on the other hand, it would be so fun to be a film historian because everybody would say, "Oh, wow, I didn't know that about June Allyson. I didn't know that about Betty Hutton," and stuff like that. That would have been a lot of fun.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession other than your own would you have not liked to attempt?

DIANE RAVITCH

Cooking, cleaning, anything having to do with housework.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite movie?

DIANE RAVITCH

Oh, *Singing in the Rain*. I love musicals. I love the musicals of the 40s and 50s.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you go into Manhattan quite often and see musicals?

DIANE RAVITCH

No, I (25:00) either watch them on TCM or buy, I have quite a collection. I used to go to video stores as they were going out of business and buy all the old videos of movies of Bing Crosby, and Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers, and I love all of those, that yolk.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite book?

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, let's see, among the books that I really, really like, I don't know if I have a single favorite, I loved *Middlemarch*. I really, I read *Moby Dick* several times, although I have skipped large sections of it, in which I can't deal with the anatomy of the whale in that detail, but I think the story is very powerful. Let's see, what else have I loved? I guess I loved *War and Peace*. It took me a very long time to read it. I got around to it (26:00) many, many years after I should have read it, and I thought, "I'll never get into this." But then once I got into it, I just thought it was an incredible book.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

DIANE RAVITCH

Spend half an hour with me.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Perfect. Send him an email. If you could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

DIANE RAVITCH

Gosh, I'd have to think about that. Well I guess at this point, I would love to have dinner with President Obama and talk to him about his education policies, and explain to him why I think he's heading in the wrong direction and what I think he should be doing, and that saying nice things about teachers doesn't (27:00) substitute for doing the things that would make them feel valued. That the words are not enough. The actions have to be there too.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

DIANE RAVITCH

I'd like him to say that all of your family and friends will be here with you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What advice would you offer to graduate students and beginning researchers who hope to make a contribution to education like you have?

DIANE RAVITCH

I'd say that you should learn what I learned when I was working at the New Leader Magazine many years ago. I had been writing book reviews and kind of trying out different voices and

genres, and the editor said to me, “Find one thing and make it your own.” So I would say to graduate students, find the ideas, the issues, the things that you really care about, and become deeply (28:00) knowledgeable, and become the master of your trade. Don’t settle too quickly on your beliefs because they may change. Listen to different voices. Read widely. Try to learn about different disciplines other than your own, so that you can see your discipline from different points of view. And then once you find the thing that really, really turns you on, then dive into it and make yourself the master of that. And don’t be afraid that it’s already been done. Everything’s, Cremin once said to me, I had said, “But that’s already been done,” and he said, “Yeah, everything’s been done, but once you do it, it’ll be new, and don’t worry about that.” So don’t worry about it’s, you know, people have been saying that since Shakespeare, “I can never be Shakespeare, therefore why should I write a play?” People keep writing plays.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

When asked (29:00) to capture the essence and nature of Diane Ravitch, everyone agreed you’re brilliant, have an admirable integrity, and besides being given honorable mentions to your most recent book especially, they note that your most significant accomplishment is personal, noting most how you stay close to and grounded by your family and friends. Mary notes you are a woman of great and personal integrity and strength. Your enormous intellect allows you to connect every dot to understand, and in turn, to explain to others. You are simply brilliant. Linda Gottlieb notes that you are ferocious for your causes, for your friends, and for your loved ones. You are a contrarian. Our necessary outlier. According to Francie Alexander you are a beautiful blend of art and science as you put your considerable talents into what is arguably the most important in defining education issues of our time. Your son, Michael, agrees, highlighting as well your intelligence and incredible integrity. You bristle (30:00) at being told what to do. You are a true individual. Thank you. While there is no doubt you are leading this crowd, and we throughout the community continue to follow you as one of our best, brightest, and best dressed educational leaders. On behalf of all of us future educationists, educational researchers, and the like, we thank you, Diane Ravitch, for everything you do and for being our necessary contrarian.

DIANE RAVITCH

Well, thank you. If I can just say one thing in response: I have never thought of myself as brilliant, and I still don’t think I’m brilliant. I think that I have a large degree of questioning ability, and skepticism, and I can write clearly. I don’t think I’m a great writer. I just think I write clearly, and I think everybody can learn to do that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you’re humble.

DIANE RAVITCH

Thank you very much.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Thank you.