

## Further Adventures in the Education Blogosphere

John Merrifield  
Sept 26, 2013

[Arguing the impossibility](#) of useful politically correct schooling content was my first venture into the school system reform blogosphere since I became a blogger. As the ‘bigpicturedoc’, I’ve spent my first four months as a blogger addressing big picture issues. I’ll continue to do that, but now I’m going to mix in responses to other bloggers. Second on my list is certainly the undisputed Queen of the Education Blogosphere, Education Historian, Dr. Diane Ravitch. Her recent transformation from prolific education historian to policy wonk and blogger has been a huge disappointment to a lot of people, including me. And it’s not just because she reaches bizarre conclusions from her unequaled skill in ferreting out and documenting key moments in the evolution of U.S. school systems. It’s mostly because I wish she’d continue to write books like *Left Back* and *Language Police*, and articles like “Adventures in Wonderland,” that I have cited more often than I can recall, and will continue to. Those works bolster my preliminary conclusions about what’s wrong ([Roots of the Problem](#)), and what to do about it.

To tolerate Dr. Ravitch’s blog posts – typically many per day – you have to have as much time to read them, as she apparently has diverted from more useful applications of her time to write them. There is a very high ‘chaff’ to wheat ratio. In my ‘where’s the beef’ search of her most recent blogs, I finally discovered this nugget:

“Rick Hanushek thinks the nation is in terrible trouble because of our international test scores; I don’t. From my perspective as a historian, I recall 1983 when “A Nation at Risk” issued dire predictions about the future because our international scores were so terrible.”

Maybe Professor Hanushek actually said that in the debate described by Professor Ravitch, but my take on Professor Hanushek’s writings on the subject is the huge opportunity presented by the approximately eight percent gap (depending upon which international test score) between the

top international scores and U.S. test scores. But, as [I said previously](#), the second big story here is that the outcomes of the world's best school systems are not that much better than ours; terrifying actually, because we all know that the potential to improve – the 'NEED' to do it – is much larger than eight percent; though as Professor Hanushek points out, that gap is worth about a \$1 trillion dollars per year.

And contrary to Professor Ravitch's take on the 'Nation at Risk' problem, the risk created by a poorly educated population is not directly economic. The know-nothings interviewed by Jay Leno and Glenn Beck mostly seem gainfully employed. They are good enough at at least one thing to make a decent living, but not good enough to participate in the political process. The political risk and indirect economic risk was described by Thomas Jefferson: "If a nation expects to be *ignorant* and *free*, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." A poorly educated population elects demagogues with ill-conceived or malicious policy agendas. Already we see the early warning signs of indirect economic destruction through bad policies in the USA's slippage from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> in the [Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World Index](#), and in a host of policies, themselves.