

# [PDF] The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn

**Diane Ravitch - pdf download free book**

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Author: Diane Ravitch  
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**Description:**

The impulse in the 1960s and '70s to achieve fairness and a balanced perspective in our nation's textbooks and standardized exams was undeniably necessary and commendable. Then how could it have gone so terribly wrong? Acclaimed education historian Diane Ravitch answers this question in her informative and alarming book, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*. Author of 7 books, Ravitch served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education from

1991 to 1993. Her expertise and her 30-year commitment to education lend authority and urgency to this important book, which describes in copious detail how pressure groups from the political right and left have wrested control of the language and content of textbooks and standardized exams, often at the expense of the truth (in the case of history), of literary quality (in the case of literature), and of education in general. Like most people involved in education, Ravitch did not realize "that educational materials are now governed by an intricate set of rules to screen out language and topics that might be considered controversial or offensive." In this clear-eyed critique, she is an unapologetic challenger of the ridiculous and damaging extremes to which bias guidelines and sensitivity training have been taken by the federal government, the states, and textbook publishers.

In a multi-page sampling of rejected test passages, we discover that "in the new meaning of bias, it is considered biased to acknowledge that lack of sight is a disability," that children who live in urban areas cannot understand passages about the country, that the Aesop fable about a vain (female) fox and a flattering (male) crow promotes gender bias. As outrageous as many of the examples are, they do not appear particularly dangerous. However, as the illustrations of abridgment, expurgation, and bowdlerization mount, the reader begins to understand that our educational system is indeed facing a monumental crisis of distortion and censorship. Ravitch ends her book with three suggestions of how to counter this disturbing tendency. Sadly, however, in the face of the overwhelming tide of misinformation that has already been entrenched in the system, her suggestions provide cold comfort. --*Silvana Tropea* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**From Publishers Weekly** Textbook publishers are guilty of self-censorship, argues Ravitch (*Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*) in this polemical analysis of the anti-bias and sensitivity guidelines that govern much of today's educational publishing. Looking at lawsuits, school board hearings and private correspondence between textbook editors, Ravitch, a professor of education at New York University, shows how publishers are squeezed by pressure from groups on the right (which object to depictions of disobedience, family conflict, sexuality, evolution and the supernatural) and the left (which correct for the racism and sexism of older textbooks by urging stringent controls on language and images to weed out possibly offensive stereotypes)-most publishers have quietly adopted both sets of suggestions. In chapters devoted specifically to literature and history texts, Ravitch contends that these sanitized materials sacrifice literary quality and historical accuracy in order to escape controversy. She also discusses how current statewide textbook adoption methods have undermined competition and brought about the consolidation of the educational publishing industry, leading to more bland, simplistic fare. There is no shortage of colorful examples: a scientific passage about owls was rejected from a standardized test because the birds are taboo for Navajos; one set of stereotype guidelines urges writers to avoid depicting "children as healthy bundles of energy"; editors of a science textbook rejected a sentence about fossil fuels being the primary cause of global warming because "[w]e'd never be adopted in Texas." Readers will likely disagree about whether, on balance, anti-bias guidelines do more harm than good, but Ravitch's detailed, concise, impassioned argument raises crucial questions for parents and educators. Appendixes include "A Glossary of Banned Words, Usages, Stereotypes, and Topics" as well as a recommended reading list for students.

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