

more letters



to editor

Rebuttal

This letter is in rebuttal to an article, which appeared in May in the Capitol Campus paper, by Terri Ann Reed concerning her visit to John Harris High School in Harrisburg.

Editor:

I am the "young student-teacher" (from Capitol Campus) "learning about the techniques of educating" that Ms. Reed mentions in her article. I think it necessary to point out the distortions and false implications which Ms. Reed is so fondly adept at creating.

Ms. Reed begins her observation of my class with this statement: "The room is large enough for thirty students, but there are only about 15 students in this class." The room could conceivably hold much more than thirty students. There are seats for thirty five, more than enough for the twenty five students assigned to my class. Of the twenty five students, seventeen were present that day. The absence of eight students that day was the highest number of absences for the quarter school year, the average for April being 3.5.

If Ms. Reed's statement is taken in conjunction with her other statements concerning room capacity, student attendance and student apathy, it is evident that Ms. Reed desired to create the impression that few students attend class. In my case she implied that fifty percent of the students were not present which is incorrect.

Ms. Reed continues her observation using Michael, a

student assigned to her, as protagonist. "Michael learns that Orientals honor their elderly citizens and that they live in extended families because they are poor. He learns that the Oriental countries are not like the United States. he learns that Orientals tend to grow up, live, work and die in the same town or village. "just think if you had to spend your entire life in Harrisburg!" " the student-teacher says, implying that Americans are more fortunate."

Not only did I point out that elderly citizens are respected and form an integral part of the family in China, I also implied that such behavior is superior to the treatment of the old in the United States. This implication Ms. Reed forgot to mention.

Extended families do serve an important economic function, a fact well-known to sociologists and anthropologists. Extended families many times produce close personal relationships which in turn create loving responsible people, a benefit which I did not say is absent. Nor did I state that only the poor live in extended families.

"Oriental countries are not like the United State." I will allow that statement to stand as I will the next statement, except for one major correction, the replacement of the word Oriental with the word Chinese.

Ms. Reed has an acute fondness for the word Oriental, a word you should notice I was not quoted as using. Ms.

Reed evidently desired my lecture to be an ethnocentric "them versus us" indoctrination, with a flavoring of racial prejudice.

The statement "Just think if you had to spend your entire life in Harrisburg" is accurate. But sentences are surrounded by other sentences and sentences form paragraphs. Each sentence is only part of the whole communication. This is a very basic fact that even mediocre writers and speakers grasp. The sentence preceding the quoted statement was: "Even trips twenty miles into the country would be difficult."

I did not mean to suggest that Harrisburg was a bad city to live in or that living in one place your entire life was loathsome. I did imply that in the United States we have freedom of movement perhaps unequaled in the world and that we sometimes take it for granted.

Ms. Reed believed I implied that "Americans are more fortunate." She forgot to clarify that the implication pertained only to freedom of movement. Her implication of my statement coming at the end of the paragraph, and thus seeming to be a summary of the entire paragraph, coupled with her reckless use of the word Oriental establishes the effect Ms. Reed desired.

Ms. Reed discards the student teacher for the moment for as of yet untouched prey—the students. "Two students are resting or sleeping. Three students are doing their English homework..." You cannot force a student to

learn. You can inform them they are responsible for the material presented in class. You will find that all my students recognize their responsibility and if they, for the reasons mentioned, are not attentive they know enough to borrow the notes of their friends. Students are individuals who have their own schedules and their own priorities. As long as they remember their responsibilities, I would not deny them their small measure of freedom.

Lunch is taken and the students return. "The World Culture student-teacher continues lecturing. Where were we. Oh yes, the Orientals," writes Ms. Reed. Only a diligent reader would notice that both sentences are Ms. Reeds. "Oh yes, the Orientals" are not my words.

Ms. Reed is not finished. "A student...asks, 'Isn't everything you said today in the textbook?' 'Yes,' the teacher answers, 'I'm just picking out the things that are important.'" Ah, so this is why two students sleep and three work on their English homework during class. As a student-teacher I do rely more heavily on the book than experienced teachers. However, my lectures are supplemented by other sources, and structuring teaching around a book is a practical method of organization and reinforcement.

If so many distortions concerning my class could be congealed into a few paragraphs, what injustices must have been perpetrated upon the capable and conscientious teachers who had the

misfortune of Ms. Reed's visit? If it took me hundreds of words to dissect the devious meanderings of a few paragraphs, how many Capitol Campus newspapers would be filled to correct all the injustices of the article.?

I have no ill feelings towards Ms. Reed. I have nothing but praise for her writing skills. She is a capable journalist; perhaps someday she will find herself on the staff of a large newspaper. She has all the requirements—an extensive and discerning command of the English language, an understanding of the intricacies of sentence construction, the ability to formulate ideas in concise terms. her grasp of the abstract manifests a most trenchant and sentient mind. Thomas Wolfe, in his novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*, delineates some of the characteristics of the veteran journalist:

"I'd sell my best friend out to get a story. I'd betray your trust, your faith, your friendliness, twist everything you say around until any sincerity, sense, or honesty that might be in your words was made to sound like the maunderings of a buffoon or a clown if I thought it would make a better story. I don't give a damn about the truth for accuracy for facts for telling anything about you people here, your lives, your speech the way you look, the way you really are...What I want to get is the special angle on it."

William Johnson
John Harris campus of
Harrisburg High School

Rebuttal to Rebuttal

Dear Mr. Johnson,

You've done it again. You've compared Chinese culture to American culture in your rebuttal. Should a teacher compare one's own culture to explain another culture?

Enough of this--my concern is for the student, an innocent victim of Big Education. The consumers (students) mechanically move

from classroom to classroom while the laborers (teachers) offer products (education) to the consumers and yell "Next!" when class is over.

Perhaps I've hit upon a truth that hurts. And perhaps my "devious meanderings" are simply the ugly side of Big Education that no one wants to see. Do you see it?

Terri Ann Reed

Reader Corrections

In the "Sexual Harrassment: it's against the law," article in the May 17 issue, pages 4-5, it was incorrectly printed that two women wrote the article. Roz Powell was

the sole writer. The Reader apologizes for any inconvenience caused Ms. Powell by this mistake.

EGG ON THE FACE! bland, ludicrous, spiritless Apologies to Ruth Chess tragedy of Capitol Campus-- and Todd Barnhard, for the eh, Todd? No typos though, name/photo mix-up. Guess no typos. Sorry to both of this is an example of the you!

BITCH

I'm tired of playing the BITCH.

Glad this one's over.

the editor

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