

Education issues

TO THE EDITOR:

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In his June 16 article — "Education — reaching critical mass(es)?" — James E. McClellan Jr., a professor of education at the State University at Albany, raises points of the profoundest importance for American education and American society. Professor McClellan correctly sees the issues that he addresses as transcendent in their significance, with implications that go far beyond teaching methods and procedures, entering into the larger fabric of American life itself.

The problem, as Professor McClellan sees it, is that the teacher is the victim of ambitious parents who want their children to "attain college and attain an occupational status traditionally reserved for college graduates." These parents are the "conduits" through which anxieties, tensions, insecurities and bitterness are passed, and teachers and tttttttheir own children are the innocent victims.

And what happened in the classroom to create so much stress? The main problem, it seems, is that parents want their kindergarten children to read, so the teacher had to set up reading groups, the mere mention of which made some of them cry. I cannot say if reading is a proper and reasonable activity for kindergarten children, but it does seem to me that a way could be devised to take some beginning steps in that direction, making some necessary adjustments for those who feel anxiety.

There is much here I find puzzling. That children should burst into tears at the mention of a reading group is not what I should expect, but far more surprising is the teacher's response. By inundating her students with ditto sheets she abandoned the thoughtful, creative approach to education to which she is committed and introduced her students to a crude, mechanical device that has become the bane of American education.

It seems the teacher-victim might not be a victim of parents but the university that prepared her for the classroom. When faced with a problem her reflex response was to do exactly what her instincts undoubtedly told her was wrong, so tied was she to her methods.

What brought particular grief to the teacher was a direct order not to be hugged and kissed by her students when they wanted love and affection. Anxious to have a close and emotionally warm relationship with her students she regarded such demonstrations as valuable, just as she wished to set aside time in the classroom for play activities. But her superiors came down hard, telling her to forget "any type of socialization, pretending or play acting."

This view of socialization is a mistaken conception that has caused confusion and misdirection in our schools and in much of American society. For a teacher the key is to bring to a structured activity the right balance of control and emotional warmth and responsiveness to the individuality of those in the group. Difficult as it is to strike a balance, it can be done, at least sufficiently to give the teacher a sense of fulfillment and well-being and students a healthy mixture of discipline and freedom. It is also possible to give them a far better education than they now receive. And thank goodness that parents want their children to go to college and acquire the necessary skills to do so.

WARREN ROBERTS

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LOCAL/STATE

SUNY honors area professor

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A professor at the State University at Albany has been awarded the rank of distinguished teaching professor by State University trustees.

Warren Roberts of Albany, a professor of history and winner of the first university Chancellor's Award for Teaching in 1973, is the fifth Albany faculty member to earn the title and the first since 1977.

In nominating Roberts for the award, SUNYA President Vincent O'Leary said: "Warren Roberts is the sort of faculty member who serves as the standard for the rest of us to live up to; an intense teacher whose devotion to his students approaches religious fervor."

Roberts, a member of the history department since 1963, is recognized for his exceptional ability to make his subject come alive for students in his classroom, SUNYA spokeswoman Sheila Mahan said.

He is credited with developing such innovative courses as "Youth and Modern Culture" and "Art, Music and History" and with helping to develop the university's general education and writing requirements.

Roberts is the author of two books, "Morality and Social Class in Eighteenth Century French Literature and Painting" and "Jane Austen and the French Revolution," which describes the French Revolution's effect on her thinking.

Roberts received his bachelor of arts, master of arts and doctoral degrees from the University of California at Berkeley. He was promoted to full professor in 1980.

SUNYA historian to shed some light on Tiffany church windows

By MAGGIE ZIOMEK
The Knickerbocker News

When it comes to the art of producing stained glass, the creations of Louis Tiffany are among the finest.

Just ask Warren Roberts, history professor at the State University at Albany. Clearly a man who appreciates the decorative arts — his third floor office in SUNYA's social services building is furnished with an oriental rug, a carved oak credenza, a stained glass lamp, art prints and pottery — Roberts has studied the artist's work for 30 years.

"When I was a grad student at Berkeley in the 1950s, I started looking at the stuff and I've been looking at it ever since."

The historian freely admits one of the reasons he joined the First Presbyterian Church on State Street in Albany was to see Tiffany's commanding "Sea of Galilee" on a regular basis.

He has also become well acquainted with the signed Tiffany creations in St. John's, St. Joseph's and St. Paul's churches in Troy.

And when Roberts bicycled through France a few years ago, he made a point of visiting Chartres Cathedral. Designed in High Gothic style by Abbot Suger, the windows are considered the highwater mark in art glass.

"The windows in Troy stirred me as

much as those at Chartres," Roberts said.

"What Tiffany did with the medium is just astonishing."

The glass maker discovered if he injected fluorine into molten glass, he could produce the kind of luminous mottled glass that has become associated with the name Tiffany.

"For confetti glass, he would put broken pieces of glass out on the table and have workers pour glass over it."

In addition to his technical abilities, Tiffany "was a fine accomplished artist in his own right. He designed

many of his windows. And every window was personally signed."

As enthusiastic as Roberts is about Tiffany — "the towering figure in the second great age of stained glass" — he realizes the majority of people in the Capital District have never seen the religious figures and the floral designs in the church windows in Troy and Albany.

"People go to New York City to see Tiffany and they don't know of the treasures in their own backyard."

To provide some insight into the artist, his work and place in the arts and crafts movement, Roberts will give a free, lunch-hour talk, "Tiffany

Windows," on Friday at the Troy Public Library, 100 Second St., Troy.

Tiffany studied in Paris during the last half of the 19th century, and when returned to the United States in the 1870s, the country was in the midst of church construction.

"Some 4,000 churches were built in the 1870s," Roberts explained.

The artist was also a successful entrepreneur took advantage of the interest in building opulent churches.

"My own theory is one church commissioned Tiffany to put in new windows. When the deacons and elders from down the street paid the church a

visit, they were not to be outdone and ordered Tiffany windows."

Tiffany's designs went out of fashion in the 1920s when art nouveau gave way to the angular art deco style and a number of his windows were smashed. Remarkably, those in the Capital District remained intact.

After the 12:15 p.m. lecture, Roberts will give a guided tour of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Third Street in Troy.

"It's important to see Tiffany's windows in their architectural setting," he said. "As an art form, the Tiffany in Troy is as good as any exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum."



ST. PAUL'S — Louis Tiffany designed the interior as well as this window in the church on Third Street in Troy.