Letters from our readers

6 August 2011

On "Thirty years since the PATCO strike"

Congratulations to Tom Mackaman on his excellent series about the PATCO strike. This event and the Reagan administration's ruthless response to it set the tone for the decay of everything since then. Young people need to know about the importance of the PATCO strike and what happened to the strikers as a result. The SEP (Workers League that was) has a right to be proud of its defense of the workers when the unions and so-called "left" had abandoned them.

Carolyn
California, USA
5 August 2011

On "New York Times decries 'squandering' of Medicare funds"

Right on! I happened to have actually seen Dr. Redberg for a very serious problem. I figured, here's a doctor that complains about women not being taken seriously with their cardiovascular health. I had a genetic defect in my heart that had been thought to have caused a mild stroke. I am athletic and in my 30s.

This doctor completely dismissed me. Did not touch me. Spent three minutes scoffing at the thought from my neurologist that the cardio problem caused my small stroke. She did exactly what she claims to be against in her practice ... dismissing women before even knowing if they should be dismissed. I ended up having another small stroke waiting to get the defect repaired.

And Dr. Redberg happily collected nearly $600 from her "high level consultation" in which I had to pay a good chunk. I tried to fight her on it, but she had all her bases covered and all her canned answers assimilated. Very scary woman. I hope people don't entrust their health with her, because medicine seems to be all about what it's gonna cost. Sadly, she makes enough money to not have to ever totally depend on Medicare for her health care. Otherwise, she might not be so dismissive of those "unnecessary tests" when they are for her own health.

Of course Medicare needs some reining in. Fraud, over-testing, etc., are probably happening. But this doctor is not one I would trust in that process, nor with my health.

Shar
3 August 2011

On "Sydney Film Festival 2011—Part 6: Douglas Sirk's elegant imitations of life"

Thank you for the very fine essay on Sirk. It was particularly gratifying to read about the cultural milieu in which he developed as an artist.

I also enjoyed the piece on Jane Eyre very much.

Colin
Amsterdam
4 August 2011

On school class sizes

Numbers do matter!

I have a little experience about the number of students in a classroom myth. I began in the early 1960s with classes of approximately 38-42 students. I ended my career 30 years later with classes of approximately 25-28. *I went from not even knowing the individual needs of my students in the 1960s to actually meeting the needs of my students when classes were smaller 30 years later.*

Below are questions for people who do not believe that less students in one classroom can promote more teacher attention and more learning:

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1. Are you a parent? Do you have a spouse to help you with your child(ren)?

2. If you have one child, I will assume that with two parents your child gets a lot of attention and because of this he/she learns quickly and has his/her needs met immediately.

3. If you have two children, I will assume that with two parents both of your children get a lot of attention since there are two parents to meet the needs of one child at a time.

4. If you have three children, I will assume that it is harder to give a great deal of attention to one child and that the same level of attention and learning for each child has decreased somewhat with each new addition to the family.

5. Now imagine that your family has grown from 3 to 10-15 children! I will assume that you would find it quite impossible to give the attention to each child that they deserve and need.

In my opinion, relating parents to children is somehow comparable to teacher to students.

Examples: In most schools, there is one teacher per classroom.

1. I'll assume that in a one-teacher classroom of 10 students, each student would receive some individual attention and instruction each day.

2. I'll assume that if the number of students increased in a one-teacher classroom to 20 students that each of the 20 students may not get undivided, specific attention or instruction from the teacher. However, they will get more attention and instruction from the teacher in a more easily controlled environment than they would if the classroom had 40 students.

3. In a classroom of 40 students, I can assume that the teacher would be spending more time organizing and controlling students than giving them the individual attention and instruction they deserve.

In a classroom of 40 children, the teacher would find it almost impossible to meet the specific needs of the neediest or the brightest children in the classroom. In a class of 40 students, the superior, average, and needy students would get the identical attention and instruction from a teacher in front of the room lecturing to all students at one time.

What a waste of our brightest students, which is not the challenge that these students need and desire. Nor is it what America needs. America needs the most intelligent students to get a superior education so that these kinds of students can become our scientists and productive thinkers in all areas.

Likewise, it is a pity for the neediest students. Without individual and specific instruction, these students will remain needy.

Unfortunately, most students are average and they remain average when the opportunities to move forward toward being a superior student aren't available in a class of too many students.

My conclusion is that whenever classrooms increase in numbers, the individual and specific instruction each student deserves decreases.

Julie
Georgia, USA
27 July 2011

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