

## Reflections: Teaching and Terrorism

by Barbara Suter

Emotions and thoughts have been swirling through my mind since I heard about the acts of terrorism in Paris this past weekend. Paris is a city I love dearly, having lived there for over a year in the '70s in my mid-twenties and returning many times to visit.

I first began reading about the *banlieues* (outskirts or suburbs) of Paris about a decade ago. This was not the Paris I first experienced, but it had become a city of haves and have nots, with the native insiders living within the city and the outsiders/immigrants relegated to substandard lives on the outskirts. These outsiders burned cars and trashed their neighborhoods as a way of expressing their frustration and anger. Eventually, however, things returned to the status quo and their frustration apparently forgotten.

This past year the news of the violence that took place at *Charlie Hebdo*—the French newspaper whose cartoons mocked the Muslim extremists—in which local terrorists took the lives of over 100 Parisians and others there reminded us of that anger. The lives of several French cartoonists and journalists were taken in another outburst of hatred toward French culture. The world responded with sympathy (“I am *Charlie Hebdo*”) and a renewed vow to celebrate free speech.

But the events of last November remind us again that this hatred is not dead. More extreme and widespread violence has just begun, and we are now wondering what to do next to contain or combat extremists throughout the world.

This is where teaching comes into the discussion. I am so proud of my profession—more so now than ever. In the United States, teachers are the ambassadors of plurality, seeking to find ways to assimilate and educate our newcomers as they arrive at our borders and in our airports.

This is not to say that all teachers welcome undocumented immigrants and their families; prejudice and scorn often rear their heads in faculty lunchrooms. But teachers also understand that our nation was built on immigrants’ efforts and continues to flourish in many ways because of them. Supporting the assimilation of immigrant children and their families into our culture is how we will continue to sustain its principles of freedom and equality.

I have often questioned my own beliefs as a teacher of English to immigrant students, but I have always come to the conclusion that becoming more understanding of people from other cultures, while helping their children to become better educated and assimilated, is the only way to continue to build a foundation of trust and strength.

I am particularly proud of my fellow English as a second language teachers. We are often not held in high regard in our own schools or communities because of the controversial work we do, but we are the best advocates in our educational system for making sure that *all* children have equal access to a good education. Education is terrorism’s worst enemy and the best weapon we have for preserving our values.

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