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Parker, Walter C. (Ed.) (2010) *Social Studies Today: Research and Practice*. NY: Routledge.

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Concerned social studies professionals, whether the K-12 teachers or college professors, are generally familiar with *Social Education*, the “flagship journal” published by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). This journal contains a “balance of theoretical content and practical teaching ideas. Its resources include materials for classroom use, information on the newest instructional technology, reviews of educational media, lesson plans, and research on significant social studies-related topics that can be applied to various disciplines. The journal is organized into recurring departments, including “Research and Practice,” with articles selected and edited by Dr. Walter C. Parker, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and the University of Washington. It is the essays from this department, 2001-2009, that have been collected into Walter C. Parker’s *Social Studies Today: Research and*

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Practice. Thus, the regular reader of this section of the journal might have already be familiar with the chapters in this book. However, that does not weaken the strength of this collection as Parker has organized the 23 selected chapters into five sections with an introduction and an epilogue that frame the problems, challenges, goals and aspirations for the field of social studies in the 21st century. Thus for this reader, who read the articles when they were originally published, and then again in this collection, the opportunity to revisit them in Parker's framework provided a fresh look at the persistent issues in the field.

Parker's preface begins with a list of questions that have plagued social studies since the inception of the field.

What is the core subject matter of social studies? Do young children need to learn anything about food and shelter or are these cultural universals "covered" at home? Is that most prized pedagogy, classroom discussion, worth the trouble? Can tolerance be taught? How do students from different social positions interpret the same history lesson? And, what is the testing-and-accountability frenzy doing to social studies? (p. ix).

These questions, coupled with Parker's well known (to social studies professionals) concerns with both democratic citizenship and global issues are front and center in the essays selected for the book. More importantly, Parker refuses to accept a dichotomy between theory and practice believing that they inform one another. This stance, the combination of research *and* practice, is carefully explained as a "conjunction of equality" (p. ix) because Parker, citing Dewey's *How We Think*, reminds the reader that "research and practice is just another name for normal life: (ix). Humans do things intentionally (practice) and reflect on the meaning of those things (research). Thus, the stance is that *all* teachers are both practitioners and researchers. In a field where a deep rift is often seen between the college faculty teaching theory and methods vs. the classroom teachers who are immersed in practice, this is a position I wholeheartedly endorse.



Walter C. Parker is professor of education and an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Washington. His books include *Education for Democracy: Curricula, Contexts, Assessments* (2002), *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life* (2003), and *Social Studies in Elementary Education* (2009). He is currently working on a book about the "international education" movement in U.S. schools.

Parker accomplishes this by selecting and organizing the chapters, written by some of the field's top researchers, in a way to engage readers not only in thinking *about*, but also, in thinking *through* (italics in original) the most contentious issues in the field (p. 4).

The five divisions of the text include: Purpose Matters, Perspective Matters, Subject Matters, Global Matters and Puzzles. These sections are preceded by a chapter, *For the early twenty first century* (p. 5) and followed by an Epilogue titled *Idiocy, Puberty and Citizenship: The Road Ahead*. Both of these chapters address a concept near and dear to Parker, "enlightened political engagement." As the stated goal of NCSS, accepted by many social studies professionals, is "creating effective citizens," Parker's explication of enlightened political engagement through this collection of essays is particularly on target.

While it is impossible to discuss fully every chapter included in the text, it is necessary to highlight the focus of each section. In Part I, Purpose Matters, the articles approach major controversies in the field: should K-12 social studies be about transmission of knowledge or the transformation of society (Chapter 2, Stanley); what are the political struggles over the curriculum as defined by Evans' as the "social studies wars" (Chapter 3); if history is, as widely agreed, the centerpiece of social studies education, why don't more history teacher engage their students in the discipline of history, specifically historical interpretation (Chapter 4, Barton and Levstik); what is authentic intellectual work in social studies (Chapter 6, King, Newmann and Carmichael); and the impact of high stakes testing (Chapter 5, Grant). All of these topics have been addressed by the chosen authors at length in other articles and books, so these essays are just a glimpse at the issues. But, they engage the social studies professional in the fundamental questions: What am I doing; and Why am I doing it? Without struggling to answer these questions, the issue of "How should I do it?" cannot even begin to be approached.

Part II, Perspective Matters, forces the reader to remember that the answers to the questions in Part I are affected by the pluralistic, multicultural society that is the United States in the early 21st century. Many of the preservice and inservice teachers I work with believe that they are "color"

blind or that diversity does not matter, we just teach the children assigned to our classes. Part II makes it very clear that this belief does great harm in classrooms that teach true, effective citizenship. It is the recognition of diversity, the acceptance of difference and the opening of the classroom to this plurality that makes the difference. Whether the focus is on race, gender, sexual preference or social class, these chapters point out that perspective must be taken into account. Au summarizes the topics most directly in Chapter 8, *Isn't Culturally Responsive Instruction Just Good Teaching*, explaining succinctly by asking teachers to recognize the particular circumstances within the group. Thus, the answer to the question posed in the chapter title is answered by Au's definition of what constitutes good teaching—"helping all students to learn and prosper in school" (p. 85).

Part II, Subject Matters, tackles some of the most challenging social studies issues including : how social studies students understand film (Chapter 11, Wineburg, Morsorg and Portat); the importance of maps/geography in our GPS age (Chapter 13, Bednarz, Acheson and Bednarz), and Holocaust Fatigue (Chapter 16, Schweber). While these are not the only issues in this section of the text, I highlight them because they are issues that almost all teachers of social studies face. The selection and use of film in social studies is not only controversial but also increasingly important given the need for media savvy by our students. Thus, understanding how students interpret history through film is something all educators should consider. The focus on maps, all sorts of maps, from Google Earth to static and animated maps available from sources such as Global Information Systems (GIS) and the variety of uses for maps in daily life (mental maps, hiking, driving directions, etc.) are addressed in this chapter. The Holocaust article presents a different view of Holocaust education than usual in that it is a cry for less, not more, place in the curriculum and depth over breadth. Schweber's fear is that the Holocaust appears in so many places in the curriculum (English and social studies courses) across so many school years, that students "turn off" with a "here we go again" attitude. Her call is for an end to both the curriculum overexposure and its superficial nature replacing it with a study of why the Holocaust occurred in the first place and how that is important to the present (p. 159).

Part IV, Global Matters, homes in on a few important issues for social studies professionals as we are ever more aware of our interdependent world. Merryfield's chapter on teachers' responses to globalization (Chapter 17) focuses the reader on both practical pedagogies for globalizing curriculum and the controversial nature of the topic. Crocco alerts teachers to the issues of multicultural literature in the classroom (Chapter 18) as she explores an award winning fictional book and the harsh criticism it receives from some of her students from that cultural background. This discussion problematizes how teachers select and present multicultural information to avoid stereotyping and still tackle global curriculum. Chapter 19, Dunn's essay should be particularly informative to world history teachers, especially those who may have been in the field for a considerable number of years. The changes in the academic approach to studying world history are defined as Arena A, the investigation of the planet as a whole, and Arena B, social studies in general and world history in particular as expressions of national value and purpose. These arena's have political constituents that are stakeholders in the public school curriculum and severely restrict, through the adoption of standards and tests, a teacher's freedom to stay academically fresh and to appropriately prepare students for further history education beyond high school. My personal response to this chapter was to consider how this information in would impact my approach to my secondary social studies methods class which is focused on teaching world history. The last chapter in this section highlights Hahn's work on international civic education focusing on how several European democracies teach citizenship in comparison with the United States.

Part V, Puzzles, selects four problems faced in social studies: (1) why is there an absence of true discussion in social studies classrooms when both teachers and students say that discussion is very important (Chapter 21, Hess)? (2) What factors, outside the classroom, constrain social studies teachers from approaching teaching meaningfully (Chapter 22, Cornbleth)? (3) Chapter 23, Segall's what is the connection between curriculum (herein defined as content) and pedagogy (instruction)? And (4), Can Tolerance be Taught (Chapter 24, Avery). Each of these chapters calls upon the reader to carefully consider their

understanding of these important issues with an end towards improving teaching and learning in social studies classrooms. For example, Segall challenges the reader to question the inherent biases of the materials like their textbooks as part of curricular content and to alter instruction to take account of these biases. Since many teachers approach textbooks as value neutral, Segall's challenge may force them to rethink that opinion.

The Epilogue, Chapter 25, is titled *Idiocy, Puberty and Citizenship: The Road Ahead*. Now, having considered the sections of the text and the issues they address, the reader is thrust back to the concept of enlightened political engagement. Lest the reader be put off by the chapter title, Parker takes pains to define his terms as they were used by the ancient Greeks. Idiocy Parker tells us hails back to the root *idios*

which means private, separate, self-centered—selfish. When a person's behavior became idiotic—concerned myopically with private things and unmindful of common things—that person was believed to be like a rudderless ship, without consequences except for the danger it posed to others. (p. 248).

That term contrasts with *politēs* or citizen. Parker reminds the reader that schools are well positioned to create effective citizens if only they would seize the opportunity by addressing the issues posed in the chapters in the text.

Parker goes on to warn that idiots do not mature, enter puberty, or develop into people who take their proper place in public life. Citing an array of sources from Aristotle, the former mayor of Missoula, Montana, and de Tocqueville to Addams, Banfield, Marx, Bellah and Galbraith, the importance of engaged, informed citizens who understand the interconnections of liberty and community (citizenship) is highlighted. Whether or not “idiocy” is the product of alienation, capitalism, affluence or greed is less important than the role of schools in reversing the trend and strive to create democratic citizens.

In her review of Parker's text, Dilworth (2010) contends that Parker is optimistic about the future democracy and social studies. I would concur. After all, Parker states and explains his three assumptions about democracy: that it is superior to the alternatives as it aims to protect civil

liberties, equality before the law, limited government, competitive election, and common civic goals that coexist with individuality and pluralism; that “there can be no democracy without democrats,” and that “democratic citizens do not materialize out of thin air” (p. 251). Thus, it is the role of schools in our society is to assist in the creation of those democratic citizens and “in poll after poll, the American public makes clear its expectation that schools do precisely this. “ (p. 251).

Parker posits that schools are perfect venues for democratic citizenship precisely because they are diverse, public spaces where multiple perspectives and personal values are brought together with mutual concerns (social and academic). The plan for accomplishing the task is threefold.

First, increase the variety and frequency of interaction among students who are culturally, linguistically and racially different from one another ... Second, orchestrate these contacts so that competent public talk—especially deliberation about common problems is fostered. . . . Third, clarify the attributes of deliberation and the distinction between open/inclusive deliberation and closed/exclusive deliberation . . . [E]xpect, teach and model competent, inclusive deliberation (discussion).

The use of both the informal social curriculum of schools and the formal, social studies curriculum could lead the way and prepare our students to enhance our democracy by becoming enlightened political participants.

All social studies professionals and stakeholders concerned with the social studies curriculum in our schools should read this book. The chapters contain myriad references for further in-depth research on each of the topics discussed and thus, yield a path to understanding the complexity of the social studies curriculum and the relationship of theory *and* practice.

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