

Walter Parker is Professor of Education and Political Science Emeritus in Seattle. He has been an educator for 42 years, and his expertise is in K-12 social studies.

Q. Why did you become an educator?

A. I discovered the field of Political Science as a student at the University of Colorado and wanted to dig deeper. There's no better way to learn than to teach, so I got my BA and teaching credentials and began teaching the U.S. Government course at a Denver high school. At first, I was rather bad at it. I lacked both content knowledge (to plan the right units) and teaching knowledge (to plan the right learning activities). But I learned more about government and had timely opportunities to learn instructional strategies like concept development and political simulations. Over time and through moves to Texas and then Washington, I kept working at these and came to see them as manna from heaven.

Q. What career achievement are you most proud of?



A. Thanks to funding from the Lucas and Spencer foundations, I led a research team that tackled a vexing problem for anyone who teaches: balancing curricular depth and breadth. We did the work on the most challenging platform available, Advanced Placement, where a zillion topics are crammed into a course too small to hold them. We began with the AP government course and then moved to AP environmental science. We showed that, yes,

you can have your cake and eat it, too: deep understanding, engaging pedagogy, *and* success on the exam. (To learn more, see *Social Education* 82, no. 1 (2018) "Projects as the Spine of the Course," and my new book *Education for Liberal Democracy*, Teachers College Press, 2023).

Q. When and why did you join NCSS?

A. I joined in the early 1980s. My reasons were to broaden my horizons and build a nationwide network of colleagues. I also joined the state councils, first in Colorado, then Texas, and now Washington.

Q. How has being a part of a professional association enriched your career?

A. Colleagues near and far make all the difference—they sharpen my vision, challenge my priorities, get me out of town, and make play of work. ■

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