



## education review // reseñas educativas

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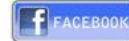
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Parker, Walter C. (Ed.) (2010) *Social Studies Today: Research & Practice*. New York: Routledge

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Reviewed by James E. Schul  
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Social studies teachers and teacher candidates need to know both the historical and theoretical foundations of their professional field as well as what contemporary research says about best practices in the social studies classroom. Walter Parker's newest edited book does just that through a succinct and eclectic compilation of chapters suitable for such a broad field as social studies education. Each chapter has been written by a respected member, or members, of the field of social studies education. Included in this list of notables are William Stanley, Ronald Evans, Keith Barton, Linda Levstik, James Banks, Diana Hess, Fred Newmann, Merry Merrfield, and Patricia Avery to just name a few. The chapters, which are actually articles taken from the "Research and Practice" section of the acclaimed practitioner's journal *Social Education*, are bookended by Parker's own articulation of what the normative mandate

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of democratic citizenship means for the twenty-first century social studies classroom. I currently use Parker's book in my social studies methods courses as a means to saturate my students in their field and to foster in them a disposition toward a research-based approach toward their teaching. The book, I have found, is extremely useful in fostering discussion about what works best in the real world of teaching for prospective teachers who might otherwise base their approach toward teaching on mindless whim or on their own experiences as a student.

Parker organizes his chapters around five fundamental themes. The first, entitled *Purpose Matters*, includes chapters that discuss answers to various questions that revolve around the purpose of social studies education, such as: How should social studies educators use teach toward transformation – social reconstructionism or reflective inquiry? What are the philosophical camps of social studies education that have historically competed with each other for curricular control? Why don't more teachers engage in historical inquiry? How has standardized testing affected social studies education? How can social studies teachers gauge whether or not their instruction is relevant to the lives of the student and appropriate for the aims of a democratic society? I find that the readings from this first theme are particularly helpful in framing the meaning of social studies education for my methods students as it provides them an opportunity to reflect on what kind of social studies they are and subsequently need to be throughout their career.

The second theme, entitled *Perspective Matters*, includes chapters that focus on issues of multiculturalism such as culturally responsive teaching, race, gender, sexual preference, and how each affects the social studies classroom. These chapters are particularly important in my methods class when I position the students to create lessons for an inclusive classroom. The third theme, entitled *Subject Matters*, includes chapters that focus on particular instructional issues in various disciplines within the social studies such as historical thinking, map reading, civic education, cultural universals, and Holocaust education. I use these chapters sporadically in the methods course with the particular reading that I assign dependent on the issue that I aim to highlight at the moment. Often times, I pair some of the readings from

this theme with those in the other themes. For instance, I may use a chapter on historical thinking along with the first theme as a way to enrich what it means to teach through the lens of the philosophical camp of the social scientist. The fourth theme, entitled *Global Matters*, focuses on the element of global education in the social studies by including chapters that discuss issues ranging from the effects of globalization on the practice of social studies teachers to a cross-cultural comparison of civic engagement. I find some of these chapters particularly helpful in highlighting why and how teachers may infuse a global perspective in their social studies classroom. The fifth, and final theme, entitled *Puzzles*, includes chapters that aim to solve problems that often baffle social studies teachers and teacher educators. Among these problems are: If teachers value discussion, why then is it so scarce? What keeps students from experiencing a meaningful social studies education? What's the connection between curriculum and instruction? Is tolerance something that can be taught to students? Like the chapters from third theme, I intersperse these chapters throughout my methods course as we explore various instructional strategies. As a case in point, it is very helpful to include a chapter on classroom discussion as I have students explore Socratic seminars and other ways to integrate literature in the social studies. The book concludes with a thoughtful chapter, written by Parker himself, where he explores individualism as being the central problem faced by democracies, and subsequently, social studies teachers today.

As useful as I do find this book, it is not without its weaknesses. First and foremost, it includes nothing about how the integration of digital technology is currently transforming the social studies classroom. This might be because the advent of instructional techniques such as desktop documentary making is relatively new and little research and writing has been conducted on the phenomenon of movie making in the social studies classroom. However, I know that the research is being produced which already promises to outdate the book before it has the opportunity to gain much traction among teachers and teacher educators. Another glaring weakness about this book is that it contains nothing about economic education. This omission is particularly disturbing given the financial woes that the nation and world are currently

mired in. However, no book can be completely satisfactory for everyone in a field so broad and contentious as social studies education.

*Social Studies Today: Research and Practice* is a very practical, affordable, and extremely well written book that provides a platform for the most prominent social studies educators to effectively enlighten and inform elementary, middle, and secondary social studies teachers across the country about the status of the social studies. Our schools need more social studies teachers who are broadly versed in where their field has been and where it is going. Parker's singular volume is a noble attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice that many practitioners complain is ever widening. This attempt, in my estimation, is a successful one and worthy of use in any social studies teacher preparation program.

### About the Reviewer

James E. Schul is an Assistant Professor of Education at Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio where he teaches courses in Educational Foundations and Social Studies Education. His primary research focuses on the integration of desktop documentary making into history classrooms. He is also interested in curriculum history. In 2009, he earned his PhD in social studies education from the University of Iowa. Prior to working in higher education, he was a high school social studies teacher for ten years at Franklin Monroe High School in Pittsburg, Ohio.

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