

# We Make Students Engaged Citizens

Terry Cherry

Thank you for being here in San Francisco for the 97th conference in the 97th year of the National Council for the Social Studies. I also want to offer my congratulations to award winners. To receive national recognition speaks not only to your work, but also to you as a person.

I would like to start off recognizing the current NCSS Board of Directors and officers. Would you please stand? This group was elected by the membership to serve you, the members. Each board member serves a 3-year term and officers make a 4-year commitment. These are volunteer positions that require work at weekends, evening conference calls, quick email responses, and other obligations. Now that we have a new Executive Director, new ideas and changes are happening. Each needs discussion and voting by the Board of Directors. Members of the board maintain relations with associated groups and affiliated councils, as well as NCSS communities, as part of their responsibility. These are just some of the duties a member of the board commits to fulfilling.

India Meissel is President Elect and Tina Heafner is Vice President of NCSS. India's conference is next year in Chicago and Tina's is in 2019 in Austin, Texas. When you see them, please let them know you are willing to help them with their respective conferences. If you have an idea that you would like to see in an NCSS conference, share it with them. Also if you want to tell them, "Hey, don't do what that Cherry guy did in San Francisco, that is O.K. too."

I would like to mention that when the conference is in Austin, Texas, in 2019, there will be a major change. Both NCSS and the Texas Council for the Social Studies (TCSS) will combine their conferences. They will meet in the same location, share the exhibit hall, and have both NCSS and TCSS sessions

Next I would like to have the NCSS staff stand. What you see here is the behind-the-scenes operation of NCSS. The current staff have made the adjustment of working with a new Executive Director, Larry Paska. Any of you who have had a new boss come onto the job knows the anticipation that brings. The good news is, the staff is still here. When you see them in the hallways, please take the time to thank them for their service and dedication to NCSS.

Every conference has that one person who knows the "movers and shakers" of the conference city, who does much of what is needed to make the conference happen, who works

with local officials, assists me with ideas, and occasionally says, "Terry, maybe we want to hold off on that idea," while being the most supportive person of new ideas and concepts for the conference. Please stand, my conference co-chair, Karen Korematsu.

This morning I want to publicly say that Donald Trump is correct in saying that Fake News exists. In our case, the Fake News is that social studies is dead. That is Fake News because social studies is alive here in San Francisco, in California, in the state you work in, across the globe, in your community, and in the classroom where you teach.

Three years ago, after I received the phone call telling me I had been elected Vice President of NCSS, one of the first songs I heard was Katy Perry's "ROAR." I said I want that to be my theme song. The first verse is about being afraid to speak out or to "rock the boat." She says, "I guess that I forgot I had a choice."

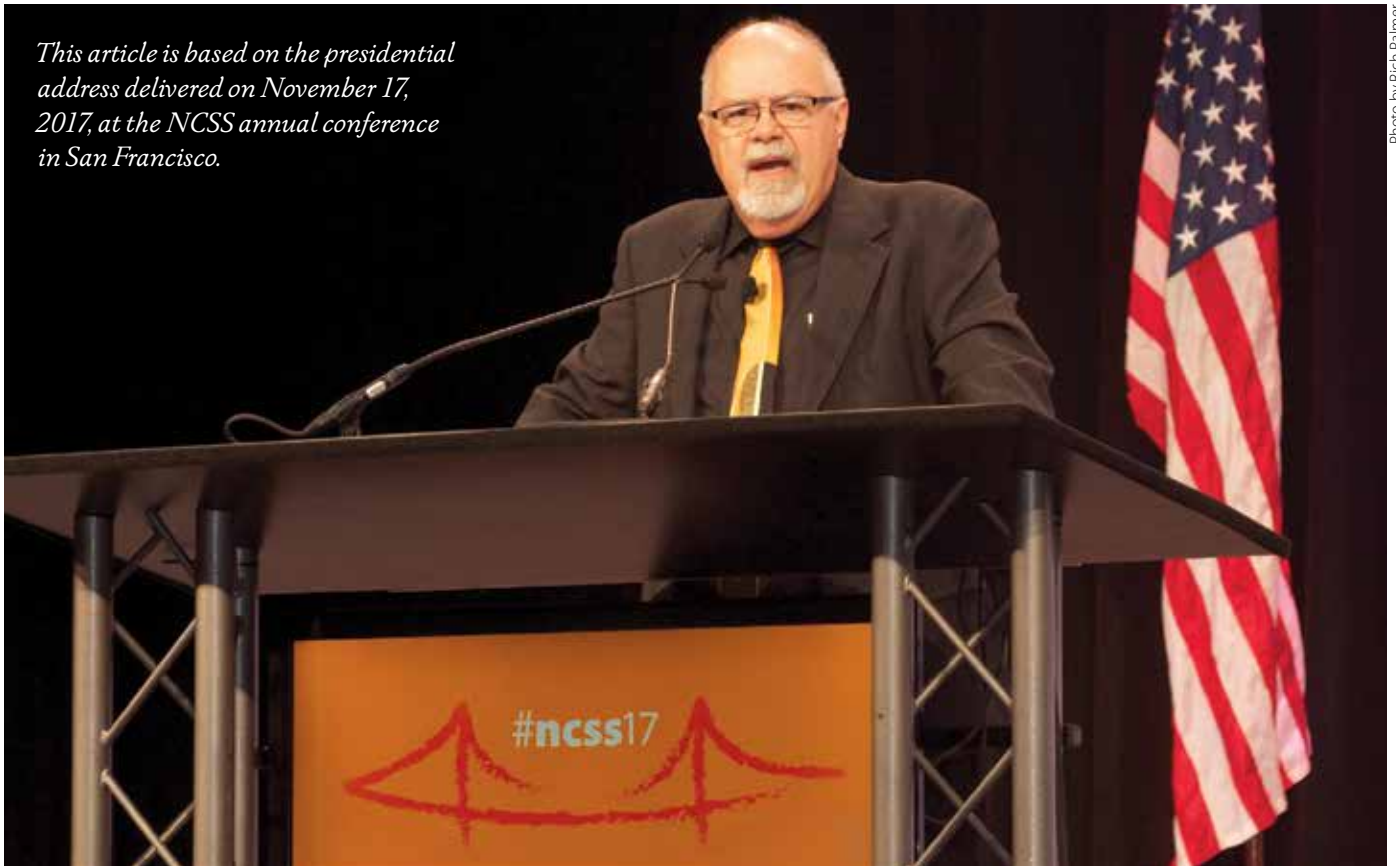
Sometimes I think that the attitude of many to social studies and social science is that we have lost funding, lost respect as a curriculum, and had subjects removed from the student class selection, so that we wonder what we can do. So we sit quietly. So many social studies/social science educators want to keep their jobs, so they don't make a stand.

But that is not you. Most social studies and social science teachers are not at this conference. Some of you may have had your colleagues say you are crazy for spending your money to attend this conference. To me, that makes you unlike most teachers—it makes you the "UnMost Teacher." To be called "crazy" isn't always bad. It puts you in a category that people don't understand, which makes them always wonder what you will do next.

A year ago, NCSS adopted a Strategic Plan. This plan has five priorities: Collaboration, Communication, Innovation, Inclusiveness, and Influence and Leadership. The board and staff has decided to make our decisions, plans and programs fit within the five priorities. This conference has five sub-themes that match the priorities:

**Media Literacy.** This matches the first priority of the Strategic Plan, which is Collaboration. It is so important to work together as educators for the sake of the students, not the sake of our curriculums, to engage students in civic life. Collaboration includes working with the various affiliated councils and associated and community groups in NCSS, as well as groups outside

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of NCSS circles. Collaborating with media literacy experts allows educators to discuss the importance of separating fake news from real news.

***Teaching Students in a Rapidly Changing World.*** This matches the second priority of the Strategic Plan, Communication. There are so many ways to communicate. It is imperative for social studies and social science not just to keep up, but to be ready for the next new way to communicate. The world our students live in today is rapidly changing. We need to communicate together to learn new methods to continue our goal of preparing students for civic life.

One way NCSS is communicating is through our Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society. This society started in 2011. In the last 18 months, we have added 220 chapters, bringing our current total to 596 chapters in 39 states and 4 countries.

***Technology and Change.*** This matches the third Strategic Plan priority, Innovation. Please think back, and if there was a time when you taught without a computer in your classroom, please raise your hand. I applaud you because you have had to make a major change in your teaching style.

Critics of social studies say we are trying to change history. We are revisionist. We are asked, “Why aren’t social studies and social science taught the way I was taught?” A couple of years ago, I had my appendix removed. The doctors did not put leeches on the area of pain to heal it. Many of you

traveled to this conference by auto, train, or plane. I didn’t see any horse and wagon tied up outside the building. If we can allow for revision in medicine, transportation, and other areas, why not in social studies? When new information is discovered in the areas of social studies and social science, should not that information be made available to our students?

***Globalization and Global Interdependence.*** If you have traveled internationally to enhance your knowledge, please raise your hand. This makes you the “UnMost Traveled Educator.” NCSS needs to begin to think, act, and support international programs. We need to reach out to countries to share ideas, listen to each other, and exchange teachers and students. This matches the fourth Strategic Plan objective of Inclusiveness. We can no longer be satisfied with being National. We must become International. Imagine when teachers are trading places with teachers from around the world and the same with students.

Imagine also that at some time in the future, those students who experienced living in another country thanks to NCSS are the leaders of their country. For whatever reason, country A is thinking about attacking country B, where its leaders spent time as exchange students. Imagine those students taking a stand and objecting to the conflict because they spent time in the country they are considering attacking. If that happens in the future, NCSS will help make John Lennon’s song “Imagine” a little closer to reality.

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go beyond being fun and help students engage in critical thinking and deep inquiry. Given that PBL has swept the nation as an important instructional strategy, it is timely that this issue seeks to help social studies teachers learn more about PBL, include these strategies in their own teaching, and show them that it is not only possible, but also desirable, to incorporate high quality PBL instruction in their classrooms. I hope these essays will encourage social stud-

ies teachers everywhere to try rigorous project-based learning in their own classrooms. 🌐

#### Notes

1. "Research Spotlight on Project-Based Learning: NEA Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education," [www.nea.org/tools/16963.htm](http://www.nea.org/tools/16963.htm).
2. John Larmer and John R. Mergendoller, "Seven Essentials for Project-Based Learning," *Educational Leadership* 68, no. 1 (September 2010), [www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Seven\\_Essentials\\_for\\_Project-Based\\_Learning.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Seven_Essentials_for_Project-Based_Learning.aspx).

3. Gisèle Huff, "Project-Based Learning Needs More Learning" (August 03, 2016), <https://edexcellence.net/articles/project-based-learning-needs-more-learning>.

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Photo by Rich Palmer



NCSS turns 100 years old in 2020, and our conference will be in Washington, D.C., to celebrate it. You have heard me use the term "social studies/social science." I just mentioned the importance of having an international presence. My thinking is that it is time for a change to a new brand. International Council for the Social Sciences. The term "social studies" is mostly used only in the U.S. "Social science" is used globally and starting to appear in states in the U.S. I am not adamant that the change needs to be made to call our organization International Council for the Social Sciences, but I would like something with that flavor. Since I have become president of NCSS, I have publicly included my suggested change in my talks. About 85 or 90 percent of the people respond favorably to my idea for the change. Yes, making such a change will create some difficulties, but we are social science educators and we know how to overcome difficulties. The second verse of "ROAR" talks about rising up after being suppressed.

You hear my voice, you hear that sound  
Like thunder gonna shake the ground  
You held me down, but I got up (HEY!)  
Get ready 'cause I've had enough  
I see it all, I see it now

**Cultivating Empathy through Instruction.** This matches the fifth objective of our Strategic Plan, Influence and Leadership. If you served or are serving as a state or local board member or officer, please raise your hand. You have exhibited Influence and Leadership. It is time for NCSS to provide leadership by reaching out to the many social science curriculums and getting them to join together under one banner representing the identity of all.

I don't think that after the National Math conference there is a conference on Multiplication three weeks later, and five weeks after that another conference on Calculus. NCSS is the organization to reach out to the other social science groups and say, "let's work together, by keeping our identity, but coming together, leveraging our strength in numbers, and have a conference of 7–10,000 and membership of 30,000." That is how we can ROAR.

I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter, dancing through the fire...

'Cause I am a champion and you're gonna hear me roar.

We are champions. We teach citizens. We make students engaged citizens. We are Social Science Educators. We will ROAR because we make a difference in the lives of students.

Thank you for being a part of NCSS and being here in San Francisco. Enjoy the conference, listen and talk with each other, and return to your school with a renewed passion for what you do. Please do me one favor, when you return to your classroom, "Teach like you know how." 🌐

*"Roar" lyrics by Katy Perry, Henry Walter, Max Martin, Bonnie McKee, Dr. Luke*

**TERRY CHERRY** is President of the National Council for the Social Studies. He asks readers who have comments about this address to let him know at [tcherry@ncss.org](mailto:tcherry@ncss.org). He welcomes all thoughts, comments, and/or opinions.