

# Barry Amper

It is very hard to believe that I have been a member of KDP for 50 years! It really does seem like only yesterday. I was drawn to KDP because I was graduating from Queens College (1974) and the organization recognized the efforts that I had put into my education. I enjoyed my courses, classroom observations, and student teaching. I enjoyed working with the students and getting feedback from my clinical supervisor and mentor teacher. So being recognized for this was a great feeling.

I wasn't very active in the Queens College chapter. However, when I started my graduate work at Hofstra University in 1974, a professor I liked was the faculty advisor, so I got very active. I graduated in 1976, but I remember continuing for a little longer. I was involved as an officer and as the communications secretary. I had a great time working with the students who participated.

Even though I was not active, I wanted to continue to keep up with the latest research and just to keep in touch with what was going on. Kappa Delta Pi, through its newsletters and magazine, helped to do that. Additionally, now that I am an adjunct associate professor at Pace University in New York, I like to share what I learned. Coincidentally, I was asked to temporarily work full time at the University. I was friendly with the KDP faculty advisor, and I worked with the chapter while I worked full-time. Additionally, when I now attend graduations at Pace as faculty, I proudly wear my green and purple rope over my gown.

I have had 31 wonderful years teaching students with special needs for the NYC Department of Education. It was a very interesting journey. I served my school and district in many capacities in addition to being a classroom teacher. I was a mentor to new teachers and eventually became an instructor to teach other teachers how to be a mentor. Another important part of my journey was creating a validated New York State program for adolescents who were on the autistic spectrum and had an Intellectual disability. We opened a coffee shop within the school. I taught students how to read recipes, shop, use money, and prepare foods and then to sell and serve the foods to staff as well as bus drivers and bus matrons who took the students to school every day. We also served many DOE superintendents and chancellors, as well as preparing platters of food when our principal had district meetings in our school. It was a great teaching experience and a wonderful learning experience for our students. Once a program is validated by New York State, it remains validated whether or not it is active. I am happy to say that the school continues the program to this day. I also had the opportunity to be part of the committee that helped the school achieve a New York State School of Excellence Award.

The background is a deep purple with a bokeh effect of out-of-focus light circles in shades of purple and gold. A bright starburst with multiple points is located in the upper right quadrant.

As a professor, I have had the great opportunity to work with NYC Teaching Fellows, teaching them courses on how to teach. I am also a clinical supervisor to undergraduates and graduates, as well as Teaching Fellows, as they complete their fieldwork assignments and begin their teaching careers.

As far as what inspired me, I am not sure. But my parents always said I would be a teacher from the day I was born! Perhaps it was the fact that I was the eldest of four children, so I was always helping someone. I babysat, worked youth programs for the "Y," worked in day camps, and always enjoyed watching the children grow and succeed. My first teaching experience was right after I graduated Queens College. A friend of mine helped me secure a position as a teaching assistant for students who were deaf and had other multi-handicaps. While it was a challenge, I enjoyed it. I even learned American Sign Language, as it was a requirement of my employment. However, there was no room for advancement at that school and I was finally given an opportunity, via a friend, to work for a new school that was being opened in Queens, New York, for students with disabilities. That was the beginning of my very long career with the DOE.

As you can see, I always enjoyed a challenge and getting involved in the school and programs I worked in. Always having a challenge and seeing the fruits of my labor is really what kept me going all these years. Having great administrators and colleagues also helps add to longevity.

My advice to new teachers is to become a part of their school community. Get involved in special projects. It is what helps keep the adrenaline going and keeps interest in the profession. Take professional development courses in areas that interest you or that you feel will enhance your teaching skills. Don't be afraid to ask questions. And finally, always make room for "me time." Teaching requires a lot from us. Sometimes it can become overwhelming. Therefore, schedule for yourself "me time." Get away from the computer, grading papers, and writing lesson plans. Go out and take a few minutes every day and do something for yourself that is not work related.

When I first started my career at my NYC school, I wish that I was better prepared for what was ahead of me. All the theories and book learning, while laying a foundation, can never teach you the feeling of being in front of your very own classroom on the first day. No one could ever teach you how to manage your time until you needed to do it. I also wished I had been better prepared. When I studied at Hofstra it was to be a teacher of students with emotional disabilities. However, as I finished up my course work, New York State changed the license to all students with all disabilities, except for students who had visual or hearing disabilities. So, while I could teach students with various disabilities, I really wasn't quite as prepared as I would have liked to have been, especially since the population of this school was not students with emotional disabilities. But time is the best teacher and needless to say, it was the best 30 plus years of my life.