



EDITORIAL,

Memories of John Nisbet

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Memories of John Nisbet

My memories of John Nisbet and his work in educational research reflect my experience as a student and as a lecturer in his department. As MEd students and practising teachers in the class of '65, few of us came initially to his lectures on 'experimental education' at 9.30 on Saturday mornings with any great enthusiasm. But John's own enthusiasm was infectious and, because of the clarity of his lectures and his endless patience with those who floundered, he won us over. Given that the course at that time was based largely on psychological testing and statistics, that was no mean feat.

It was always clear that John's students, from undergraduate to PhD level, were important to him. In the early days when Med classes were small he knew everyone, every year faithfully recording a group photograph for posterity and, until 1987 when MEd numbers became too big to handle, he organised regular reunion dinners for MEd and PhD graduates.

His postgraduate teaching continued to centre on research methodology and it was a compulsory element in every postgraduate programme. Over the years new approaches such as ethnography joined the more traditional as 'experimental education' became 'research methods', but some things never changed: his meticulous preparation, his super-efficient assessment, his role as 'critical friend' to students and, above all, his commitment. It is significant but not surprising that, although John retired formally in the late 1980s, he was still supervising PhD work 20 years later.

His own published research work is well documented but what is also remembered by those who worked with him is his attitude to it. A research grant was like a new gift to John, signifying confidence in his work and providing more exciting opportunities to pursue what lay at the core of his professional life. By the 1970s he had become well established as a national authority. He mixed with all the 'big names' of British education, but he didn't always find it easy to deal with the 'politics' of research and research funding. By the early 1980s the political climate was not conducive to more open-ended styles of research and John found it difficult to adjust to a new world of management, accountability and government control. It was not his world but, while he grumbled at what he saw as the new constraints and expectations, he continued to be involved, writing widely about changing attitudes to the purposes of educational research. His own world, however, was one of interest in his students, research teaching and supervision, and a genuine enthusiasm for anything he saw as an interesting research challenge. Forty years later it was still the same enthusiasm which I had first recognised in the 1960s

Finally, and importantly, John showed confidence in those who worked with him in both teaching and research. He simply trusted us to get on with the job. In my first week as a raw lecturer in the Department of Education in 1972 I was told to my astonishment: 'Don't always be coming to me to ask for permission; see yourself as far as possible as a freelance in education'. That was trust, those were the days, and that is why we remember him with great respect and affection.

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