

Colin Latchem: 1933-2018

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It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Colin Latchem, a key and influential member of the Editorial Board of *Education & Self Development*. He died peacefully on 3rd July 2018 after a very short illness.

Colin Latchem was born in Rugby, Warwickshire England. His father was a draughtsman at Lodge Spark Plugs and his mother a primary school teacher. Although an only child, he described his childhood as happy, as never lonely, never bored. One year, his parents bought him a toy episcope. This allowed him to project opaque pictures on to a screen. He loved to storyboard his own “films” which laid the foundations for all the video production and editing work he was involved in in later years.

He won a place at The Lawrence Sheriff Grammar School where he was particularly interested in Art and Drama and combined the two talents in producing Macbeth’s bloody severed head out of papier mâché. He developed a love of motor racing and because of his father’s involvement with Lodge Plugs, he was often allowed into the pits at Silverstone to meet some of the great drivers like Fangio and Stirling Moss. After grammar school he attended Birmingham College of Art and Design where he excelled in stage design and later won an Arts Council Award for the sets of George Bernard Shaw’s “The Devil’s Disciple”.

After college, he did two years National Service and did his initial training with 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and was then posted to the Education Corps at Marlborough House in London, where he illustrated text books and helped design and set up the Centenary Exhibition of the Victoria Cross.

At the end of this, he sought a quieter life and accepted a position as the Head of the Art Department in Friends’ School, Lisburn, Northern Ireland. It was here that he met Miss Marion McKinlay, a teacher of French. The combination of the Art Master and the French mistress was perhaps a bit risqué for a Quaker School. They liked to shock 1950s morality by admitting that they had had breakfast together, before marriage, omitting to say that it was in the company of 90 boarding pupils!

He left Friends’ to become Head of the Art Department at Stranmillis College, Belfast and beside his teaching he was involved with the Ulster Folk Museum. In holiday time, he acted as Director of Studies for teacher training in Nigeria, during the Biafran War, and also in India.

In 1982, he accepted a position at what was then Western Australia Institute of Technology (now Curtin University) as Head of the Educational Media Centre and then Head of the Teaching Learning Group. He left Curtin University in 1998 and it was then, at the age of 65, that his career really took off. He worked for nearly a year in Japan, a full year in Barbados and made frequent visits to South Korea and Canada where he worked for the Commonwealth of Learning, producing a report for UNESCO. He loved to research and write and was still so involved in projects around the world, helping university staff to be published, reviewing articles and generally sharing his knowledge and experience with passion and enthusiasm.

In South Africa, a few years ago, he was introduced as “The Grand Old Man of Distance Education”. He thanked the speaker for his introduction but objected strongly to the word “old”. Some, reading this obituary, will have heard his keynote presentation. He never grew old, he just moved on. He was tireless in his mission to educate the world. His mantra was “lifelong learning” and he didn’t just preach it, he lived it to his last breath.

Colin had a very keen sense of what was right and what was ethical. At the end of 2015 he was a member of the editorial team of the *British Journal of Educational Technology* when the journal’s owners crossed the line of what was acceptable in terms of interference in editorial decisions. Colin led the forceful protest of the editorial board which concluded in the mass resignation of the board members – and the resignation of the editor in chief. We were shortly to be reunited on the editorial team of the *Education and Self Development* where he made a significant contribution to the direction of the journal. He had a firm belief that great things can be achieved if you don’t mind who gets the credit and this was apparent in all of his work.

Colin once advised me that “if you want something done, ask a busy man” and this was certainly true of the man himself. He was ever willing to help with anything and would forecast, accurately, when he could deliver the work. And he was very concerned about helping early career researchers to develop their work and get published in high quality journals. It doesn’t surprise me that there have been tributes from colleagues across the globe. Their reactions on hearing about his death were particularly poignant: one of his mentees at Kazan Federal University wrote that he and Marion were like grandparents to her.

In addition to his academic work which resulted in numerous books and countless scholarly papers, this busy man found time to become active in local politics. He was incensed by what he saw as injustices in government and fought for greater democracy in Western Australia.

Colin leaves behind his wife Marion, to whom he was married for 59 years, his son Donald and daughter Julie and five grandchildren – Patrick, Elena, James, William and Amelia. They have our heartfelt sympathies. He also leaves friends who are too numerous to mention. Colin was a lovely man, a mentor an inspiration, and role model. As the Russians say, “we wish the ground will be soft for him.” We shall all miss him very much and he will stay in our memory always.

(In writing this obituary, I am indebted to Colin’s family and colleagues for their contributions. NJR)