

## JOHN DARLING, 1942–2002

---

On the last day of the European Conference on Educational Research in September 2000, John took suddenly ill and was rushed to hospital, where an inoperable brain tumour was diagnosed. He lived through the next sixteen months with memorable courage and constant cheerfulness, and died in January 2002 after only a short spell in hospital.

From 1985 to 1990 he was Editor of *Scottish Educational Review*, having served previously as Deputy Editor, and was a member of the Editorial Board for over twenty years until his death. *Scottish Educational Review* had in John Darling an Editor and Board member who, in addition to his obvious skill and commitment to developing the journal's academic standing, also brought to the task a zest and enthusiasm which typified his approach to all his work. He often referred to it as 'good fun'.

John first degree was in philosophy from Edinburgh University in 1964. He then qualified as a primary teacher in Aberdeen in 1965. Significantly this was also the year of the publication of the *Scottish Primary Memorandum* with its emphasis on the child-centred approach which was to be the focus of John's academic interest for the next thirty-five years. A series of articles in such publications as the *Oxford Review of Education*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* and *British Journal of Educational Studies* established John as a national authority on Rousseau and progressive education, lucidly summarized in his seminal book, *Child-centred Education and its Critics*. In later years his interests included issues of gender and equal opportunities, to which he applied the same critical reflective and analytical approach.

This approach has sadly become unfamiliar in the last twenty years, during which there has been pressure for almost exclusively empirical research on 'priority topics'. John, however, consistently continued to search for the underlying principles that shape our assumptions and perceptions about education. He saw philosophy and theory of education as fundamentally important and kept going although he recognized it was not an approach to attract funding or win preferment and often meant solitary work. Being out of step was irrelevant to John if he was true to his own beliefs – it was also part of the fun.

There was another creative side to John's personality that some of us may remember best from late-night sessions around the piano at SERA conferences. He had many talents: in his school days at George Watson's in Edinburgh, not only was he was president of the literary society and editor of the school magazine, but also (a rare distinction) pipe-major in the school's cadet corps.

John was a gifted teacher. He taught in primary schools in Glasgow and Aberdeen and Aberdeen College of Education before he joined us as a Lecturer in the Department of Education in Aberdeen University in 1974, successively becoming Senior Lecturer, Head of Department and latterly Co-Director of the Centre for Educational Research. As a teacher he was an individualist: generations of students recognised his academic integrity and warmed to his easy style of interactive teaching and supervision.

Those of us who were his colleagues over many years know what Scottish education and we personally have lost. Like his students we remember him with respect and deep affection.

JOHN NISBET