

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Robbie Case

(1945-2000)

Robbie Case, Professor of Education at Stanford from 1988 to 1998, died suddenly and unexpectedly in Toronto on May 19, 2000 at the age of 55, of an aortal aneurysm. Professor Case earned his Ph.D. in education at the University of Toronto, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Before he joined the faculty at Stanford, he held faculty positions at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. At the time of his death, he was a professor at the Institute of Child Study, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

Case's research contributions ranged widely, including important papers on social, emotional, and linguistic development and on the development of creative intelligence. His main research focus centered on child developmental psychology, and particularly on theories of intellectual development in relation to education. He was the author of a stage theory of cognitive development, presented in its most general form in his book, *intellectual development: Birth to adulthood* (1985). The theory and empirical research presented in this book were a major advance in developmental psychology, integrating important aspects of the Piagetian stage theory and cognitive information-processing theory to capitalize on the strengths and overcome limitations of each, and particularly to draw out from this integration implications for the design of instruction.

In subsequent research, during his Stanford tenure, Case deepened the scientific theory of the mind further by developing a concept that he termed *central conceptual structures*. Using this concept, Case developed explanations of the kinds of information children can mentally represent and operate upon as they progress, which incorporate important aspects of the informational and conceptual content of their growing cognitive abilities, along with important advances in the complexity of their cognitive capabilities. Through analyses of the processing requirements of a wide variety of tasks, Case demonstrated that the main consequence of these cognitive developments is increased power in the representation of information in several broad domains, such as number, space, and social interaction. An important presentation of his research and theorizing on these topics was the monograph *The role of central conceptual structures in the development of children's thought* (1996, coauthored with Y. Okamoto).

The implications of Case's work have broad generality. The development of scientific and mathematical understanding are particularly illuminated by his research, and principles of curriculum design and teaching in these domains are guided directly. His work also showed how instructional analysis can be used to drive fundamental advances in basic developmental theory. Collaborating with his research students, many of whom were experienced school teachers, he developed innovative curricula, especially in mathematics, that support successful learning by students, and exemplify and advance fundamental principles of learning.

Robbie's intellectual style was that of an eager explorer of big questions. His main concern was such a big question: How does the mind of the child develop into that of the adult? Do children go through stages on their way from childish thinking to mature thinking? If so, what are these stages and why do they exist? Toward the end of his life,

Robbie became interested in the question: Do civilizations go through stages of development? He collaborated with social scientist Tom Rohlen in developing a speculative theory of the development of civilizations from hunter-gatherer groups through early cities supported by farming to larger empires linking these cities with trade to modern nations linking their populations with modern transportation and communication infrastructures. He was always eager to discuss big questions with colleagues. He frequently walked around the campus with a colleague discussing such questions as the future of reading when computers and information technology were widely available and the significance of the Vygotskian position that children internalized social interactions. He welcomed new perspectives and treated them with a generously critical attitude. For instance, he accepted the central tenet of Piagetian psychology that children's minds develop in stages while remaining skeptical about the specific stages Piaget identified and about the extent to which these stages were teachable. Thus he became a neo-Piagetian, but never a Piagetian.

As a teacher Robbie was, in the words of Alberta Siegel, Professor Emerita of Psychology, "very devoted to his students and very generous with his time" for them. Many of his publications were co-authored with students and former students and his former students are professors in major universities throughout North America. In the classroom Robbie was an excellent lecturer and a skilled discussion leader. He set high standards for students and yet was always sensitive to their needs. He would often anticipate the danger that a topic might make some students uncomfortable and find a way to approach it tactfully so as to minimize the discomfort. He could adroitly defuse personal conflicts in discussions.

He was a wonderful colleague. He was always available to discuss a troublesome problem or to read a draft. He participated fully in the business of the faculty of the School of Education. He was a trusted mentor to several faculty members in the early years of their careers. He was extremely sensitive to social situations and to the social meanings and overtones of actions. He always knew what course of action each situation called for and found polite yet often ingenious ways to fulfill social obligations. He could set everyone at ease in any social situation. He gave an impression of great propriety yet did so in graceful and distinctive ways.

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