

## Remembering Alan Rogers (1933-2022)

Anna Robinson-Pant

Experienced adult educator and University Professor, Alan Rogers passed away on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. Many colleagues will have worked with Alan - whether on PhD theses, the MA adult literacy module, research projects, books, articles, seminars, conferences or policy initiatives, like our Adult Education 100 events, or simply informal interactions about fledgling ideas or drafts. This is a strong indication of the gap that Alan will leave in so many of our lives - and the enormous contribution he made to the field of adult education and development. His death will also come as a shock to so many of us as - despite suffering pain and illness over many months - he was actively engaging with our research and writing until just last week.

Before moving into international development, Alan had a long career in local history - and developed a strong interest in medieval history. He taught history in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Nottingham for over 20 years - and became Director of the Institute of Continuing Education at Magee University College in Derry, Northern Ireland in 1980. In 1985, he set up his own NGO, Education for Development, working on adult literacy and development training and research projects for over 13 years. Many of us here at UEA (Sheila Aikman, Bryan Maddox, Lindsay Howard and myself) worked with him during this period - particularly the DFID-funded Community Literacy Project Nepal, which developed theoretical ideas on literacy as a social practice as the basis for a national adult literacy programme. My first encounter with Alan was when he arrived at my office in ActionAid where I was working as a desk officer in 1989, asking for funding to make a film on adult literacy in Bangladesh for International Literacy Year. As he liked to remind me ever since, I was a 'donor' then and he was very successful at persuading us to find the money!

There are not many of us who can claim to have written an academic 'best seller'. Alan's 1986 *Teaching Adults* book was and is just that - having reached an impressively diverse audience of researchers, adult educators, policy

makers and facilitators across the world. Alan had a great gift for writing about (and talking about) complex ideas in an accessible and engaging way. He also practised what he preached re adult learning approaches - his students will not forget having to rearrange the room furniture into small groups every time we had an MA session! In 2006, Alan and I set up an MA course in 'Adult literacy, lifelong learning and development: international perspectives' - consisting of three separate modules on literacy policy, literacy practice and literacy theory. Alan worked intensively on developing the curriculum and handbooks, and we co-taught the sessions. The course included engaging with local adult literacy projects in situ, so that students could reflect on concepts of literacy and adult learning in relation to policy and practice - this is when we first started working with adult educator Jules Robbins (who has since been editing a book with Alan), colleagues at New Routes (who then joined the UNESCO Chair steering group) and Norwich Prison. Several of the MA Adult Literacy students - including Ahmmardouh Mjaya, Burcu Evren, Eleni Konidari and Qingru Wang - went on to conduct innovative research in this area at PhD level. An optional MA module based on the original MA adult literacy course is still offered and is always very popular with EDU and DEV students.

Above all, as a founding member of our UEA Literacy and Development Group, Alan was an irreplaceable (very!) 'critical friend' when we wrote the proposal for establishing our UNESCO Chair. He continued to play an important role in the development of this programme, strengthening our research direction in informal learning and literacy, and professional development of literacy facilitators - both continuing themes within his research and publications. The books about to be published in the Bloomsbury series on Adult Literacy, Learning and Social Change (edited by Alan and myself) will be a rich tribute to Alan's intellectual influence and drive - former EDU PhD students Ahmmardouh Mjaya and Fusheng Jia experienced first-hand Alan's 'hands on' approach to editing, with his extensive comments on their draft manuscripts. It is a pity that he just missed seeing the first book published in this series.

We will all miss Alan's incredible intellectual energy, support and friendship which continued until the end. Only a month ago, he was saying how much he enjoyed working with our PhD students and was keen to continue his supervisory role despite many health issues. Alan was also a constant mentor for many early career researchers in the field of adult learning/literacy, particularly in Ethiopia and other countries in Africa where there had previously been little qualitative research in this area.

We are planning to put together a booklet in memory of Alan - please feel free to send any memories, photos, reflections to UNESCO Chair [unesco.chair@uea.ac.uk](mailto:unesco.chair@uea.ac.uk) (and cc to A.Robinson-Pant@uea.ac.uk). We will also hold a memorial event in the Autumn as an opportunity to reflect on Alan's remarkable contribution to adult literacy and adult education in the UK, in our UNESCO Chair partner countries and in many other contexts across the world.