

arithmetic yet themselves are not excited about them. This boy was starting to branch off in so many directions, an unfolding and an unleashing of intellectual power; something took root once it had occurred. The last time I saw this boy was as an adult driving along, looking pleased with the world.

I offer this classroom anecdote to help to fill out a picture of David Wheeler, this lovely and remarkable man. Not least, I would say that this was true of David too: he was a man who was generally pleased with the world.

#### Notes (by the editor)

- [1] This piece is based on two telephone conversations between the editor and David and Frances Hawkins during the Spring of 2001
- [2] This is discussed further on page 4 of David Hawkins' article 'The edge of Platonism', *For the Learning of Mathematics* 5(2), 2-6. The graph itself appears on p. 580 of Leibniz' *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe series VII: Mathematische Schriften. Vol. 1: 1672-1676* (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1990)
- [3] In 1975, David Wheeler gave an AIM conference plenary address entitled 'Humanising mathematical education', a version of which (under the same title) appeared in *Mathematics Teaching* 71, 4-9. However, although related, the notion of mathematics itself as a humanity is not directly addressed there
- [4] David Wheeler wrote about his reading of Serres in this context in: 'Knowledge at the crossroads', *For the Learning of Mathematics* 13(1), 53-54

## An Extraordinary Elsewhereman

WILLIAM C. HIGGINSON

One of the annual landmarks of Canadian intellectual life is a series of fall lectures delivered on the national radio network. Named after a former governor general, the Massey lectures present the voices of pre-eminent scholars grappling with interesting and substantial themes in five hour-long lectures. Over the past three decades, listeners have heard from thinkers as diverse as Northrop Frye, George Steiner, Carlos Fuentes, Ursula Franklin and Charles Taylor.

In 1997, the Massey lecturer was Hugh Kenner, a Canadian-born literary critic and long-term resident of the United States. The title of Kenner's lecture series, and his related book, was *The Elsewhere Community*. In his opening talk, Kenner considered the classical 'continental tour'. In his final session, he reflected on the potential social and cultural impact of electronic communication devices. In between these historical limits, there was a lot of autobiographical material. Central to Kenner's theme was the educational impact of travel, of spending time with carefully chosen 'others' in some 'foreign' culture who see the world differently. Having sought out and experienced this 'elsewhere community', the traveller, according to Kenner's model, returns to his or her society primed with possibilities for innovation and change.

These were provocative ideas for me. They caused me to think of the extent to which travel - I have lived for extended periods of my life in Africa, Continental Europe, Great Britain and the United States - has formed my way

of viewing the world and my consequent approach to life in my native country. The mathematician in me, doubtlessly spurred, at least in part, by exposure to graph theory, moved to an extension of Kenner's definition. If we had 'elsewhererson category 1' - Kenner's original - who does a complete tour from society A to society B and back to society A, then might we not have a 'one-way elsewhererson', someone who voyages out from his or her homeland but who does not return. These speculations brought me quickly to thoughts about my long-time friend and colleague, David Wheeler. At a subconscious level, he may even have been the archetype for my creation of the second category of elsewhererson. David had, at age 50, relocated to Canada - first to Québec and then to British Columbia: except for short visits, he never returned to his native England.

I met David more than thirty years ago when I was a student in England, studying initially for a 'Certificate in Education' (a teaching qualification), and then for a Master's degree. I had come to my Cert. Ed. course with a rather unusual background: two years of unqualified teaching in Canada and two years as a teacher/acting headmaster of a secondary boarding school in northern Kenya. With this experience I found many of the formal and informal opportunities available to students much more attractive than did my more conventional peers who were, for the most part, fresh out of undergraduate programs.

I was, in particular, quite entranced by the activities of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics. Professional gatherings of mathematics educators in Ontario had been rather stodgy affairs, full of dry lectures, low-level workshops and a heavy commercial presence. The ATM gatherings I began to attend in England were, both in structure and content, a revelation. The meetings had an egalitarian flavour, the intellectual level was bracingly high and themes were dealt with in considerable depth. One came away from these highly participatory gatherings intrigued, stimulated and challenged.

A central figure in this movement was the editor of the association's first-class journal, *Mathematics Teaching*, one D. H. Wheeler, at that time a senior lecturer in education at the University of Leicester. I was, at first, somewhat intimidated by this large and imposing man with his quick wit and formidable intelligence. Before long, however, I came to see the warmth, generosity and sensitivity behind what might be taken as a gruff exterior, and deeply appreciated his kindness to a young, visiting student. We chatted at several meetings and corresponded a bit. He encouraged me to submit some of the ideas we had spoken about for publication in *Mathematics Teaching*.

Our next contact was some five years later, when I learned to my pleasure that David was moving to Canada to take up a position at Concordia University in Montréal. In the meantime, both of us had made major 'elsewhererson' moves. I had returned to Canada, completed my doctorate and had begun my university teaching career. David had left Leicester, moving to New York City to work with Caleb Gattegno as an educational consultant before deciding to go back into the academic world in Canada. Over the next twenty-five years, David was, from a Canadian perspective, the best of all possible elsewherepersons. (Category 2 elsewherepersons)

get, depending on the individual, very mixed reviews in their adopted countries – the classic examples of this are, perhaps, some of the ‘assisted passage’ British in Australia who became known as ‘whingeing Poms’.) In addition to his numerous friendships and important personal relationships emerging from his professional life, David made two highly significant contributions to the mathematics education community in Canada and beyond. In the best ‘elsewhereperson’ tradition, these both emerged from experience he brought to one culture from another.

The first of these, building on his editorial experience with *Mathematics Teaching*, is the journal in which these remarks are situated. It would be, in a sense, redundant to point to the many characteristics of this publication which are a direct result of David’s values and expertise. Individuals who are regular readers will already have come to appreciate, consciously or unconsciously, the clarity, range and depth which distinguish *FLM* articles from the more ‘templatish’ offerings of other publications in the field.

The second, considerably influenced by his ATM experience, is the Canadian Mathematics Education Study Group. Shortly after arriving at Concordia, David wrote to mathematicians and mathematics educators at most major universities in Canada asking whether they saw any value in trying to create some form of activity in mathematics education at a national level. Several respondents indicated that they felt that existing channels of communication, especially through the NCTM, adequately met their needs.

Two to the most encouraging responses came, independently, from Queen’s University in Kingston. The first was from me. Intrigued by the possibility of working with David on a project of this sort, I expressed a strong interest. More significantly, the long-time head of the Department of Mathematics, John Coleman, also responded positively. David followed through on these two offers with typical efficiency and imagination. Using funds made available through John’s leadership of a national study of the role of the mathematical sciences commissioned by the Science Council of Canada, an invitational meeting was held in Kingston in 1977. This gathering led directly to the formation of CMESG. In his characteristically patient, sensitive and thoughtful way, David led the construction of this group with its clear connections to the tenor of the ATM.

These two institutions have come to be defining features in the professional lives of almost everyone in the Canadian mathematics education community. We owe David Wheeler a great deal for his imagination, intelligence, dedication and discipline. Our lives have been very much enriched by his decision to not just visit, but to come to live with us.

## Remembering David

BETTY JOHNSTON

I was going to start this story in Leicester, England, but in fact it begins more than thirty years ago in Africa, in a

remote high school in Ghana. Where would you go in England, we asked the volunteer British teachers, if you wanted an exciting post-graduate education qualification in mathematics (for me), in sociology (for Ken)? Ah, Leicester, said Tom, it’s got a good sociology diploma and there’s this great guy – David Wheeler – who teaches maths education. Definitely Leicester.

*A Midland town, parks and large houses, an attic flat at the top of an elegant brick house. Shared bathroom, with a bath once a week! Walking to class, through autumn, winter, spring. Mulled wine, pubs, a tight budget. We have just scraped in with our colonial credentials – the following year the rules change, and we would have had to pay impossible fees. New Zealand relatives send a side of lamb to keep us from perceived starvation. So, once a week, proper coffee and a record borrowed for sixpence from the local library.*

I am in a small group of maths education students and David is our tutor. I am a little older than the others, having taught for a few years. Most will be high school teachers but I am not sure – perhaps there is room for more active engagement in primary classrooms? David says to try both. Maths changes for me. It shifts from its hard edges, its rules, to openness, conversation, possibilities. Demanding as before, but less predictable and ?? Films, discovery.

He is a provocative tutor. He discusses our assignments, but refuses to grade them. We are becoming teachers, he argues, and must learn to grade ourselves as we will be grading others. The students mutter, “He has us in little boxes, he’s just not telling us”. It is hard to let go of the need for judgement, for praise. Later, I read a furious footnote in one of his articles:

Automatically praising kids is an abominable practice, debilitating to both parties; after a time, everyone becomes intellectually and morally flabby, especially the teacher.

Out walking one Sunday afternoon, we pass David’s house, and unthinkingly casual – New Zealanders that we are – we knock on the door. He is taken by a very English surprise – caught in a courteous confusion. We don’t stay long. It is only shortly before he dies that I appreciate the patterned dailiness of his life.

*We are back in the southern hemisphere, Australia, Sydney. Children enter our world. We share a large old house with others, fringe hippies. Vietnam is an issue, anything is possible. Fired by teaching in Leicestershire schools, we are appalled by the routineness of NSW primary schools. With others, we begin a small progressive school.*

Airmail envelopes with blue and red stripes bring news over those next ten years. I enjoy the letters, they are sharp and quick, always interesting. We exchange ideas about books and writing, films, sometimes people, sometimes food, rarely maths. I cannot share music far – I look on in envy at this detailed pleasure. And now David is coming to stay with us while he is a keynote speaker at a conference in Sydney.