



**David Harry Wheeler**  
*(1925 – 2000)*

# Editorial

This issue is dedicated to the memory of David Wheeler, founding editor of this journal. Each piece has one or more connections to his life and work, which for much of the time were inseparable. Over the last few years, he would sometimes say, "I have given fifty years of my life to mathematics education - I think that's enough".

There have been various summary pieces of remembrance and appreciation which have appeared in other places since David's death in early October last year. Two such are the obituary written by David Fielker to be found in *Mathematics Teaching* (December 2000, 173, pp. 56-57), a shortened version of which appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper in the U.K., and the December 2000 issue of the ICMI Bulletin (#49, available via <http://www.mathunion.org/ICMI/bulletin/>), which contains short pieces by Bernard Hodgson, Trevor Fletcher, Mogens Niss and Sandy Dawson.

This issue has a wider brief. It was my intent first and foremost to let us hear David's written voice once again. He published a fair amount during his life, but there is not a huge legacy, certainly not one commensurate with his stature. In corresponding with Jeremy Kilpatrick, he sent me an unpublished paper David had written for a conference held at the University of Georgia in the summer of 1980. I am both grateful and very pleased to be able to print it here for the first time. As chance would have it, David's post-meeting final revision date was to the very month the same as the first issue of *For the Learning of Mathematics*, the July of some twenty-one years past. His article comprises the lead piece in this issue.

Wheeler's lifetime preoccupation with the topic and notion of 'mathematisation' (of which he once remarked "an ugly word, but no matter") in various direct and indirect guises was long-felt. And as a memorial issue took shape, this theme came to the fore as a partially unifying strand. I therefore additionally decided to reprint his talk to the International Congress of Mathematicians in 1978 in Helsinki (and I am very grateful to the IDM in Bielefeld for permission to reproduce this piece here).

My second intent was to offer space for pieces which in some way evoked elements of David's remarkable self: his passions, intellectual rigour, specific academic preoccupations and sense of fittingness, as well as that unmistakable twinkle with which he often addressed the world. Therefore, following this opening Wheeler article entitled 'A mathematics educator looks at mathematical abilities', in the *Communications* section there are pieces by a number of colleague-friends recalling distinctive aspects of their connection with David Wheeler: David and Frances Hawkins, Bill Higginson, Betty Johnston, Tom Kieren, Jeremy Kilpatrick, Colette Laborde and Eric Love.

Possible ways of conjuring Wheeler's presence and

diverse modes of being in the world include his prodigious correspondence, initially by letter and latterly by email. Dick Tahta, in 'Seeing voices', lets readers in on the sort of regular email interaction he had with David. Marion Walter's links with David Wheeler also go back to the U.K. ATM conferences and her article, 'Looking at a painting with a mathematical eye', connects to mathematisation. I assembled the notes for the piece that follows in order to bring out some more of the artistic background to this painting, as well as to raise the question of in what sense is Walter's work a remathematisation of the picture.

Dave Hewitt completes his trilogy of articles on the theme of arbitrary and necessary, and in a fortuitous way it links to David Wheeler through the common ancestor of Caleb Gattegno. Gattegno's profound claim that 'only awareness is educable' is echoed in Hewitt's subtitle 'Educating awareness', but there is also a flavour captured by Jan Zwicky in her poem sequence *Wittgenstein Elegies*, where she writes:

*Although there is something arbitrary  
In our notations, this much is not;  
That when we have determined one thing  
Arbitrarily, some other thing  
Is necessarily the case.*

The education of others' awarenesses was an approach to teaching which David Wheeler, that consummate teacher, embodied. In the final piece of this issue in memory, Lesley Lee recalls to life some of her sense of David Wheeler as her teacher, research mentor, colleague and friend.

I first met David Wheeler in August of 1980 at the ICME IV meeting in Berkeley, again at the precise moment of the birth of *FLM*. Three years later, I found myself reviewing *FLM* for *Mathematics Teaching* (103, p. 59). With the *chutzpah* of the newly thirty, and with no actual editorial experience to draw on, I wrote:

The functioning of an editor can only be tenuously gleaned from the journal itself, yet editors filter, select and juxtapose to create something. [...] What is attributable to him may only become visible when another takes his place. [...] To what extent is a journal] a projection of a particular person, giving force to the heard label 'David Wheeler's journal' [...] Initially this seems ludicrous - after all he didn't write any of the articles. Yet I still wonder

Putting this issue together has been both an act of love and a significant challenge, as more than once I found myself transgressing others' grieving (however good the cause), as well as needing to contend with my own profound sense of loss. For me, this is still - and likely always will be - David Wheeler's journal.