

## **David E. Eskey: In Memoriam**

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On Saturday, October 19, the world of EFL/ESL, and the area of second language reading in particular, lost one of its best and brightest; David Eskey died of a sudden and unexpected heart attack while attending a University of Southern California (USC) football game.

David's postsecondary education was in English and Linguistics; first at Pennsylvania State University where he earned his BA, then at Columbia University where he earned an MA in English, and finally at the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned an MA in Linguistics followed shortly by a Ph.D. in English.

Except for brief teaching stints at Carnegie-Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, and Thammasat University in Thailand, David spent virtually his entire academic career at USC. He loved USC and the American Language Institute, where he served as director at three different points in time, most recently from 1991 until 2001.

David was an early advocate of "interactive" models of second language reading, but he was leery of those who interpreted these models as being primarily top-down in approach. He emphasized the importance of bottom-up processing, and he particularly emphasized the importance of "holding in the bottom" -- a phrase he acknowledged getting from a colleague, but a phrase with which he will be indelibly identified.

We would point out that some of the most exciting current research in L2 reading is similarly focused on "holding in the bottom" -- on the role of word recognition, the role of the similarities and differences between the L1 phonological and orthographic mappings, on the one hand, and L2 phonological and orthographic mappings, on the other.

In his own work, David had a teacher/practitioner orientation. His research was never research for the sake of research, research that did not have direct or immediate classroom applications. His approach was always based on common sense and a solid footing in the EFL/ESL reading classroom; David was a classroom-, teacher-, learner-oriented researcher.

While David was interested in cognitive aspects of L2 reading, his burning passion was for the social aspects of L2 literacy acquisition. He was a fan of Frank Smith and of the notion that literacy acquisition involves "joining the reading club"

David co-edited three books on L2 reading, one with Fraida Dubin and Bill Grabe in 1986, and two with us in 1987 and 1988. David was the glue in our two collaborative efforts, keeping us on course and keeping the collaboration enjoyable.

In addition to collaborating on two anthologies, the three of us collaborated for years in organizing the annual TESOL Reading Research Colloquia, and then, subsequently, a couple of years of Reading Research Colloquia at AAAL. One of our fondest memories is of the traditional dinners we would have after each colloquium, with our other presenters and any attending spouses and significant others. These dinners were always highlighted by David's delightful sense of humor and storytelling.

Anyone who ever met David, and especially those of us fortunate enough to have been among his many friends, can attest to his immense personal charm. His sense of humor --- sly, irreverent, and self-deprecating --- combined with an easy laugh made him welcome company. Widely traveled, well-read, and socially and politically engaged, David brought energy and interest to a surprising range of topics, from basketball to world politics. And his talent as a raconteur was legend.

As his many professional achievements attest, David took his work and the work of his colleagues very seriously. But he never took himself too seriously. This was perhaps the greatest of his personal charms. It certainly made him a pleasure to work with. It also allowed him to keep focus on those things that were clearly important to him: family and friends. In particular, he took special joy in watching his daughters mature into happy, accomplished women.

And, of course, there was Eleanor. David was a true romantic who seems to have found his soul mate in Eleanor. Sharing a passion for L2 classroom reading, they worked together easily. Perhaps more importantly, they obviously loved just being together. A self-professed "mature onset" happy newlywed, over the past few years with Eleanor, David radiated a lightness of spirit. The happy, joyful couple were models for how to approach the inevitable autumnal part of life.

It has indeed been our profound pleasure to have known David Eskey; he was a wonderful colleague and a dear friend. We miss him terribly.