



Colleagues,

It is with great sadness I inform you of the death of Professor Gordon Wells in a bicycle accident in Pennsylvania on July 12, 2020. We were privileged to have Gordon as a member of the Education Department faculty from 2000 to 2012. He was a great man and distinguished scholar with an international reputation. To date his publications have been cited over 30,000 times in scholarly journals in many countries and languages.

Gordon spent his early life and career in England where he gained his B.A from the University of Cambridge and his Ph.D. from the University of Bristol. Prior to coming to UCSC, he served on the faculty of the University of Bristol and the University of Toronto / OISE (Ontario Institute of Educational Studies). He was drawn to UCSC by the strength of its interdisciplinary scholarship on sociocultural theories of learning.

Gordon was a major theoretical scholar of applied linguistics and education as well as a leader in the application of CHAT theory to education. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) helps us understand and analyze the relationship between the human mind (what people think and feel) and activity (what people do). It traces its origins to the cultural-historical school of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who saw the dynamics of consciousness as essentially subjective, shaped by the history of each individual's social and cultural experience. For Gordon, it was simply how children learn to talk, and talk to learn. His seminal book Wells G. (1999) *Dialogic Inquiry: Towards a Socio-cultural Practice and Theory of Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press has been very influential to sociocultural scholars over the last twenty years and to date has been cited 4,600 times.

Gordon, however, went beyond theoretical treatises and applied theory to educational practice. In the later part of his career, he focused on preparing teachers to use these principles in educating their students, and he very explicitly modelled CHAT in his teaching of Education 265, *Learning, Teaching and Schooling in a Diverse Society* to the MA/Teaching Credential students. One student said in her evaluation of this class: "He is an absolutely amazing teacher; couldn't ask for a better one. He is really lovely as well". Which pretty much sums up Gordon.

Gordon was much more than a scholar and teacher. He was a kind and gentle man who loved to cook, tend his garden, play the flute in small ensembles, and entertain family, friends and colleagues. Some of you will remember the parties he hosted for the Education Department in his beautiful garden. Even at 85, he was a physically and intellectually active man. He filled a large space in many people's lives, not the least mine. Gordon was a dear friend. We shared a common cultural history being born and educated in England, and we often (not always) viewed the world through a similar lens. I spent many happy hours sitting with him and his cat, Hector, drinking tea or a glass of wine in the garden or by the wood burning stove

in his house. I still think of those days when I visit my sister who bought Gordon's house when he left Santa Cruz.

Gordon loved his wife Mari deeply and she is bereft by his loss. Soleste Hilberg and Tamara Ball, who were Gordon's last Ph.D. students, are working with Mari on a memorial website where friends, students and colleagues can pay their respects to Gordon and acknowledge his contributions to the field and to their lives.\* I believe this will be a comfort to Mari and I encourage those who knew Gordon to contribute to it.

Trish Stoddart, Professor of Science Education, Emerita, University of California Santa Cruz

\*Memorial site information will be posted as it is available.

\*Mari Haneda, Professor of World Languages Education and Applied Linguistics,  
Pennsylvania State University

\*Soleste Hilberg, Director of Teacher Education, University of California Santa Cruz

\*Tamara Ball, Project Scientist, Institute for Scientist and Engineer Educators, University of California Santa Cruz