Vale Fritz Oser (2020)

I knew Fritz as a key moral educator and Kohlbergian theorist well before I met him. It was one of the highlights of my attendance at the EARLI conference in Fribourg in 2001 to finally meet him. He was warm and gracious to me from the outset, interested in my work, in what was happening in Australian education and always encouraging of my participation in EARLI as a non-European.

We met many times over the years at EARLI biennial and SIG13 and SIG19 conferences, as well as AERA and AME conferences. Our collaboration grew in a number of ways. When he organised the AME conference at Fribourg in 2006, he asked me to chair a symposium dealing with Islam’s interface with its Abrahamic sibling religions. At the Amsterdam EARLI of 2009, Fritz was one of my nominators for taking up the position as SIG19 coordinator. Around the same time, he contributed to my edited handbook on values education and at the Exeter EARLI of 2011, we joined forces with Karin Heinrichs in the editing of a handbook on moral motivation. I last saw him at AERA in 2018 when we signed off with Springer to edit (with Karin and Johannes Bauer) an edited handbook on teacher ethos, one of Fritz’s persistent research interests. This handbook will go ahead as an ongoing testament to Fritz’s work.

I value highly my time working with Fritz. I count him among my own later-career mentors, as well as a colleague, learning much from him which I continue to take with me in my work. He was a powerful figure in our field, noted for his work well beyond Europe and the West.
Above all, I value Fritz’s collegiality and friendship. Whether in Fribourg, Amsterdam, Munich, Exeter, Canterbury, Cyprus, Malta, Pasadena, San Antonio or New York, one of the things I looked forward to most about a conference was meeting up with him. It was one of my deeper regrets that he was too ill to attend EARLI in Aachen in 2019. Our regular meetings happened over lunch or dinner, sometimes just a coffee as we sat around before or after a session, or in an airport waiting for our respective flights. Apart from face to face, we communicated regularly by Skype and email.

Beyond the warmth and ease of chat, there was always an insight, a new thought, an idea to take away from any engagement with Fritz. He was to me an archetypal scholar who could turn his head in any number of directions and never lost his verve for sharpening our understanding of the optimal ways in which our field of endeavour might function.

Education is the better for Fritz Oser being here - and the poorer for his leaving us.

Vale Fritz!

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In memory of Professor Fritz Oser

Fritz Oser was very important to me personally and to the academic community at the University of Helsinki. After my doctoral dissertation that dealt with teacher effectiveness, I developed a deep interest in teachers’ professional ethics. This interest guided me to the research works of Fritz Oser and I met him for the first time in person at AERA in 1996 in New York. After that meeting, Fritz invited me to visit his University in Fribourg, Switzerland, and shared his instrument to measure teachers’ professional ethos with me. I reported results from Finnish teachers’ moral dilemmas and their strategies in solving them, using a translated version of Fritz’s instrument. This publication, that is published in 1999 in the Journal of Moral Education, is still my most cited work.

In 2002, I became a Professor of Religious Education at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. In 2005, I had the honor to host Fritz Oser as an honorary doctor in a festive celebration at our Faculty of Theology. In that celebration, my husband, Henry, and I had the chance to spend many days with Fritz and his wife, Gretl. During my years at the Faculty of Theology, I worked with Fritz on topics related to religiosity and spirituality. Fritz supported the establishment of SIG Religious and Spiritual Education (now Religions and Worldviews in Education), and I had the chance to be the first coordinator of this SIG, with Zehavit Gross.

In 2010, I became a Professor of Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, and the co-operation with Fritz continued. We met every year at AERA conferences in the US and had many symposia together. In Europe, we met at the EARLI conferences and EU project meetings. Fritz always carried a big bag with him, with scientific articles and new ideas. I admire his creative thinking and scientific discipline. He gave the most creative names to the symposia we arranged together and, in conferences, he always attended his colleagues’ sessions and took part in the discussions afterwards. He was the best discussant I know when he took that role in conferences.

We also discussed our personal lives and our family issues. Fritz had three daughters like I have. Fritz was a devoted grandfather and the grandchildren brought a lot of happiness to the last years of his life. I am grateful that I had the chance to know Fritz and learn from him so much. He loved good books, great wine and conversations with other scholars. Every time I met him, he asked me is your life good and suggested a class of wine! The last time I saw him was in New York in our home where Henry and I held a wine party for our international friends, including Fritz and Gretl. My last memory is of Fritz enjoying our best wines and admiring our book shelves. I can still remember his smile among his closest friends and the talks we had that night. A very good last memory of a great scholar and a dear friend!

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