

DAVID JOSEPH FLINDERS

David Joseph Flinders describes himself as “a secondary generalist with interests in curriculum theory and school reform.” Those of us who know Dave, while recognizing his gifts as a scholar, more often remark on his more human attributes. “A gentle soul,” “a caring and compassionate man,” someone who “readily makes connections to others,” who is “affable and unflappable,” is how several current colleagues recently described him. Many remarked on his calmness and quick wit that act to defuse even the most fraught situations. Colleague Dan Castner connected Dave’s positive personal dispositions directly to his abilities as a scholar, saying, “It is interesting to think of Dave’s affable personality as a vital part of his accomplished career. Few individuals have the ability to simultaneously be a giant in the field of curriculum studies, while also embodying a wonderful sense of intellectual humility. For example, his ability to codify disparate and even feuding factions of the curriculum field is truly unparalleled.”

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, Dave was the middle child of three, raised by his mother, who was a first grade teacher. He attended the University of Utah, where, despite being accepted conditionally, he graduated magna cum laude in 1978 (B.A. English with sociology minor). Upon graduation, he taught high school English in nearby Sandy, Utah, after which he relocated to California to teach middle school English, social studies, and then ESL. While employed as a teacher, Dave earned M.A. (Education, 1981) and education specialist degrees (program evaluation research, 1984).

Dave continued his studies at Stanford University, completing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction in 1987. There he had powerful mentors who influenced his personal philosophy of curriculum and the course of his academic career, including Elliot Eisner, his advisor, and Nel Noddings, instructor for seminars. Both Eisner (education reform, arts education, and qualitative research) and Noddings (ethics of care in education) are intellectual giants in the field of curriculum. Dave would go on to publish with both Eisner and Noddings and to write, teach, and do presentations about the influence of their work throughout his career.

Another important influence from Dave’s years at Stanford was his long-lasting relationship with student colleague Stephen Thornton (University of South Florida). They have worked for decades as co-editors of the highly regarded *Curriculum Studies Reader*, first published in 1997 and now in its 5th edition. Thornton says this about Dave: “Writing with him is a singular pleasure, as he is a generous and consummate collaborator.” The *Reader*, an expansive volume, is considered a groundbreaking collection of essays and articles by prominent curriculum theorists and educational philosophers from the 19th century to the current day.

In 1986, together with Noddings and Thornton, Dave published his first article, titled “The Null Curriculum: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Implications,” which appeared in *Curriculum Inquiry* and was republished online in 2014. Since that first publication, Dave has been prolific, publishing 12 books and over 50 book chapters, articles, and other publications. His first book, *Voices from the Classroom* (1989), launched an important strand of his work examining responsive teaching practices, work that led to collaboration with renowned educator and environmental activist Chet Bowers on Dave’s next two books. Another important strand is his contribution to the study and application of qualitative methods in research. He has written extensively and taught about educational criticism, narrative inquiry, and connoisseurship in qualitative studies.

Recipient and nominee of numerous teaching and mentoring awards, Dave truly is, as IU colleague Cary Buzzelli noted, “beloved by his students.” In addition to popular graduate seminars, he was an important leader in the Community of Teachers, a highly specialized teacher licensing program that is student-governed and co-led by students and faculty. Dave’s students say they appreciate how he connects to them as individuals, and how they enjoy the way he starts each class with something light-hearted and humorous—a joke, pun, comic, etc.—sometimes drawing laughs, other times groans. His knowledge of curriculum and expertise in qualitative methods and his well-earned reputation for being a supportive mentor resulted in



his directing and serving on dozens of dissertation committees. Notably, and commendably, Dave’s support as teacher, advisor, and mentor was extended to many students who because of background or area of interest did not fit traditional molds or expectations.

Dave’s legacy will be his numerous contributions to the field of curriculum studies in the form of the work he has disseminated and the lasting influence of his leadership in numerous positions on executive boards and committees within his professional organizations. Just as importantly, his spirit and influence are stamped on the countless students whose lives he touched, now mostly teachers and academics themselves, through his lessons about being kind, humane, and generous in their work with others.

Dave and his wife, Lynn Flinders, who married in 1987, are both dog lovers. As of this writing, they reside in Bloomington with their current pooch. Lynn, who is recognized as a gifted painter, is a disabilities advocate and retired from her position at IU as an academic advisor. If you run into Dave, be sure to ask him for the punchline to: “Rene Descartes walks into a coffee shop . . .”

Mary Benson McMullen