

## ROBIN DAY: A TRIBUTE

Martin Andrew, Jo Kirkwood, Malcolm Macpherson  
and Henk Roodt

This issue of *Scope* is dedicated to Robin Day, the lead author of our first paper, passed away on Friday 25 September 2020 following a battle with cancer.



Figure 1. Always a chin-stroker: Robin Day (on left) with Lindsay Smith. Photo credit – John Gualter

In a staff communication, Chief Executive Megan Gibbons noted that Robin had been with Otago Polytechnic for nearly 34 years, starting his career as a tutor in the School of Nursing. "He then moved on to become the Head of School, Nursing and Midwifery, and eventually Deputy Chief Executive." He also spent a period as acting chief executive prior to the arrival of Phil Ker, a co-author of the paper. More recently, Robin worked in Capable NZ as an assessor. He was known, John Gualter recalls, to play a mean electric guitar at events. His "love of making music and his ability to reach people with it" appears in the materials we received from colleagues past and present to assemble this tribute. This short tribute has been speedily assembled by some of those who knew Robin.

Robyn Hogan first met Robin in the 1980s when they shared a common interest in programmes for at-risk young people and combined efforts in OP courses. She recalls his early adoption of online social media like WikiEducator for pedagogical purposes, and even his sharing knowledge on the use of TradeMe. Robyn recalls some of his strengths:

Robin's open-mindedness, flexibility, common sense and ability to think outside the square; his clear philosophy around APL; the place of the working environment in developing high level skills and knowledge outside of the formal classroom setting; his interest and knowledge around blended approaches to learning including the use of new technologies and e-learning; his passion around providing educational opportunities for those who were not given them as young people.

Glenys Ker worked with Robin for 15 years and travelled the nation as well as Australia and Rarotonga as assessors. She recalls, "You never knew what questions he would ask – he was naturally curious and interested in everyone and everything". Her recollections are filled with anecdotes involving his love of gadgets. The following passage summarises the Robin we all knew and illustrates these traits in an anecdote:

He engaged with people, he enjoyed their life stories, he knew lots about everything and the learners felt listened too, they knew he genuinely cared about them. Robin was a passionate believer in education for all and he enjoyed seeing this happen for learners. Not a particularly traditional learner himself, he could relate to learning by doing, learning by experience, learning in the workplace. As a colleague, friend and mentor Robin was loyal and a man of integrity – there have been times over the years that he has supported me – and on one occasion he told me to leave the 'talking to him'. I won't forget his tremendous support for me.

Learning Facilitator Trish Franklin, who retired in late September 2020, remembers: "As lead assessor Robin had a great gift for putting learners at ease before they started their presentations. I never ceased to be amazed at the breadth of his interests and wide-ranging knowledge and enthusiasm for a huge variety of subjects – he always found common ground and never in my experience repeated himself. He was full of surprises and always entertaining!"

"Pracademic" colleague Margy-Jean Malcolm, an author in this edition, offers her key memory of Robin as someone who was

one of the first Capable NZ staff I met – in fact, I think it had a different name then. I was asked to be part of an assessment panel for a BAM (Bachelor of Applied Management) learner from the NFP (not for profit) sector. Robin was a great facilitator of the panel – helping the learner relax and asking questions to bring out their best. He provided my first introduction to what an assessor's job was in this space – showing me new ways of thinking about evidence, capabilities and the power of learners articulating their own unique framework of practice. He role-modelled and started my induction into Capable NZ values, culture and practice, for which I am very grateful. You don't teach these things, you live them, and others learn from being around you.

In a similar vein, Martin Andrew recollects:

My first assessments at Capable involved working alongside Robin. Assessing Master of Professional Practice learners' presentational assessments in the light of their written assessments is a challenge on one's first run. As a co-assessor, I found Robin modest, encouraging and open, and always appreciating the depths of experience of individuals, both fellow assessors and learners. Clearly, to him, this was identity work. I observed the value of what I first saw as chit-chat as part of a conscious process of acclimatising everyone into the high-stakes space of assessment and putting the candidate at ease.

In addition to observing closely the Robin formula for in-person assessments, I also observed the Robin formula for writing feedback reports, always strength-based. His reports allowed the learner to have improved via reflection from the time of completing the written work to the time of presenting, in such a way that the presentation showed the learner at his or her best. I learned from this the importance of always stretching learners to give their best version of themselves, and assess them on that, not allowing apparent weaknesses in the technicalities of the written work to occlude the moment of 'best performance'. The oral response at the end of the session was always congratulatory and positive, and I only ever saw smiles. I was

fortunate to repeat this experience three more times before becoming myself a lead assessor. Even today, I am unable to perform this role without remembering my learnings from Robin.

These narratives are echoed in the words of other colleagues. Heather Carpenter also credits Robin with being a key source of her early learning on processes, programme development and assessment. His appreciation of learners' journeys creates memories that last long, both for assessors and the learners. His insights and wisdom have become part of the legacy he leaves behind for us.

Oonagh McGirr attended Robin's funeral, and reflected on what was said and seen at this bittersweet event:

Robin was a polymath, a multitasker and a high achiever: He brought laughter, curiosity and an enquiring mind to all that he did. He shared freely, mentored wisely and challenged us to be the best versions of ourselves. His generosity of spirit was matched by his loyalty to friends and family alike. An admirable adversary in moments of challenging debate, he defended ideas and ideals with passion and clarity, and always sought fair resolution. He was loved and loving in equal measure.

Fare forward dear Robin – husband, father, friend, colleague, mentor and leader.

We will miss you.

He mihi aroha tēnei ki a rātou, e te whanau pani, i raro i te korowai tino pōuri nei. E te rakatira, e Robin, moe mai, okioki mai rā.