

## OBITUARY

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# Michael Armstrong

Michael Armstrong, who has died at his home in Southampton, was Chairperson of the *FORUM* Editorial Board for over twenty years, and centrally associated with the journal for more than half a century. Committed to the principle of comprehensive education, to the imagination's vital importance for learning, and to the profound educational significance of children's narrative thinking and writing, Michael taught in every educational phase from infant school to university.

Michael began his long career as a teacher in 1959, at Wandsworth Comprehensive School. Five years later he joined the *FORUM* Board under Brian Simon's editorship. At this time he also became a research officer with the Nuffield Foundation, helping to create a wide range of innovative learning resources to encourage group work and individual study as one means of supporting teachers in both primary and secondary schools who wanted to work in unstreamed classrooms, free from determinist assumptions about 'ability'. Michael's name first appears in Volume 8, number 3 of the journal, a Special Issue devoted to 'Content and Method in the Non-Streamed School'. Perhaps Michael himself wrote the issue's second editorial, which contains this characteristic insight: 'The abolition of streaming ... implied the restoration to the teacher of his creative role as educator'.

In 1970 Michael took up a teaching post at the radical Countesthorpe College, where he also conducted research. Six years later he switched educational phases, going to teach at Sherard Primary School in Melton Mowbray, the setting for his first book. In 1981 he became Head Teacher at Harwell Primary School in Oxfordshire, retiring in 1999. Michael also worked with teachers at the Harvard Graduate School, and from 1986 annually at the Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College, Vermont, where his course on 'Describing the Imagination' was renowned.

Michael published many articles in *FORUM*, authored or co-authored a number of pamphlets defending aspects of comprehensive education, and addressed many conferences on the contemporary educational scene. He gave the Brian Simon Memorial Lecture in 2012. His publications include *Closely Observed Children: the diary of a primary classroom* (1980), *Children Writing Stories*

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(2006), and *What Children Know: essays on children's literary and visual art* (2011). Michael was a key member of the team that wrote the Cambridge Primary Review (*Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, 2009) He declared the final report: 'a revolutionary document ... the essential authoritative document we have been waiting for'.

Michael became Chairperson of the *FORUM* Board in 1994. The world of education has been enriched by his work, and in particular by the sustained attention and deep consideration he has given to what children write. To those of us involved with the journal, his loss is incalculable.

We shall remember and celebrate Michael fully in the Spring 2017 issue. The editors would welcome contributions ([FORUM@wwwords.co.uk](mailto:FORUM@wwwords.co.uk)) – whether snapshots, reminiscences or essays – from those who knew Michael, were taught by him, or have been influenced in their thinking and practice by his remarkable and enduring work.