

# **MEMORIAL RESOLUTION RICHARD E. SNOW (1936-1997)**

Richard Eric Snow, died on December 5, 1997 of pancreatic cancer at his campus home with his wife, Joan Talbert, and son, Ryan near his side. He was 61 years old and had spent 30 years on the Stanford faculty.

Dick was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1936. He earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Virginia (1958), and his master's and doctoral degrees in psychology from Purdue University (1960 and 1963, respectively). He then joined the Purdue faculty in 1963 as an assistant professor and continued as a tenured associate professor and Head of the Instructional Media Unit until 1966.

In 1966 Dick joined Stanford University as a research associate at the Stanford Center for Research and Development on Teaching in 1966. A year later he was appointed assistant professor of Education and then, two years later, to associate professor. In 1971 his position was converted to associate professor with tenure, and he was promoted to full professor in 1975 with a courtesy appointment in the Department of Psychology. Dick was named the Howard H. and Jessie T. Watkins University Professor in 1992. For health reasons, Dick retired in the summer of 1997 to become a chaired emeritus professor, though he continued his research and teaching. He specialized in human aptitudes and learning environments, areas that were reflected in his teaching, research and professional activities.

Dick studied and taught courses and seminars on human aptitudes—those abilities, motivations, volitions that distinguish individuals one from another. His signature course was Education 255/Psychology 133, Human Abilities, and was open to and attracted both advanced undergraduates and graduate students. The catalog describes the course as follows: “Introductory survey of psychological theory and research on human cognitive abilities; their nature, development and measurement, and their importance in society....” He also taught courses and seminars on educational psychology, human abilities, and social- and behavioral-science research methods.

His strongest teaching lay in his mentoring of students. We have seen none better. His ability to advise while giving free rein to his students' interests and varied backgrounds were unequalled. This is what attracted students to him from across the School of Education, and across the Stanford campus. If you had stepped into his office, you would have seen a blackboard, along the side of which were arrayed some 30 names of students he was helping with their work. They were his own advisees, students with other

advisers who, attracted by his ideas, had attached themselves, and still other students, most not in “Psych Studies,” whom Dick spotted as being adrift and took under his wing.

He was the driving force behind the Education School’s Committee (like a department) on Psychological Studies in Education, with his leadership as chair beginning just after his arrival on the faculty in 1967 and continuing off and on (mostly on!) right up to the time of his death. The Committee includes faculty, research, and courses that address experimental, differential, developmental, quantitative, and counseling psychology as they apply to a wide range of educational settings. Much to Dick’s credit, the Committee has been consistently ranked the number one educational psychology program in the United States for the past 30 years.

Dick’s primary research agenda focused on how individual differences in aptitudes played out in different educational settings which received wide attention in the monumental treatise with Lee Cronbach on aptitude-treatment interactions. He approached his research from multiple perspectives, those of a differential psychologist, experimental psychologist, personality psychologist, and cognitive scientist. Of particular interest to Snow was the match between individual differences and learning environments on the one hand, and how variation in learning environments elicited different patterns of aptitudes on the other.

Studying the link between aptitudes and learning environments made Dick’s research agenda broader than these two areas. Indeed, his research spanned a wide array of topics. These topics included work on aptitudes and instructional media, not the least of which was the isolation of new aptitudes for audiovisual information processing. They included research on teaching-  
- Brunswikian representative designs for research on teaching; teacher expectancies and the Pygmalion effect; evaluation of systems for medical education and health worker performance; and theory construction that promises to change the relation between instruction and assessment. They also included differential and cognitive research on mental abilities in academic tasks. He highlighted the complexity continuum in hierarchical and radex models of intellectual performance; analyzed the cognitive impact of tests for purposes of redesign; and disentangled knowledge and reasoning constructs in large-scale assessments of mathematics and science.

The capstone of Dick’s work lies in his theory of aptitude complexes—particular combinations of aptitudes individuals bring to bear to address particular situational demands. He argued for an important role for individual-difference complexes in cognitive processes and analyzed these processes in relation to variations in environmental affordances to develop a person-situation interaction theory of intellect. Especially noteworthy was his

elaboration of the aptitude construct to include conative and affective as well as cognitive processes in learning and instruction.

As a scholar, Dick was extraordinarily thorough, kind, supportive, and gentle--but fiercely unforgiving on one subject. He detested those professional scholars who sought publicity for their work and dramatized it with rhetorical devices. Dick growled even while admitting that a piece of work was good, if it came with a hard sell. He never promoted himself.

His scholarly contributions were recognized in 1991 when he received the American Psychological Association's E. L. Thorndike Award for Distinguished Psychological Contributions to Education. He was a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He was elected to the National Academy of Education in 1993, and served as President of the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association, and as Vice President of the Division of Learning and Instruction of the American Educational Research Association. In 1997, just before his death, Dick was honored for Distinguish Service to Measurement by the Educational Testing Service for his contributions to the development of methodology for educational research and evaluation. It is gratifying to remember that those who awarded him fellowships appreciated the excellence beneath his low-key demeanor, as his colleagues and students do.

Among his distinguished roles off the Stanford campus, Dick served as liaison scientist for psychology in Europe and the Middle East for the U.S. Office of Naval Research in London from 1983 to 1985. In the course of that service he, along with a Belgian colleague, founded the major educational psychological research association in Europe, the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction. He was Boerhaave Professor of Medical Education, University of Leiden, The Netherlands (1972-1973), and held honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Göteborg in Sweden and the University of Leuven in Belgium.

Dick's contributions to the university were equally impressive. He served as a member of the Academic Senate at different times for five years, served on six university-level committees, and, as noted above, chaired the Psychological Studies in Education Committee in the School of Education off and on for 30 years.

For all his achievements, perhaps what set Dick apart from his distinguished peers was his humanity. He was a deeply caring husband and father, colleague and friend, and teacher and mentor to his students, and to "strays" from across the university. He loved, played and sang Irish music (on occasion with a wee bit of Irish whiskey at hand) with family, friends and students. Dick was a strong, kind man with a strong will which shone brightly in his last days in his will to live, to remain active, involved,

teaching and writing, up to the very end. His sense of humor remained intact. Even as his body weakened, his ideas remained alive, and his planning for the future never abated.

We close in memory of Richard (Dick) Snow with lines from Jacquelyn Mitchaud:

*The afterglow of a good and long relationship is like the light of a star that keeps pulsing long after the star itself has been extinguished. It may not make your wishes come true. But it can light your way.*

**Committee**  
**Richard J. Shavelson, Chair**  
**Lee J. Cronbach**  
**Lee S. Shulman**