

in memoriam

from the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University

Inside

This special edition of the EP News is dedicated to our long-time professor, colleague, and friend, Fred Rothbaum.

Fred Rothbaum

Eliot-Pearson Professor for 32 Years

On August 24th, Eliot-Pearson lost a dear colleague and friend. Fred Rothbaum had been a faculty member at Eliot-Pearson since 1979. Twice he chaired the department, and twice he was the department's director of graduate studies. He taught statistics and courses focusing on parent-child relations. He published many articles in prestigious journals and several chapters for seminal handbooks in his field. He acquired an international reputation for his work on culture, attachment relationships, and parenting. For the past several years, he worked on developing a new way of looking at depression and coping with depression as well as an innovative way that parents and professionals could get expert advice through his and Nancy Martland's Child and Family WebGuide. All this made Fred Rothbaum an extremely productive professor and scholar. However, during the weeks following his death, what has come to light has been the fact that Fred's greatest accomplishment was his mentoring. Ann Easterbrooks put it best when she said, "He was really a student's professor."



Mentor, teacher, friend

The three articles that follow testify to the fact that Fred Rothbaum showed his students a kind of mentoring one can only hope is the standard for every professor. Even in this issue's final article, on the WebGuide, what stands out is Fred's empowering students to unleash their creativity and demonstrate their own special know-how.

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E-P Professor for 32 Years

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Following his death, Fred's mentoring came to light in meetings for students, faculty and staff to share stories of Fred, in the comments posted on two websites to share experiences of Fred, in several obituaries, and in the memorial service on September 24th. The specialness of that mentoring is captured in different ways. Bryan Marquand opened his Boston Globe obituary on Fred with the following comment: "Raising the simple practice of paying attention to an art form, Fred Rothbaum let everyone know the words they spoke didn't just drift off into thin air." His wife, Vickie, added her own comment about listening, "When I think of Fred, the word that comes to mind is listening, True listening was what he was good at."

According to his students, Fred's listening had a powerful and positive effect. It was hardly passive and often occurred in the form of simple acts of kindness that in themselves told he had listened well and understood. One student wrote that after revealing to Fred her extreme anxiety around statistics, Fred said, "I think you need a cookie." And then gave her one. Another said, "I know I could always trust Fred to really think about anything I said." Still another wrote, "I was a shy student who didn't often take advantage of connecting with professors directly. But I felt totally comfortable approaching him about class content, other courses, or my career goals." In sum, Fred's listening both calmed and empowered – providing students with a feeling of being both understood and appreciated for who they are.

However, Fred's listening was also challenging, especially when the conversations were about ideas – as they often were. I know, because for over a decade, my office and Fred's was separated by only a very thin wall – so that the tone if not the substance of conversations in one room could be heard in the other. What I heard was a man who deeply cared about ideas and his students. Fred and his students, especially his graduate students, could sit for hours after most had gone home – discussing ideas. I never listened closely enough to get the details or distinctions or gentle arguments. But I listened just enough to know that there was always something good transpiring. The conversation was always spirited but never heated — two people, mentor and mentee, playing a kind of intellectual tennis in which both could win the game. "That's interesting..." and "But maybe...." and other back and forths always indicated that Fred and whoever he was talking with were having serious and productive fun.

Students' own comments attest to this way Fred challenged them while he listened so carefully. As one student put it, "The way Fred gently pushed his students to think for themselves and go beyond what they read was truly revolutionary for me." And another said, "He was dedicated to taking students' perspectives seriously, and would insist on having collegial debates until we came to a resolution. I knew I could always trust Fred to really think about everything I said."

Finally with respect to Fred's listening so that students felt truly understood and heard but also challenged to think critically, Fred instituted what is arguably Eliot-Pearson's most important tradition in the last decade, Student Presentation Day. It is his legacy to our community. Now, around the beginning of every April, students, faculty, prospective students, deans, and anyone else who wishes to participate, all gather at Eliot-Pearson to listen, watch, and learn about the many student research and applied projects that have gone on throughout the year. There are poster sessions, talks, panel discussions, and short films – all showing the incredibly diverse and meaningful ways that Eliot-Pearson students involve themselves with children and the great issues around providing for children. For many, it has become not only a day to celebrate students' work, it has also become a way to celebrate Eliot-Pearson.

Fred's work was, then, mainly about persons, not papers. The significance of that work, that listening and mentoring, is perhaps best summed up by one of his students who wrote, "I am a better person for having known and worked with Fred."

W. George Scarlett

The memories sent by students about Dr. Rothbaum are available online at <http://tinyurl.com/fredstudents>. In addition, there is a website for the entire Eliot-Pearson community to add their thoughts and memories: <http://ase.tufts.edu/epcd/tribute.aspx>.

Remembering Fred - September 24, 2011

When Bill Tsang and his wife Eva heard the awful news that Fred Rothbaum had died, they knew right away they needed to share their grief. A few days later they were on a flight from Beijing to Boston to show respect for all that Fred had meant to them as Bill's advisor, mentor, and collaborator and to both Eva and Bill as their friend. From the airport Bill wrote to a colleague: "I feel like my soul is dislocated."

Students, administrators, collaborators and colleagues expressed their loss, their sorrow, and also some laughter at a memorial service for Fred on September 24th, 2011 on the Tufts campus. Because Fred was one hundred percent present when he was with someone, it was easy to assume that he bestowed this attention on just a few lucky ones. Instead, as his students, colleagues and friends looked around Cohen Auditorium at the 350 or more people present, they were incredulous that Fred had somehow become critically important to throngs of people.

The service opened with the Bach Prelude # 1 in C major, movingly played by pianist Dalya Umans, a new graduate student. As Director of Graduate Studies, Fred had admitted her into the program just last spring. A family member of Fred's commented afterward that the piece was well-chosen because "Bach is so mathematical." Many discovered for the first time that Fred had taken a circuitous route to child development: he started his academic career as a math major at the University of Michigan, entered the doctoral program at Yale in mathematical psychology, and then stepped over to clinical psychology to specialize in children and adolescents.

His route to child development was emblematic: Fred did not follow the expected path—not as a student, not as a researcher, and not as a mentor. John Weisz, whose friendship and collegial relationship with Fred began in graduate school, reported that Fred did not take the typical route of attaching himself to a faculty mentor's work; rather, Fred knew what he was interested in and sought out mentors who would help him accomplish those goals. In this way Fred pursued his critically important work—together with John Weisz—on primary and secondary control. John lauded Fred's contribution: while most perceive "control" as trying to influence the environment to fit oneself, Fred recognized "secondary control"—the ability of the self to accommodate to existing realities. This wasn't the only instance of Fred turning established theory on its head. When the world of attachment theory was wedded to the balance between attachment and exploration or independence, Fred suggested that a type of dependence could actually be healthy, pointing to the Japanese concept of *amae* as evidence of the healthy interdependence characterizing close relationships in the East. These concepts were cleverly illustrated in an analysis of song lyrics in the East and the West, resulting in a paper that Fred and Bill Tsang wrote together.



Visiting Evelyn Pitcher in NH with colleagues in 2004

Fred was atypical as a colleague too. "Fred had a special civility which stood out like a beacon" said Sol Gittleman, University Professor and former provost. In a profession that is often filled with elitism and self-aggrandizement, "Fred stood out from his fellow academics in a most remarkable way and had a very special effect on his colleagues. His nature simply could not abide the kind of conflicts that led to permanent schisms and personal or professional disruption." Sol added that "Fred was a problem solver, because his temperament could not conceive that people couldn't get along. He was a leader, because he was happy to follow and brought no ego or ambition for himself to any table. He commanded respect, because he commanded no one; he loved his profession and had a deep respect for his colleagues and department."

Remembering Fred - September 24, 2011

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Fred even had a unique way of commuting. Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Dean of Arts and Sciences, in her warm opening remarks, said that Fred was one of the first faculty members to welcome her to Tufts. He immediately made her an insider by offering a handwritten map with his own directions for driving the “back way” from Lexington to Tufts.

Perhaps his most unusual characteristic was the regard Fred held for his students’ ideas. He was not interested in cloning himself. On the contrary, when a student was drawn to Fred’s work, Fred immediately began probing the student’s own interests and, before long, encouraged the student to pursue those ideas. A doctoral student who came to work with Fred on his parental acceptance study noticed that some children made it easy for parents to be accepting while others were “impossible to parent.” Fred advised the student to abandon coding parent tapes and instead develop her own measures of child behavior. This resulted in collaboration between them that lasted for years.

When students in his advanced seminar in clinical developmental psychology wrote case studies, Fred pulled novel theory out of the students’ work—even when they didn’t know it was there—and encouraged students to pursue doctoral work to develop those theories. Fred saw sparks inside talented students that other faculty members didn’t notice, and he fanned those sparks into flames that now burn brightly all over the world.

In an article in this issue, Natalie Rusk has written eloquently about Fred’s influence on her own academic development. At the service she offered a metaphor for Fred’s mentorship: in noting that he guided, encouraged, and supported his students but never interfered with their own goals, she told the story of her last visit to Fred and Vickie’s Maine home the week before he died. When they took a break from writing, Natalie wanted to swim to the island in the middle of Stearns Pond but wasn’t sure she wanted to go the distance. Fred offered to kayak along with her. In doing so he stayed a good distance behind her, allowing Natalie to swim toward her own destination at her own pace with the security of Fred’s supportive presence just behind.

Stacie Clayton was one of Fred’s advisees. Well, actually, she acknowledged that she wasn’t his official advisee but that she regarded Fred as a true advisor because he listened to her, believed in her, and encouraged her to achieve. Stacie, who now directs her own school in addition to a gospel choir, sang a soulful tribute to Fred: “If I Can Help Somebody,” by A. Bazel Androzzo, ending with a new verse that she wrote to Fred.

Some of us at the service had thought Fred worked almost all of the time. But somehow he also had time for long-lasting, deep and intimate friendships. A testament to his friendship with the Rothbaum family came from Louis West, who accompanied himself on the guitar as he sang “No More Blues,” a song he wrote for Fred. When he finished, the otherwise solemn service was broken by applause. Paul Joseph and Steve Treistman also spoke eloquently about their deep and respectful friendships with Fred.

Although Fred could almost always be found at his computer, he didn’t just write about children and adolescents. Vickie Rothbaum, Fred’s wife, gave a powerful account of Fred’s devotion as a constant, loving, and present father to his sons, Abe and Max, adding that he was delighted when Ally, Abe’s wife, joined the family. Vickie also spoke of Fred’s love for their summer home and the joy they shared there, especially the entire summer just ended.

George Scarlett, whose office was next door to Fred’s and who shared “a very thin wall” with Fred for many years, closed the service with a poem: “We Remember Him.” Indeed we do.

Martha Pott

Our Mentor and Our Friend

The Chinese phrase *zhiyin* 知音 refers to a person who truly understands you. The characters literally mean “knows music” (or “knows songs”). The phrase comes from a legend of two friends from more than 2,000 years ago:

When Boya played the zither to describe lofty mountains or flowing waters, the legend reports, Ziqi would promptly and accurately grasp his friend’s expressions. Through music, the two developed a lifelong bond.
(Lam, 2007, p. 70)

I felt that Fred was one of those people who knew my tune, who could often follow what I was saying even when I was unsure myself what I was trying to express. Or, when he did not understand, he would persistently ask questions until the meaning was clear.

Over the past month, one of the remarkable things I have learned about Fred is just how many people’s tunes he understood. When I put out a call for students to send memories of Fred, I had no idea I would receive such depth and breadth of response. Because he had few official advisees, I have been amazed to read these accounts, to learn how many other students viewed him not only as a thought-provoking and inspiring mentor, but also as an understanding and supportive friend.



Fred and Natalie Rusk

I had originally intended to reprint the student memories here, but the accounts are so numerous and so descriptive that they would not fit in all the pages of this newsletter. Thus, I have shared these vivid memories of Fred online <http://tinyurl.com/fredstudents>. Fred’s wife, Vickie Rothbaum, explains that she has also received dozens of cards from former students, describing how he changed the course of their lives, expressing sympathy as well as gratitude.

When I last saw Fred in August, his face brightened as he described to me how one of his favorite things was to ask students what interests them. He described how he would probe to understand further, to help them articulate their core interests and motivation.

This persistence in seeking to understand students’ ideas is particularly striking given that Fred was such a creative thinker and brilliant theorist himself. Martha Pott, who worked closely with Fred for many years, describes how, when Fred listened, he would often look away. She explains that, at such times, Fred’s mind was not wandering from the conversation but rather connecting what the person was saying to other ideas he had. Fred did not passively listen. In true Eliot-Pearson fashion, Fred helped students connect their ideas to existing theories, investigate their ideas in research studies, and find ways of applying these ideas to help others.

In the legend, when the musician Boya finds out that Ziqi has died, Boya breaks his zither into pieces and vows never to play music again, because no one will understand his songs as well as Ziqi did. This expression of grief resonates with the sorrow many of us feel at losing such an extraordinary person in our lives, who helped us recognize the value of our ideas, abilities, goals, and interests. And humor: Fred often had to remind me of the value of humor for gaining perspective in difficult times.

However, we know that Fred would not want us to break our zithers—quite the opposite! He would want us to continue playing our music, as he modeled in his own work, even when others do not yet appreciate or recognize the value of what we are pursuing. And I know many of us are already striving to follow his example, by becoming more attuned to the people around us. As his students, we will seek not only to apply our ideas in ways that help others, but also to provide opportunities and support for others to share their songs.

WebGuide Retrospective

When the World Wide Web burst on the scene in the mid-1990s, it revolutionized the world of information. Suddenly, there was an explosion of available information, much of it unfiltered, unverified, and untrustworthy. *The Tufts Child & Family WebGuide* was born of the concern that parents, students, and professionals were vulnerable to poor quality online information about children. Fred Rothbaum, in partnership with his student and later colleague, Nancy Martland, determined that Tufts and Eliot-Pearson could play an important role in providing high-quality, research-based online information to the public. They designed *The WebGuide* (www.cfw.tufts.edu) to offer access to carefully evaluated web sites which could be trusted to provide the best available information about children and families.

Rothbaum spearheaded the project. With a grant from the Berger Technology Fund, Fred led a team, which included librarians from Tisch Library, staff from the Tufts IT department, and a group of students who designed the site, designed the evaluation method, and conducted research with parents to determine their interests and preferences.

The first version of the site was launched in the spring of 2000. *The WebGuide* was warmly received. It was covered in *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*. The public visited the site in large numbers, indicating that users were being well served. Here is one example:

“When our second grandson was born, he had a newborn breathing syndrome called TTN — Transient Tachypnea of the Newborn. It involved rushing him from the delivery room to NICU, giving oxygen, IV’s etc. and was quite frightening for his parents. My son Sam had his laptop with him, and the hospital had wireless Internet service. So, I went to one of *The WebGuide* medical sites, found a concise description of the syndrome (which none of us had ever heard of and the doctors were too busy to explain), emailed the link to him, and he was able to get good info on the condition, which relieved his anxiety greatly.”

The WebGuide also generated new research. For example, funding from the W. T. Grant Foundation supported an ambitious three-year research study of parents’ use of the Web, and *The WebGuide*’s team of researchers found that parents were getting very different kinds of information from the Web depending on social class. Parents with less education and less income had less knowledge of how to find and evaluate information they were seeking from the Web. Furthermore, they were more likely to find and settle for bad information and bad advice.



Fred and Nancy Martland

Almost from its inception, *The WebGuide* project has been staffed by students in the Work Study program. All aspects of the project have been handled by these students – technical design and construction of the site itself, evaluation of sites, publicizing the site, research with the end users of the site, and administrative functions. The hallmark of *The WebGuide* has been the richness of the experience it offered to its student employees.

Fred believed in hiring bright, independent individuals and giving them as much responsibility as they could handle. This approach resulted in the development of a core staff that returned year after year, training the new employees and heading up the individual task areas. To watch these young students grow and blossom over time was remarkable. By the time they were seniors they were telling Fred what to do instead of the other way around, and they were ready to be turned loose on an unsuspecting world.

Fred gave *The WebGuide* students something priceless: he trusted them and their ideas and allowed them to test and develop their ideas in a real-world situation. He followed them even when they led him into places where he had no idea what was going on – such as inside the black box that was the code in the back end of the web site. That willingness to embrace the ideas of the young made *The WebGuide* the success that it became.

The WebGuide enjoyed considerable success during its first decade. It went through two redesigns and grew to cover over one hundred topics and over 500 web sites. The most recent affirmation of the site's importance came in the spring of 2011, when *The WebGuide* entered into a 5 year contract with the Minnesota Department of Education to provide content and technical services to its site, *ParentsKnow*.

Why has the *The WebGuide* been so successful? The main reason is it offers users carefully selected sites organized in an easy-to-use, appealing format. There are five main categories of information: family/parenting, education/learning, typical child development, health/mental health, and resources/recreation. The first four categories contain sites with research-based information. The fifth category, resources/recreation, contains sites with information about specific programs and things to do. The resources/recreation sites, which were added at the request of parents, do not contain research-based information. *The WebGuide* also offers an option of searching for sites that are especially relevant to a particular age group, and it offers several features requested by parents (e.g., ask an expert sites; research news sites). One of the most successful *WebGuide* features is a custom Google search which allows the user to search a topic only on *WebGuide*-listed sites, thus excluding sites that are not trustworthy from the search return.

In recognition of *The WebGuide*'s importance to the public, to the Department and to Tufts, Fred's colleagues have begun to make plans to ensure that his work on this important project can continue. Julie Dobrow, who for many years has taught courses on children and media in the department and who often consulted with Fred about *The WebGuide*, is spearheading efforts to maintain *The WebGuide*. Other Eliot-Pearson faculty are involved as well – as are, of course, the students. A plan is emerging to both maintain the direction in which Fred so ably steered this project, and to suggest new directions for *The WebGuide* in the future.

Nancy Martland

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