

# **Dr Gervase (Gerv) Leyden (1939 – 2015)**

**in the Psychologist  
The British Psychological Society  
An appreciation from Professor Andy Miller.**



Gerv Leyden, who died on 7 October 2015, has left a huge gap in the lives of his family, friends and colleagues.

From his early days as an educational psychologist (EP), he was recognised as a creative, thoughtful and conscientious practitioner and he continued to exert a profound influence within and beyond the profession throughout his long career.

Gerv was born in inner-city Nottingham at the outset of World War Two into considerably straightened financial circumstances. This first-hand experience of material deprivation fueled his life-long concern for the marginalised and excluded and he remained their passionate advocate right through until his final days.

The divisive 'eleven plus' examination determined that Gerv was most suited to pursuing his secondary education at Nottingham Building School where, among other subjects, he learned joinery, plastering and plumbing. But these were not his destined career and, after considerable application and additional study, he ended up at Liverpool University where he gained his psychology degree.

Gerv subsequently taught in a secondary modern school in Nottingham, undertook his professional training as an educational psychologist at the University of Swansea under Professor Phillip Williams, worked in teacher training at Edge Hill College and as an educational psychologist in Kirkby in Lancashire.

From the beginning of his career, Gerv was publishing persuasive papers, challenging various established institutional practices that were not founded on, or had drifted away from, humanitarian principles. In these pursuits he was highly effective, winning hearts and minds with his beautifully-crafted prose and his outstanding gifts as a speaker. Throughout his career these qualities, combined with a razor sharp wit and a disarming charm, won him many admirers. He provided a considered perspective to those in the most senior of positions – Directors of Education would, for example, seek him out for informal counsel. And he would in turn also ensure that the voices of the least powerful were heard in the offices and committees where decisions that affected their lives were taken.

His skills as an EP were recognised early in his career and resulted in his rapid promotion to the position of Senior EP for Stockton on Tees, after which he returned to his native city in a

similar capacity but with management responsibilities for a much larger team of EPs and allied professionals.

Gerv was an obvious choice of contributor for Bill Gilham's landmark 1978 publication, 'Reconstructing Educational Psychology'. In a book that challenged many of the major tenets of the profession at that time – including the centrality of psychometric measures, especially of 'IQ', and support for segregated special educational provision – Gerv's concluding chapter provided a magisterial overview of both the need for change and the directions in which this should proceed. Firmly rooted in his own professional practice, he argued with authority for the profession to be guided far more by psychology, research and imagination. This book, almost forty years on, continues to be one of, if not *the*, most influential in professional educational psychology and those in training and many in practice still benefit from its study.

In 1986, Gerv was appointed as an Associate Tutor to the Educational Psychology training course at the University of Birmingham which was directed at that time by the influential and sometimes eccentric Brian Roberts. Later, when attempting to solve a particularly knotty or sensitive problem, Gerv would sometimes imitate Brian taking a long, reflective drag on a roll-up before saying 'Now, what Brian would say here?' After two years Gerv returned to a similar post at the University of Nottingham and the Nottinghamshire County EP Service.

With the retirement of Professor Elizabeth Newson in 1994, it was necessary to design a new initial training course for EPs at Nottingham. Rather than tinker with an existing format, Gerv and Andy Miller, started from scratch and, working in the evenings over the preceding year, constructed a brand new course. Because the projected intake was likely to be small in the first few years, teaching duties would be carried out almost exclusively by these two and hence it was possible to plan a highly integrated course in which the links and progression between modules and each individual session through the year were developed to a very extensive degree.

In the early 1990s, Gerv registered in the Nottingham Psychology Department to study for a Masters degree in Organisational Health under Professor Tom Cox. He recognized that the concept of 'organisational health' being proposed by Cox, and its relationship to

individual employees' health and well-being, held great potential for the development of the educational psychology profession in its endeavour to help improve the quality of learning and social cohesion within schools. Undertaking such a course as an already established professional in his fifties was a typically courageous act, given that he was to be assessed by means of unseen examinations that would be marked by his, sometimes much younger and less experienced, colleagues.

Later in the 1990s, Gerv began to make world-wide links with leaders and others in the movement for inclusive education. While out running one morning in Montreal, he knocked on the apartment door of Jack Pierpoint and Marsha Forrest, the directors of the Centre for Integrated Education and Community and the publishers of Inclusion Press. Thus began an intensive collaboration in which Gerv worked voluntarily as a classroom assistant in a Canadian school to assure himself that he could speak from a position of first-hand experience. He then organised and contributed to conferences and international networking whilst, crucially, remaining an advocate for individuals.

The Nottingham training course thus became the first to incorporate a module on inclusive education and he invited Jack Pearpoint and Marsha Forest to Nottingham to run a series of national inclusion conferences alongside workshops on Circles of Friends, MAPs and PATH. When the BPS came to consider its stance on Inclusive Education in 1999, Gerv was the obvious choice of convenor for its working group, as a result of whose efforts, the BPS signed up to the Charter for Inclusive Education in 2002.

Gerv's wit and wisdom was honed through a lifetime of extensive reading both within, and way beyond, psychology. He drew widely from across psychology, particularly social and humanistic psychology and psychodynamic approaches. He was also an enthusiastic sportsman and a regular attendee at Nottingham Forrest's ground and at Trent Bridge and could as easily draw on the pronouncements of 'Cloughie' (Brian) as Eric Berne when considering how to function effectively among 'the games people play'.

He was the most attentive of listeners and supporter of students, colleagues and friends. He would be the most serious and steady of people when the situation demanded and the most light-hearted and irreverent when it definitely did not.

Gerv bore fifteen years of treatment for prostate cancer with good humour and a continuing focus on the positive. He was a special person whose kindness touched the lives of so many and he is terribly missed.

*Professor Andy Miller*  
*Nottingham*