

## John Killeen at NICEC

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I joined a very small NICEC in January 1990, replacing one of the three Senior Fellows based at the Balls Park Campus of what was then Hatfield Polytechnic. We were on the first floor of a wing of the building that stuck out into a stately park, with oaks and cedars dotted over a great expanse of green, visible through every window in all the offices down our little corridor. The NICEC library was on the floor below us. We had four secretaries (one each!), an office each, a very small meeting room, and a kettle on a cupboard in a hall outside John's room with a plant that thrived on tea and coffee dregs. In fact, we were a proper Institute.

We also had a Visiting Fellow that spring, Peter Plant from Denmark, so I had a fellow novice – though none so green as I in relation to the academic disciplines of guidance. I had come from practice and then development work in adult guidance. Although I had done some psychology as an undergraduate and some sociology as a graduate student, my first and most important experience of John was as the repository of all there was to know about work that was relevant to guidance in those fields. He seemed a little, but benignly, surprised that I showed interest in learning some of this, but was exceedingly generous with his time.

We worked together on a project in that first year which luckily combined our fields of experience: advising the new Training and Enterprise Councils on who offered adult guidance (me) and what it was or could be (John) (IASU, 1991). He co-ordinated the case studies and showed me how to construct self-assessment questionnaires that would provide sensible results. The team who carried out the case studies – my first introduction to the NICEC way of working, in which data is collected not by junior research assistants but by honoured colleagues who all then contribute to the thinking of the project – were Diane Bailey, Jenny Kidd, Eddy Knasel, Peter Plant and Tony Watts, people whose names I had known for years by then but never thought would ever collaborate with.

It could not have been a better induction to John's ways of thinking and working: impatient of the general idiocy of the world beyond, while gentle and courteous over any slowness on the part of colleagues; in the spoken word using two words and sub-clauses where one would do, but writing like an angel of clarity on the most complex ideas; producing written work astonishingly (to me who sweats over every sentence) quickly, but always at the last possible moment. One feature of that period was the rising fever in the office when John

approached a deadline, with Daphne his secretary, the world authority on his handwriting, typing as fast as he could pass her individual pages, and a courier on hand to race it to its destination.

This period did not last long: within one year of my arrival we were already beginning to have meetings called 'the future of NICEC' and within three we were rebuilding it in a very different form. In that period after we left the University of Hertfordshire, with the Senior Fellows dispersed and the present more virtual organisation beginning to take shape, I mainly saw John at meetings. He was still at Hatfield, working on large projects for the Department of Education and Employment, and doing more teaching for the University (both of which are described by others), but I was not able any more to wander down the corridor and take up his time asking for references or explanations.

We did work together again during that next phase, most memorably on 'the book' (Watts *et al.*, 1996). These were wonderful meetings for me, still a junior in all except years. They were a symbolic representation of NICEC as well as a demonstration of how the five very different approaches of the authors could combine yet maintain their individual voices. John's contribution to that book, in particular his chapter on career theory (Killeen, 1996b), was and remains the best possible overview of the subject.

But in the summer of 2003 I did have the great good fortune to collaborate with him again, on a report for the Guidance Council. By then I was living, like him, in Kentish Town. So instead of wandering down the corridor, we now made rendezvous at his local pub of long standing, the Pineapple; rough drafts often ended up with ring-stains of London Pride. This was a kind of re-run of our first collaboration on *Who Offers Guidance?*, only this time it was 'who offers research into guidance?' (me) and what it was or could be (John).

As John used to say, my *forte* is in lists, and I was very happy to concoct those; but I also realised as he drafted sections of that report on evaluation that this was a remarkable opportunity for John to provide a statement on just what standards we should expect from rigorous research of that kind. Here again was the old difference of understanding from which I had learned so much ten years before: evaluation for him meant controlled trials of particular interventions under as near laboratory situations as possible; whereas for me, coming from my different background but

conscious too of the working of policy wheels, evaluation meant measuring any gains from funding initiatives after they had been introduced into the real world. John could bring the rigour of the first to the second, as others have described, but in this section of our report (Hawthorn, Killeen, Kidd & Watts, 2003, Annexes ii-xvii) he provides a deft, and charitable, sketch of a world that contains both.

In our report John then goes on to provide a masterly introduction to social research, illustrated with examples from the guidance literature. This would be an excellent text for any Masters student in the field, but equally should be on the reading lists of all studying for the Qualification in Careers Guidance: on the grounds that today's practitioners are the people who will be commissioning tomorrow's evaluation, and everyone should know what constitutes a sound argument. John's further section, on the research that should be considered by the guidance community from the neighbouring disciplines of psychology, sociology and economics, is an extraordinary insight into the breadth of his own unique perspective on the guidance field.

John was not well when he was working on this project, and I knew he was impatient to get on to a larger study in the early autumn, which was not to happen. So again it was written speedily but, of course, precisely. A difference from our first project at Hatfield was that this time I was properly aware of the unique quality of his understanding and abilities, and understood how privileged I was to be working with him so closely again, so was able to value it consciously. He is very sadly missed.