



A tribute to Miro Martin

Miro was a lover of life who had an innate ability to laugh at its incongruence. Education has lost a great principal. The world has lost a unique human being.

These words, written by a Queensland principal, Denis Anthonisz, sum up beautifully the sense of loss recently experienced with the passing of Miro Martin, well known to readers of *Education Today*. In this brief tribute to a fellow author, I would like to add my own reaction to this loss.

When Bill Minnis passed on the news that Miro Martin had died, I experienced a profound sense of disappointment. This arose for three reasons: I knew he had finally been defeated by a pernicious disease that he had resisted so bravely; I knew that I was going to miss his irreverent (but never irrelevant) articles in this magazine, and perhaps most of all because we had to say farewell to an educator of rare quality.

Over the years I have been privileged to

work with many great Australian educators, people like Hedley Beare, Barry Dwyer, Patrick Duignan and Keith Tronc, all blessed with a delightful sense of mischief and all rightly known as people who have enriched educational thought and educational leadership. Miro would probably laugh to be included in that panoply of the educational elite, but the truth is that he deserves such a place because he was able to transcend the limits within which most of us live. Who else could write “Education is the most important investment that we can make in our future. We can’t afford to leave it to average people.” In the same article (*Mediocrity in Teaching*, ET 3, 2010.) he took a swipe at uninformed politicians, inexperienced academics, and apathetic teachers – and yet he did so without coming across as a pessimist or a defeatist.

Miro was already writing for this journal in October 2007, when it was acquired by Minnis Journals and I have to say that his was

always the first article I read in each issue. His wife, Allana, told me recently that she was his number one fan, so I guess I have to settle for number two. His passion for children, his non-nonsense approach to political correctness, and his willingness to ask (and answer) the difficult questions were all elements that I learned to treasure and to depend on. A quarterly dose of Miro was a great antidote to the stupidity that was so often apparent in popular writing about education.

As an erstwhile university lecturer, I probably had a different view about academics, about whom he wrote “I fear that too many academics have little, no or outdated classroom teaching experience.” Although to be honest... I suppose even a handful of these would be too many!

On the other hand, as a long-term tertiary student, I do agree with him that while many of our lecturers had impressive knowledge, they lacked the talent to impart it. While Miro took further study seriously, he had no

Miro's final email to ET 13 January 2013

Sorry to let you down but my creative juices have run dry. I have been away from the job for so long I have lost all interest in school and education. I'm really struggling to come up with anything new for your next magazine. Hopefully this is only temporary. May be OK for Term 2. My health is good and my condition is stable. Regards for the new year.

Miro

time for academics with “more degrees than a thermometer” who lacked the experience that was really needed in order to meet the needs of education students.

Miro was an iconoclast, even a bull in a china shop, but his outbursts were not the vitriolic ramblings of a radio shock jock. They came across as the well-argued expressions of someone who knew that all is not well in the educational world. He was able to deliver devastating critiques about myriad issues: government extravagance, teacher mediocrity, political interference in education or (surely his worst nightmare) NAPLAN presented as the answer to our learning needs. Despite his own confession to the contrary, I could not see him as a grumpy old man, but rather as a courageous prophet who was prepared to attack the indefensible and to defend the underdog.

Miro knew that he was not everyone's pin-up boy, but he was not arrogant about it. He once wrote “I pushed... boundaries to the limit and apologise to all my superiors who must have pulled out a lot of their hair whenever my name was mentioned.” (What makes a great teacher? ET 1, 2012) Despite this self-effacing honesty, I suggest that many educational administrators and countless classroom practitioners must have recognised his real value and, along with the readers of this journal, will miss him greatly in the years to come.

I must leave the final word to Denis Anthonisz, who summed up his friend this way:

“Miro was ahead of his time as philosopher, provocateur and strategic educational thinker. He was on about kids and focussed leadership, not about jumping through the hoops of bureaucracy, systemic game playing and politics. His laconic style belied the fact that he could do those administrative tasks well, standing on his head, but they were always the ‘necessaries’ rather than the ‘main game’. Miro was always present to people regardless of their status or position. Everyone felt comfortable and important in his company. He was equally at home in schools with severe disadvantage and more affluent communities.”

May he rest in peace.

Dennis Sleigh ET

Dear Dennis

Thanks for the request to provide some details on Miro Martin.

I worked with Miro as Area Supervisor for two years when Miro was Principal of Christ the King School, Deception Bay. It didn't take long to realise that Miro was not your average principal. He was always relaxed, informal and very welcoming. He had a refreshing vision and approach to leading learning at his school. He wasn't one for the latest educational buzzword or bandwagon and always spoke confidently and passionately about the vision he and the staff were trying to achieve. Miro's biggest concern was that the CTK community was a place where students were the centre of attention. He knew each student as a learner and person, genuinely involved in their learning progress at CTK. This rapport enabled an approach which was affirming of progress but always challenging of what could be achieved.

Miro had a wonderful way with parents even in the most challenging of circumstances. His down to earth approach was disarming in even the most vigorous confrontation. He was as adept at adjudicating a car park dispute as he was talking to parents about the latest educational initiative. Having a hearing loss Miro secretly confessed that he wasn't adverse to turning his hearing aids off if the conversation was dragging on. After hearing this I prefaced many conversations seeking confirmation that the hearing aids were on and sufficiently functioning.

Miro's leadership style matched his writing. His published articles were always well received by colleagues and expressed succinctly and with dry humour the thoughts and experiences of many principals. One such article was on the successful implementation of the 'Gold Class', an ambitious and innovative approach to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of disengaged learners. The program was often the catalyst for turning around poor engagement in and attitude to learning. Many students benefited from Miro's vision, expertise and special connection with reluctant learners. It was an achievement Miro was very proud of.

Patience and quiet determination, the hallmarks of Miro's second love, fishing, were also the hallmarks of Miro's approach to life. Acutely aware of what really matters in education and life Miro set about his work and family life with quiet determination to make it happen. Guided by his faith and belief in the goodness of all people Miro was an unassuming, much admired and very effective educational and community leader. His legacy continues in all of the school communities he was associated with, and is exemplary of the qualities of a good Christian educational leader.

Kind regards

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The wisdom of Miro

Unfortunately, it's very difficult to like these children. There were several students I taught in my career who I was very happy to see the back of. It would be great if these children would be taken out of the class and put somewhere else. It would be great, but not right. ET Term 4 2011

I might be stating the bleeding obvious, but surely one of the most important qualities is a passion or desire to do the job. I have met too many teachers who are teaching because they can't do anything else or, in the case of some older teachers, are just marking time until retirement. Great teachers want to teach. ET Term 1 2012

There are many times I would have liked to smack a parent or staff member in the mouth or tell them exactly what I thought of them. Fortunately I had fairly good control over my Italian blood. The gas bottle analogy – a barbecue salesman once told me that, if a gas bottle ever caught fire, you should never try to put it out because you would inevitably get burned. You should simply wait for it to burn itself out. ET Term 2 2012

I was brilliant in tests. I could cram information in a relatively short period of time and achieve good results, however I forgot most of what I'd crammed in an equally short period of time. There must be others like me who learn very little from testing. There are other aspects of learning which I consider more relevant than being taught to jump through hoops. ET Term 3 2012