



## IN MEMORIAM

Evan R. Keislar  
Professor of Education, Emeritus  
Los Angeles  
1913– 2003

Evan Keislar died on January 1, 2003. Professor Keislar is remembered for making teaching, research, and service a way of life – worthy of emulation.

Evan was born in India, and lived there until age 15, where his mother, Edna Beck, was a medical missionary and his father, Mott, a Methodist missionary: little wonder his dignity, decorum, and unshakable religious beliefs. Although Evan had a moral gyroscope set spinning early, never slowing, he was willing to consider any notion but not easy to convince.

In 1933, Evan received a teaching credential and his A.B. degree as a math major from College of the Pacific, and in 1936 he was awarded both the M.A. and B.D. in religious studies from Pacific School of Religion. Concurrently, he served as a Methodist minister until 1944 when he earned the Ph.D. in educational psychology at UC Berkeley. He subsequently became a researcher for a number of military projects at Stanford University and also at the College Entrance Examination Board. From 1946 to 1948, he served as an assistant professor at Tufts College.

Evan began his career at UCLA in 1948 as an assistant professor of educational psychology. He was known for his fair- mindedness, low- key manner, and generosity in helping students and faculty conceive and conduct experimental studies of high quality.

In his classes (some numbering more than 300 students) in which he taught psychological foundations for prospective teachers, Professor Keislar was inspirational as well as optimistic about what teachers could do to enhance their work by applying fundamentals of learning theory. His lectures were clear and concise. “He would describe in great detail research studies that justified each of his theories – it was always easy to get Evan very excited about any idea you had. Someone in the class might raise a hand with a challenging question, and Evan would first respond by moving his head forward, carefully listening to the student; he’d frown a little, obviously giving the question serious thought. Then suddenly, with a broad smile, he’d take one of the three- by- five cards he kept by his desk, and, full of enthusiasm support his theory with additional evidence from another research study.” Many students of Evan said “he is my favorite teacher”, and he repeatedly received standing ovations from students at the conclusion of the required course.

More revealing, however, is Evan’s own assessment of this course for prospective teachers. Although Evan recognized that a large portion of the students liked a well organized lecture course, he thought student growth and the transfer value of the course would be better with new teaching procedures that would give students more responsibility for their learning and connect educational psychology to the teacher’s life in the classroom. Evan’s innovations foreshadowed today’s exemplary practices of field experiences as laboratories for professional courses, the classroom as a “learning community” – student projects and presentations, peer assisted learning, and multiple theories of learning. He wanted to provide students with a wide range of perspectives and approaches to teaching so they would have rich resources to draw upon without telling them which would be best.

Later, as professor of educational psychology and director of the UCLA Teacher Education Program, Evan put into practice professional development through partnerships with those in different disciplines and schools, fostering dialogue about what schools should be.

Evan was also non- directive and collaborative when mentoring colleagues and graduate students, often posing such questions as: “What might you take as evidence that the treatment is not effective?” and volunteering to assist in any aspect of one’s study – access to research populations, building research equipment, and suggesting statistical methodology.

Once when a colleague said that he first read the conclusion to a study before deciding to invest in reading the entire article, Evan replied: “I first look at the data and analysis and then draw my own conclusion.”

Evan was autonomous in his own life and wished autonomy for others, showing his transformation goals by supporting learners in their development instead of focusing exclusively on imparting disciplinary knowledge, pedagogy, or research methodology.

Evan’s research productivity extended beyond his modesty in reporting. He contributed to the design and conduct of research by other scholars, including those in research centers, regional laboratories, schools, and professional organizations, often without adequate recognition of his crucial role in their projects. His modeling of controlled experiments in classrooms of learning and development have not been matched.

Evan emphasized teaching children the tools of thinking and inquiry in order to meet the broad goals of education, including the development of children’s problem- solving skills in academic areas. This aspect of his work was given impetus by a year- long fellowship at the Center for the Advanced Study of Behavioral Sciences (1963-64). His book with Lee Shulman, *Learning By Discovery: A Critical Appraisal*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1966, remains a classic in the area of children’s construction of knowledge, laying out the issues of learning by discovery: the implications for students, teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers. Evan also opened new directions in teaching and learning through his work, such as cross-cultural experiments in developing children’s literacy, effects of dialects upon children’s language and concept attainment, and differentiated instruction in problem solving for those with different mental ability.

Evan was also a pioneer in educational technology. He was among the first to develop, test, and use a variety of instructional media – programmed instruction, simulations, games, videos, films, teaching machines and computers for both applied educational research and as components of instruction. However, Evan took care that technology should serve educational purposes. He used technology in the interest of developing children’s strategies for learning how to learn math, science, language and the like and not for rote and factual recall.

In connection with one of his last projects, a curriculum model for self development with the goal of optimizing the future growth of individual children by helping them recognize that much of their future is within their own control, Evan found it necessary to construct a measure of autonomy among young children. In stating what the measure should assess, Evan revealed many of his own attributes:

Is the child:

- developing curiosity about his environment and learning to deal with uncertainties
- withholding judgment when information is lacking
- taking risks by trying out ideas
- recognizing when information is needed and seeking it out in order to attain his/ her goal
- placing a value on information and formulating questions in the presence of others
- accepting the fact that one may be wrong
- resisting distractions

Evan retired from the Graduate School of Education in 1983. In retirement Evan and his wife Janet fully engaged in church activities and enjoyed the company of their daughters Helen and Kathy, their son Bob, and their six grandsons.

In his 89th year, at a get- together with former associates, someone mentioned a televised biography program concerning the 100 individuals of the last 1000 years most important to humanity. Question: “Who was number one?” A room full of bright people guessed until Evan answered correctly, “Gutenberg”. If the question had been, “Who helped you the most to develop personally and professionally?” the former students and colleagues present would have responded, “Dr. K”.

John D. McNeil  
Lawrence Mace