

Edward G. Carr, Mentor

Mentor (men-tawr, -ter), noun. 1. A wise and trusted counselor or teacher; 2. An influential senior sponsor or supporter.

Ted was our mentor. We had the distinct honor and pleasure of being Ted's graduate students at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We are among the fortunate few who were able to spend years working so closely with this warm, witty, wonderful, brilliant man. He was our mentor in the truest sense of the word. Always approachable, Ted was incredibly generous and open with us as students and as people. Through his skill as a researcher, we learned how to think about problems, the technical aspects of planning and implementing research projects, and the art of technical writing. Through his incredible empathy towards others, we learned the importance of service, of the quality of a person's life, and the persistence that it takes to address problems that really matter.

Ted was incredibly supportive of us as young professionals. He involved us in a variety of projects and activities to ensure that we were well rounded as professionals. He introduced us to his colleagues and collaborators and encouraged us to reach out to others whose work we found interesting. He'd say, "Call him/her and introduce yourself. Tell them you're my student." When we did, we were always greeted warmly and often regaled with a funny story of that person's time with Ted. Even quite recently, more than a decade out of graduate school, colleagues would say that they'd seen Ted and when he heard that they worked with one of us, he would sing our praises.

In the initial wave of grief that followed Ted's death, many of us who had studied with Ted reached out to one another. We communicated across the country via e-mail and telephone to once again share our common experience. Many of the conversations began with tears and ended with laughter as we recounted the days working in the lab, meetings centered around the consumption of chocolate, and our sometimes hilarious misadventures as young researchers. We also talked about the themes that ran through

our individual relationships with Ted; the lessons that he taught us individually and collectively that set us on a path to become mature professionals. We discovered that, across the continent and quite independently from each other, we began many of our training sessions with parents and direct service staff with the same lecture on systems of truth; a philosophy of science lecture that was a Ted Carr standard and creates a context for thinking about evidence-based practice. As we struggled to put into words what Ted meant to us as individuals, we were struck by the depth with which the lessons imparted during those graduate school years had affected our professional lives.

Many tributes will be written to Ted, and all of them well deserved. Ted was truly a giant in the field of autism and developmental disabilities and his work has had an immeasurable impact on research and practice. Much will be written about his numerous publications, his involvement in professional activities, and the honors and awards he collected throughout his career. We pay a different sort of tribute to Ted; a tribute to the important role he played in our lives, his role as mentor. It would be impossible to impart all of the lessons learned from our years working with Ted so we've selected a group of "Ted-isms" to share that represent a sample of the wisdom that he passed along.

“There are no treatment packages, cookbooks, or recipes.”

Ted taught his students that analysis was paramount and there are no short cuts. In Ted's uniquely entertaining, engaging, and ultimately enlightening way, he would frequently mock less sophisticated intervention agents by dramatizing a scenario (doing something like a Woody Allen impression) during which a frazzled psychologist would frantically flip through a textbook saying to himself, "What am I supposed to do for aggression? The book says to use Time-out... Done!" There would be some laughter and then Ted would become very serious and say something like, "...A prescription for failure." The brilliance of this guiding principle goes beyond the analysis of problem behavior. In 2009, many of us still encounter so-called ABA-based programs for children with autism in which every single child in the program receives the same treatment package: the same exact augmentative communication system; unvarying teaching procedures for every target objective; identical visual supports/schedules; etc. Every child in the program

receives the same recipe. Ted taught us to avoid such an approach; inevitably, that approach is a prescription for failure.

“The bad data point is often the most interesting.”

In graduate school, the focus is on a set of research products and, as we well know, research does not always go as anticipated. The odd outlier data point can often extend a phase of a project and heighten the anxiety of a graduate student facing a deadline. Ted would say, with a wry smile, “So, what did you learn from that?” He would empathize and then help us to understand that failure in treatment research can be as informative as success. Analyses of the things that don’t go according to plan can become the impetus for the next treatment innovation. With the signature grin returning, he would occasionally express this idea another way: “There’s a reason it’s called *re*-search.”

“Write so that people who need the information can understand it.”

Writing for an audience of colleagues is an important vehicle for sharing information. Equally important to Ted was writing in a way that was accessible to the person who would ultimately need to solve a problem, implement an intervention, teach the skill: the parent, the teacher, the direct service worker. Ted would have us hand over our papers to other students from different orientations, people in the community, our parents, to ensure that the concepts being presented were clear and comprehensible. “If a classroom teacher or parent can’t understand what you’ve done, you haven’t done anything.”

“Systems of truth”

Ted was a scientist working in an applied field with interdisciplinary teams whose members were often not trained in the methodologies of science. Ted was a psychologist whose broad range of colleagues in the larger field of psychology were comprised of many different orientations, many not rooted in a scientist/practitioner model. Ted was an advocate working with families who were desperate for assistance and relief and who would often turn to “alternative” treatments with the hope of obtaining better outcomes for their children. While Ted’s diplomacy skills with respect to navigating the dynamics of an interdisciplinary team meeting, for example, were unparalleled, we can only

presume that these situations were some of the setting events for his semi-annual lecture on systems of truth.

At the beginning of every semester, in every course that Ted taught, he described the process by which we determine whether or not something is “true.” He talked about three systems of truth: the Authoritarian system, the Phenomenological system, and the Empirical system. When we adhere to the Authoritarian system of truth, we believe that a statement is true because an expert or reliable source expresses that the statement is fact. When we adhere to the Phenomenological system of truth, we believe that a statement is true because our experience, albeit, our subjective experience, confirms that the statement is true. When we adhere to the Empirical system of truth, we believe that a statement is true because direct measurement following the systematic manipulation of independent variables yields reliable data that strongly suggest that the statement is true. In other words, when we adhere to the Empirical system of truth, we rely on results obtained via experimentation and the scientific method to guide our decision-making with respect to selecting interventions and modifying systems to achieve our desired outcomes.

As we mentioned above, many of Ted’s students still use this taxonomy in our lectures and workshops today. It empowers parents as they are faced with contradictory recommendations from professionals. It inspires students and staff to pursue careers dedicated to evidence-based practice. It is the philosophical foundation on which this organization, the Association for Science in Autism Treatment, is based.

Ted’s death leaves a huge hole in our lives. He won’t be there now to bounce around a research idea or to offer advice on a professional problem, but his voice will continue to inform the work we do every day. He’s shaped the way we analyze problems, the way we design intervention strategies, the way we communicate about our work, and the service we provide to people with autism and their families. His teachings have become part of our DNA; who we are as professionals and as people. For this we are forever in his debt.

Ted Carr was our mentor; he was our friend.

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