

Donald J. Cunningham

Donald Cunningham is retiring after serving Indiana University for 38 years. Don will be remembered as the consummate teacher and mentor, thoughtful, reflective, and challenging. Don has also left an indelible mark on the fields of learning and instruction by advancing the applicability of semiotics to understanding learning and education.

Don was born in 1943 in Cleveland, Ohio. He received his A.B. from Wittenberg University in 1965 and completed his graduate work at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana in the joint program in psychology and educational psychology. Don joined the faculty of Indiana University in 1969 as an assistant professor. Since that time he has served as a member of the Departments of Counseling and Educational Psychology, Cognitive Science, and Semiotic Studies, and the School of Informatics. He also helped to begin the Learning Sciences Program in 2002.

Don has served in various leadership roles during his time at IU. He has twice served as associate dean for graduate studies in the School of Education and has directed two research centers: the Center for Research on Learning and Technology and the Center for Applied Semiotics.

With a passion for travel and the application of his work to different cultures, Don has taken several positions abroad. In 1990–1991 he was Garfield Weston Visiting Professor at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. He founded the Center for Research on Educational Applications of Multimedia and served as professor and head of department at the University of New England in Australia in 1992–1994. In 2006 he was a visiting professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Don's work is well respected throughout the areas of cognition and instruction. He is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and a charter fellow of the American Psychological Society. In April 2001 he was named a distinguished alumnus of the University of Illinois College of Education. He continues to pursue an active program of research and development in computer mediated instruction and is a leading contributor to the development of semiotic/ constructivist theories of learning and instruction. Most recently his research has focused on abductive models of reasoning and problem solving. In recognition of his outstanding reputation as a researcher, Don was named the Barbara Jacobs Chair in Education and Technology at Indiana University in July 2000.

Don's greatest accomplishment may be his students. He has graduated an average of one to two doctoral students every year, and they have gone on to work all over the world, including universities in Iowa, Washington, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Illinois, Cyprus, and Singapore. His students have become deans, associate deans, book and textbook authors, award winners, and engaged community citizens. Don consistently challenged his students to think for themselves and become "masters of their own meaning." A short quote from one of Don's papers may illustrate this point best.

Becoming a master of our own meaning requires appropriate skepticism about our observations, discernment of trustworthiness, willingness to accept multiple points of view and data sources, collaboration with others who may have insights and resources different than our own, and a tolerance for the reality that our decisions are always fallible, subject to review and revision. (Cunningham, Baratta, and Espring, 2005, p. 65).

Being aware of this process—reflecting on our reflections—helps us to better manage and understand the process, and grow from it. As an important part of his mentoring, Don has published with most of his former students, initially as first author, then as a junior author, finally as a footnote! Of course, these same students were often recruited to help

put hay in the loft of Don's barn. Interestingly, those bails get heavier and heavier every year when Don and his extended family of former students meet at the American Educational Research Association national conference.

Don has no intention of stopping his scholarly work with retirement. He will continue to pursue an active program of research and development in computer mediated instruction and semiotics. Most important, however, Don saw the potential in each of his students, helped them realize it, and each of them is better off because of it. Don's students will continue their work, and Don's legacy and contributions to the field will continue to grow.

Joyce Alexander