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Recollections of Simon

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Abstract: Chris Rasmussen's tribute to Simon Goodchild

Keyword: Simon Goodchild

It is my honor to write this reflection on the life and contributions of Dr. Simon Goodchild. I first met Simon in December, 2014 at the Oberwolfach Research Institute for Mathematics in Germany's Central Black Forest. This meeting was focused on dialogue between mathematics and didactics of mathematics. Although I did not know it at the time, the conference theme of bridging communities and finding common ground is an apt characterization of who Simon was and how he carried out his professional and personal life. The work and contributions that Simon made was never about Simon. Others and their best interests was his priority. Whether it was creating opportunities for doctoral students, building a network of people within Norway and across the world, providing occasions for new university teachers to deepen and reflect on their practice, or creating spaces for students to more thoroughly enjoy and excel in mathematics, it was others' growth and community that drove him, not personal accomplishment or accolades.

In 2014 when I met Simon he had recently become the inaugural leader for MatRIC, the Centre for Research, Innovation and Coordination of Mathematics Teaching in Norway. Under his stewardship, MatRIC quickly became a hub of innovation and improvement in university mathematics teaching and learning. As was his way, Simon raised the voices and work of others as the agents of change. Indeed, as he wrote in his 2023 chapter entitled, *Students Enjoying Transformed and Improved Learning Experiences of Mathematics in Higher Education*, "if mathematics teaching and learning in higher education is to change, it is up to mathematics teachers to be the change agents" (Goodchild, 2023, p. 74). Both the title of his chapter and this quote give me pause, and I hope it does others, to reflect on Simon's values, focus, and attribution

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of agency. It is no wonder that many affectionately referred to Simon as the “servant leader,” which reflects both his deeply held religious beliefs and his stance toward leadership.

Consistent with Simon’s approach to leadership and life, his research was largely informed by and contributed to a community of practice perspective. A community of practice perspective embraces, as did Simon, the mutual engagement in a joint enterprise with a shared repertoire of discourse, history, and artefacts. The theoretical and practical perspective that Simon embraced and lived was not about individual accomplishment, but the coalescing of community around student enjoyment and success in mathematics. Simon’s embracing of a community of practice perspective has a long history in his professional life. While many of us, myself included, only knew Simon as a university educator and leader of MatRIC, Simon had a long and storied career. His professional life spanned more than five decades where he worked in mathematics education as a mathematics teacher and as a mathematics education researcher. His experiences traversed working in schools, in teacher education, in a university department of mathematical sciences, and in a center of educational improvement.

Since first meeting Simon in 2014, I had the pleasure and good fortune of working with him on a number of different projects and initiatives. I was lucky enough to visit Simon and colleagues several times in Norway and had the pleasure of hosting Simon and his colleagues at my institution. Below is a pic of Simon and his colleague, Yuriy Rogovchenko, when they visited San Diego State University and played around with the lightboard technology referred to as [Learning Glass](#) pioneered by Physicist Matt Anderson at San Diego State University.



What I love about this photo is Simon's joy in learning about and trying out this relatively new technology for creating engaging online classes and the pleasure expressed by Yuriy in seeing Simon do this. Their mutual engagement around this artefact is in on full display! My experiences in building community with Simon and colleagues, both in the United States and in Norway is not unique. This is what Simon did. He connected people and in doing so made everyone's lives richer and more meaningful.

I want to conclude this piece with two reflections, that to me, joyfully reflect some of my interactions with Simon. On my first visit to Kristiansand and the University of Agder, I remember the detailed walking directions that Simon gave me. Simon meticulously detailed every turn and landmark from point A to point B. As someone with less than an excellent sense of direction, this was much appreciated. More broadly, these detailed directions reflect Simon's concern for the well-being of others, their ability to navigate new terrain. Lastly, I want to comment on what it was like to take a walk with Simon. As someone who is tall and has a long stride, I found it exhausting to keep up with him. I felt like I needed running shoes. This personal encounter with Simon reflects my, and I suspect others, experiences with Simon. It is hard to keep up with him.

The world is a bit less bright without you, Simon. We miss you, need your map from A to B, and I for one just bought a new pair of running shoes.

References

Goodchild, S. (2023). Students enjoying transformed and improved learning experiences of mathematics in higher education. In S. Stewart (Ed.). *Mathematicians' reflections on teaching: A symbiosis with mathematics education theories* (pp. 73-101). Cham: Springer International Publishing.