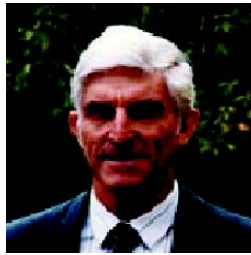


ROSS HARROLD
1939 – 2001



The unexpected death of Ross Harrold on 1 October robbed Australian educational research of one of its most energetic and influential members. For over 30 years Ross taught, researched, consulted, published and communicated with enthusiasm and impact. He played a major role in promoting the economics of education as a field. Ross was excited by the intellectual challenges of applying economic concepts and techniques to the study of education. He was also convinced that economic analysis could make a real difference – an improvement – in the daily life of schools and education systems. His capacity to combine excitement for ideas with the desire to apply them in practice made him such a stimulating and inspiring colleague.

It is appropriate that we pause during the 2001 CEET National Conference to pay tribute to Ross Harrold. Ross was a strong supporter of CEET. He established the Economics of Education Network in the 1980s, and thereby helped to lay the foundations for the eventual establishment of CEET in 1992. His work with the Network brought together many of the people who would eventually work with CEET, or form part of its activities in other ways. He was a frequent contributor to CEET conferences and activities over the past decade. At the time of his death Ross was actually working with CEET on a project for the ABS on the development of a new framework for education and training financial statistics. Somewhat fittingly, the theme chosen for this conference -- *Linking Economics and Learning* -- comes close to capturing the essence of Ross's professional work.

This tribute focuses principally on the contribution that Ross made to the field of the economics of education in Australia. The document also includes an obituary prepared by his colleagues from the School of Administration and Training at the University of New England. The obituary refers to the wide range of Ross's contributions to his university, his community, and to his family. When writing about Ross with such affection, his colleagues at UNE clearly recognised the intertwining of his personal qualities with his professional work. This intertwining is also evident in the discussion of his professional contributions that follows. Ross was very much a "package" in which his drive and passion for social improvement were inseparable from his research and teaching.

Beginnings

Ross completed an Honours degree in Economics at the University of Western Australia in 1962 and a Diploma in Education in 1963. The twinning of these interests – economics and education – was the basis for the rest of his professional life. His strong focus on applied research was evident early on. In the 1960s there was concern in Western Australia about how best to provide secondary schooling for lightly populated communities separated by vast

distances. Ross tackled this question in his Master of Economics thesis which was awarded by the UWA in 1969. His thesis, *An economic evaluation of country high school hostels in Western Australia*, analysed the costs of different forms of schooling for rural students and evidence on the impact of different models of school on the retention of students to Years 11 and 12. He concluded that a model which combined a Senior High School with boarding facilities for students from remote communities was more cost-effective than the alternatives. Although the thesis was based upon a very detailed analysis of the costs of different forms of schooling, its starting point was an educational objective: how to encourage as many rural children as possible to complete a full secondary education. This focus on economics as a tool to improve educational provision was to be an enduring theme of Ross's work.

There was one other aspect of Ross's work on his Master's thesis that foreshadowed his later research. He was not content to let his research serve purely academic purposes. He took whatever opportunity he could to bring his findings to the attention of Education Department officials, teachers and school communities. He spoke about the work on a number of occasions and wrote several articles in educators' publications. The articles were free of jargon, clearly written, and carried a clear message: the reliance on the then-dominant District High School model and student busing was serving the needs neither of students nor the State Treasury. Ross's skills as a public communicator were also evident in his work for ABC radio and television in Peth where he provided regular commentaries from 1969 to 1972.

Teaching at the University of New England

Ross moved to UNE in 1976 as a Lecturer in the Economics and Finance of Education. He was to work at the university for the next 25 years.

In the mid-1970s the UNE was one of the few Australian universities with a strong emphasis on distance education. A common teaching pattern was for students to combine external study with residential schools at Armidale working with the academic staff. Ross thrived in this environment. He was always well organised and thorough in assembling teaching materials for the external students and providing them with on-going support. However, he came into his own in the residential schools where he could work intensively with small groups of students. Ross had the capacity to take an interest in each student and their work, and to make each person feel that they had something special to contribute. This was not an affectation on his behalf – he genuinely had such wide interests that rapport flowed easily and naturally.

Over the years there were literally hundreds of students who were introduced to the economics of education through lectures and seminars run by Ross Harrold. Many of the students that Ross taught went onto influential positions in education, and thereby helped to create a base of people who were aware of the potential applicability of economics to education, and had an interest in its findings.

Many of these students also went onto substantial research in their own right. From personal experience, two theses in particular had a strong influence on my work: the 1985 PhD thesis by Geoff Ellem on using school timetables to analyse internal resource allocation; and the 1993 PhD thesis by Marian Stone on the role of cost-effectiveness in educational planning. Both theses were characterised by the effective interplay of rigorous conceptualisation and detailed empirical work, features that Ross brought to his own research and tried to bring out in those he worked with.

Ross's dedication to teaching, and in particular his work with overseas students, was recognised by the UNE Postgraduate Association through its 1993 Supervisor of the Year Award.

It is fitting that Ross's first book grew directly from his teaching activities: *Economic Thinking in Education*, which was published in 1982 as the first issue in the UNE Teaching Monograph Series. It is worth quoting from the Preface since it captures well what drove Ross:

At a time when society is demanding that educators do more for its students, it is cutting back on the resources they need to do their job well. The scarcity of means relative to competing demands is therefore becoming increasingly apparent to educators. ... Since economics specifically addresses problems of choice in the context of scarcity, it can assist decision-makers to think more clearly about the choices they face. This book tries to assist the clarity of this thinking. ... The writer's position is that education is a much more complex sector than private business, the sector in which the main ideas of economics have been developed. In education there is no clear valuation mechanism because only a small fraction of educational activity involves free market transactions. Moreover, the purposes of education are under continual dispute and ... few consistent relationships can be found between changes in educational inputs and resulting learning achievements. In such an unpromising setting for rational choice-making, it is probably better to adopt the modest goal of suggesting a few ways in which the economic approach may provide some useful insights to educators ... (Harrold, 1992, vii)

Over the succeeding 300 pages Ross provided a thorough and clear exposition of the major ideas of economics and how they can be applied to education, illustrated by examples drawn from a wide range of research and policy. This was the first major overview of the field published in Australia since *Readings in the Economics and Politics of Australian Education* edited by Grant Harman and Chris Selby Smith (Pergamon, 1976), and did much to stimulate research and debate.

As it happened, Ross' book formed the basis of my first contact with him. I wrote a review for *Education News* in which I praised the book but issued a (mild) rebuke for its limited treatment of the potential use of cost functions in education, which for some reason was a concern to me at the time. I sent Ross a copy of the review before it was published, and his response arrived by return mail. I opened it nervously, expecting that this could have been the start of one of those academic jousting matches that so enliven some journals. Instead, he had written a very gracious note that expressed appreciation for my review, conceded my point about cost functions, tackled me about what I had said on externalities, said that we should work together on a project, and invited me to Armidale – all in about 200 words! For someone just starting their own research career, I greatly appreciated that such a well-established researcher took my views seriously.

The Economics of Education Network

From the mid-1980s onwards myself and a number of others, including Gerald Burke, Leo Maglen and Chris Selby Smith, started to work more closely with Ross and with each other. In 1987 Ross conceived the idea that it be helpful to develop a semi-formal arrangement whereby people could meet regularly and share their work. Thus was born the Economics of Education Network, which Ross led for the next eight years. The Network was open to all

who were interested in the economics of education either as researchers, policy makers or practitioners. At its height in the early 1990s the Network had a mailing list of around 100 people and organisations. Ross was the Network's driver and principal source of energy.

A key early decision facing the Network was where the primary focus should be directed: towards educators with an interest in economic issues; or towards economists with an interest in education issues. Ross took the lead in this debate and, not surprisingly in light of his interests that had been evident from early on, argued that the group would be most useful – and better informed – if its primary reference group was to be the education community.

This orientation was given practical effect by the decision to organise an annual conference of research on the economics of education under the umbrella of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). The AARE provided assistance with establishing a mailing list and organising conference sessions, and the Network had its first public airing at the 1988 AARE Annual Conference. Appropriately, AARE that year was held in Armidale, Ross's home town, and he played the leading role in bringing researchers together with interested educators, and organising social functions to help foster the friendships that are so important to such groups. In all, around 12 papers on different aspects of the economics of education were delivered at the 1988 conference to audiences ranging up to about 50 people in size.

At the 1988 conference the Network was also able to feature a presentation by Professor Jim Hough from Loughborough University in the UK, who was one of the world's leading researchers on the economics of education at the time. Jim had been spending a sabbatical with Ross at the UNE, and Ross was quick to see the potential benefits from bringing him into closer contact with Australian researchers. The Network, by providing an organisational framework for the economics of education in Australia, was able to facilitate such contacts internationally and help strengthen local research activity.

The 1988 AARE conference established a model, and up until 1994 the Network and its symposia were regular features of the AARE annual conferences. In 1993 the Network also organised a symposium as part of the Conference of Economists in Perth, and again attracted large attendances to around a dozen papers on the economics of education. In 1995 the functions of the Network in organising an annual conference were taken over by CEET, when CEET's first national conference was held in Melbourne.

There is little doubt that the vision and energy of Ross Harrold in establishing the Network on the Economics of Education was fundamental in stimulating research on the economics of education and training in Australia, and in shaping the ideas that led to the establishment of CEET as a national research centre.

The Focus on Making a Difference

In addition to his contributions to the field as a whole, Ross's impact was also evident through a wide range of projects and consultancies in which he often did pioneering research. This work included the development of education price indexes for the Schools Commission (1978), the development of tools to assist curriculum and financial planning in non-government schools (1990), accreditation by the NSW Treasury as a consultant on economic appraisal for NSW government departments (1991), the role of finance in managing schools in Fiji (1993), the community service obligations of the VET sector (1995), advising the South Australian Department of Education over a productivity-based salary increase for

teachers (1996), and the training of system administrators in education finance in Bangladesh (2000).

These projects and others like them took Ross directly to where people were grappling with tough issues and being faced with difficult decisions. He felt that not only did academics have a social responsibility to use their knowledge and skills to help others, but that researchers needed such interactions to remain fresh and relevant. Each consultancy deepened Ross's understanding of the choices facing policy makers and practitioners, and the role that economics could play.

In Conclusion

As noted earlier, Ross was working on a CEET project at the time of his death. Just two weeks before he died he was sending Gerald Burke and myself comments on the draft report and suggestions for how it could be sharpened and improved. The final report, which was submitted to the ABS last week, was dedicated to Ross. It included the following tribute by Gerald Burke, which encapsulates the feelings of those who had the privilege and honour to work with him:

Ross was a person of the highest integrity and sense of justice. He had enormous energy, strong views, great goodwill and humour. He was a much loved friend and colleague.

Phil McKenzie
ACER & CEET
29 October 2001

Obituary

ROSS IVES HARROLD **11 March 1939 – 1 October 2001**

Dr Ross Harrold died suddenly and unexpectedly on the 1st of October this year. He had provided long and dedicated service as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Administration & Training and its predecessor departments at the University of New England. Members of his School mourn his passing.

Ross was born in 1939 in Western Australia, the youngest of three boys. He was awarded a scholarship to Hale School in Perth where he had a distinguished record of achievement. While there he joined the Air Training Corps and was able to fly a plane before he could drive a car.

Following completion of school in 1956 and with good references noting leadership qualities Ross was accepted by the RAAF for officer training at Point Cook in Victoria where he trained for a year and a half. But his dreams of a flying career ended abruptly because a medical report indicated an impaired capacity for flying at high altitudes. Consequently Ross left the RAAF and later enrolled in an economics degree at the University of Western Australia where he completed an honours degree and was awarded a Master of Economics in 1969.

From 1969-1972 Ross took up a position as Lecturer in Economics at the Western Australia Institute of Technology (now Curtin University) during which time he was also a commentator on economic matters for ABC radio and television. From 1973-75 he worked in the Faculty of Education at UWA lecturing in the economics of education. In 1976 he began his lectureship in Finance and Economics of Education at UNE. He did so with great enthusiasm, dedication and with considerable success until he retired from academic life in February 2000.

In celebrating Ross's life, it is fitting to acknowledge his professional contributions as a university teacher and researcher. During his 24 years at UNE his PhD was conferred in 1989 and he produced a large number of reports and publications. His publications included two significant books, *Economic Thinking in Education*, and *Resources in Education* – the second published only in 1998. Ross contributed enthusiastically and loyally to the work of the University and his discipline, and participated fully and actively in the work of his department until he retired. As a teacher and supervisor, he was totally committed, taking his teaching seriously and giving time liberally to students. He developed a special interest in international students who were unfamiliar with Australian university systems and often hampered by problems of working in English.

Ross was a highly competent and helpful colleague, interested in the work of others, ready to debate significant issues, but willing to listen to alternative theories and explanations. At the same time, Ross often defended his point of view energetically, even against significant contrary argument.

Underpinning Ross's professional work were strong ethical convictions. He had firm views about how academic work should be conducted – about integrity in scholarship and about

drawing conclusions honestly from evidence. But above all he wanted to make a difference – to the training of new researchers in his field, to the generation of new knowledge, to helping education systems use resources more efficiently.

In addition to his scholarly work, Ross was a great supporter of causes. These included active participation in Community Aid Abroad, in Earl Page College Senior Common Room, in supporting the Uniting Church chaplaincy at UNE, and engaging in issues of social justice and Aboriginal employment and reconciliation.

Ross read widely and deeply, not just in his disciplinary area but particularly in areas of theology, spirituality and psychology.

Time for Ross was a resource not to be wasted and he certainly made every minute count. Although he lived only 62 years, as noted at his funeral service he probably managed to pack more than 80 years into his all-too-short but extremely full life.

While Ross was competitive and aggressive on the tennis court he was admired for not being forceful and ambitious in seeking accolades for self-aggrandisement. He was also admired for being a pragmatist and not being ideologically-driven, for being loyal to his friends, for adopting an inspiring attitude to adversity and for always being prepared to carry the extra load and walk the extra mile.

Following his retirement Ross was appointed as an Honorary Fellow and continued to work on consultancies in Bangladesh for UNESCO, and in NSW and Victoria on matters involving the financing of education. He was halfway through such an assignment when he took ill with a lung infection which progressed to pneumonia. However, after being discharged from hospital he died suddenly at home after experiencing a pulmonary embolism.

Ross's passing leaves a gap that will not be easily filled. His contributions were important and recognised. His work did make a difference and will continue to do so. He will be sorely missed and will be long remembered by his colleagues at the University and elsewhere. Deepest condolences are extended to his wife Beryl, daughters Jane and Darien and son Tim and their families on the sad loss of a much cherished husband, father and grandfather.

Prepared by Ross's colleagues in the School of Administration and Training
University of New England
Armidale, NSW
October 2001

Ross Harrold Selected Works

The *Australian Education Index* lists 65 publications and papers by Ross from 1978 (when the AEI started) to 2000. The following is a selection of his main publications.

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The Evolving Economics of Schooling . Deakin University Press, 1985. (116 pp)

Economic Thinking in Education . Teaching Monograph Number 1, Armidale: University of New England Press, 1982. (320 pp)

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