

John Triseliotis (1929-2012)

For more than 50 years, John Triseliotis made important contributions to our understandings of children separated from their parents through his research, writing and teaching. His early career in social work developed in Cyprus and London, then he gained an academic post at the University of Edinburgh in the 1960s. He became Professor of Social Work and Director of Social Work Education there. Most of his research was carried out in Scotland but he also engaged in important studies that covered England too, and wrote about social welfare and children's issues in Cyprus and Greece.

John built up an international reputation, particularly for his work on adoption, which helped produce crucial changes in attitudes, practice and legislation across the world. However, he took a broad view of services for children not living with their birth parents and some of his work examined residential care. In the early 1980s, he compared adults in their twenties who had been placed for adoption, in foster homes or in residential care after the age of 3 and before the age of 10, during the 1960s and 1970s (Triseliotis and Russell 1984). This was a period when residential care was still regularly used for younger children on a long-term basis: the residential group in the study had spent on average 11 years in that setting. They had experienced residential care at a time when family group homes and therapeutic communities were among the ideal kinds of setting, but despite this most gave negative accounts testifying to the persistence of features of traditional institutional care: absence of affection, turnover of staff, rigid rules and lack of privacy. While the outcomes for the residential group were generally poor, some had done better through success at work or in marriage.

A decade later, John led a study about social work services for teenagers (Triseliotis, Borland, Hill and Lambert, 1995). This examined the packages of care provided in the context of home supervision, fostering and residential care. This study highlighted the importance to young people of having at least one person who is committed to them over an extended period, be that a parent, foster care, residential worker, social worker or teacher. Each form of provision had examples of success and failure. Residential schools had helped young people make good progress more often than other forms of care, which appeared to be linked to their stability, flexibility and supportive educational arrangements.

These studies illustrated themes that figured strongly in John's wider body of work. He was extremely committed to the application of research to practice and was always mindful in his writing and talks of the importance of distilling implications so that practitioners and managers could see how this might affect their work or the organisation of their services. He emphasised the importance of emotional relationships alongside evidence and rational thinking. Long before it became fashionable to emphasise the viewpoints of children and service users, John made sure that these figured prominently in his studies. Across many subject areas, he sought to understand the perspectives of all the main parties. Thus, although he was broadly supportive of adoption and permanence-

based approaches, he always recognised the complexity of the issues and stressed the contributions that birth parents can make, even when they are not able to look after their children. In his final publication from earlier this year (Triseliotis 2012), he expressed concern that the legalistic and managerial ethos that came increasingly to affect children's services resulted in less time and fewer skilled staff to carry out in depth family support work.

John's professional and academic work reflected the man. He was compassionate and generous, with a strong commitment to helping the vulnerable and disadvantaged and to supporting them to help themselves. He was always willing to give time and advice. Many students benefitted from his inspirational teaching and conscientious tutorials. He continued to work hard well beyond retirement and remained energetic until his final illness. He was a much loved husband and father to Vivienne, Paul and Anna, who survive him.

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