In Memoriam of Professor Dr. Tjeerd Plomp

With deep sorrow, we recently learned that Tjeerd Plomp passed away on September 17, 2021, at his home in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. His health had been declining for a while and his final hours were peaceful. Tjeerd leaves behind his wife, three children and six grandchildren. Our thoughts are with them all at this difficult time. He will be missed by family, friends and colleagues all around the world.

Professor Tjeerd Plomp, who started his career as a mathematician at the University of Twente in 1964, is regarded as one of the founders of the field of Educational Science and Technology (also known as Educational Sciences) and the Faculty of ‘Toegepaste Onderwijskunde’ at the University of Twente (UT). Characteristic of this work and the UT approach to educational science has been the interdisciplinary engineering orientation to address educational challenges. That includes attending to real-world implementation from the very start of a project and the value of acknowledging and leveraging insights from multiple scientific disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, in addition to the hard sciences. Tjeerd obtained his MSc in Mathematics (1964) and PhD in Education (1974), both from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. During his doctorate, he investigated individualized study systems in UT mathematics education. Together with his colleagues of the newly founded faculty, he developed the curriculum of UT’s Educational Science and Technology undergraduate programme which was launched in 1981. In that same year, he was appointed Professor of Curriculum Technology and in 1982, he became the first dean of education at our newly founded faculty. In the 1990s, he went on to be one of the main initiators of UT’s very successful international master’s program in Educational Science and Technology.

Next to his mammoth efforts for the UT, Tjeerd is also remembered as an initiator of international ground-breaking educational work. For example, as chair of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), he was an important driver of comparative research of student achievement in countries around the world, like TIMSS and PIRLS. Also, the large-scale international research into Computers in Education, which was carried out under his leadership, has received much appreciation. Since the early 1990s, he stood at the cradle of design-based research in education, which has grown into a much-valued research approach all around the world. During his career, Tjeerd supervised over 30 PhD candidates in the Netherlands and abroad. In addition to supervising the development of the research, he also supported the development of the candidate as a person. In later years, Tjeerd also focused on international educational development in (amongst others) South Africa, Mozambique, Russia, Hungary and Indonesia, for instance by setting up a university-based educational sciences department in Mozambique.

Being granted a professorship in the domain of international aspects of education, he remained active in the educational field, even after his official retirement in 2006. In Dutch education policy, Tjeerd has gained ample recognition as a policy advisor to the Minister of Education on educational innovation and the national agency for STEM education, especially in the field of the introduction of information and communication technology. He was a driving force behind multiple national initiatives, including DUDOC, a program designed to increase the number of teachers who conduct research by offering them PhD scholarships.

In addition to being appreciated by his colleagues in the Netherlands, Tjeerd’s exceptional contributions to the field have been recognized by many organizations around the globe. For example, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Ghent (Belgium) in 1996 and an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria (South Africa) in 2013. He was recognized as an honorary member of the IEA and of EERA (European Educational Research Association) and was knighted for his services to education.

Tjeerd touched many lives nationally and internationally. Whilst his work ethos was legendary, so was his humanity and compassion. He was an exceptionally good human being and made the best of his long life. He held himself to high standards and worked hard to help others do the same. His many acts of kindness assisted countless others around the globe. He was a truly international scholar focusing on making the world a better place, remaining positive in his outlook until the end. In his farewell interview with the UT newspaper in 2006, he noted: “It is love for your profession and belief in what you do. You need that, of course, with the support of the people around you.”

We are grateful for the many ways in which Tjeerd has helped us to discover and nourish our passion for Educational Science and Technology, and for making a difference in the world. He was a role model for what it means to support those around you. He is greatly missed, and will not be forgotten. His contributions endure through the lives he has touched directly and the work he started, which thrives on campus today.

­ Sections OWK, IST, ELAN & CODE (Educational Sciences, Instructional Technology, Teacher Professional Development & Cognition, Data and Education)

­ Department of Learning, Data-analytics and Technology

­ Faculty of Behavioral, Management and Social sciences

­ University of Twente