

Prof. Victor Müller-Oppliger

In Memoriam

Sally M Reis
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Appreciation is an excellent thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to all of us as well.
Voltaire

We are both sad and honored to write this tribute upon the death of our dear colleague and friend, Prof. Victor Müller-Oppliger, who passed away on November 14, 2020 at the age of 68 in Basel, Switzerland. Victor Müller-Oppliger worked diligently to promote gifted education and talent development in Switzerland and throughout Europe. A beloved colleague, teacher, and mentor, Victor lived with zest and energy and had several passions in his life, in addition to gifted education and talent development. He was one of our closest friends and with his beloved wife and partner, Salome Müller-Oppliger, he worked tirelessly, promoting the education of academically talented students in Switzerland and Europe. In particular, he was deeply interested in the psychological and pedagogical connections of research on talent development, and how it could improve schools and bring opportunities to more students.

Like us, Victor was committed to the application of gifted education pedagogy to the idea of talent development for all children and young people. In addition to his enthusiasm for gifted education, he was passionate about his family, telling us that Salome was the love of his life and that his two children were his greatest joys. He was also a talented drummer, indeed, marching with his wife and drumming group on some of the hottest days in the summer, always beaming with pride and enjoyment, demonstrating his love for his drumming group and his dozens of drums. We often wondered if this passion for drumming is one of the reasons he became interested in our Schoolwide Enrichment Model, that promotes the passionate interests of children. We became close friends with Victor and Salome over the last three decades. We loved so much about him—his enthusiasm for living, his booming laugh, his indomitable spirit, his love of a great martini, a Viennese opera, a good meal, his love of music, and his passion for his work, a trait we share with him.

Victor had extensive teaching experience. He was the consummate adult learner, first interested in primary education, then later gaining experience in secondary schools, and extending his interest in underachieving students. Sally first met him when he contacted her about visiting her former school district to see an SEM school in person in Connecticut, where he visited frequently, with his family. Victor and Salome owned a home in coastal Madison, CT, and spent a month there each summer, where the Müller-Oppliger family spent time with the Renzulli/Reis family. Over countless meals and glasses of wine, we learned of his experience in teaching and his time at the Universities of Basel, Friborg and the University of Hagen. Victor was passionate about learning and spent time each summer at the University of Connecticut with us.

He completed advanced training in the field of talent development and built upon his foundations as a primary and secondary school teacher, teacher trainer, curriculum developer, and school principal. From 2008 until 2019, he excelled in his work as a Professor of Educational Psychology and Didactics at the Northwestern Switzerland University of Education. As we worked with both Victor and Salome during that time, his interests in gifted education continued to develop and intensify, as did his commitment to spreading the theme of talent development across Europe.

During this time, Victor developed both a master's and post-graduate courses which are still extremely successful today, and included an optional opportunity to study in our Three Summers Master's Program at UConn. The Swiss international Master program in Gifted Education and Talent Development collaborated closely with our Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talented Development at the University of Connecticut. Working collaboratively with his partner Salome Müller-Oppliger, Victor developed programs that placed trained teachers all over Switzerland.

During the last two decades, Victor was also a popular and informative guest lecturer in and outside Switzerland. He served as a member of the General Committee and of the Educational Board of ECHA (European Council of High Abilities) and was one of the founders of IPEGE (International Panel of Experts in Gifted Education). He also served as a delegate for Switzerland in the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC).

As noted, he was also an author and co-author of over 100 articles and the editor of books in the field of gifted education and talent development and with Salome, he organized the triennial International Conference in Gifted Education and Talent Development in Switzerland. Serving as a member of many different research groups, Victor was an intellectual force in the European Gifted Education movement in the areas of talent development and self-regulated learning. In addition, he was a devoted colleague and friend. His publications including the two LISSA volumes Talent Promotion Rises, the theoretical and practical book Personorientierte Talentförderung, and a handbook Talent that will be published in 2021.

Victor's love for life and his passion for his family, his work, friends, and drumming are only a part of his legacy. He approached life with enjoyment and gusto and he made all of us happy to be in his presence. A pioneer of talent research in Switzerland, a wonderful husband and father, a devoted musician, Victor was a dear friend and colleague whose legacy will stay with us, as will our collaboration and friendship with his wife Salome Müller-Oppliger, and our affection for his children Michaela and Fabian. To this family, the field of gifted education sends our sympathy and deep respect for all Victor accomplished in his academic work, but also our joy in knowing him. Victor lived his life, guided by his kindness, compassion and a commitment to work to create schools that enabled children to develop their talents. What a special legacy of good work he has left all of us!