

Reflections on the incredible and important impact the life and work of Dr Kathy Evans has had on the world of education across the UK and Europe

One of my overriding memories of Kathy is the enthusiastic and single-minded approach she brought to anything to which she committed herself.

I first met Kathy at SEBDA conferences and training more years ago than I care to remember. I also was very honoured when she asked me to be part of her focus group when she was researching for her PhD. I always saw her as being so much cleverer and more academic than I ever was.

It was a great bonus for SEBDA when she had the time to get involved on National Council and the trustees. Her insight and wisdom in relation to the whole area of SEBD/SEMH helped us to keep the focus on their needs. It was clear that she wanted the Association to be a strong voice for the children and young people and those working for and with them. It was with this in mind that she persuaded us to initiate the idea of an international conference. Once she and Marguerite Watt 'got their teeth into it' their enthusiasm ensured that SEBDA had a successful conference. All the feedback was full of congratulations for the team led by the duo. I went away from that conference 'buzzing', wishing that I was young enough to try out some of the strategies I learned about from so many young workers in the field. Kathy nearly convinced me that my age was just a number and that I should book myself a place on the ENSEC* conference in Greece - that was the essence of Kathy.

During the Pandemic, Kathy worked with Rob Long to write two information booklets for parents/carers which were a reflection of her commitment and determination to support children and families during difficult times.

It was so sad that she was not well enough to enjoy the success of the ENSEC conference in Greece which was once again largely down to her drive and infectious enthusiasm.

She was 'one of a kind'

Joan Pritchard, President of SEBDA

Early in the Spring of 2022 Kathy started sharing her vision for a SEBDA International Conference. Following many months of hard work her ideas came to fruition and a very successful three-day international conference was held in Birmingham in September 2023. The success of this conference can be put down largely to the force of nature that was Kathy Evans.

Kathy was tireless in her pursuit of the fulfilment of her vision, irrespective of her health issues, hospital appointments and treatment sessions. She was ambitious in her expectations of what we could achieve, whom we could involve and who would respond to our requests for support; she could be quite audacious in her approaches to anyone and everyone who she thought might contribute in some way – and very often it paid off!

Kathy loved working with others and drew on her extensive network as well as seeking out new colleagues in an attempt to generate the most creative ideas and solutions. It was important to her to give others opportunities to grow professionally and she was generous in her support of contributors to ensure they could share their work at the conference even if they had previously had little or no experience of writing abstracts or presenting. Inclusivity ran through Kathy's veins and in planning the conference, as in every other aspect of her life, she sought to include everyone and make participation in the event, in whatever role, as accessible as possible.

Kathy's vision was to stage an inclusive conference that celebrated the achievements of vulnerable children and young people as well as the challenges faced by them and had a lasting legacy. She wanted to draw researchers and practitioners together to learn from each other and to have fun, enjoying good food, music and dancing – and that's what we did.

Kathy's caring, generous and straight-talking nature drew people in to share her vision. She was the most positive person I have ever known. Her legacy lives on in everyone whose lives she touched.

Marguerite Watt, Former SEBDA Trustee, NC member and conference organiser

SEBDA'S Kathy Evans lost her battle with cancer in October 2024. Kathy was our warm, inclusive and remarkably positive friend and colleague. She strove to make this world a better place and I believe she continues to do so, with the many ripples she created.

It is easy to see why Kathy was drawn to SEBDA. Kathy embodied inclusivity. She aspired to understand and honour the whole child. She was passionate about advocating for, and eliciting the best from every young person. In fact, from every single person.

Perhaps, the pinnacle of Kathy's contribution to SEBDA was her vision and her role in delivering the outstanding SEBDA international conference "Global Solutions to Working with Vulnerable Children and Young People". The aspiration to deliver such a conference had been inscribed on her 5 year plan. after her terminal prognosis. It was to be her last act of service for SEBDA.

Marguerite and Kathy made a formidable conference team. Kathy's creativity and pragmatism drove proceedings. Marguerite's excellent planning and organisational skills made it happen. The preparation and delivery were seamless. The conference was a resounding success; warm, inclusive, international and full of insight and learning!

Kathy spent her last years in service to others, making her difference wherever she could. On a personal note, she encouraged me to develop my writing and inspired me to carry out more research. Kathy had that ability to inspire the soul. Perhaps this gift being a remnant of her Welsh heritage and values. Ysbrydoli is the Welsh word for inspire. Ysbryd means spirit. Kathy touched the spirit, elevated the soul.

Thanks to Kathy's inspiration, I presented at the SEBDA International conference and the ENSEC 2024 Crete conference "Social Emotional Learning for Lifetime Achievement". Kathy also encouraged me to co-author a chapter in a book with her: "Cyberbullying and Online Harms", edited by Helen Cowie and Carrie Anne-Myers. Our chapter was called "Interventions to challenge cyberbullying and online harassment". Kathy asked me to develop this with her for a symposium and we were due to present this in Crete, before she became really unwell.

Kathy regularly volunteered to meet a group of us to get our presentations ready for ENSEC 2024 conference. One such was Tambay from Sierra Leone. Kathy went well out of way for us.

When Kathy wasn't going to be able to join us at the ENSEC conference, I was deeply saddened and conflicted about what to do for the best. However, Kathy was determined for us all to go. Even from her hospital bed, her altruism was exceptional. We had important work to do and she wanted us to do it!

Dear Kathy, we know you would want the show to go on without you, but I carry with me all the important lessons I learned from you and will carry on the good work we started. Heartfelt thanks.

Lynn Gazal, SEBDA National Council and conference organising team member

*ENSEC's tribute to Kathy can be found here: <https://www.enseceurope.com/>