

...with Margaret McAllister

Educational psychologist and independent practitioner,
Honorary Life Member and Past President

One inspiration

The head teacher of my primary school, who recognised how much I enjoyed learning and opened up many additional opportunities to me. Nowadays we'd call this enrichment of the curriculum. This gave me an early awareness of the importance of education and the desire to be actively involved in it.

One alternative career path

Politics or journalism.

One reason I've devoted much of my professional life to the BPS

I believe strongly in 'bringing psychology to society'. It is important that the structures of the Society are as well fitted as possible for the purpose of promoting psychology and demonstrating how much the discipline has to offer. Through my involvement I gained an excellent grounding in effective committee work, for example, considering all sides of an argument,

achieving consensus and getting things done.

One book that you think all psychologists should read

The Republic, Plato. It covers so many aspects of social organisation, reminding us that the fundamental questions have been addressed, just as we go on addressing them.

One moment that changed the course of your career

Completing my degree in modern languages. Much as I loved them (and still do), I decided to carry out further study in order to pursue a career in educational psychology. To me, language is very important. Learning to think and speak in another language is life-enhancing. This ability has enabled me to make enduring links with a number of psychologists in Europe.

One regret

That the history and philosophy of psychology has

largely disappeared from the university curriculum. Interestingly enough it is still being taught in many university departments of philosophy. There is a marked tendency to rely on recent sources of evidence, and a neglect of much valuable work that has gone before. I think that we need to understand much more about the origins of psychology and the evolution of the discipline to enhance our understanding of where we are now.

One challenge you think psychology faces

Access to funding affects most areas of the discipline in the public sector, whether in research, teaching or applied psychology. This challenge is likely to continue for some time, and there is a particular worry for educational psychologists working with vulnerable children and families.

One thing I've learnt from working with children

Expect the unexpected, and do not jump to conclusions.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Focus on the course you wish to follow, and make sure you are well informed about the requirements. Be able to

demonstrate a breadth of reading and a knowledge of relevant research. However, admission to postgraduate courses is very competitive and likely to become more so in the current financial climate. If your hopes are not realised, then remember that psychology graduates are very employable across a wide range of organisations, and keep an open mind in looking at the opportunities available.

One heroine

Beatrice Edgell, very influential in the early years of the Society, and its first woman President.



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One cultural recommendation

Swann's Way by Marcel Proust, for its evocation of childhood and the way in which the author plays on the themes of time and memory, showing events from different perspectives.

resource

Maxwell Magnus, S. & McAllister, M. (2001). *The toddler book*. London: Brilliant Books Ltd. 'A very practical guide to development and behaviour, written with a journalist: an interesting collaboration.'

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