

In Memoriam: Erik Duval 1965-2016

Katrien Verbert, On Behalf of Friends and Colleagues of Erik Duval

ERIK Duval, full professor at the Computer Science Department of KU Leuven, passed away on 12 March, 2016, after a two-year illness with cancer, T-ALL Leukemia. He was 50. During these two years, he was still supervising his team and as always sharing his great thoughts with all of us. He was optimistic, as always, and we were all optimistic for him. It was only in the last few weeks that unexpected complications of the treatment got the better of him.

He chaired the research unit on human-computer interaction. Erik is known worldwide as a pioneer in the field of learning analytics. The impact of Erik's work is extensive, both in industry and in the research community. He cofounded two spinoff companies Tunify and @mire. He was at the core of many European projects, including PROLEARN, MACE, MELT, ASPECT, ICOPER, ROLE, STELLAR, iTEC, weSPOT, and eCloud.

His work is highly recognized by the research community and has been honored with several best paper awards. He was elected as fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). His key role in the community is reflected by the large set of keynotes he delivered at diverse scholarly venues worldwide. He served among others as associate editor of the *IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies*, general chair of the Learning Analytics and Knowledge (LAK) conference, and both general and program chair of the European Conference on Technology Enhanced Learning (EC-TEL).

In addition to his inspiring research, he was an amazing teacher. He introduced the concept of open learning at our university and used Twitter and blogs to communicate with his students, instead of using a closed Learning Management System. By doing so, his students received feedback and input to their work by many leading experts in the field. He also led several practice-focused courses where students worked together with him during four hour sessions, instead of traditional presentation style lectures. He was very passionate about his teaching and able to inspire many students. He was honored for his approach by the university: in 2011, he received the prestigious Education Council Award of the university.

Erik was outstanding in every single aspect of his life and was always eager to share his abilities and knowledge with others. The world is worse off without Erik here. He was a brilliant man, mentor, and teacher who had a great impact on my life, and I expect on the lives of many others as well. We miss him tremendously, but as his Good Friend Wayne Hodgins posted: *"He will continue to be a source of phenomenal inspiration and learning. Just as a single candle can light an infi-*



Erik Duval (1965 - 2016)

nite number of other candles and not be dimmed one bit by doing so, the memories and the ideas and the teachings of Erik will continue to light up more and more snowflakes and lives around the world. So, in fact, what we would notice when looking down at Earth is that since the day Erik Duval was born, just short of 50 years ago, the "light" emanating from the hearts and minds of likely millions of people has been growing at an ever increasing rate. I had the great privilege of being both a colleague, a fellow world traveller, and very close friend of this very special man and I can assure you that the world will continue to glow more brightly every day due to the inspiration and energy Erik has gifted us with."

In the flood of social media reactions on Twitter and Facebook that was triggered by his passing on March 12th, some people have called him a Science Rockstar, or even the Steve Jobs of Flemish higher education. But as Steven Verjans nicely articulated: *"He was a Steve Jobs in the sense that he was very influential, innovative and that he passed away much too soon, but the comparison stops there. Erik was first and foremost a family man, firmly rooted in Antwerp, who preferred video-conferencing and skypeing above travelling and plane hopping. He was also open and generous with his knowledge, insights, and ideas, and not just trying to monetize them. He was the ultimate educator when guiding and supporting his students, PhD researchers, and colleagues. His research group often had the highest number of PhD students within the department or even the faculty, mostly due to Erik's network and ideas."*

Erik is survived by his wife Griet and his daughters Hannah and Eli. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. His legacy endures as he continues to serve as a role model for our community. The mark he made upon this world will long be remembered.

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