

Phillip Lance Knowles In Memoriam

1947-2017



It is with great sorrow that we share the news that Lance Knowles, founder of DynEd, passed away on Saturday, December 23rd after a nine-month battle with inoperable brain cancer. Lance died quietly in his home surrounded by his wife Yoshiko, their daughters Jennifer and Emily and Jennifer's husband Xandre.

After serving in the Peace Corps, and then as Director of The Language Institute of Japan (LIOJ), in 1987 Lance returned from Japan with a revolutionary idea about a new way of teaching English using digital media. Lance recognized that digital media could allow a learner to interact with high quality, native-speaker audio and video, simulating the experience of one-on-one language learning with a teacher or coach. The problem was that Lance was ahead of his time – in 1987 there were no computers with built-in digital media. He took his ideas to the major technology powerhouses of the day such as Sony, Samsung, Apple, Fujitsu and Epson, along with major content publishers such as Longman, Oxford University Press and the BBC. As the technology companies embraced digital media Lance formed content alliances, hired a great development team, and over the next three decades they authored and produced over 30 award-winning courses for English language learners.

The technology-based courses that Lance created were ahead of their time, as well, with their awareness of brain-based memory systems and their emphasis on blended learning which acknowledged the continuing essential role of the teacher. He was also a pioneer in the collection and use of student data to create adaptive, individualized learning for each DynEd student. Lance formulated these core ideas into the DynEd learning theory, termed RHR – Recursive Hierarchical Recognition. This theory of language learning addresses the importance of neuroplasticity, iconic representation, repetition, careful sequencing, and the role of media-rich input in skill acquisition. It suggests how different pathways in the brain work together, and how coordinated, multi-modal inputs facilitate long-term learning.

Lance was always focused on the learner, promoting educational value and results, as opposed to 'edutainment'. And Lance's vision paid off for the tens of millions of users who have learned the DynEd way. DynEd's data shows that by using DynEd methods and courses, learners learn English in about half the time needed using standard approaches. With DynEd, language patterns are built up and stored in long-term memory, allowing learners to more quickly use their English fluently in real-life situations. During his 26 years at DynEd, Lance created a team of younger staff protégés to continue his work and ensure a lasting legacy of helping English learners globally achieve faster fluency, a life-changing skill for many foreign students.

Lance himself was not only a teacher, but also a life-long learner. He was an excellent piano player and a ranked Go player. Over the last decades, Lance delved deeply into brain research and contributed regularly to ResearchGate. Even over his last months, Lance took an amazing view of life as he observed how his disease was affecting his brain, and he prolonged his fight using the insights of RHR; he started playing piano and meditating again to promote his neurons to rewire.

A GoFundMe research campaign has been created in Lance's memory benefiting the American Brain Tumor Association (ABTA). The ABTA was the first national non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to brain tumor research. It provides critical funding to research-based breakthroughs in brain tumor diagnoses, treatment, and care, with the ultimate goal of finding a cure. A Fund has been established in Lance's memory [here](#) if you would like to contribute.

Doug Crane, DynEd International co-founder

Ian Adam, DynEd CEO and President

Dr. Andy Blasky, DynEd Director of Development

Nick Randall, DynEd Chairman of the Board