

## OBITUARY

# Annabelle Dixon

Readers of the Cambridge Journal will be saddened to learn that Annabelle Dixon died in May 2005, after a three-year struggle with cancer. Annabelle was a long-serving member of the Editorial Board and occasional contributor: her paper 'Storyboxes—supporting the case for narrative in the primary school', in Marion Dadds' special issue ('Of primary concern', Volume 17, Number 3, 1987) is still as fresh and insightful as the day it was written. This paper alone would be a significant legacy to the hundreds, even thousands, of primary and early years teachers who have been touched by her work.

But Annabelle's whole professional life was dedicated to the critical examination and imaginative application of the big ideas in education, schooling and society. For many years she worked as a classroom teacher, but was never just one of the crowd. Early in her career she gave evidence to the Plowden committee, and throughout the ensuing years she regularly wrote, in her inimitable, challenging way, for *FORUM* (of which she recently became co-editor), the *TES*, and other journals. In her writing, as in her contributions to seminars and consultation groups, Annabelle set about opening windows onto the excitement of the intellectual and social life of her classroom, drawing vivid vignettes of children and their learning, raising difficult and serious questions about where we were all heading.

After taking early retirement from school, Annabelle was awarded the *TES* Lucy Cavendish Scholarship, and spent two years studying and writing on the theme of citizenship, an abiding passion, and a central principle of her pedagogy. In 1999 she joined a group at the Faculty of Education in Cambridge, led by Susan Hart, as Research Associate to the Project 'Learning Without Limits'. Annabelle was deeply committed to the purposes of this enquiry, which set out to explore ways of teaching that are free from determinist beliefs about ability. A lifelong opponent of streaming in all its manifestations, she brought her years of classroom experience and deep understanding of children's learning to the research process, and to the alternative pedagogy that emerged from the case studies of teachers whose classrooms were free from ability labeling and ability focused practices. Despite her serious illness during the project, she remained a valued member of the team, and was, in her modest way, immensely proud of the good reception given to the resulting book *Learning without limits* (Hart *et al.*, 2004). She was an equally valued member of the group responsible

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for the publication on which she was working at the time of her death, and equally proud of the part she played in it. *First hand experience—what matters to children* (Rich *et al.*, 2005) was dedicated to Annabelle's memory; the *TES* reviewer wrote of it 'if enough of us rally to the cause it represents it will save lives' (24 June 2005).

Annabelle Dixon will be sorely missed by an enormous community of parents, teachers and other educators, writers and researchers, by anyone and everyone who encountered her steadfast dedication to the cause of making the world a better place for children.

**Mary Jane Drummond**

*Cambridge, UK*

## References

- Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M. J. & McIntyre, D. (2004) *Learning without limits* (Maidenhead, Open University Press).
- Rich, D., Casanova, D., Dixon, A., Drummond, M. J., Durrant, A. & Myer, C. (2005) *First hand experience—what matters to children* (Ipswich, Rich Learning Opportunities).

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