

Judith Hamilton, languages teacher and educationist: An appreciation

Judith Hamilton was a revolutionary whose theories about teaching modern languages were well ahead of their time, with many of them reflected in key features in the Scottish government's *Curriculum for Excellence*. Her initial experience as a teacher of modern languages in the early 1970s sparked the flame that lit her way through life. She rose to the challenge of inflicting an outdated syllabus on disinterested learners and by 1976 had become principal teacher in Holyrood High School. Her unwavering commitment to making language study a rewarding part of the curriculum for all pupils led to her being seconded in 1979 to Lothian region's GLAFLL project (the acronym for "Graded Levels of Achievement in Foreign Language Learning") as its research and development officer.

A unique feature of GLAFLL was its focus on teachers as the main agents of change and innovation, unfettered by any diktats from the Scottish Education Department. Judith hated being desk-bound so worked in many schools with all kinds of teachers, an experience which had a profound influence on her thinking and undoubtedly prepared her for the next stage in her career as principal teacher at Balerno Community High School from 1983 to 1990. The department started off with 3 teachers but when Judith left there were 7, all of them having come to the school by choice rather than placement. Her staff have described the work as challenging, demanding (12 hour days devoted to teaching and preparation were not unusual) and above all inspirational. Judith's gift was to let each individual teacher work in his or her own way as a member of a team where all talents were recognised. In due course Balerno was selected as an official pilot school for introducing modern languages into its feeder primary schools and set about tackling its task in a radical manner by introducing the target language to all curricular areas, most successfully in science.

The need to provide more languages teachers to cope with the introduction of compulsory language study up to S4 led to Moray House College of Education re-establishing training in foreign languages. Judith was seconded in 1989 to work out a framework for the new course. As principal lecturer she established a team of seconded practitioners whose aim was to ensure that teachers in school had a pro-active role in developing training.

In 1992, David Glynn Cochrane reappeared in her life. He had first met Judith when she was 18 and had invited her to join him in the Solomon Islands, to which he had just been appointed as an administrative officer in the Overseas Civil Service. Second time round, over 3 lunches, he invited her to the Cook Islands and this time she accepted. She agonised about quitting Moray House but in the end, the urge to explore new horizons was too great to ignore.

Making hard decisions was always a feature of Judith's life, and this was not one that she ever regretted. Through David's expertise as an anthropologist and latterly as senior social adviser to Rio Tinto, one of the largest mining

companies in the world, Judith was able to visit and explore new communities and cultures. Much of this is incorporated in her master-work *Inspiring Innovations in Language Teaching*. She obtained an MBA qualification in the record time of 8 months, largely with a view to obtaining insights into the relationship between education and commerce. She was appointed secretary general for FIPLV (the International Federation of Teachers of Modern Languages). She contributed to the Nuffield Commission on Languages which has been heavily influential in moving language learning up the political and educational agenda south of the border. She was a regular and acclaimed speaker at international conferences.

She was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1997. Typically she researched her illness to try to persuade the medical experts that there were remedies available outside the UK which might help her. In this she was successful, for her leukaemia eventually went into remission. However it returned in 2003. She continued her fight, with typical dignity, but this time closer to home. David and she rediscovered some of the peace and tranquillity of the Pacific in Shetland, which became their second home. Sadly, her immune system could not cope with the final illness.

All of the above is a pale reflection of the personality that underpinned the educationist. Judith had a rich sense of humour and enjoyed the cut and thrust of intellectual debate. She appreciated the good things in life, and elegantly hosted many joyful and stimulating parties at the family home in Edinburgh. She considered that she had experienced a highly privileged career but it was those who were friends and colleagues who had the privilege of knowing a brave, unique and inspiring individual. With the deaths of Judith and her former partner Peter Wheeldon, in the space of a year Scottish education has lost two individuals whose contributions to language learning can never be under-estimated or over-valued. Our sympathy goes out to the extended families, and above all, to her inspiration and husband, David Cochrane.

Judith Hamilton, born 7 December 1943; died 4 March 2008

