

Deanne Myra Lawrance (1938–2010)

Deanne Lawrance was a well-known teacher in Pietermaritzburg, who started her teaching career at Pietermaritzburg Girls' High School. Many young and more senior pupils remember her with great affection and tell how she inspired them to try something new and different. Deanne was certainly not the run-of-the-mill educator; she chose to travel the less familiar way and challenged the old, the prosaic and the outworn.

After her return from Boston, USA, in 1977, where she helped start an experimental school called the Boston Learning Project, she headed up the SA Institute of Race Relations here in Pietermaritzburg. Opposition to apartheid rule was spreading wide and fast across the white English-speaking liberal circles. She played a vital and positive role in the preparation for the new South Africa by managing the



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awards of bursaries to underprivileged black children. Some of these went on to become prominent figures in the country's new political elite. She simultaneously ran the African Art

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Centre in Printing Office Street which uplifted thousands of impoverished people, mostly women, from the Natal midlands. She returned to teaching at the Amakholwa High School in Edendale and eventually took over as acting school principal during the war between the UDM and Inkatha. After this period she rejoined the staff at Girls High School until her retirement.

Deanne was convinced that the soul of education itself was the problem in both white and black schools in this country. She attended the first international conference entitled *Soul in Education* held at Findhorn, Scotland in 2000, and returned inspired. By then she had established the Brookby Learning Project based on holistic education at her home. She organised programmes for colleagues in holistic education and at her own school placed great emphasis on environmental education and ecology.

In 2004 she organised an international Soul in Education Conference at Epworth School. Prominent education reformists from around the world attended. She counted this event as one of the most successful in her career as an educator. She was a visionary and passionately believed that in order to become part of the global community we had to expand our consciousness. Her educational

projects shifted to adults. She organised consciousness-expanding film festivals on an annual basis. She held meetings at her home for a group called 'The Seekers' who met to study and discuss philosophical, ethical and spiritual topics. In 2007 she organised 'The God Debate – Evolution vs Creation' at the Natal Museum. Her courage and determination to face difficult situations, despite criticism from the more orthodox in the community, never failed her.

Deanne was a woman of integrity and she set demanding standards for herself and her colleagues. Her death left a great emptiness both locally and internationally with her fellow soul educators. The example she set to us was that in her inmost soul she stood for truth and honesty, fearless against inhumanity, speaking out against injustice when necessary. She believed that transformation came from a determined discipline to engage in new thinking and new behaviour.

She is survived by her three children and grandchildren.

IRIS BORNMAN

(With acknowledgement to the memorial speech of her son Anthony Lawrance at her celebratory gathering in the Botanical Gardens, Pietermaritzburg on 12 March 2010.)

