

## **Remembering Anna Craft Education 3-13**

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### **Teresa Cremin and Kerry Chappell**

Reflecting on Professor Anna Craft's contribution to education in the early and primary years, one is immediately struck by the remarkable breadth and depth of her influence. She not only published extensively, she also led myriad workshops and gave multiple keynotes, alongside undertaking considerable consultancy work for diverse organisations across the world. It is these areas in particular that this obituary will consider. Whilst conscious we are considering only part of her legacy, we know that research-informed primary practice and fostering creativity in young learners, enabling them to cope with tomorrow's uncertain world meant a great deal to Anna. She desired, as probably all educators do, to make a difference.

Anna commenced her professional life as a primary school teacher in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). She had previously undertaken a BA in Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cambridge, and a PGCE at the Institute of Education, London. She was seconded as an ILEA Teacher Fellow to the Polytechnic of North London (now London Metropolitan University) and later worked as a National Curriculum Council project officer on an Education for Economic Awareness curriculum development project. In 1991 she was appointed as a Lecturer at the Open University where she was initially involved in contributing to and co-chairing courses on primary education. Later she also co-wrote a study guide on creativity in education to accompany a course (1995) and contributed to framing online professional development modules for primary teachers. Indeed her first book focused on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (Craft, 1996). She was also involved in a research and curriculum development project on Creativity in Education, in collaboration with the Institute for Creativity, London (1995-1998), became a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and co-directed an international research study investigating the impact of CPD on teachers' ability to foster critical and creative thinking strategies (1998-2001). Her colleagues from that time recall her energy, determination and passion, characteristics she retained throughout her life, at home and at work.

At the turn of the century, having begun to research the potential contribution of little-c creativity - life wide creativity as she called it - in education, she published her key texts for educators 3-13 : *Creativity across the Primary Education* (Craft, 2000) and *Creativity and Early Years Education* (Craft, 2002). Both were well received by a profession interested in exploring creative pedagogies and curricula and triggered a wealth of consultancies and speaking appointments. Between 2000-2010 Anna spoke at no less than 115 events, these included international and national keynotes, multiple seminars in universities and governments and more practical 'hands-on minds-on' workshops at teacher conferences and arts/cultural events. She was an engaging and eloquent speaker, at ease with sharing her scholarship and passion for creativity.

From 2007 Anna held two chairs, at the Open University (OU) and the University of Exeter, she worked with doctoral students in both contexts and always went the extra mile for them, often drawing them into her own research studies. At the OU she had set up an inter-faculty creativity research group with Bob Jeffrey, and at Exeter she established the Centre for Creativity Research in Education (CREATE) as well as teaching face to face on aspects of creativity, the arts and educational futures. Her myriad of other roles included working as a Government Advisor with Pat Cochrane on creativity in education in England, offering advice

to other governments and organisations, and being a patron of the organisation 5x5x5 Creativity led by Penny Hay. Anna also co-founded the BERA Creativity SIG with Bob Jeffrey and the Elsevier Journal *Thinking Skills and Creativity* with Rupert Wegerif. She was highly proactive, with extraordinary energy and drive and a phenomenal network of colleagues in the arts, and in creative and cultural education as well as within the primary and early years sectors. More recently, she took up the role of a Director of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT) led by Robin Alexander. Within CPRT, Anna focused on research and professional development programmes being developed with Pearson plc. She initiated the Trust's South West Research Schools Network based at University of Exeter and Bath Spa University and co-wrote the Trust's new research-based CPD programme on Children's Voices.

Her particular interest was the concept of Possibility Thinking- the transformation from 'what is' to 'what might be' - which she perceived to be at the heart of creativity (Craft, 2001). Collaborating with colleagues Teresa Cremin, Kerry Chappell, Pam Burnard as well as Tatjana Dragovic, Alice Matthews and Linda McConnon she undertook several phases of empirical research in order to examine the characteristics of Possibility Thinking and the pedagogy which nurtures it (Burnard et al., 2006; Cremin et al., 2006; Chappell, 2008; Craft et al., 2012; Craft et al., 2012b, Cremin et al., 2013). These naturalistic studies were often co-participative, involving Early Years practitioners and teachers in various ways and triggering reflection upon practice. Her most recent research projects included examinations of Creative Primary Practice (Craft et al., 2013), Possibility Thinking and creative change in schools (Craft and Chappell, 2014) and two EU projects Creative Little Scientists (exploring the synergies between creativity and science and mathematics in the early years) (Megalakiki et al, 2013; Cremin et al., forthcoming) and Create2Learn (developing collaborative creativity in online playful contexts). Always cognizant of the consequences of the changing world, Anna also wrote about creativity in relation to childhood and educational futures and explored the four Ps of changing childhood and youth triggered by the digital revolution (Craft, 2011 and 2013). She argued these were: the plurality of identities, possibility awareness, playful engagement and participation and argued that the education community needed to attend to them in order to help children flourish in this new media age.

Professor Anna Craft was committed to listening to learners, old and young alike; she was convinced that in order to handle the complexity of the future, we need to develop our creative capacities (both individually and collectively) and she worked determinedly towards this goal. Her tragic death at the young age of 52 years prevented her from personally sustaining this work, but its influence thus far, both theoretically and practically, has made a difference to many academics, educators and young learners. Long may it continue to do so.

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