

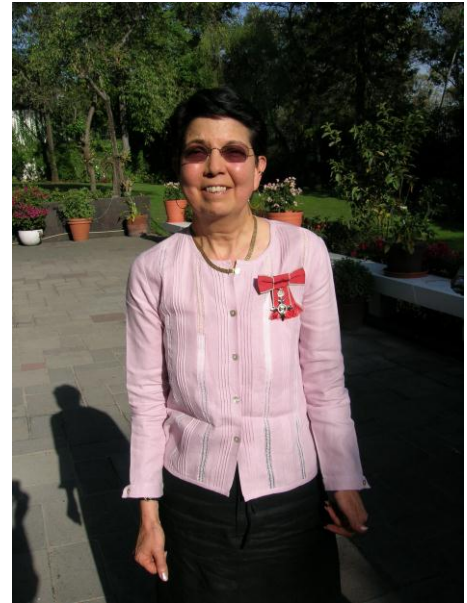
## **A Tribute to Ana María Aramayo**

### ***Pat Grounds, Free Lance TESOL Consultant***

Ana María Aramayo, admired by all of us in the ELT profession who worked with her, or simply knew her, passed away on Friday, October 28, 2011, after 25 years of courageously fighting leukaemia, while at the same time carrying on with a full, enthusiastic and immensely productive life. Ana María reached many people, as a trainer, project manager and director, as a genuine and sincere human being, as a loyal and unconditional friend. This she achieved not only in Mexico, but also elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, the UK and, indeed, in the much wider world.

In Mexico City, Ana María first worked at the Instituto Anglo Mexicano de Cultura (now The Anglo Mexican Foundation) and went on to begin work at the British Council as English Language Officer in March 1986. At this time, British Council ELT activities in Mexico still went little beyond the organization of occasional workshops for teachers, and the range of professional contacts between the UK and Mexico was somewhat limited. Some of the projects which Ana María worked on in the 80s used a then innovative mix of short, intensive courses given to small groups spread across the whole of Mexico. These short courses, funded jointly by the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP) and DFID (UK Department for International Development) were complemented by supervised home study and helped some 250 Mexican teachers to graduate at BA and MA levels.

Colleagues who worked with her in those early days remember that, from the first day in her post, Ana María took it upon herself to set up partnerships with colleagues in both UK and Mexican institutions, because she was able to perceive great opportunities for the mutual enrichment of the profession across countries. In this Ana María was fully supported by a long line of English Language Officers over the years, but by none more than Dr. Huw Williams, the visionary ELO behind the setting up and implementation of the Professionalization Programme for Mexican University staff, funded by the British Government through DFID, together with the SEP, in the early nineties. Ana María's advice and leadership in this project, which began with the seeking out of a cadre of qualified trainers willing to cover hundreds or thousands of kilometres to give training all over Mexico, was crucial. From 1993 to 1997, Ana María coordinated specialized training at Cambridge COTE (Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English) level for 3,500 university teachers of English, at BA level for 250 teachers and at MA level for 90 teachers, as well as orchestrating the updating and improvement of existing BA in TEFL courses at Mexican universities in collaboration with a number of UK institutions and, not least, the setting up of 34 English language learning resource centres (now better-known as



self access centres) with 3,600 teachers being trained in their use, all over the country.

After the year 2000, Ana María, then as Director of ELT, began to work more closely with the Director of Basic Education at the SEP. As a result, a major distance course in English as a Foreign Language (SEPAINGLES) was born, and more than 300,000 people have already benefitted from this course, to date. As well as overseeing this project, Ana María administered a range of other projects in ELT materials design, methodology and reading comprehension at technical high schools, a major project at the National Polytechnic Institute, and other in-service training courses and ELT development projects at over a dozen public universities. At secondary school level, too, Ana María coordinated various training programmes for teachers in a number of states and, not least, the national curriculum for English at Mexican primary and secondary schools was also enriched by her advice, and indirectly by that of the consultants she selected.

Ana María also supervised the organization of numerous conferences in specialized areas of ELT, over the decades. From 2003 to 2007, she headed the Mexican Centres for English Language Learning Support (CELLS) project. This project provided training for self access centre staff from 34 Mexican universities, so that they could participate in the design and creation of the E4U (English for Universities) ESP website, as well as a successful exchange programme. The exchanges, many still continuing to this day, began by bringing young English undergraduates out to help students in Mexican self access centres and also giving Mexican teachers the chance to experience life at UK universities. The Mexican centres at public universities give some 500,000 students support for their English language studies.

Ana Maria's energy in the development of new projects never ceased; she was ever opening doors to new learning opportunities eagerly offered by UK and local ELT specialists, always trying to respond to the changing training and development needs in Mexico as swiftly and effectively as feasible. Before her retirement from the BC, Ana María was able to set up the current online MA in TESOL in collaboration with the University of Southampton, which is now into its third generation. Another achievement was the PhD in Language Studies set up in conjunction with Canterbury Christ Church University, the College of St Mark and St John (University of Exeter) and other outstanding UK universities. With the setting up of the PhDs, Ana María at last fulfilled her dream of creating access to a complete professional career structure for ELT specialists in Mexico, ranging from basic pre-service training, all the way through to postgraduate levels.

Also a pioneer of the regionalization of British Council ELT activities throughout Latin America, Ana María headed the first Latin American Regional ELT conference in Mexico City and led the project to develop the first Latin American Regional online language development course for teachers, now known as "Yes".

More recently and closer to home again, Ana María supervised the project for the production of Digitalised EFL materials for the use of all Mexican state primary schools, keeping us all up to date with the possibilities digital learning at lower levels and supporting the SEP's "*Habilidades Digitales para Todos*" initiative.

Throughout her life, Ana María left her mark on individuals and institutions in Mexico, the UK and farther afield. Fortunately, her contributions did not go without due recognition. In 2004 she was awarded a British Council 70th Anniversary Cultural Award. In 2006 Ana María received the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's Honours list. There is perhaps no higher mark of appreciation for a non-British citizen, and this acknowledgement of her contribution was no more than the just reward of a loyal, consistent and committed professional life.

Although Ana María retired from the British Council on December 19, 2008, her work did not stop there. Always a teacher trainer herself, at heart, Anita was soon tutoring DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English for Adults) courses. As if this was not enough, she also became a successful textbook writer, during her "retirement"!

This account of achievements would be impressive in any ELT professional. How much more so in Ana María? Although she herself was never a person to complain, it should not be forgotten that she fought a never-ceasing battle against leukaemia, determined not to let it hold her back. Shortly after her bone-marrow transplant, for example, Ana María herself studied an online MA in ELT, and thus achieved a cherished personal aim.

ELT professional development will continue in Mexico and Latin America, and the absence of this outstanding professional will be much felt. Those of us who worked with Ana María, or were trained through one of the projects she led, have been inspired by her professionalism as a teacher and her commitment to her profession. More than anything, we have been awed by her never-failing courage in facing both enormous professional challenges and intense personal suffering. It is this courage, which has become for many of us, a beacon and a guiding example in the smaller adversities of our own lives.

Thank you, Ana María.