

Developmental Section Annual Conference

13–15 September 2017, Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon



The British
Psychological Society
Developmental Psychology Section

Distinguished Contributions Award Winner

From Beyond Modularity to Neuroconstructivism: Annette Karmiloff-Smith's unique contribution to developmental psychology

Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith

Birkbeck, University of London



Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith was a highly influential developmental and cognitive scientist who made significant contributions to our understanding of normal and abnormal development. She was the recipient of many awards, including the European Science Foundation Latsis Prize for Cognitive Sciences, Fellowships of the British Academy, the Cognitive Science Society, the Academy of Medical Sciences, and the Royal Society of Arts, as well as honorary doctorates from universities across the world. She was awarded a CBE for services to cognitive development in the 2004 Queen's Birthday Honours list. For her PhD, she trained in Geneva under Barbel Inhelder and Jean Piaget. Her first article in 1975 ("If you want to get ahead, get a theory!") encapsulated her view that

understanding cognitive processes was the key to understand the child's developing abilities. Annette was a prolific author and co-author of a number of influential books. Her most notable scientific books, *Beyond Modularity: A Developmental Perspective on Cognitive Science* (1992) and *Rethinking Innateness: A Connectionist Perspective on Development* (1996), have been reprinted in several languages. She also wrote several extremely successful books directed at a broader audience, including *Baby It's You: A unique insight into the first three years of the developing baby* (1994). For the last 10 years of her career, Annette was a professorial research fellow at the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck, University of London, where her work focused on understanding the complex epigenetic interactions involved in brain organisation across early development.

Michael S. C. Thomas is a professor of cognitive neuroscience at Birkbeck, University of London, and a Fellow of the BPS and will be presenting on behalf of Annette Karmiloff-Smith.

Abstract

Annette Karmiloff-Smith was awarded the BPS Distinguished Contributions Award shortly before her death in December 2016. In this talk, her former postdoctoral fellow, Michael Thomas, discusses

the main intellectual contributions of Annette's research career, from her initial work with Inhelder and Piaget, through her re-conceptualisation of modularity as a product of development rather than a precursor to it, and her later shift into cognitive neuroscience, where her study of genotype-phenotype relations in genetic disorders such as Williams syndrome led to the influential proposal that development itself is the key to understanding developmental disorders.