



Rosemary Cathcart, Ph.D

Rosemary has been intensively involved in gifted education since the early 1980s in a very wide variety of roles.

Her first involvement was as a surprised parent when she and her husband discovered they had somehow produced two children in this category. Her own training as a high school teacher had not prepared her for this, and when her children's school experiences were quite traumatic, she realised with dismay that primary school teachers also weren't prepared to provide for such children. She joined the NZ Assn for Gifted Children, became its national president in 1984, and was shortly afterwards asked to develop and

teach a gifted programme at a large central Auckland primary school. She has been professionally involved ever since.

Her early professional work in this field was mentored by Professor GW Parkyn, still the most eminent New Zealand scholar ever to have been involved in gifted education in this country. Rosemary's work with Professor Parkyn built on the programme she had developed at the primary school and resulted in the establishment of the REACH model as the first such model to be developed in New Zealand. She would later go on, with his approval, to edit Parkyn's collected papers on gifted education for publication by the NZCER. (*To the Aesthetic Road: Neglected Areas of Giftedness*, NZCER, 1994).

In 1990, following various invitations to take teacher workshops, Rosemary wrote two papers on gifted education for the Auckland College of Education's post-graduate Advanced Studies for Teachers, and taught these papers through till 1994. At the same time, from 1990 till 1992, she was an invited member on two Ministry contracts looking at how schools handled professional development. She says of this interesting experience that it was a steep learning curve, not just for the schools, but for herself and her fellow contractors. "And sometimes a surprising one – we hadn't realised how little support schools had been given before then in understanding how to manage this issue". Another somewhat unusual part of this contract involved a study retreat in a monastery for the participating principals, with monks in hoods and brown habits as the hosts.

She then moved in 1992 to take up a position as the sole advisor on gifted and talented learners employed by Special Education Services (now GES). This role involved her in working very closely with numerous parents and their children and with schools seeking to support these children. Initially her position was limited to West Auckland, but she rapidly found herself responding to requests from throughout Auckland and then from SES centres around the country. This included initiating and organising a national conference in Palmerston North in 1994. During this period she also acted as a consultant for the Advanced Band for the new Maths Curriculum and as a member of the Reading Group for similar material for the new Science Curriculum.

But it seemed increasingly obvious that gifted education needed to be served by more than the few and widely scattered people then involved in the field – Dave Freeman, for instance, as an inspector permitted to use a small portion of his time on this topic, Don McAlpine valiantly teaching a solitary paper at Massey, Elwyn Richardson with his superb but tiny creative writing group in West Auckland, Elaine Le Sueur independently and unaided organising a national conference with international speakers in 1992, Rosemary herself and a handful of committed teachers elsewhere. But there was nothing to link these people with each other, and, at that time, no official Ministry support or funding. No way to make a real impact on our national provision for gifted learners.

What was needed was a central specialised agency which could make gifted education visible and accessible, a centre which could serve teachers, children, parents and researchers.

So in 1995, Rosemary left the SES and set up the George Parkyn National Centre for Gifted Education, led it through its first decade, and developed its innovative One Day School programme which ultimately reached out to include 18 venues and nearly 600 children. This too involved many adventures – classes held in an underground crypt, for example, and in a working fire station! Nonetheless, it worked. Based on the REACH model, ODS built its programme round an understanding of the needs of highly gifted children, provided a high level of challenge, and

functioned in a flexible and responsive way to create a rich learning environment. Twenty years on, Rosemary still hears from parents about the difference it made for their children.

ODS was not the Centre's only activity. During Rosemary's ten years as director, three further national conferences were held, with keynote speakers including François Gagne and Louise Porter from Australia, and Rosemary herself travelled widely throughout New Zealand taking scores of workshops for teachers ranging from pre-service trainees to school principals and including people such as RTLB and trainee psychologists. She worked with noted Maori leader Naida Glavish to organise a hui on giftedness in Maori children. Parents were supported in various ways, individually, in workshops and through a course run in conjunction with Sue Breen. Several researchers were also given access or support for their work – some 20 projects in all. But perhaps most importantly, Rosemary and her staff continued to lobby intensively for Ministry recognition, leading directly to the Ministerial Working Party on Gifted Education which, amongst other significant moves, wrote catering for the gifted into the regulations governing our schools.

Finding her interest increasingly focussing on the importance of professional development, Rosemary stepped down from her role as director of the George Parkyn Centre and in mid 2005 established REACH Education to concentrate specifically on this aspect of gifted education.

Her first move was to develop the semester-long Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education which pioneered the delivery of an online teacher's course in gifted education in this country and also apparently in Australia. Firmly grounded in the research in this field, the course also drew on Rosemary's and her tutors' extensive experience in working directly for many years with gifted learners and their families, a powerful combination of research and practical experience to underpin the learning offered by the course. Its quality has been recognised, not only in New Zealand, but also through international endorsement from the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development. In 2017, the course won the US National Association for Gifted Children's Professional Development Network award, believed to be the only time it has been awarded outside the US.

Rosemary has also continued to take workshops in different parts of the country and to present at conferences in workshops or as a keynote. She has also presented in Australia, and as a keynote speaker there for their national conference. She organised another national conference in 2009, this time with significant Maori input. She has brought a number of eminent researchers and practitioners in gifted education to New Zealand, including again François Gagne, Linda Silverman, Michael Piechowski and Stephanie Tolan, and in 2015, at their request, hosted members of the internationally-respected Columbus Group at a symposium in Auckland.

Over the years, Rosemary has developed various resources, written many articles, a number of which can be found on the REACH website, and has also produced three books for teachers, *Differentiation Made Practical*, *Gifted Programming Made Practical*, and her earliest work, believed to be the first full teachers' manual on gifted education published in this country, *They're Not Bringing My Brain Out*, now in its third edition and with a fourth updated edition due in the near future.

In 2016 Rosemary completed her PhD, with a research focus on ethical leadership and gifted adolescents. In the same year she was invited to join the Advisory Board of the international *Advanced Development Journal*. She is an Honorary Life Member of the NZAGC and served as foundation board treasurer for giftEDnz, stepping down from that role in 2013 but remaining as a member. She maintains close links with a number of international colleagues to help ensure her own knowledge is current. In 2017, she was invited by the Columbus Group to become a Group member, the first person outside the US to be so invited.

Her "other" life has included activities such as working as a postie while studying, editing an arts programme for Concert FM, writing feature material on house design, being a play centre Mum, setting up an annual community fair, supporting her husband's work in the theatre, and being an active political party member.

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