

What our participants told the Ministry ...

In 2016, the New Zealand Ministry of Education instituted a national accreditation system for providers of professional development. When REACH applied for its staff to be accredited under this system, the Ministry's Accreditation Panel initially declined to include gifted education as a subject and queried whether our work with teachers would actually result in positive change. So, as well as sending the Panel the research on the need for gifted education, we asked our participants for what they thought about the results of doing our course. Dozens of emails poured in. They came from teachers in both New Zealand and Australia, from principals through to beginning teachers, from teachers who had completed university papers in gifted before doing the course through to teachers who had no prior knowledge at all, from early childhood, primary and high school teachers, and from recent course graduates through to teachers who'd done the course years ago and were still finding positive outcomes. With their permission, we've printed some of their responses below, too many to include them all, but we hope these comments will help you determine what this course could mean for you. (And yes, the Panel changed its mind when it read this evidence, and we were accredited!)

To whom it may concern,

I discovered the REACH programme via an email. I knew our school needed to take steps in this direction and this PD met my professional needs.

I registered, and carried out the demanding, but very satisfying programme. The professional readings, assignment programme and on-going dialogue relating to understanding and meeting the needs of our gifted students was the best PD I have had in my 36 years of teaching.

As the Principal of a very large primary school in greater Christchurch, I used this new learning to establish a group of like minded students within my school. Over the period of four years, this group has extended to 85 students from six schools covering years 2-10, working five full days. These groups are hosted at Lincoln Primary School. Our Community of Learning fully support the programmes we have developed. This programme is self sustaining financially as families willingly contribute to the costs as they are delighted that their children's gifts and talents are being acknowledged, extended and highly valued.

This programme is a direct outcome of the REACH professional development.

Vivienne Butcher, Principal, Lincoln Primary School.

Having recently been involved in a two-day REACH PLD session on gifted education in Wellington, and having gone through the full 6 month REACH course on gifted education, I can personally attest to the rigour and value of PLD services offered by REACH. Not only that, REACH provides ongoing counsel and enrichment to those completing its courses at no additional charge. This is immensely valuable to teachers.. This is not hyperbole; it is an empirical fact for those of us in the daily trenches of gifted education. Affordable, intense and effective gifted education training is provided by REACH Education.

Richard Brudvik-Lindner, Social Sciences Teacher & Coordinator for Gifted, Talented & Highly Motivated Students, Nelson College.

Without studying with REACH Education I could not have begun to do my job this year as a new Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator. I was in no position to do a Masters and needed specific guidance and education about the Gifted and Talented field. REACH Education gave me that. I had excellent feedback and feedforward. This is a vital course for those beginning their journey in Gifted and Talented Education.

Irene Jennings, Kaitaia College.

In an ECE centre that employs 12 teachers my REACH qualification is what motivates our group to consider the needs of these learners. As a qualification REACH was within the 'reach' of many teachers through being affordable and on-line which is necessary in an industry (ECE), which is becoming increasingly for profit (something the Ministry allowed) and where I find a lot of teachers pay for their own PLD.

Sincerely, Jane McLeod

The REACH PD I completed was the most significant gifted professional development I have been involved in throughout my years as a teacher. I was able to move on from the course to totally revamp gifted provision in our school. Our programme has since been of great interest to other schools and several people researching for post graduate qualifications. I always recommend teachers who are struggling with gifted provision to enroll in the course. Phil Spriggs Deputy Principal, Pt Chevalier School

When I undertook the REACH Certificate course it was, and has continued to be, invaluable in supporting my role as a secondary school teacher and as the GATE Facilitator at my school. In fact I devised our initial school identification process around the very practical strategies offered in the course. The course content was ideal as it comprised both rich, wide ranging, and up-to-date research and reading material (the equivalent of any university paper reading list) and in-the-classroom practical tasks, including case studies of individual students. Having my own tutor (yourself at that time, Rosemary!) to give advice and detailed feedback along the way was incredibly affirming and valued. No question was too small for you to respond to and the feedback given combined both your own many years of practical experience with exceptional students and your understanding of fundamental issues in this area that are being explored in current international research and practice. The REACH course was very much student-centred and inclusive in its approach and the understanding I gained has been exactly what I have needed to fulfil my role.

Regards, Dinah OMeara, Mt Maunganui College

Having completed a certificate in gifted education with Reach Education I cannot overstate how beneficial the course was to my teaching of gifted students in the classroom. The course was a great balance of research together with practical applications showing how to transfer the knowledge to the classroom. To me, the practical aspects of the course, which had many regular assignments (rather than massive theoretical essays) gave me the opportunity to immediately try what I had learned in the classroom which was invaluable.

I live in Australis and searched high and low for the right course before I found the Reach course in New Zealand. Gifted students and their education is sorely neglected in schools as it is, and the Reach course which is rare in its level of expertise needs to be nurtured and protected at all costs.

Maree Kelly, Sydney, Australia

The REACH course made a profound difference to my teaching practice, and helped me to understand the otherwise inexplicable actions of some of my students. The course was particularly important in the way that the staff at our school dealt with my own son. Their increased understanding of his giftedness has meant that the once shy and frustrated little boy has gone on to achieve excellence endorsements at NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3, has been a successful Head Boy, and is about to study Engineering at Canterbury University. None of this would have happened if I had not had access to the REACH material.

Lynne Grove, Southland.

The REACH course is an exceptionally well delivered course, with passionate, committed tutors who go over and above. The course content and style ensures you develop knowledge and usable strategies, can practice and try things out and get thorough feedback and guidance. You end the course knowing so much more than when you started but also keen to keep learning. As it seems to be with gifted education, once you start you realise how much you actually didn't know. Our gifted children in Aotearoa NEED teachers who have been through this training. If they are not challenged in their learning they are cheated, and this course fully helps you understand the depth and complexity that is lacking for our gifted learners

Tessa McTaylor, Early Childhood Educator, Little Earth Montessori Preschool, Kapiti

As a graduate of the REACH Education course in 2014, I have found the learning and the nature of the assignments invaluable to my work as Gifted and Talented coordinator at my school. The professional readings, which are continually updated and at the cutting edge of Gifted Education, are carefully chosen by Rosemary Cathcart, the course writer and a woman of vast accredited experience in the field of Gifted Education.

The practical nature of this course, where one is guided through the steps of creating a program specific to the needs of the Gifted learners in their schools, and the level of support given, have allowed those who have taken this course to competently set up and evaluate their own Gifted programs. Even after graduation there is ongoing support and encouragement from Rosemary and her team. She is also able to connect us with others in the field who may be able to meet specific needs. Her passion and lifelong dedication to Gifted Education is exemplary and indeed contagious.

In the two years since completing the course, our Gifted students have enjoyed many successes which, I doubt, would have been gained without the knowledge and direction we have gained from the course.

I strongly recommend the REACH Education course as an invaluable tool to train teachers to deal with New Zealand's most valuable assets, our Gifted individuals.

E.L.(Sue) Crawford, Gifted and Talented coordinator, Verdon College, Invercargill

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to study for the Certificate in Effective Practice in Gifted Education which I studied on-line almost ten years ago. It was an excellent course, with a sound research base. The standards you set were very high, and the support, both in resources and tutors/as mentors was as good as anything I have experienced in my university study in NZ. The course equipped me to advocate for gifted students in the two international schools where I have taught for the last 11 years. I have had the privilege to lead school wide development including staff development and support structures for

students. I was fortunate to be part of a complete shift in conceptualisation of giftedness in the school I was in in Dubai, and it was exciting to see in the 2015-16 round of gradings the KHDA (equivalent of MOE) change their best practice model for giftedness - it was everything I had learned when studying with REACH, demonstrating how current the course content is. I had introduced it 4 years earlier as part of a school wide project I had bid for, and so we were well and truly at the forefront of best practice. Since returning to NZ I have continued to use the excellent skills and knowledge I gained when studying for the certificate. I am looking forward to accessing the extensive resources you have available now on line so that I can ensure my understanding and practice is current.

Heather Vickery

I regard your organisation as an essential part in the development and maintenance of professional learning around the special needs of gifted students. I was a participant in your course and gained the certificate a few years ago. This qualification has been an important one in the development of my career.

**Yours sincerely,
Mary Anne Sleyer, Cullinane College Wanganui.**

Mary Miller, Principal of Gore Main Primary, was just completing a year's sabbatical which she undertook specifically to work on the introduction of gifted provision in her school, based on what she had learned from participating in the REACH online course. She has kindly given us permission to use the following extract from her draft sabbatical report:

Over 2014 I completed the Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education. This is an online course offered by REACH (Responding to Children with Exceptional Abilities) Education Consultancy. This course was created specifically to support schools in working successfully with gifted learners. It gives practical tools and strategies for teachers to utilise with gifted learners and has been designed and taught by educators with real expertise in this field, based not only on their comprehensive academic knowledge but also on many years of themselves working directly with gifted children, classroom teachers, and parents. The course is built around three interwoven themes - understanding, identifying and teaching gifted learners.

The Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education was one of the most empowering Professional Development opportunities I have undertaken. This course gave tools that were not only research driven, but able to be trialled in our own school with an online tutor assisting us along the way. The course itself was year-long, and each fortnight new skills built upon the learning that had occurred previously, meaning that by the time we could robustly plan for these children, we also had the knowledge as to why such approaches would work the best and why.

It became apparent that the reason why I had found it so difficult in the past to truly understand the needs of our children with exceptional abilities, was due not only to the complexity of these children, but also the image I had built up of what society portrays a gifted learner to look like and do. I had lacked real access to research based professional development that answered the questions that I had for our learners. Working in your own school, using your own learners to study, made the learning so much more powerful and informative. To grasp the needs of children with exceptional abilities requires time to process their needs and complexities.

Mary Miller, Principal, Gore Main Primary

Here are my comments re the "CERTIFICATE OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN GIFTED EDUCATION" which I received with distinction from REACH Education Consultancy in 2011....

- The course is rigorously research based and academically challenging
- It is also the most practically useful PD I have ever undertaken, (I have been teaching since 1981)!
- It fosters a supportive community for Gifted learners, their parents and teachers.
- It is constantly growing, updating, informing and challenging everyone in the field of Gifted Education.

Trudy Thumath, GATE teacher, Sunnybrae Normal School

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am a full time PEAC (Primary Education and Challenge) teacher of gifted children based in Perth, Western Australia, employed by the Department of Education. I am always on the lookout for new and relevant PDL in the area of gifted education. Good professional learning in this area is like hens' teeth.

In 2015 I attended the Columbus Symposium in Auckland New Zealand which was organised by Rosemary Cathcart of REACH Education. As a result of this I decided to enrol in Rosemary's online 'Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education'. Many years ago I was trained in the delivery of the GERRIC models (NSW) and thought it was time to raise my profile. I liked the idea of the course because it was not going to take me forever to complete and also it was presented in a relaxed manner. It also referred back me back to classroom teaching – which was extremely valuable as I teach in a withdrawal situation.

That year was extremely enjoyable. I was able to converse with my tutor, discuss, argue, question, discover – it was fabulous professional learning for me. Susan was extremely knowledgeable but also appreciated the knowledge I had – commenting that she was also learning from my vast experience. Best way to learn.

I was particularly taken with the planning framework REACH proposes. I took this framework, combined it with my PEAC requirements, to come up with a unique but extremely powerful planning tool. The knowledge gained from this course has extended my profile even further:

I now present to schools information on 'Identifying Gifted Learners'. The feedback has been most rewarding. Schools find the research especially new to them and subsequently valuable.

My new planning framework has been widely shared and used by the PEAC community and also by teachers in various networks. I have used it as an example in my recent job interview.

My own understanding of theory and research in giftedness has been enhanced. I am a 'doer' rather than a theorist but the modules were presented in such a way that I found them interesting and encouraged me to read more.

Raewyn Donald, PEAC Coordinator/Teacher – South Metro PEAC.

Our whole teaching staff completed two semesters in 2012 which included in-depth analysis in-school through research and professional readings, along with numerous assignments. We met on a fortnightly basis as a staff, to discuss our progress and assignment

requirements. All teachers passed this intensive PD, which I know had huge benefits for our students.

The end result was teachers focusing on engagement of all students, differentiated teaching strategies and improved teaching practices, and increased student agency. Inclusion was also a key element, and addressing 'At Risk' students who include Gifted and Talented students. These are all foci for the PLD model which is being promoted from 2017 onwards.

**Phillipa Ellis, formerly Principal, Pongaroa School
Now Principal – Norsewood and Districts' School**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I enrolled in the Certificate of Effective Practice Gifted Education run by Reach Education in 2010. My intention was to obtain practical experience in how to meet the learning needs of my gifted and talented pupils as well as learn more about the theory of gifted and talented education. In both regards, the course provided by Reach Education exceeded my expectations.

I found the course to be ideally suited to classroom teachers as it was very practical. The assignments were based around designing materials that could be used in the classroom or developing skills in relation to identifying gifted and talented students. This has proved practical and invaluable. As a result, I now use the REACH model for teaching gifted learners in relation to all unit plans that I prepare and in relation to my daily classroom delivery. I have also incorporated the teacher checklists in relation to my school's processes on identifying gifted and talented achievers and underachievers. I further refer to many of the articles that I was provided with to assist me regularly in meeting the learning needs of my students.

The course provided by Reach Education combined practical teaching skills with theory in a way that was meaningful and useful. This is absolutely essential for busy teachers.

**Kim Cohen, HOL Senior English, GATE Co-ordinator
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"Promoting Christian values, learning excellence and quality relationships to enable students to be outstanding citizens."

As a teacher of gifted children, REACH is my first port of call should I need support with any issue concerning gifted education. The course, which I did some years ago was and is still the best professional learning I have done in gifted education and I still refer to the readings and notes from time to time. I am not aware of anything offered to teachers at present that compares to the depth and breadth of the learning offered by the REACH course.

Paulien Gray, Senior Team Leader, Otonga Primary School, Rotorua. 07 3486443.

I am a past Reach course participant who has led the gifted education area of the curriculum in a primary school setting. I found that what I learnt on the Reach course was invaluable in identifying gifted children and providing a learning environment that both challenged and supported the special learning needs of these children.

I am now working in the early childhood sector and I continue to find what I learnt on the Reach education course to be an amazing source of insights and teaching ideas to meet the learning needs of very young gifted children.

I found the Reach course to be fascinating and extremely well taught. The Reach course motivated me to put in hours of extra work on gifted education, above my usual work load as a teacher. When I implemented ideas from the course I saw significant positive changes in children's attitude to learning and in the quality of their work.

Anna Carmichael

I participated in the REACH gifted education course in 2012. I cannot overestimate the profound effect the course had on me as a teacher and as a person who values gifted education most dear. The course gave me the skills to not only examine my own practice and that of others, but allowed me to drastically improve the educational outcomes for gifted students within my class and school. In subsequent years I have become more involved in the management aspects of a school, I find I constantly refer back to the work of Rosemary and others at REACH as a basis for implementing change to improve the outcomes for ALL students. While their work is focussed on the gifted learner, the skills imparted impact on the critical and creative thinking skills of all students. Surely that is something to be cherished.

Matt Jones, Acting Principal, Mt Somers Springburn School.

I took part in the REACH Gifted and talented online course three years ago now. I found the course to be highly useful in giving practical strategies to differentiate the class programme to meet the needs of the gifted and talented students in my class. The programme had a good balance of theory and reading and the necessity to put the theory into practice or reflect on one's own experiences or practice.

As the SENCO of our school, it also gave me the scaffold I needed to write a policy and procedure as well as developing screening tests. These were then worked on with the full staff. We have since been attempting to embed this practice within our school.

Rosemary and her team have always worked tirelessly to support teachers and their development at the level they come in to the course. The course is very suited to the busy class teacher being able to work on modules in their own available time.

I have since recommended this course to my colleagues who have been trying to upskill themselves in professional development with Gifted and talented learners.

Kind regards, Wendy Huriwai

I would like to say that the REACH course is a much needed and totally unique course. I don't think that there is any other course that looks at the current research and literature in such depth, that looks at the issues that surround gifted children and their families and schools and how to deal with them.

The course has been a totally invaluable source of learning for me. The theory I have learned backs up the practical strategies I now know how to use to improve the learning outcomes for the gifted students in my classes.

I have learned how to identify and cater for the gifted learner, I now have many tools available to me to use for identification and planning. I better understand the gifted learner as a whole and know places to access information and help for students, families and schools. All thanks to the REACH Course and the fabulous tutors.

Students, parents and colleagues have all given me positive feedback about how my changes in practice (due to the REACH Course) have positively impacted students learning and their feelings about school and themselves.

The REACH Course is very comprehensive with a mix of theory and practical tasks and lots of guidance and feedback to help achieve successful outcomes.

Claire Nankivell

The REACH Course was pivotal in my teaching Gifted Students and had a huge impact, informing my work significantly. The Course was thorough, rigorous, based on sound methodology and current research. This Course empowered me to initiate change within the whole School's program and was the impetus for reflection and moving in new directions for Gifted Education. The REACH course gave me the background and confidence to assist in submissions to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Gifted and Talented and Students.

Michelle McGowan, MCAT, Gr.Dip CAT, Grad.Dip V & P Arts, Dip Ed Primary, REACH CERT, Cert III & IV Govt & Security Investigations, ASSIST Cert.

I completed the REACH course in 2010 and found it to be the most useful PD I have had to date. It was a fantastic mix of research and practical assignments, cementing ideas to use in teaching as well as learning good theory to apply throughout my career. I often refer back to the book and course contents, and have gone on to become a specialist in gifted and talented education. Rosemary's vast knowledge and incredible passion is very valuable in gifted education in NZ and the REACH course is academically sound, practical and extremely good value PD. Unlike other courses I have completed, where that is all you get, REACH continues to be helpful and useful as we are often updated with new material and research.

Debbie Thompson

The impact of completing the REACH Programme on the school I currently work in has been major! The PLD I undertook myself as a professional brought the words "Gifted and Talented" to life in a big school for Staff who really had little knowledge about, and certainly never referred to, any students as "G & T". For students themselves heading to high school, this training I had impacted on them in terms of classes they were being promoted for, subject and career choices they were to make, and so on.

(Name withheld on request).

The teaching team at enrich@ILT gained significant insight into the world of Gifted education when we all completed the course. We were provided with excellent resources, archived readings, challenges and provocative thinking assignments.

Our programme grew in us as a team gaining new insight into our students. Our tutor feedback was timely, challenging, reaffirming and also pushed us to another level of thinking.

The on-going access to the archived readings has assisted us in teacher workshops and sharing with parents. We have developed the skills and confidence to facilitate teacher professional learning meetings and share our new learning. We have developed a parent support group and scaffolded them to become independent of us and take on a life of their own supporting each other.

We consider REACH director Rosemary Cathcart to be Aotearoa's " Grandmother" of Gifted Ed!

Marlene Campbell,
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I am an Australian teacher who works with gifted students and undertook the online course last year. I found it an extremely professional and valuable course and have benefited from it in so many ways. The course material was brilliant and the tutors were exceptional. I visited New Zealand twice in the last year to attend conferences run by Rosemary Cathcart and the REACH organisation and again found them to be most highly organised, professional and beneficial to me as a teacher of gifted children.

Sandy Robertson, Gifted Education Manager, Melbourne, Australia

Completing my Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education via REACH has been a rewarding, satisfying and an invaluable experience. As someone who did not know a great deal about gifted education and the needs of these amazing students and community, I

have found the professional learning through REACH of immeasurable benefit. I have been able to put into practice the need to identify gifted students and differentiate curriculum and assessment for the students I have worked with. I gained greater confidence in my abilities to do this since completing my professional learning through REACH and have seen the rewards first hand in doing so through the student and parent feedback.

I have also been able to impart my learning and share with colleagues the needs of the gifted community and even presented aspects of the REACH coursework in one of my conference presentations whilst recommending both the online professional learning and resources available. I have no doubt that by working with the passionate professionals running REACH I have become a better gifted educator and therefore my community of gifted and talented students and teachers gain the benefits of my professional learning. REACH prepared a high level learning program filled with variety in learning materials, coursework and engagement through the course.

I was always very well supported by my tutor and the collaborations were always positive and constructive. The team at REACH clearly have the best interests of the gifted and talented community at heart and deliver their best in every capacity via their professional learning opportunities. Thank you for making such a difference in my life.

Myra Karantzas, Victoria, Australia

I am currently working at Tawa College as an English Teacher with additional management responsibility as one of two GATE coordinators. Part of this role is to teach two classes of Year 11 GATE students for a period each week throughout the year. This year I have also been responsible for the professional development meetings for the teaching staff of our Year 10 GATE identified students which have occurred twice a term. I have also set up a forum in Google Plus Communities with the aim of creating a community where we can share ideas/strategies/knowledge and work collaboratively to develop comprehensive programmes for our gifted and talented students. It has been through the expertise delivered by the REACH course that I have been able to strengthen this forum with the enhanced knowledge that I have acquired whilst completing the certificate.

Our school serves a culturally diverse community and we value parent/whanau interaction so I have been particularly interested in understanding cultural perspectives and evaluating parent input. I have made this one of the basics for planning appropriate provision for our students. The course over the year has taught me how to evaluate parental input and the modules entitled- "Are there external factors which can prevent giftedness from being recognised or which impact on its development and expression?" were extremely instructive.

Many of our students are twice gifted as well so recognising factors which disguise giftedness and learning how to differentiate the curriculum material effectively was useful. The course has been very informative and provoked many a discussion and has led to me being able to quote from the modules offered when leading colleagues in workshops. An entire PD session delivered to the staff at the college was entitled Culture and Ethnicity.

Ultimately the teaching received and the instruction provided was very valuable to the staff and the staff gained a deeper understanding of the how to provide a culturally responsive environment for the culturally diverse learners at our school. Alongside the programme's excellent resources an archive was made available to all participants that includes a long list of culturally responsive readings that were very comprehensive.

In terms of having an understanding of school contexts the course has been very well grounded in research and knowledge that covers both secondary and primary areas of teaching. The course has provided me with material/knowledge/skills and a teaching pedagogy to use at secondary school level which has been very practical. The course has also equipped me with an array of different teaching strategies which will surely improve the learning outcomes of the students.

Rosemary Cathcart has been intensively involved in gifted education since the early 1980s in a very wide variety of roles. Her extensive knowledge and understanding of teaching gifted students has been invaluable to me this year. I have applied her ideas and strategies to my Year 11 gifted class and to my year 9 streamed class. Both classes have commented in their final evaluations that they felt that their needs were met and they enjoyed the "extension" activities. I feel like I have developed as a teacher and now feel more confident that I am meeting the needs of the gifted learners at Tawa College. Discussions with staff on the importance of how to generate interest and engagement of gifted learners in their classes have also led to changes in our teaching and provision for the gifted students at the school.

The course has empowered me and the professional development that I have received through the REACH programme has had a significant positive impact on akonga at Tawa College, both students and teachers.

Angela Roberts

Personally I found the Certificate in Effective Practice one of the most valuable learning opportunities I have had for a long time, benefitting not only myself, but all learners in our environment staff and students. The learning provided me with a much deeper insight into how to achieve 'real' differentiated teaching and learning and this has had a very positive impact on learning and achievement in our school. Over the years I had been involved in many opportunities for PLD in GATE but none provided me the information and format I needed to really question my beliefs and put into practice with passion my understandings. I am always promoting TNBMBO* as the go to book, full of practical ideas, and use this within our own and across schools to support professional development in planning and teaching to meet the needs of all our students.

Katrina Dekker, Principal, Rere School

**TNBMBO – "They're Not Bringing My Brain Out", Rosemary Cathcart's first teachers' manual.*
