

## Our History

**REACH Education was created in 2005** specifically to support schools in working effectively with gifted learners by providing quality professional development.

**Our basic philosophy** is simple: unless teachers have access to sound up-to-date research allied to thoroughly achievable practical strategies, they cannot be expected to cater for a group of learners with such significantly different needs. So that's what we provide.

Our first initiative was to establish the online **Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education**. Launched in 2006, this 13-module course takes participants on a journey of growing insight and understanding and equips them with a wide range of high-interest strategies to transform their teaching approach.

- It has been successfully completed by numerous New Zealand teachers and by teachers from Australia, Singapore, Sweden, Jamaica, Thailand, Dubai and Beijing
- It has won endorsement from the US-based **Institute for the Study of Advanced Development**.
- In 2017, this course won the **Professional Development Network Award granted by the US National Assn for Gifted Children**. Our understanding is that this had not previously been awarded outside the US itself.
- In 2020, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) assessed the course (microcredential) and assessed it to be equivalent to **15 credits** (150 notional learning hours) at **Level 6** on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF).

In 2022, we supplemented the Certificate course with a shorter 4-module course, the **Gifted Intensive**. This is specially designed for classroom teachers who do not have time or do not feel ready to undertake the more in-depth course, but who do want a sound practical introduction to helping their gifted learners. Like the Certificate course, participants are individually supported throughout by one of our expert tutors.

Our **strong international links** have also enabled us to bring a number of leading experts to present in New Zealand, including Linda Silverman, Stephanie Tolan, Francoys Gagné, Michael Piechowski and in 2015 eight members of the prestigious Columbus Group on their first-ever presentation outside the US, attracting delegates from throughout New Zealand and from across the Tasman. We also organised a successful national conference in 2009, "*Reaching Forward*", held in Rotorua and strongly featuring local gifted Maori young people.

From the outset we have provided **advisory support** both to individual teachers and to schools, taken workshops on a range of topics to various parts of New Zealand, and presented at national and regional conferences. For example, we helped a high school evaluate its three-year talent development initiative, worked over a period of more than a year with an RTLB cluster to develop a knowledge base for intervention strategies, addressed a national children's librarians' conference, took a day-long workshop for a group of visiting Australian principals, took workshops to smaller centres often not reached by speakers in this field (eg Kaitia, Otorohanga, Whakatane), supported a school trying to arrange special placement for a specific gifted child with complex needs, etc etc. Our director, as well as speaking at various conferences, has also presented in Australia and in 2008 was the keynote speaker at the Australian Association's annual national conference.

We have also often provided individual support for parents who have contacted us seeking information and advice, most memorably perhaps in a phone call from a homeschooling parent on a remote outback farm in Australia, but on many other occasions as well.

In 2016 we successfully applied for our staff to become accredited “**facilitators**” under the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s newly established accreditation system for professional development providers, or professional learning development (PLD) as it is now known. In 2017 our focus was on developing **PLD packages** for whole school development in relation to provision for gifted learners. From 2018 through to its end in 2020, we joined with the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education and the New Zealand Assn for Gifted Children to form **Gifted Aotearoa**, a Network of Expertise in gifted education, collectively winning a Ministry of Education contract for this purpose.

In 2019 we were invited by the Nga Potiki iwi in Papamoa, Tauranga to join them in applying for one of the Ministry’s contracts for “**Events and Opportunities for Gifted Learners**”. Our joint proposal was successful, and we began working with gifted tamariki from several schools.

This proved to be a most interesting journey. It further contributed to our ongoing work to achieve a definition of giftedness in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Our work towards this end is based on Māori concepts of giftedness, with its emphasis on the significance of qualities as well as abilities, linked to an ethic of caring and service, and has involved discussions with Māori leaders including Naida Glavish, Jill Bevan-Brown, Pita and Claire Mahaki, and most recently Professor Melinda Webber. (See our Key Concepts page).

In 2020, the international publishing firm Routledge UK published the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of our director’s teachers’ manual, ***They’re Not Bringing My Brain Out*** with a foreword by Dr Linda Silverman. This was then favourably reviewed in the noted US journal, the *Roeper Review*.

Over the years we have been involved in various discussions and panels with the **Ministry of Education**. This work continues. Meanwhile, in 2023, reflecting on our work on definition for this country, we made the decision to change our name from REACH Education to **Aotearoa Gifted NZ** – a big step but an exciting one!

All of these things we have embarked on in our search to fulfil our vision. It is a continuing and exciting journey.