Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6034

Brennan Kemmis, Roslin Elizabeth

(1949 - 2015)

Born	19490906, Mortdale New South Wales Australia
Died	20150728, Wagga Wagga New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Academic, Advocate, Educationist, Educator, Researcher, Teacher

Summary

Roslin Brennan Kemmis's working life was committed to education in schools, TAFE/VET and universities, especially for disadvantaged people: Indigenous, prisoners, people with low levels of literacy. A Riverina resident for 40 years, she taught in secondary schools (full-time, 1972-1977), and kindergarten and primary schools (part-time, 1985-1988), and adult literacy (1989-1992). She also worked as a teacher in the Education Centre, Bendigo Prison (1983-1984). From 1978, she worked part time for Charles Sturt University (and its predecessor institutions), and full time as a Lecturer in Vocational Education and Training from 1997, then Senior Lecturer (2004). She was a member of the University Council 2000-2004, and Head of the School of Education (and Associate Professor) from 2008 until her retirement from full time work in 2012.

In 1987, with her then husband, the late Mark Brennan, she explored linguistic inequalities in the criminal justice system. Published as 'Strange language: child victim witnesses under cross-examination', this work had significant impact internationally and nationally on the language and treatment in courts of child victims.
As President of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, 1992-1997, she was a fearless warrior, advocate and activist. She successfully advocated for the 40kpm school zones and the establishment of the Office of the Commission for Children and Young People. In 1999, she was appointed Member of the Order of Australia, for service to children and school education.

Between 1999 and 2006, she contributed significantly to research in vocational education and training (VET) including work on online pedagogies in VET, and apprenticeships and traineeships. In 2007, she was awarded the Carrick Medal for pioneering work embedding pathways from the VET to the university sector.

From 2013-2015, with Wiradjuri elders, Ros led the development and delivery of the ground-breaking CSU Graduate Certificate course in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage.

Details

Ros Brennan Kemmis was compassionate, warm, generous, strong, kind, and fun- loving. As President of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, 1992-1997, she was a fearless warrior, advocate and activist. She elevated the Federation's profile, routinely stepping on the toes of vested interests. She refused to be silenced or moderated. She asked difficult questions and demanded answers for those less able to ask. She successfully advocated for the 40kpm school zones and the establishment of the Office of the Commission for Children and Young People. As President, Ros was highly visible and audible in the media, giving more than 20 interviews most days. In 1999 she was appointed Member of the Order of Australia, for services to children and school education.

Ros was born in Mortdale, Sydney to Winifred Ruth and Norman Montague Leeder, and grew up in a home with strong links to the Baptist church. Her father taught mathematics in state secondary schools, and the family placed a premium on education. Although her mother suffered frequently with mental illness, there was much warmth and support in the Leeder home. A strong commitment to social concerns and social justice informed Ros's activism, which echoed that of her grandmother, Retta Dixon Long, who, in 1905, in her late teens, founded the Aborigines Inland Mission.

Ros's family moved to Epping in 1953. There she attended primary school and later Cheltenham Girls High School, then Macquarie University. At school, Ros was progressively recognized for her energy, wide-ranging interests, rebelliousness, good cheer and commitment to social justice

Ros was a committed educator who lived in the Riverina for 40 years, where she taught in secondary schools (full-time, 1972-1977), kindergarten and primary schools (part-time, 1985-1988) and adult literacy (1989-1992). She also worked as a teacher in the Education Centre in Bendigo Prison (1983-1984). From 1978, she worked part time for Charles Sturt University (and its predecessor institutions), joining the School of Education full time as a Lecturer in Vocational Education and Training in 1997, then Senior Lecturer (2004). At CSU she was a member of the University Council 2000-2004, and Head of the School of Education (and Associate Professor) from 2008 until her retirement from full time work in 2012. As Head, she led a vibrant academic community committed to excellence in teaching, research, engagement with the education profession, and public service. In 2007 she received a Carrick Award; a national award for outstanding contributions to student learning, 'pioneering work at a national and institutional level in the embedding of a VET sector qualification into university awards, supported by robust credit transfer pathways.'

Ros was involved in many fine pieces of research. In 1987, with her then husband, the late Mark Brennan, she explored linguistic inequalities in the criminal justice system, published as 'Strange language: child victim witnesses under cross examination'. The former head of the NSW Witness Assistance Program in the Dept. Public Prosecution explained: 'Since then there have been significant legal and systematic reforms to change the way children give evidence in court.' From 1996-2015, she made many outstanding contributions to research on vocational education and training, including work on online pedagogies in VET, and on apprenticeships and traineeships. She mentored many emerging VET teachers and researchers.

From 2013-2015, with Wiradjuri elders and her husband Stephen Kemmis, Ros led the development and delivery of the ground-breaking CSU Graduate Certificate course in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage.

Ros juggled academic work and activism and took joy in her family, music, Guinness and a wardrobe of lurid virtuosity. She was a gracious and extraordinarily generous host to many friends and international visitors. She was immensely good hearted, kind, thoughtful, supportive, and generous with time and energy. She made time to listen. She knew who to talk to or to lean on to make things happen. She had an infectious sense of joy.

She is survived by Stephen Kemmis, her brothers Stephen and Greg Leeder, her former husband Graham Allport, and is remembered as a generous, warm, loving and involved mother to Julian Allport, Tom, Alice and Eliot Brennan; and her stepchildren Standish, Jessica and Tracey, and families. She was much loved by her grandchildren.

Ros died in Wagga Wagga, of complications following treatment for cervical cancer.

Published resources

Book
Strange Language - Child victims under cross-examination: A report to the Criminology Research Council of the Australian Institute of Criminology on child victim witnesses under cross examination in cases of child sexual assault, Brennan, M and Brennan, R.E, 1987

Edited Book
Teaching in the VET Sector in Australia, Brennan Kemmis, R. and Atkins, L., 2014

Author Details
M. Bannister, S. Kemmis, S. Leeder and family

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