

# Editorial

2014 marks the 40th anniversary of *set: Research Information for Teachers*. Much has changed in education in the past 40 years, yet much has stayed the same. We launch our 40th birthday celebrations by imagining the future. How might education shift, even dramatically transform? Most importantly, what can we do today to create the future we want for our students, communities, and country?

This futures education special issue encourages teachers and schools to embrace a futures orientation in their thinking and practice. This is easily said, but not at all easy to do. In our opening Q&A interview, Keri Facer, author of the book *Learning Futures*, discusses theoretical, practical, and emotional approaches to the future of education. She reflects on the challenges we face when we begin to question our assumptions about the future, and offers practical ideas about how schools can foster future-building conversations and processes within their communities. For those yet to read *Learning Futures*, Karen Melhuish-Spencer offers an engaging interpretation of its key ideas in a book review that concludes this special issue. Between these two bookends that draw on Facer's work, you will find a set of diverse research perspectives and thinkpieces focused on possibilities for the future of education.

The teaching and learning section offers six varied thought provoking articles. Alex Hotere-Barnes, Nicola Bright and Jessica Hutchings lead off with their research-informed imaginings for an educational future unique to Aotearoa. Their 2040 scenario intends to inspire English-medium schools to reflect on the cultural landscape of our country and explore ways to proactively uphold te reo and mātauranga Māori throughout their evolving processes and programmes.

Andrew Gibbons creatively draws on science fiction and philosophy to explore the notion that teachers' futures-orientation ought to be considered in terms of their orientation to the *present*. His theoretically driven piece reminds educators that *how* we think about the future matters as much as *what* we think that future may be, and provides a compelling case for teachers' mindfulness-in-action.

Sasha Matthewman and John Morgan turn our attention to *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and offer practical guidance on how schools might approach its *future focus* principle. Suggestions for scenario-building strategies among staff and students are underpinned by their concern that current educational thinking and practice may limit our view of alternative educational possibilities and downplay the pressing need to address current environmentally unsustainable systems.

The next three articles read well as a group, as each explores the nuts and bolts of what future-oriented teaching and learning can look like in different learning areas. Knowledge building and critical literacy are key themes. Kwok-Wing Lai discusses the shared learning journey of teachers and researchers working in partnership to understand and scaffold knowledge-building approaches in online and face-to-face classes across a range of curriculum areas. Sue McDowall also sees knowledge building as central to futures-oriented teaching. She unpacks some of the different purposes for teaching English in the curriculum, and argues that each of these purposes has a tendency towards knowledge reproduction. She then outlines six alternative teaching strategies that support students to collectively produce new knowledge, illustrated by classroom examples. Susan Sandretto and Jane Tilson theorise the importance of "critical multiliteracies" for future-focused literacy programmes. They explain a practical model to teachers which has been successfully drawn on to help with classroom implementation in their research.

In He Whakaaro Anō we feature three commentaries. Academic futurist Jim Dator argues that our many different ideas about the future tend to coalesce into four main kinds of futures, all of which are possible, but some of which look so certain to be a part of the future that we can no longer act as though they are only possibilities. He challenges schools to prepare for all four possible scenarios while working hard to articulate and build their preferred future. Experienced secondary teacher Maurice Alford reflects on the traditions that influence educators today and considers possible levers for change, both

personal and institutional. He issues a plea to his fellow teachers to collaborate together and acknowledge the vital part they play in creating the future. Finally, librarian Senga White considers modern learning environments with a focus on how the architecture and role of libraries can enable futures-oriented learning opportunities for students, whānau, and communities.

Several of the articles in this special issue refer to a 2012 report titled *Supporting future-oriented teaching and learning: A New Zealand perspective* (Bolstad & Gilbert with McDowall et al.) produced for the Ministry of Education by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. As guest editor Rachel Bolstad co-wrote the report, we have been delighted to see several of the authors in this special issue provide fresh commentaries and critiques of the report and the body of literature it draws from. As the report acknowledged, researching the future is certainly a challenge. While educationalists may proffer ideas about the future of learning, many of these ideas present challenges to the status quo and would necessitate major changes to the current education system. Drawing together findings from new data and more than 10 years of New Zealand and international research, the *Supporting future-oriented teaching and learning* report discussed six emerging principles that could underpin a future-oriented learning system: personalising learning; new views of equity, diversity, and inclusivity; a curriculum that uses knowledge to develop learning capacity; new roles for learners and teachers; a culture of continuous learning for teachers and school leaders; and new kinds of partnerships between

schools and the wider community.<sup>1</sup> We welcome critique from our peers in the educational research community regarding how useful this collection of themes could be for promoting discussion within and outside the educational community about how to reshape education to better meet current and future learning needs.

It is a privilege to bring together the voices that make up this special issue on futures education. We thank the authors and reviewers for stepping beyond *set's* usual parameters to offer readers a motivating, moving and memorable collection in celebration of the journal's 40th anniversary. Look out for more to mark the anniversary later in the year.

Rachel Bolstad (Guest Editor) and  
Josie Roberts (*set* Editor)

## Note

- 1 For the full report and summaries see <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/supporting-future-oriented-learning-and-teaching-new-zealand-perspective>

## References

- Bolstad, R., & Gilbert, J., with McDowall, S., Bull, A., Boyd, S., & Hipkins, R. (2012). *Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching: A New Zealand perspective*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.