

Editorial

Tēnā koutou katoa

Issue 2 of *Set* for 2025 builds on our 2018 special edition, *Learning through Play and Games* (Bolstad and Roberts, 2018). Over the intervening years interest in play-based learning has deepened as research and classroom practice have demonstrated the potential of play to support both curriculum learning and dispositions for lifelong learning. Although current policy directives prioritise structured approaches and time allocations for reading, writing, and mathematics, teachers continue to innovate so that children are supported to learn through play. In practice, this means attending to curriculum goals by creating rich opportunities for culturally responsive learning that honours students' identities and interests. The articles in this issue reveal how teachers are finding ways to provide both structure and flexibility. Play is not merely a break from "serious" learning; rather, it serves as a pedagogy that enables creativity, problem-solving, and engagement to flourish.

Amelia Threadgold shows how school gardens can become powerful contexts for learning when they are opened up to community participation. In her case study, which involved whānau and the wider community, the curriculum was enriched, creating opportunities for students to learn from different knowledge holders. Gardens are learning spaces where cultural perspectives, sustainability, and curriculum learning can come together in ways that strengthen both community and schooling. Gardens also invite exploration, experimentation, and playful inquiry.

In *He Whakaaro Anō*, Stevi-Rae Tahi Ofoana offers a co-created reflection on play as an enduring aspect of Māori childhood which can be tended by education. Her article reminds me of the 2018 Q&A with Harko Brown, an expert in traditional Māori games and play, who spoke of tākaro as

"spiritual, physical and educational tools" and a "life force" (Brown and Bolstad, 2018, p. 86). Stevi-Rae shares insights from her recent kaupapa Māori research with principal Te Haumoana Biddle, whose leadership in recognising play as both integral to learning and an antidote to colonisation is humbly shared. Play is intertwined with Māori ways of knowing and being, and enabling children to engage in learning through play is fundamental to their educational success as Māori. The pūrakau shared demonstrate that culturally responsive teaching values exploration, creativity, place, and identity.

Sarah Aiano's contribution builds on this foundation by presenting a culturally responsive observation and reflection tool for play-based learning, developed in partnership with Ngāti Kahungunu. The article offers practical strategies for teachers to critically examine and extend play in ways that align with te ao Māori. Sarah emphasises that local relationships and reflective practice are key enablers of culturally attuned play. Her work supports teachers to recognise and nurture the learning embedded within children's play experiences.

Paula King continues the exploration of play-based learning, focusing on the transition from early childhood education to primary school. Paula demonstrates that play enables children to engage meaningfully with the curriculum while preserving the exploratory and joyful qualities of childhood. Her research highlights both the role of teacher intentionality and the range of ways in which play can coexist with reading, writing, and mathematics.

In *Assessment News*, Claire Coleman provides an overview of Aotearoa New Zealand results in the PISA Creative Thinking assessment. She explains that although our students perform well overall, they nonetheless demonstrate

low confidence in their creative abilities. Her article encourages teachers to consider how classroom practices can foster creativity and help students to recognise their capacity for original and diverse thinking. Claire reminds us that creativity—like play—is crucial for learning and life in a rapidly changing world.

Julie Roberts and Rosemary Hipkins close this issue with an exploration of rich mathematical tasks in the refreshed mathematics curriculum. Their Q&A considers how thoughtfully designed tasks can bring mathematical processes alive, encouraging curiosity, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking. The use of Rich Tasks Planning Cards provides teachers with tools to plan and reflect on tasks that engage students at multiple levels. They connect the mathematics learning area's "Do" strand to creative, student-driven inquiry.

Issue 2 offers a glimpse into the breadth of play and creativity in classrooms across Aotearoa. As teachers

continue to navigate evolving policy requirements and curriculum expectations, I anticipate that these articles will provide both inspiration and practical insight for integrating play, creative thinking, and cultural knowledge in ways that support all learners.

Ngā mihi

Josie Roberts (General Editor)

References

- Roberts, J., & Bolstad, R. (2018). Editorial. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.18296/set.0111>
- Brown, H., & Bolstad, R. (2018). Games: The social tools handed down by our tūpuna. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 86–88. <https://doi.org/10.18296/set.0125>