

# Editorial

For the final issue of *set* 2017 it is a pleasure to present a collection about eco-literacy, an important concept for New Zealand schools. The opening words of the collection's preliminary article by Sasha Matthewman and team state: "In times like these we need to teach as if place and planet matter" (p. 27). Indeed, the interrelationships between place, planet, and people imbue all articles within this edition of *set*, not only the eco-literacy collection itself.

Given our focus, *set*'s publication is timely. Issue 3 tails the release of Mātauranga Whakauka Taiao, a new Environmental Education for Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan for 2017–2021. The strategy's vision is that "all New Zealanders value a connection to our environment by actively working together for a sustainable future" (Department of Conservation, 2017, p. 15). Three priorities are to be upheld by the Ministry of Education, Ministry for the Environment and Department of Conservation and shared by others, including schools, organisations, and community groups.

Issue 3 also coincides with the first 100 days of a new government headed by a Prime Minister who claims to value both empathy and the environment. Labour's election policy manifesto likewise signals a new compass for education:

The current focus on standardisation and measurement works against adapting the education system to the needs of the modern world... We need to rebuild an educational environment that is characterised by high levels of trust, ongoing opportunities for professionals working within the system to engage in professional development and access the kind of support they need to thrive, and a much closer connection between the education system and the other social services that impact on citizens' ability to participate in it." (Labour, 2017).

At the risk of over-alliteration (a habit picked up from my "soon 7" year old), I am optimistic about what might be possible if *set*'s focus on place, planet, and people is well-supported by a state focus on education, empathy, and environment.

We begin with a teaching and learning article concerned with both empathy and equity. Susan Ng, Mary Hill, and Catherine Rawlinson help teachers to

identify and support twice-exceptional students. They draw on international literature and local data to suggest twice-exceptional students' unique combinations of giftedness and learning difficulties can easily confuse teachers. They encourage an inclusive strengths-based approach to providing appropriate learning opportunities.

In He Whakaaro Ano, Jo Knox considers the concept of mathematical proof and suggests it deserves more attention in primary schools. Proof aligns with promotion of mathematical inquiry and argumentation in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (*NZC*). Jo shows how using proof takes teachers a step further and strengthens students' abilities to develop and communicate their mathematical understandings.

The ability to articulate one's rationale and productively engage with others' viewpoints are essential skills for the future. While proof may provide an appropriate scaffold in mathematics, these sorts of capabilities can be a challenge to both cultivate and assess across all learning areas. Assessment News offers alternative pathways in two different entries about how to assess perspective-taking and other complex outcomes signalled by *NZC*.

The first article comes from Alfriston College, where an integrated junior curriculum supports students to transfer skills between the disciplines "to become more self-aware and self-regulating with regard to their learning and their futures" (p. 16). Karen White and Rose Hipkins introduce us to the school's associated assessment. Here, carefully designed discussion cards help students to demonstrate progress in capabilities such as perspective-taking, knowledge-of-self, and learning-to-learn.

The second Assessment News entry looks at how the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) assesses three dimensions of social-studies learning: conceptual understandings; exploring values and perspectives; and active participation in society. Samantha Sasse and Bronwyn Wood offer a rubric that helps teachers to identify progression towards more "critical and complex" (p. 22) forms perspective-taking and social action. This teacher-led, deductive and categorical assessment approach can be seen to contrast

with Alfriston's more open-ended, inferential, student-led process. To me, the contrast affirms how important it is for schools to establish the purpose and context for any potential assessment before selecting (or developing) the best tool for the job. I'm also heartened by both articles' consideration of the sorts of rich inquiry projects that students can be involved in, often for the sake of their communities and the planet.

The remainder of Issue 3 is dedicated to the eco-literacy collection. First, Sasha Matthewman and team introduce us to the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project, *Tuhia ki Te Ao—Write to the Natural World*, that all five articles arise from. The project explores connections between literacy, culture, and environmental identities across three learning areas in secondary schools: Arts, Social Science and English. The overview article extends a popular model of 3D literacy pedagogy so that holistic understandings of literacy will consider nature and environment too.

Rawiri Hindle and Sasha first look at how literacy practices can honour the cultural and ecological perspectives of Māori and embed learning opportunities respectfully in their rohe. The article considers four Māori concepts alongside a variety of teaching moments to open a conversation about "how eco-critical literacy can be situated in Māori ways of knowing and operating" (p. 36). Molly Mullen and Michelle Johansson consider the place of literacy and its extension to eco-literacy within The Arts learning area. They examine a teaching unit that allowed students to articulate their contemporary Pasifika environmental identities through culturally significant imagery. John Morgan and teacher Maria Iti apply the project's 3D eco-literacy model to a social-studies unit on Kiribati. They give examples of students' developing operational and enviro-cultural knowledge as well as their emotive eco-critical perspectives.

The collection's final article critiques ecological units of work within subject English. Sasha Matthewman and her teacher co-authors begin by asking "How can we

teach with an awareness of how literacy shapes attitudes and actions in relation to place, nature and environmental futures?" (p. 52). They look at how teachers can support students to make informed readings of culturally and environmentally situated texts. They also draw attention to how a school's environment can be as much a writer of learning opportunities as a lesson plan itself. Place and culture are ever-present on the path to producing eco-critical students for an eco-literate society.

For those interested in exploring environmental and sustainability education further, a conference titled 'Ecosystem for Environmental Education', will be hosted by the New Zealand Association of Environmental Educators in Wellington, 18–20 April 2018.

Before I sign off I would like to thank everybody who completed our Education Readership survey. Congratulations to Sue Elley of Christchurch, happy winner of the iPad Pro draw. Our analysis shows that readers of *set* appreciate its credibility and productive balance between research and practice. Most are also open to the sorts of developments that we hope will broaden our readership over time. Thank you for your support and flexibility as we orient to the changing climate. We look forward to pursuing your requests in future editions. If you are interested in trying out new sorts of material for *set*, please email me at [josie.roberts@nzcer.org.nz](mailto:josie.roberts@nzcer.org.nz).

*Josie Roberts, Editor*

## References

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