

# Editorial

**A**s the new Director of NZCER, I am delighted to write this editorial for *set* – a publication which I know very well. Louise Stoll’s metaphor of an iceberg caught my imagination as I read the articles in this issue. In her article on school culture, she argues that “as all improvement is change, anyone who is trying to bring about improvement needs to understand what goes on below the surface is likely to influence surface aspects of improvement”. She offers the iceberg metaphor to convey the difference between surface aspects and those below the surface when considering the management of change.

It is the practice of teaching that is visible on the surface. But underlying good practice is expert knowledge. There have been many attempts to describe this knowledge and to express it in terms of standards. A common reaction to these descriptions is amazement at just how much there is for a teacher to “know”. Another view is that teaching is such a challenging and interesting occupation because there is just so much to learn.

A significant factor underlying teacher practice is well-developed pedagogical content knowledge and an associated commitment to particular teaching approaches. The articles on co-operative learning and curriculum integration offer teaching methodologies that challenge teachers to improve student learning through the development of positive interdependence between teacher and learners. To do this effectively requires an associated knowledge of the needs of the individuals in any one class, and of how people learn.

Elaine Vine, Adrienne Alton-Lee and Lena Klenner provide case studies that illustrate key principles for supporting curriculum and language learning for ESOL students. Similarly, John Alban-Metcalf gives specific background to inform teacher practice for working effectively with children who show symptoms of AD/HD, as does Sally Boyd for supporting the learning

of children with special needs through the use of computers. The use of computer technology to enhance teaching and learning processes in classrooms is also the focus of the paper by Dianne Chambers and Kaye Stacey.

Teaching, however, is a complex activity and it is not always easy to translate knowledge and beliefs into practice. Russell Aitken’s paper on teacher perceptions of the use and value of formative assessment highlights this difficulty. He reports that most of the teachers in his study were caught in conflicts between their own beliefs on what constituted effective assessment for learning and the institutionally valued agendas and structures that favoured an emphasis on summative assessment. It is helpful to identify these tensions, as this can be a starting point for debate about how to effect change that might lead to greater alignment between expert knowledge and beliefs and subsequent practice.

The purpose of *set* is to provide teachers with research based information to inform this ongoing professional debate in areas of current concern. The article by Julia Flutter not only does this, but also illustrates the power of moving beyond debate to the implementation of school-based research initiatives. She reports on a partnership between researchers and teachers to investigate student perspectives about learning within the context of creative writing. It is a rich example of the effectiveness of classroom-based research and its role in informing teaching.

Flutter suggests that such a research investigation “can be rather like dropping a pebble in a pond and watching the ripples move outwards”. The articles in this issue of *set* provide considerable scope for generating a similar reaction within classrooms and schools.

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