

Editorial

I am pleased to introduce the first issue of *set: Research Information for Teachers* in 2013. It is a privilege to be the new editor of a journal that has always been located at a nexus between research and practice. I have worked for many years as a researcher with a passion for projects that inspire vision while supporting changes in practice. In my experience, these projects often involve rich partnerships between researchers and teachers. While many articles in this issue have been written by researchers for teachers, several contributions involve teachers as team members or co-authors. I hope that the issue lives up to *set's* aim—to provide teachers with thought provoking and useable research-based information.

This issue's teaching and learning section covers a range of topics, curriculum areas and levels. What strikes me is that the projects or topics featured in most articles provide an access point for inspiring and resourcing ripples of change beyond their initial specific focus. Many are underpinned by a strong philosophy that offers guidance in new situations and enables change to snowball. Take as an example the article by Chris Eames and colleagues on whole-school approaches to sustainability. Here, change in a school is underpinned by whole-systems thinking, including principles of interconnectedness and a deep commitment to a sustainable future. Such principles feed into a new tool that enables schools to envisage and evaluate what change might look like within any aspect of their operations, relationships, teaching and learning.

Similarly, Marg Cosgriff and her team develop a “shared ethos” titled “Everybody Counts”. This multifaceted concept is used to connect Health and Physical Education with holistic concepts of wellbeing. The Everybody Counts philosophy can be applied to a multiplicity of learning opportunities and, potentially, other curriculum areas to raise critical questions about “what is” and open up possibilities and expectations for change. Sally Boyd's article (which follows on from Part A published in *set* 3, 2012) identifies several principles that better align student inquiry and curriculum integration with ideas that underpin 21st-century learning. Central to the philosophies that underlie these articles, I think,

is the recognition of students' and teachers' active citizenship; in particular, students are approached as respected contributors to school and community life, and as knowledgeable partners in the development of learning opportunities.

Two articles in the teaching and learning section promote students' use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for learning. The first article by Craig Paterson and company investigates students as individual information seekers and foregrounds the techniques that students use to operate search engines. The second article promotes students as collective knowledge builders. In contrast with the first article, Sue McDowall foregrounds disciplinary knowledge and 21st-century learning ahead of technology tools and skills themselves. Placing both articles together demonstrates that ICT knowledge and disciplinary knowledge are important and interrelated, as are skills related to both 20th and 21st century approaches to knowledge. Teachers need to support ICT-specific skills to help students locate and assess information available via the Internet *and*, at the same time, teachers need a sound theoretical grounding to maximise ICTs as a tool *for*—not just a focus *of*—learning.

Our focus section this issue is titled “Learning ahead of the rest”. The first article, by Joanne Bate and Deb Clark, is located firmly in the gifted and talented literature. It presents evidence about a primary level withdrawal programme, Gifted Kids, alongside other ways to group students for academic, social and emotional benefit. The second article, by Jenny Horsley, explores the experiences of students who enter university courses at a younger age than most. Some of these students—but interestingly not the majority—have demonstrated the sorts of school results that might be expected from gifted students. Both articles provide rich insight into students' experiences of extension and enrichment opportunities from which we might critically assess the potential to extend aspects to a greater number of gifted students and, where appropriate, other students too.

For me both focus articles also raise as many questions as they answer. With our focus on lifting

educational engagement at the “lower end” of the achievement spectrum, do we do enough in New Zealand to notice and extend engagement for students at the upper end? What aspects of (the few) opportunities that have been developed for gifted students might also be able to ignite the minds and motivation of students outside this grouping? What aspects of senior secondary schooling might need to shift in order to offer the flexible learning formats and access to rich content knowledge that is associated with university-level study? Do we want to enable more students to access tertiary alongside secondary study, or might we prefer to distil some of the elements that appeal to early entry university students and explore ways to draw similar opportunities down into the structures and pedagogies of the senior secondary school itself? Perhaps we may want to do both. Can such opportunities be framed by a 21st-century approach to knowledge, teaching and learning?

Our two dedicated think pieces are offered by Cathy Wylie in *He Whakaaro Anō* and Melinda Webber in *Q&A*. Cathy Wylie provides a big picture, hard-hitting account of New Zealand’s education system and its underpinning concept of self-managing schools. She wonders whether our system is fundamentally counterproductive to our aims of quality education, and in particular to raising the achievement of priority learners including Māori and Pasifika students. Melinda

Webber provides a fine-grained account of potential underachievement in her response to a question posed by teacher Michael Harcourt of Wellington High School. She draws on psychological and sociological thinking to examine the ways in which students construct their ethnic identity in schools. She argues that, if we mean to raise educational achievement and support students’ wellbeing, it is counterproductive for educators to avoid or oversimplify questions about students’ ethnicities. Her suggested alternatives will hopefully be useful for the teacher who asked for input as well as many others. To end, Charles Darr addresses a question about the reliability of national norms for the new Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR) tests produced by NZCER.

To reiterate my introduction I sincerely hope that readers find this issue thought provoking and useful. I also hope that it raises questions for you and, in doing so, stimulates discussion among your colleagues. It is a privilege to be part of the team that brings *set* to your mailboxes and to your screens. We thank this issue’s authors and readers and look forward to crafting *set* with you, and for you, throughout 2013 and beyond.

Josie Roberts
Editor