

# Editorial

Welcome to the second regular issue of *set* for 2014. My involvement in this edition began with an invitation to be guest editor for a collection of articles broadly focused on the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). It is now a decade since the inception of NCEA so a collection with this focus seemed timely. But please don't think these articles won't be relevant for you if you don't teach senior secondary classes. The questions and issues raised have much wider application. In fact, as I was pondering what this editorial might add, I found myself wanting to integrate all the articles into one unified discussion. You can judge for yourself how well the following argument does this.

Mark Osborne's cogent discussion of the challenges of leading change provided me with a powerful lens for thinking about the collection as a whole. Mark draws a distinction between first-order (technical) and second-order (adaptive) change. He makes the insightful point that the same initiative can be experienced as technical change by some teachers and as adaptive change by others in the same school, depending on the knowledge, experiences, and beliefs each person brings to the table. This is an especially timely discussion in view of the complexity and unsettling nature of some changes schools are being asked to address. Across this issue there is a conversation to be had about *ways of knowing*. This focus is typically intertwined with a rethinking of purposes for learning at school, and debate about how best to support all students to achieve. When ways of knowing are up for debate, *ways of being* (a student, a teacher, a person in life beyond school) are the flip side of the discussion coin.

In one example of change-focused conversation, Dayle Anderson asks what it means for students to work "like scientists" in primary school classrooms. She notes that the New Zealand Curriculum positions learning about how science itself works as a foundation for future citizenship. Dayle acknowledges the challenges that a focus on experiences of *being scientists* poses for generalist teachers in primary classrooms. She gives a range of practical examples of effective ways to scaffold and support rich exploratory learning experiences that foreground the 'Nature of Science'.

What does it mean for students to demonstrate "historical thinking"? How do teachers judge the quality of such thinking as demonstrated in internally assessed NCEA research projects? These questions underpin Mark Sheehan's discussion of the emphasis on historical thinking in the recently redeveloped NCEA achievement standards for history. Mark argues that teachers' own understanding of the 'nature of history' will have an impact on how they understand the criteria and make judgements about the level to which each student has met the relevant standard (i.e., achieve; achieve with merit; achieve with excellence).

Secondary languages teacher Crystelle Jones draws on NCEA participation data to ask why so few New Zealand students are learning international languages to NCEA level 3—the level at which they are more likely to be able to take their proficiency out into the world to meet actual communication challenges. She makes the case that many more of our young people need the opportunity to be and become bilingual or multilingual and discusses what it might take to achieve this goal.

Taking an "at home" focus on language and culture, Robin Averill and colleagues ask what it means for students to experience success "as Māori". They note that this important question has implications for rethinking whose knowledge "counts" and for adapting to new ways of being in the classroom, alongside an emphasis on building robust relationships with families and whānau as co-partners in supporting learning. Mark Osborne reminds us that teachers with different cultural backgrounds will experience this challenge in different ways. Many of us will need to open ourselves to new personal learning as we figure out what achieving success "as Māori" might mean for different students and in different contexts.

Sally Birdsall and Bridget Glasgow remind us that NCEA was intended to allow all students to demonstrate success in their chosen areas of learning, encouraging them to see themselves as people who can be successful and ongoing learners. They discuss the potential for NCEA to open up new subject areas, using education for sustainability as the context for their argument. Teachers'

and students' comments cited in this article remind us that powerful learning experiences can change the way young people see themselves and their agency to act in the world.

In different ways, four of the articles focus on teachers and students as active inquirers into the meaning of their own learning and progress. Perry Rush asks, for example, how educators might assess individual student's meaning-making—that is, how they have “come to understand reality”. He discusses the opportunities that *performances of understanding* open up, and how each learner might be positioned as an active participant in the assessment process

In the regular Assessment News column, Chris Joyce and Jonathan Fisher introduce the design principles behind the new Assessment Resource Banks collection, highlighting opportunities for online completion and interactive discussions about the meaning of new learning. They remind us that formative assessment is designed to provide information to guide next learning steps, and explain that some questions will prompt debate and deep thinking because there they do not have one right answer.

Drawing on their experiences in the Starpath Project, Mark Gan, Earl Irving, and Elizabeth McKinley discuss some of the ways in which secondary schools are developing early warning systems designed to keep all young people on successful learning pathways. NCEA

data is one source of evidence, and students themselves can be actively involved in the process of determining how well they are progressing towards their learning goals.

NCEA data also provide an inquiry focus for Aaron Wilson and Stuart McNaughton's discussion of NCEA achievement standards in English, mathematics and the sciences that make particularly high literacy demands of students. Their research has highlighted the differential impact of these literacy demands, particularly for Māori and Pasifika students in the low-decile schools. Having clearly demonstrated evidence of a problem, the expectation is that teachers will change teaching and learning experiences in their classrooms, so that the issue is proactively and thoughtfully addressed.

In this editorial I have chosen to frame all these articles in terms of changes with implications for ways of knowing and being in school classrooms, both primary and secondary. Even in this short collection, it is sobering to review the scale and diversity of the changes in play. Every one of them is demonstrably worthy of teachers' energy and effort. But where should priorities lie? There can be no single answer to this question, but hopefully the collection will prompt debate and inform strategic leadership decisions as change propels us onwards in complex and uncertain times.

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