

# Editorial

It is my pleasure to introduce the third issue of *set* for 2015. The focus, teachers and schools engaging family and whānau, is one particularly close to my heart as a researcher and especially as a mother. Woven throughout is specific attention to Māori and Pasifika learners, families, and communities. Two further threads include parents' interests in children's engagement and learning beyond traditional academic measures, plus the affordances of digital technology for sharing learning between home and school. I hope this issue will help school staff to reflect and, where opportunities are seen, act on the following sorts of questions:

- How can we be present in our communities and welcome their presence in school?
- How can we listen really well to parents and whānau?
- How can we respect and support parents as educators?
- How can we communicate clearly with one another?
- How can we collaborate or partner together?
- How can we draw home learning into what we learn at school and vice versa?
- How can we report in ways that parents want, with a real sense of their child?
- How can our teaching and leadership best reflect the communities our students are part of?

Department and curriculum leaders are called on to lead curriculum development, encourage high expectations for teaching teams, and model quality teaching in their own classrooms. Two articles highlight leadership in relation to culturally responsive practice and whānau engagement. Robin Averill and team consider how curriculum leaders can activate Māori student achievement through their teaching and leadership. An evaluation of He Kākano professional development shows that practices known to support Māori students to enjoy success as Māori can be compromised by curriculum leaders' limited knowledge of te reo, tikanga, and te ao Māori. One recommendation is for curriculum leaders to "seek ways to work with the wider school community to enhance partnership in curriculum delivery" (p. 9). In He Whakaaro Anō, head of department Celia Fleck provides a personal account of an integrated curriculum development that improved Māori and Pasifika achievement in her school. She and

another teacher designed and delivered a course that combined NCEA standards in mathematics, English and physical education, using sport as a context for learning. Students reflected that, while the sports context appealed, what mattered most was the "whānau environment" (p. 15) of the class. They appreciated having a small number of teachers, committed to culturally responsive practice and pastoral care, providing engaging and challenging learning. The approach also strengthened the school's relationships with parents and whānau.

The opening two articles of this issue's focus section on engaging families and whānau illuminate pathways to develop respectful and productive relationships with Māori whānau, hapū, iwi, and communities. Mere Berryman, Therese Ford, and Margaret Egan outline a professional development resource and activity that will support readers to reflect on their current practices and build towards stronger collaborative partnerships with Māori whānau. Four key principles for engaging and working with Māori communities are illustrated by a bicultural weave of interview comments from two researchers working in the area. In the second article, Linda Bonne and Alex Hotere Barnes set out to address the question: "What can teachers and school leaders in English-medium schools do to include whānau aspirations and strengthen whānau engagement in Māori students' learning and wellbeing?" (p. 27). From their interviews with professional development facilitators they draw together five exemplary initiatives that highlight potential approaches for schools to consider in relation to their own contexts. Both articles highlight opportunities for collective conversations and also challenge schools to open up space for whānau to be self-determining in how they engage with schools and develop those relationships.

Rebecca Jesson and team explore the "home learning" opportunities enabled by personal digital devices for low-decile primary and secondary school students, the majority of whom are Māori and Pasifika. The researchers found potential for seamless personalised learning between home and school as well as for greater parent and community involvement in school based learning. A key message is that shared conversations are needed to avoid a

“second digital divide” (p. 37) and to ensure that teachers and parents develop complementary ideas about learning, including whether or how learning might be supported by a digital environment hosted at home or school.

The final articles all consider approaches to reporting with parents and whānau in mind. They add to an emergent conversation about assessment and reporting that can go beyond academic measures, and discuss the active involvement of students and parents in any such conversations and processes. Assistant principal/teacher Karen Pohio examines the role of student portfolios in home–school communications. Her research suggests that portfolios can serve a range of purposes, from formative and learning focused through to summative and reporting focused. A range of roles are available for adults who support children in portfolio construction, from contributors to audience (for example teachers as curators, parents as readers). Confusions about purpose and roles are not necessarily sidestepped by e-portfolios’ promise of “anytime, anywhere” home–school connections and collaborations.

Helen Dixon and co-authors investigate schools’ obligation to report to parents twice yearly in writing about students’ achievement in relation to National Standards. Their interviews with parents show that schools differ in their approaches to reporting and parents differ in their understandings of what is being communicated. Using writing standards as an example, the authors suggest schools develop processes to ensure that: reporting provides a holistic picture of student

engagement, motivation, learning, *and* achievement; parents are supported to make more sense of what they receive; and surrounding conversations resource all involved to support each child with enthusiasm for learning-to-learn. Assessment News springboards from education adviser Cathie Johnson’s experience that parents want to know about children’s engagement and wellbeing at school. She explains how the New Zealand Council for Educational Research tool *Me and My School* has been used by schools throughout New Zealand to better understand and respond to patterns of engagement across their student body.

I can imagine that to read this issue may feel both exciting and daunting. Speaking from personal experience, I also suspect that many parents hold mixed emotions and expectations as they begin to engage more fully with schools and step into new territory with staff. I warmly encourage all readers to be bold, while also remaining critical and careful, in casting school doors open wide, strengthening two-way relationships, and venturing farther out into your local community. What better a time to begin than with the beginning of a new school year?

Thank you to our readers, authors, and reviewers of *set* 2015. I wish you all the best for the new year.

*Josie Roberts*  
Editor