

Editorial

Is it time to re-set *set*?

Research and inquiry are powerful tools to support effective practice at all levels of our education system, especially teaching and learning. But holding research and practice together in a way that works for teachers is neither self-explanatory nor straightforward. We suspect that *set* could get into better step with what educators want and need. We'd love you to help us clarify our purpose and explore the myriad of ways *set* could inspire, inform, equip, and connect teachers across Aotearoa. We're open to anything from a small shift in what we offer now through to full metamorphosis.

To get the ball rolling we warmly invite you to complete the online survey released in tandem with this issue. You'll find it at <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/news/nzcer-education-readership-survey>. The survey is for everybody—teachers and all other readers—whether you are a super enthusiast, a strong critic, lukewarm about *set* or completely new to it. At the end of the survey you'll find a spot to register your interest if you'd like to discuss things further, join a reference group, or trial new developments. How you answer the survey or engage in later opportunities will guide the journal's adaptation. All survey participants go in a draw to win an iPad Pro.

Some of the questions we have in mind include: What would you like to hear about and how can we communicate in a useful way? How important is a research base to you? What counts as “research” in your eyes? Would you like teachers better represented in the journal and how? What styles of engagement and content work for you—print journals, newsletters, classic articles, personal stories, rigorous reviews, pithy commentaries, “how to” guides, visuals? You name it, we're listening.

You may get a feel for what is and isn't working for you in *set* by scanning the articles in this collection. The issue includes a variety of foci, formats, and lengths – something you'll likely see more of as we begin to trial suggestions from *set* readers and stakeholders. The article by Susan Sandretto and Jane Tilson about critical literacy is noteworthy for several reasons. It functions as companion piece for an earlier article published in

set (Sandretto & Tilson, 2014)—and demonstrates how threads across different journal issues might build teachers' curriculum knowledge and skills over time. This critical literacy topic is positioned within a futures frame that pushes beyond traditional literacy practices. The article's strong theoretical base and rich visual content co-exist with practical models and unit plans that have been tested by and for teachers.

The next two articles follow a traditional research reporting format. Anna Whitehead and Linda Daniell introduce us to a 6-week mindfulness course run for teachers and students in a school hall. The interview data suggests that the teachers experienced personal benefits, began to use mindfulness techniques in the classroom, and noticed some shifts in student behaviour. Next, Carol Hamilton considers submissions to the 2015 Education and Science Select Committee inquiry into the identification and support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in schools. Using a personal storytelling style, she explains her decision to focus on narratives that indicate the financial burden borne by some families with children who have these special education needs.

He Whakaaro Anō currently provides a dedicated space in *set* for think pieces located anywhere along a theory–practice continuum. In this issue teacher and EdD candidate Beverley Booth and her academic co-authors consider how teachers can support themselves and their students to become assessment capable. They offer a conceptual framework to strengthen New Zealand thinking about assessment capability, positioning it as a critical step beyond “assessment for learning”. Implications for practice and links to resources are woven throughout. However, the authors were clear that they had not set out to write a practical professional development “how to” guide.

Another regular column in *set* is Q&A. The section has been through several guises over recent years. For a period it provided a spot for teachers to see their burning question answered by a leading practitioner or academic. More recently *set* has run interviews on a hot topic with the aim of eliciting energetic personable responses. In

this issue I questioned Liz Jones about teacher portfolios in a bid to figure out why professional portfolios seem to appeal to some and yet repel others. Liz differentiates between developmental, documentary, and dossier portfolios and demonstrates how teachers can approach portfolio production “to improve their ability to reflect on their practice in a much deeper and systematic way than previously” (p. 37).

By “re-setting *set*” we hope to co-create the best recipe to nourish reflective practice. *Set* regards teaching as a profession located within a broad frame of lifelong learning where school leaders are champions of professional learning communities. Our issue 2 focus section, titled “Teachers as Communities of Learning Professionals”, captures this sentiment. We present three quite different articles with this focus. Karen Vaughan challenges readers to join the dots between a project about “learner-practitioners” (p. 42) and the world of teaching. She discusses the profound acts of learning that can help people to cross vocational thresholds and access new ways of seeing themselves and their work. Carol Cardno, Martin Bassett, and school leader Chris Wood look at two schools where teaching-as-inquiry has been integrated with teachers’ performance appraisal systems. They note a “need to develop the expertise of leaders and teachers to participate in appraisal and inquiry dialogue that is challenging, collaborative, and critically reflective” (p. 58).

Leaders of a new school, Sarah Martin and Chris Bradbeer, share their inquiry into how to cultivate collaborative teams of teachers who are self-aware, reflective and open to learning. They have found that the capacity for all staff to have “sensemaking conversations” (p. 50) is essential in innovative learning environments and allows team-teaching to reach a state of collaboration. The article is indicative of the rise we are seeing in practitioner-led research. While *set* has always received submissions drawn from the theses of teachers and school leaders in postgraduate study, we now also receive work from schools conducting their own inquiries. In some cases these are associated with a research fund, such as

the Teacher-led Innovation Fund (TLIF), or the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI). In other cases schools fly solo or involve an external critical colleague in other ways. One conundrum for *set* is how we might best enable the publication and cross pollination of new learnings from practitioner-led inquiries across the country. We’re aware that practitioner-led inquiry rarely follows the same rules as academic research and few teachers have time to craft lengthy articles. So what can *set* do to support teachers and schools who, firstly, want to embark on a research or inquiry journey and, secondly, might aspire to publish robust and useful findings for a wider audience?

The final spot in *set* is reserved for Assessment News. This tends to be a short and punchy piece that informs teachers’ assessment practices. It often explains the logic that underpins an aspect of current assessment thinking or a new tool that has become available. Perhaps there is a place for columns of a similar nature across a range of other topics. Is there anything else would you like us to cover?

As we embark on our exploration of what *set* could become I would like to acknowledge the long tradition that *set* has had in New Zealand schools and tertiary institutions. I especially want to honour our dedicated followers and committed contributors. We welcome new submissions to *set* aligned with our current guidelines and also encourage authors to experiment with creative styles. We look forward to taking the next step in our journey with you all. Please do spare the time to complete the survey and help map the path ahead.

Josie Roberts
Editor

References

- Sandretto, S., & Tilson, J. (2014). “The problem with the future is that it keeps turning into the present”: Preparing your students for their multiliterate future today. *set: Research Information for Teachers, 1*, 51–60.