

# Editorial

It is my pleasure to introduce Issue 1 of 2017 with its themes of literacy, language, and bi/multilingualism. It builds on previous issue of *set* in which senior editor John Huria upcycled a vintage quote, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein, 1961), to add an educational twist: “If language sets limits to the world ... the limits need be neither fixed nor finite.” (Huria, 2014, p. 2). Inside you will find a suite of articles that aim to inform teaching and leading in the areas of reading, writing, subject-specific literacy, academic vocabulary, immersion learning environments, second language teaching, and intercultural relationships. This editorial attends to the questions and insights that emerge, for me, when reading across the collection as a whole. Where do the articles intersect, corroborate, sit in tension, or shed light on one another?

We begin with the vital role that schools play in supporting te reo Māori. Nicola Bright, Debbie Broughton, and Jessica Hutchings asked whānau about their decisions and experiences when moving between early childhood education, primary, intermediate, and secondary schooling. The project reminds readers that te reo Māori development is a shared responsibility where every teacher and every school holds the potential to enable or block progress, and not just in relation to individual students but for whānau and communities. The article illuminates the complex support systems involved in whānau reo development.

We then turn to the development of students’ academic English vocabulary. Here Julie Luxton, Juliet Fry, and Averil Coxhead argue that an improvement in academic vocabulary knowledge is likely to pay dividends across all learning areas. They advocate for the explicit teaching of English words “that occur frequently and uniformly across a wide range of academic material” (p. 13). Interestingly Luxton et al. found that students who had spoken a language other than English in their home, or were in Māori-medium education, learned complex English academic words at an accelerated pace. In fact previous attendees of kura kaupapa Māori had “a higher academic vocabulary score at Time 2 than any ethnic group, including NZ Europeans” (p. 18).

Thus the paper supports the advantages of bilingualism, multilingualism, and home language advocacy.

Since knowledge systems are inseparable from language systems, it makes sense that different disciplines are associated with their own specialist language conventions. So what happens then when we follow the path from general academic English to subject-specific literacy skills? This question is considered in the next paper by literacy facilitator Denise Hitchcock and teachers Catherine Braddock and Megan Nelson-Latu who agree that texts and tasks become increasingly specialised over the secondary years. They outline a project where subject teachers and generalist literacy leaders collaborated to embed a literacy intervention in social studies classes. The paper relays an important message: “when teachers develop students’ literacy skills in the context of each subject, they build an understanding of how knowledge is produced in the disciplines, rather than just building knowledge in the disciplines” (p. 25 drawing from Moje, 2008).

An authorship team from Papatoetoe Central School next introduces us to a rather different sort of literacy intervention: a Summer Reading Programme developed in collaboration with their local library. Rachel Cromie and colleagues set out to address the ‘Summer Slide’ (also covered by Turner and Tse in *set* in 2015) to improve students’ reading levels prior to entering intermediate school. The paper conveys a sense of co-responsibility within support systems, some recognition of home languages and cultures, and the importance of planning towards transition. The articles by both Bright, et al. and Hitchcock, et al. echo similar sentiments.

We remain with senior primary as our attention turns from reading to writing. Murray Gadd summarises his investigation into the actions taken by ‘exceptional’ teachers (p. 39) to accelerate learner progress in writing. These include strategically setting tasks that have purpose and meaning for the students and encouraging them to be independent and self-regulating. From within this empowering context direct and differentiated writing instruction are imperatives. One principle of direct instruction that closely aligns with other papers in this

## EDITORIAL

issue is that: “Effective teachers question, prompt and respond effectively for deep, metacognitive text-related thinking by their students” (p. 41).

In He Whakaaro Ano language teacher educator Martin East draws on the experiences of a new teacher to explore different pedagogical approaches for teaching additional languages. He asks “does a learner-centred and experiential classroom mean that teachers must abandon all use of planned and scheduled ‘teacher-led’ moments?” (p. 51). Similar to Gadd, East’s answer is assumed to be “no”. Still he does see plenty of room for more student-led and, I suspect, more immersion-style language learning environments. He suggests that the New Zealand Curriculum’s encouragement for more “learner-centred, experiential and co-constructive approaches” (p. 51) sits well with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which allows for “learners’ own discovery of the rules of language through language use” (p. 48).

Assessment News completes the collection with an entry titled “On or off screen: Reading in a digital world”. Jan Eyre looks at the assessment tool *PAT: Reading Comprehension*, and finds that students’ performance on the online version was slightly lower than on the paper

version, especially for Māori students and for those in low-decile schools. It seems that comprehension of long, complex, and linear texts is better served by old fashioned paper, but schools do still need to strive towards equity of access to, and mastery of, reading in the digital world.

I hope readers enjoy contemplating Issue 1, whether you access it online or flick through the print copy. I encourage you to make your own connections and comparisons between the articles that you select.

*Josie Roberts*

*Editor*

## References

- Huria, J. (2014). Editorial. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 1–2.
- Turner, L. and Tsu, L. (2015). Solving summer slide: Strategies and suggestions. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 16–24.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1961). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.