

Editorial

Welcome to *Set* 2018. Issue 1 speaks of equity. We present a variety of articles that focus on optimising learning experiences and life outcomes for diverse students.

The collection draws attention to inequities that exist in the New Zealand school system, including—but not restricted to—our uneven distribution of achievement. Authors explore who tends to succeed, why, and how. Most seek to broaden definitions of success and widen the range of knowledge sets and ways of being that are made welcome in the classroom. Readers are encouraged to ask, “What role can teachers play in evening out the education playing field?” and “How can we recognise skills and strengths that may currently fall under the radar?”

Some articles may feel more personally challenging than others to read. Indeed, each helps us to identify systems, practices, or relationships within schools that can unintentionally cement inequities. At the same time the issue is packed with ideas, strategies, and resources that teachers can draw from. Overall it is a supportive, thought-provoking, and helpful collection that gives insight into the equity-enhancing journeys that teachers and researchers have undertaken for the benefit of those willing to learn from their experience.

The focus section, Cultural Relationships for Responsive Pedagogy, takes its title from the opening article by longstanding members of Poutama Pounamu, formerly Te Kotahitanga and Kia Eke Panuku. Mere Berryman, Dawn Lawrence, and Robbie Lamont call for schools to move beyond any potential for tokenism in using the popular term *culturally responsive practice* by deepening into a fuller description of *cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy*. The article conveys a journey through time, offers a theoretical and practical stance, and issues a challenge to educators. The guiding concept, mana ōrite, references the relational intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi whereby Māori and non-Māori are respected as equal, different, and self-determining. For teachers, exploring ways to attend to dynamics of power and privilege in the classroom (not forgetting the whole school and education system!), with the intention of enhancing the mana of all students, is key. The authors provide concrete examples for readers to check their

practice against. They outline strategies for teachers to put into action. I envisage that the article will become a touchstone for culturally responsive teaching and learning throughout Aotearoa.

Teacher–researcher Karyn Saunders wrote the next article in follow up to her engagement in Kia Eke Panuku, assisted by co-authors Robin Averill and Hiria McRae. In a quest to develop her culturally responsive practice, Karyn immersed herself in literature and conversation to deepen her understanding of the Māori term, *ako*. She continued to build her understanding alongside her Year 9 students and their whānau as she worked to enhance *ako* within maths lessons and classroom relationships. The article shares several indicators of *ako* that helped to guide her teaching practice and the research process, “ultimately building a caring, inclusive and lively learning environment to improve students’ engagement with and achievement in mathematics” (p. 11).

Rebecca Bishop and Savelina Lepou from Mt Roskill Primary School share their practitioner inquiry article titled, “How Can a Makerspace in the School Setting Support Increased Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement for Pasifika and Māori Learners?” The school had concerns about a group of Māori and Pasifika students at risk of not meeting National Standards in reading, writing, and maths. They wanted to reduce disparities in achievement and in relation to students’ access to digital technologies. The school drew inspiration from the makerspace movement, working with a library and community experts to develop a makerspace in the school. A year on, the makerspace room has now been opened to more students and teachers are exploring how pedagogies and relationship-building emerging within the space can be adapted across classrooms.

Judy Aitken, Helen Villers, and Janet Gaffney question whether some guided reading practices in new entrants’ classes might induce downward spirals rather than build success. Children arrive at school with different backgrounds, including readiness for reading. The authors refer to literature and their own research to suggest that it can be counterproductive to begin formal

instruction, particularly in the form of guided reading, too early: “Immersing children in set learning sequences or demanding instructional protocols in their early days at school creates a risk that unequal starting points will lead to the exacerbation and persistence of inequitable outcomes” (p. 28). The authors offer four pointers to help teachers decide when and how to approach guided reading. The aim is to support the early development of processing systems necessary for reading. Doing so will lead to successful independent reading at the optimum time for each student.

The abstract of the next article starts: “Inclusive education within New Zealand requires teachers to meet the needs of all students, including those with high or very high needs” (p. 36). Stephanie McKay, Alison Kearney, and Jude MacArthur discuss resources that support teachers to plan for inclusive classrooms in which all students learn within *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) regardless of their abilities. Their project focused on the individual education plan (IEP) as “an additional supporting framework for planning and teaching in an inclusive classroom” (p. 37). It looked at how confident teachers felt in working through the IEP process and in improving learning for their high needs students. The article ends with two sets of recommendations, for teachers and school leaders, to develop IEPs in ways that “make a positive difference for all learners” (p. 41).

For Q&A I interviewed Canterbury University Associate Professor Kathleen Quinlivan soon after she ran an international symposium on new directions in sexuality education. Kathleen speaks to the challenges that schools face in providing the kind of sexualities and relationships education that young people and researchers call for. She is concerned that the lived experiences of students are often silenced in favour of a biomedical model, underpinned by an assumption that young people will do the “right thing” if they are fed the facts. Some students’ experiences are hushed more

than others: “Although there have been some shifts in making sexuality education less heteronormative, sexual and gender diversity tend to be addressed as an add-on, reinforcing hetero and gender normalcy” (p. 45). Kathleen introduces *Set* readers to a more contemporary approach, plus a number of websites and books that teachers can use.

In Assessment News Charles Darr considers the role of assessment in a climate where the National Standards are no longer required and the National Certificates of Educational Achievement are under review. A sense of the article can be gained from two bookend quotes. The abstract states: “Rather than a preoccupation with summative assessment we need to move to an approach that promotes the powerful and agentic learning that is meant to be the heart of our national curriculum” (p. 47). The article concludes: “Meeting the vision of our curriculum requires imagination, innovation, and a strong commitment to the kind of assessment that enables powerful learning and enhances the wellbeing of both students and teachers” (p. 49). Between the lines is a sensitivity to students who haven’t “measured up”; whose learning hasn’t been optimised by frequent, external judgements.

I hope this issue of *Set* supports a more inclusive, equitable, and bicultural Aotearoa. Although most of us would acknowledge that schools are just one locus for change, this issue reminds us that the power to change need not be underestimated. Teachers have such a privileged influence on the everyday experiences and life course of those they serve. Some say equity should be THE educational agenda.

Josie Roberts, Editor

Reference

Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.