

Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of *set* for 2015. Relationships, place, and context are the themes that hold this collection together. The focus is on the interrelationships that make learning possible. If the students described in these pages could shape their experiences with sufficient metacognitive insight they might say things such as:

- we're learning with one another
- we come from different places and we're in this place together
- we are part of our histories and our communities
- we work with one another's strengths and challenges
- what we learn is influenced by who we are, where we come from, and where we want to go
- we are a learning community and we're networked into wider learning communities.

As with learning, curriculum is also approached in this issue as both embodied and embedded: embodied in the sense that its expression is dependent on the specific learners and communities it is designed for; embedded in the sense that no one learning area is considered an island, they link to one other and to the broader goals of the curriculum as a whole. Subject knowledge is neither separated from students' everyday realities nor isolated from other knowledge areas. Since relationships, place, and context matter it is no surprise that the issue supports a wide scope for school-based curriculum and pedagogical development. The articles encourage teachers to use their own and their students' contexts and communities to design access-ways into a range of learning areas. Each subject area featured—be it new-entrant reading, primary mathematics, secondary history, or outdoor education—can be explored through students' rich conversations and contemporary practical application. We begin the issue where schooling starts: with the move from home and early childhood education to primary school. We interview Sally Peters, a leading thinker on transitions and co-editor of a special issue on this topic in *set's* sister journal *Early Childhood Folio*. Peters situates New Zealand's new entrant practices in an international context, drawing on current research and debate to explore the ways that school policies and teacher practices might best support our youngest school

children to engage and excel. Her response demonstrates how important it is to foster connections with—and develop an understanding of—new students' networks of belonging before, during, and after their transition to school. Joanne Hayes takes the conversation further with her consideration of the role that other students can play in supporting a new entrant's first few weeks at school. She illustrates the concept of peer learning through student case studies at three schools and she uncovers the teaching strategies that best support such interconnected tuakana-teina early learning experiences.

Julie Mackey, Niki Davis, Carolyn Stuart, and others show school leaders what it might take to enable teacher innovations and school-wide shifts towards using digital technologies for learning. They suggest that open and collaborative relationships among teaching staff and with leadership teams are pivotal. At Tawa Intermediate School several strategies successfully built a school culture that was supportive of teachers' (and students') initiative and risk-taking, balanced against its guiding structures and a united vision.

Marg Cosgriff next turns our attention to outdoor education. Her article connects with two previous *set* contributions that encourage a shift away from remote, decontextualised outdoor activities (Brown, 2013) and sport-based or one-size-fits-all approaches to Health and Physical Education (Cosgriff et al., 2013). She takes us through a teaching as inquiry cycle with two teachers who undertook a place-based and context-driven review of their curriculum. A bush reserve became a site for students to learn in and develop an embodied relationship with in their locale. The umbrella student inquiry questions, which also informed the teachers' unfolding decisions about pedagogy, included:

- What is here? What could we do/be in here?
- What does the community do here, who comes here and why?
- What is the tikanga for Rimu Reserve that we need to be aware of?
- What does Rimu Reserve mean to you?

Questions like these segue nicely into secondary school teacher Michael Harcourt's discussion of five principles

for culturally responsive history teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. He suggests that it is important to embed the broad intentions of place-based education and culturally responsive pedagogy within each learning area. He argues that their expression is likely to be unique to the nature and content of the subject as well as to the location and make up of each school community. History provides specific opportunities to “explore in depth the unique historical, cultural, and ecological contexts in which students live and learn” (p. 38). Identity work for teachers and students is implicated, as is the deliberate venture into contested spaces.

Mathematics is the topic of this issue’s focus section. Here, when faced with a subject that has a long history of being taught in relation to the individual mastery of abstract content, we again find that the themes of relationships, place, and context stand out. First, Glenda Anthony and team introduce us to ambitious mathematics in action. This discussion-based and whole-class approach to teaching is underpinned by the principles of equity, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration. Skilled (and ambitious) teacher input aims to make complex practices accessible and supports all students’ sense-making, knowledge building, and intellectual risk-taking within a mathematics learning community. Secondly, Brenda Bicknell, Jenny Young-Loveridge and two teachers from Knighton Normal School show us that 5 and 6 year olds are capable of multiplication and division when real world contexts are used. The team found that sequenced lesson structures, whole-class discussions, and carefully selected word problems that rotated around concrete everyday objects all helped to develop students’ part-whole thinking at an earlier age than current teaching practice tends to expect. Finally, Alex Neill outlines a chronology of

the Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) to lead into some recent developments that have been enabled by its online platform. The interactive and adaptive capabilities of this platform mean that students can engage with mathematics assessments that are more realistic, varied, and individualised. How students answer one question can determine the next question given, and thus the testing that each student receives will be dependent on what the student bring to the assessment rather than being pre-determined for a class or based on assumptions about ability levels. Teachers can also receive richer pictures of individual student and class patterns. Now that *set* has passed our 40th anniversary year the time has come to review whether the journal is still fitting for its context. Over the next year we hope to build closer relationships with our readership to tailor the journal to your needs. If you would like to make any comments or suggestions regarding the format and content of *set*, please email me at josie.roberts@nzcer.org.nz. I look forward to moving the journal ahead with you.

Josie Roberts
Editor

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