Our past, our story, has been a long one, and now time demands we reflect on and rewrite our present and future. No one can better tell the story of our passion, dedication, and commitment to our profession and to our students than we ourselves. It is we who prepare students to live, think, and make meaning long after the last school door is closed. It is we on whom our students depend to prepare them with lifelong literacy. NCTE’s 2017 Convention, The First Chapter, and our series of Town Halls allow us and our students to begin an ongoing conversation about who we are, where we are going, why, and how we will continue on our mission together. Come join us. Learn more at ncte.org/annual.
Editorial: Shea Kerkhoff

Embracing the And

Thoreau said, “Simplify, simplify.” I have a different mantra: “Complexify, complexify.” Often, we’re given two choices (e.g., soup or salad; which one’s clearer, 1 or 2), but education isn’t that simple. As teacher educators, we know that concepts traditionally thought of as binaries (e.g., male or female) are now thought of as a continuum. Other concepts operate more as a both/and rather than an either/or. For example, we do not teach grammar or writing, we teach both at the same time.

Three years ago when I was in graduate school at North Carolina State University, I sought the advice of my mentor Hiller Spires, as was often the case. I was debating about whether to focus the course I was teaching on traditional literacy or new literacies. She said, “Embrace the and.” This was a lightbulb moment for me. Years earlier, when I was in preservice teacher education, the buzzword was context. We were shown how to teach grammar in the context of writing, to teach vocabulary in the context of reading. Even though I had learned about context with traditional literacy, when I learned about new literacies, I immediately classified the new as a dichotomy against the old. Perhaps I was thinking in dichotomies as a way to process the new information. While simplification to the point of binaries may have helped me in the initial stages of learning about new literacies, thinking in binaries was an oversimplification, and remaining in dichotomous thinking would have led to a lack of full understanding. When we think in either/or, we limit our understanding, at best, and limit what is possible, at worst. As Hansen (2010) says, we must “reside in the conjunction and” (p. 25). As a field, we have now embraced the and when it comes to traditional and new literacies, but other topics are still being debated. Below are three ways to embrace the and in English education.

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Local and Global

My work focuses on the local and the global. If teacher candidates are going to prepare students for work and life in the modern world, they must embrace the and. They must critically reflect on the past and design a new social future. Educators must work through the tensions of binary thinking to allow for old and new, local and global. Global education is not a dualistic framework that sees curriculum as either local or global. Instead, communities around the world are seen as interconnected and interrelated. As Rizvi (2008) explains, “This does not mean ignoring local issues, but to understand them within the broader context of the global shifts that are reshaping the very nature of localities” (p. 21). In this way, teachers do not replace teaching about the local for teaching about the global, but instead show how the local is already global. Teachers share how they hit snooze on their alarm clock made in China, poured their Kenyan coffee, and peeled their banana grown in Colombia, touching three continents before even leaving their house. In addition to economic connections, global education shows how our world is connected socially, politically, and environmentally as well. Global education helps students clarify who they are and who they want to be in relation to the world, in turn helping them develop self-reflexivity—the understanding of oneself as both affecting and being affected by society. Global education also helps students learn intercultural competence and respect for others. Teachers do not merely show students the world as it is, but help students to develop the attitudes, knowledge, and dispositions needed to solve the global challenges of the future, such as perspective taking, empathy, reflexivity, collaboration, and problem solving.

Culturally, Linguistically, and Economically Diverse Students

Embracing the and isn’t always about false dichotomies. Sometimes it is about acknowledging intersectionality. As a visiting assistant professor, I am currently on the job market, and I’ve read dozens of job announcements in literacy and English education. Most prefer candidates to have experience with culturally and linguistically diverse students. A few explicitly state culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. Culture and language are important. However, we know that economic status correlates with academic achievement more so than any other demographic factor. When I go to schools, it’s the economic status of students that I hear teachers talking about. I hear teachers say things like I don’t assign homework because some of my students have jobs after school or I can’t expect my students to attend a field trip on the weekend because they don’t have their own trans-
portation. Is that really equal education for all? Are these students actually being withheld educational opportunities because the teachers are being sensitive to their economic situation? When we consider students’ cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity but use that to limit what is possible, we are not embracing the and. Embracing the and means asking, “And what will it take from me to make this work for my students?” Embracing the and is not subtractive, it is additive. It’s not divisive, it’s multiplicative. Looking at education through an intersectional lens should not lessen the educational opportunities for students, nor should it create divisions in our thinking; it should add responsibility on us as educators to think through the complexities that our students face and do whatever it takes to get them where they want to go.

Readiness and Social Justice Education

As Delpit (1986) told us all those years ago, education for social justice does not replace knowledge acquisition for college and career preparation. Instead, it creates a space for social justice education alongside college and career readiness education (Hansen, 2010). This space opens the possibility for critical theory in the classroom where students learn the standard course of study by examining content through a critical lens. For example, when I taught high school, my students wrote a cause and effect essay on the topic of racism. I was teaching them the academic skill of writing cause and effect papers, while at the same time asking them to dig deeply into the social justice issue. My intention was two-pronged: teach writing and social justice. Education policy experts from both political parties have the same intention: they want students to be successful. They may have different definitions of success, and they may have different ideas of what leads to success, but both sides of the aisle make decisions based on the ideal that students will have self-sustaining livelihoods and will fully participate in the democratic process. People from both political parties have children’s best interests at heart. But, we cannot only look at intentions. We must ask, What are the results? That is where peer-reviewed empirical studies exhibit their utmost importance. When we evaluate studies, we are not looking at the intentions. We are looking at the methods and results. An example of looking at the results is the current discussion about moving from code-switching as a pedagogical approach to code-meshing (Young, 2009). The goals of code-switching and code-meshing are to affirm diverse linguistic backgrounds and to teach the code of academic discourse. However, with code-switching, teachers communicate to students that the context determines what discourse to use. The
result was that racist views of vernacular speech were carried forward as it was deemed not acceptable to speak anything other than Standard English in academic contexts. Code-meshing uses the *both/and* but takes the approach beyond context-specificity to a two-level *both/and* conceptualization involving hybridization. Students are taught both their home dialect and academic discourse. At the second level, students are encouraged to generate a new code that combines *both* students’ home and school discourses that can be used at home and at school, a hybrid.

“Embrace the *and*.” This advice has followed me as I teach and research English education. I embrace traditional and new literacies, local and global connections, college and career readiness and social justice. This is no simple task. It requires a level of synthesis, intersectionality, and hybridization that complexifies my teaching and my research, but such is life. Life is layered. Life is complex.

**In This Issue**

In this issue, Ross Collin and Clay Aschliman consider the value of English education for college and career readiness as well as social justice education as they examine professors’ beliefs about the value of education from economic, humanist, and other perspectives. Michael B. Sherry discusses his work with preservice teachers in an English methods course as he guides them to consider the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students as they respond to student writing. Christina Berchini sheds light on economically diverse student experiences by sharing her experience in public school as a bright-eyed kindergartner. As with these authors, we must embrace the *and* to not limit our possibilities as a field.

**References**


