Energy resides within tension. While it is common to consider tension as an issue to be managed or a problem to be solved, from another perspective, tension provides benefits. It represents energy and connection. Think, for example, of a rubber band. Resting on a desk, a rubber band is lifeless. But stretched between two points, it embodies potential, ready to be wrapped around a sheaf of papers or aimed and released (this is not a recommendation!) at a target. The tension created when the rubber band is expanded creates interest and is a point of possibility.

Tensions in the field of English education are similar. They are areas where knowledge is broadened and where practices are challenged. Tensions reveal aspects of our work where passions exist and where tradition meets innovation. Moreover, these tensions demonstrate essential connections in the field, spaces where professional disagreements extend and yield, but are supple rather than rigid. Tensions bridge the past, the present, and the future through mutual respect and common purposes, and those whose positions sustain the perimeter allow the rest of us to explore the breadth and depth of our work.

Enduring tensions in the field separate us and bring us together. Our positions on key issues are cultivated through our native language practices, our own educational experiences, and circumstances we face in our schools and classrooms. As sources of energy and passion, such tensions can create conflict, but they also create opportunities for rich discussion. Centering on learners and learning, the articles in this issue demonstrate how enduring tensions can serve as points for teachers to reinforce what we believe—and to question what we think we know about teaching, English, and teaching English.

Setting the stage for this issue in their EJ in Focus piece, Leila Christenbury and Lisa Scherff embrace the “spaces of struggle that mark the heart of inquiry.” Matthew Bourjaily traces the tension between instilling independence and providing answers. Teachers frequently struggle between those polarities as we prepare students to construct and thrive in a world that does not yet exist. Likewise, Derek Burtch uses writing to guide students in traversing the cultural and geographical gaps that emerge in public political discourse. Jacquelyn Chappel investigates teacher knowledge in reading and teaching texts that cross cultural divides, emphasizing the importance of interrogating experiences in relation to texts. In her article, Jennie L. Hanna demonstrates how the intersection of public speaking and poetry analysis creates opportunities for students to engage in innovative practices that enhance both areas of study. In the spirit of contemporary historical inquiry, Pamela Lindstrom uses EJ articles to outline how standardization has affected the field. Tanji Reed Marshall addresses the challenge of determining how to value student home language while also providing access to standard academic English practices, and Tom Romano encourages teachers to focus on “Learning and Writing What Matters.” Benjamin Schwartz and Jeffrey Schwartz discuss how teaching writing as “unfinished” can deepen student learning, and Emma Smith describes a unit that spans teacher-led and student-led curriculum.

In this issue, we hope to identify how enduring tensions in the field, tensions that tend to be associated with conflict and division, can be embraced in ways that bring us together as we work with young people to extend and expand our experiences of literacy and literature.

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