Choice, voice, variety, dialogue, flexibility, inclusion, imagination, creativity, relationships, intellectual engagement, courage, questioning: the longer we’ve taught, the more we’ve realized that these are the words that are most significant to us in teaching, much more than traditional words associated with pedagogy.

—SONIA NIETO AND ALICIA LÓPEZ, TEACHING, A LIFE’S WORK: A MOTHER-DAUGHTER DIALOGUE

As teachers, what we do, say, learn, and believe takes form in the lives of the students who share our classrooms with us. Sonia Nieto and Alicia López, in their poignant intergenerational conversations about the teaching life, note significant words and practices that drive them forward as human beings and also as teachers who care about the work they have chosen and the students entrusted to them. They remind us that each of us influences the worlds of our students and also the literacies they come to possess, practice, and redefine.

The authors in this issue provide a range of examples of teaching in the English language arts classroom that promote unexpected ways of thinking and that influence how students learn. Choice, dialogue, imagination, courage, and questioning are concepts firmly embedded in the stories they tell about the interesting work they are doing with middle school, high school, and college students. In the High School Matters feature, April J. Niemela considers the need to amplify student voice and offers strategies for bolstering engagement. Patti Forster recounts the story of preparing for a cross-country move, from California to Maine, that changed her approach to her life and her teaching. Fawn Canady and Troy Hicks reimagine the traditional research paper, asking students, instead, to develop multimedia inquiry projects and enter their work in a national digital storytelling contest. Continuing the conversation, Amy (Amanda) Cavanaugh questions the efficacy of our efforts to teach students who live in a “cut-and-paste” culture about attribution, citation, and intellectual ownership. Sara Kersten-Parrish introduces a collaborative reasoning–based case study in which middle-grade students dialogue about disability while reading the graphic novel memoir El Deafo. Jennifer Peñaflorida and Vicki Collet describe signposts, a strategy Peñaflorida adapted from the principles of the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework to guide young authors in their writing journeys.

Andrew McNally argues for the inclusion of personal voice in persuasive writing and questions the current reverence for teaching argument. Laura Aull and Madison Moseley invite us to a discussion on promoting civil discourses in composition classes; they experimented with a “not my opinion” assignment that stretched first-year college students’ capacity to consider alternative perspectives. As part of a persuasive letter-writing assignment, Michael B. Sherry and Ann M. Lawrence investigate the effects of introducing immersive video games with virtual characters to help students reinforce their arguments for environmental action, and Larkin Weyand, Jon Balzotti, and Derek L. Hansen describe a strategy that incorporates playable cases and simulations to teach what they term “real-world” argumentative writing.

In addition to the articles in this issue, you will find a set of informative essays that address fiction and gender identities, teaching with hope, critical global literacies, student teaching with language learners, reflective teaching, and experiencing a live performance of Romeo and Juliet as curated by the column editors. To “bookend” the issue, young adult author Julia Watts offers a humorous essay, titled simply “Correction,” that reflects on her encounter with a new high school English teacher whom she disdained at the time but who, in retrospect, Watts has to admit, taught her a consequential lesson about acceptance.
FROM THE EDITORS

The authors in this issue of English Journal encourage us to examine our teaching practices and to focus on what is possible in our teaching lives and in our students’ lives. In their book, Nieto and López reveal, “We’ve learned that if we focus on students and what they bring to their learning, as well as what they need from us, we will have a better chance of reaching and engaging them in what should be the fascinating and exciting process of learning” (108). As you read, we hope you will find reasons to consider what matters most in your teaching and find ideas that inspire you to add your own significant words to Nieto and López’s list.

WORK CITED

TOBY EMERT and R. JOSEPH RODRÍGUEZ have worked as classroom teachers and as teacher educators. Like Nieto and López, they both have lists of significant words that guide their teaching practices and their interactions with students and colleagues. Toby is a professor of English education in the Department of Education at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, and Joseph is an assistant professor of literacy, multilingual, and multicultural education at California State University, Fresno.

ABOUT THE COVER: TWISTER OF FEELINGS

Cover Photo: Twister of Feelings by Ajay Keerthy
The Department of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, has sponsored the Summer Writing Clinic for twenty-one years. Dr. S. Rebecca Leigh, who directs the workshop, teaches the students to paint on weathered sixteen-gauge steel. The painting serves as a metaphor for the revision process: steel is a porous medium, so rust comes through the acrylic paint and water after each application, suggesting possibilities and unexpected directions.

Ajay Keerthy, a senior at Rochester Adams High School in Rochester Hills, Michigan, created Twister of Feelings in the summer of 2017. He describes his experience in this way: “The steel started off as just a rusty square of metal, but over several days it developed completely new features; each day the steel looked different than the day before. Just looking at how the steel was changing gave me different ideas to write about.”