Learning is complex, varied, personal, and social. It is neither linear nor technical, and—although it involves use of technologies and application of strategies—it can never be reduced to a set of “best practices.”

Learning and teaching are complicated and multifaceted because people are complicated and multifaceted. While probabilities can be calculated at certain points of scale, our thoughts, actions, and motivations are not easily predictable. We are mercurial, creative, difficult creatures who learn in diverse ways for mixed purposes. We live and learn in relation to others, in relation to knowledges, and in relation to the worlds and cultures we inhabit and construct. And, to a great extent, we use language to forge those relations.

We communicate through language, using it to connect, understand, critique, and beautify our lives. We use language to narrate and make sense of our own stories, as well as to interpret the stories of others. Language is an essential lens; it shapes our experiences and contours our memories, our histories, our selves.

As English teachers, our role in students’ language development is critical. In this issue, we explore the boundaries of that role, consider the moral and ethical dimensions of our craft, and emphasize the intensely human nature of our work.

Authors in this issue explicitly connect personal stories with literature, schools, contemporary scholarship, and the world. From an autobiographical perspective, Peter Smagorinsky discusses associations between mental health and multicultural education. Tom Romano looks at life through the lines of a classic poem. Danielle Filipiak and Isaac Miller encourage students to transform themselves and their neighborhoods. Michael DiCicco and Paula Taylor-Greathouse ask young adult authors to describe moral obligation to their readers. And authors consider critical visual literacy, urban storytelling, and hip-hop music and culture.

Reminding teachers of our position as educational leaders, columnist Tom Liam Lynch exhorts us to “sharpen our understanding of the nature and politics of software so we can make informed decisions regarding pedagogy.” And reminding us of our potential to be public intellectuals, especially given the current contexts of accountability that threaten to dehumanize teaching and learning, Jason L. Endacott and Christian Z. Goering challenge educators to reclaim our work, for the sake of students and society.

We know that this issue arrives in the midst of frenzied end-of-year obligations, but we invite you to perceive it as a respite, a place to reconnect with the love and passion that brought you to this calling. We hope that the kaleidoscope of ideas and experiences offered by these authors inspires you to inspire your students, and to savor this spring as an opportunity for rebirth and renewal.