Our classrooms reflect and challenge the learners who fill them. To reflect adolescents, we seek to create authentic, optimistic experiences. To challenge them, we aim to cultivate critical dispositions that encourage youth to question compliance and consider the purposes and consequences of defiance. As teachers, we are fully present in today’s world, even as we prepare learners for tomorrow. We practice in partnerships as small as one-on-one conferences with writers and as large as the historicities and futurities of our field. In between, we engage in dialogue with our colleagues next door and with the communities we serve. Like a beating heart, our work expands and contracts. It expands into unknown territories where we explore technologies and make meaning with the innovative identities learners construct in our presence. And it contracts into classic literature, rules of usage and grammar, and the enduring truths (and tensions) of teaching and learning.

Our charge is to develop academic skills that foster imagination, civic engagement, and ingenuity: to develop predictable skills to live in an unpredictable future. English teachers find inspiration in learners, in language, and in literature. Our legacy is to inspire the next generation to experience language, literature, and learning as multisensory, multimodal, and meaningful. Few would argue with these ideas. Many might wonder how to squeeze such lofty ambitions into the four walls that we inhabit with our learners—spaces shaped by preset timeframes and limited resources that seem anathema to possibility and imagination.

Reminiscent of the heartbeats that resonate in our classrooms, this issue exhibits and investigates the spectrum of secondary English. Authors herein explore the “problematic proclivities” of race and schooling, defy heteronormativity, advance “other” Englishes, and use software to compose infographics to synthesize informational and literary texts. These expansions of our field are balanced by articles that encourage us to revisit why timeless practices are, well, timeless. In this tradition, authors remind us of the power of pleasure reading, the importance of argument, and the potential of classical rhetoric. Traversing these ends are articles that bring Socratic seminars online, offer strategies for youth-based participatory action research, and much more.

We hope that your heart rate has risen in reading about the contents of this summer issue, and that you are engaged and energized by the perspectives it offers.

Julie Gorlewski is chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning at Virginia Commonwealth University, and David Gorlewski is assistant professor of educational administration at SUNY New Paltz. Two of their recent books, Making It Real: Case Stories for Secondary Teachers (Sense, 2011) and Theory into Practice: Case Stories for Educational Leaders (Sense, 2012), offer fictionalized scenarios of real-life dilemmas in the field. Both are former English teachers and members of NCTE, Julie since 2004 and David since 2001.