As we write the introduction to this Insights and Inquiries issue of *Language Arts*, a record-breaking summer heat wave is blistering the US from the Rockies to the East Coast. By the time readers get their copies, the full of winter will be upon us, but for now, children across the country seek respite from triple-digit temperatures by playing in community pools, and the media issue tips for how best to beat the heat. It’s been a hot time for other reasons, too. The United States Supreme Court recently ruled most parts of the Arizona anti-immigration bill unconstitutional and the Affordable Care Act constitutional, and President Obama announced an executive action that will temporarily allow many undocumented young adults who came to the US before the age of 16 to avoid deportation and to apply for work permits. These actions have provoked loud debate as the country wrestles with the profound sociocultural and economic changes it faces as it moves steadily into the second decade of the new century.

Schools, of course, are at the hot center of these changes. Policies concerning immigration, education, and the economy entangle one another as local and federal voices deliberate how to justly and effectively serve the public welfare. As we, the current editors of *Language Arts*, listen and participate in these debates, we are reminded of a conviction that we share: that it is the collective responsibility of all educators working in public, private, and charter schools to educate all children, that we hold absolute that no child should be deprived of an opportunity for as strong an education as the nation can effectively provide.

As an editorial team, we are not alone in such a conviction. The NCTE 2012 Legislative Platform begins with the following statement:

*Literacy education is a civil right and civic responsibility that is integral to building our nation’s capacity for innovation, economic success, and global leadership. Consequently, we are collectively responsible for providing optimal conditions for literacy learning in our education system. Under such conditions, not only will schools become richer learning environments, teachers accomplished professionals, and students engaged learners—our communities will re-discover the initiative to overcome poverty, inequity, and economic stagnation. By investing in the conditions for enhanced learning, we secure our collective future.* (National Council of Teachers of English, 2012)

The articles in this issue of *Language Arts* speak to the role educators play in securing the nation’s collective future and to the ethical imperative that all children deserve educational environments in which they are welcomed, feel safe, and find their social and cultural backgrounds embedded in the learning they are asked to do. Schools necessarily reflect the complex forces of globalization, population movements, technological developments, and other “glocal” factors that impact their communities. Teachers—through policy initiatives, curricular mandates, and standards—are asked to not only see the big picture, but to also do the delicate and caring work of supporting every child. The authors in this issue offer ways to take up that important charge with thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and intellectual strength.

Amanda Haertling Thein, in her article “Language Arts Teachers’ Resistance to Teaching LGBT
Literature and Issues,” looks at the discrepancy between language arts teachers’ positive attitudes toward LGBT individuals and issues and their unwillingness to include LGBT literature and content in their classes. She examines the rhetorical strategies that the teacher participants in her study used to explain and justify their reluctance. She argues that such strategies limit teachers’ ability to do productive “ally-work” around LGBT issues, and she offers teachers suggestions for how they can interrogate their own assumptions in ways that ultimately benefit all their students.

In “Teacher Research as a Practical Tool for Learning to Teach,” Judith Lysaker and Becky Thompson describe a preservice teacher’s use of inquiry to engage a young English learner in a kindergarten classroom. By focusing on the relationship between teacher and student, the authors show how an inquiry stance promoted instruction that “affirm[ed] and extend[ed]” the meaning-making practices of one English learner so that her home language was upheld as she developed her use and knowledge of English.

Peter Smagorinsky asks—and then answers—“What Does Vygotsky Provide for the 21st Century Language Arts Teacher?” He looks beyond the theorist’s familiar zone of proximal development and argues that Vygotsky’s assertion of thinking as a social activity can support the creation of inclusive classrooms where “people of difference feel welcome” (p. 201). Noting research that indicates some students experience dysphoria—feelings of inferiority because of how they are treated—Smagorinsky argues that with the current overemphasis on testing, developing classrooms designed for all students will require “a reconsideration of the conduct of school” and a renewed emphasis on the importance of students’ emotional as well as cognitive engagement.

In our departments, Research & Policy looks at the increasing role of informational texts in language arts classrooms and the variety of genres that can be called informational. Professional Books features publications that take up Response to Intervention as a focus for teacher advocates. The Children’s Books column provides a different look at where stories begin and end by reviewing the design of picturebook endpapers.

Finally, our Insights and Inquiries issue closes with a thoughtful discussion between Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Caitlin L. Ryan about issues faced by elementary teachers who want to create welcoming classrooms for all students, including students who are LGBT or come from LGBT families. They start their Conversation Currents by asking what could result if teachers disrupted the idea that there is a “single story” that reflects all their students. They conclude with a reference to James Howe’s The Misfits in which the narrator comments that it’s hard to hate somebody one sees as “one hundred percent human.”

That’s what teachers do every day: see the children in their classrooms—each one and all of them—as one hundred percent human. And they do that regardless of the heat outside.

Reference