In this issue, we start with the assumption that it is normal for children to be exposed to many languages and forms of languages in their everyday lives. Indeed, this is the reality for most children around the globe, and especially in new urban centers of migration. The particularities of children’s language experiences may vary across contexts, situations, and over time, and children will develop competencies in particular language forms to varying degrees. But now more than ever, language development for children around the world involves learning how to navigate varied “ways with words,” and how to use their linguistic toolkits with versatility and flexibility.

For teachers, our challenge becomes how to learn more about the linguistic tools that children bring to our classrooms, and how to enhance their development, even when we are not masters of those particular tools. The articles in this issue provide support for teachers who want to do this. First, they introduce two interrelated constructs: language brokering and translanguaging. We, the guest editors, see language brokering as a particular form of the translingual practices that are part and parcel of growing up in places where more than one language is spoken. Language brokering involves using the knowledge of two or more languages to speak, read, write, listen, and do things for others. Language brokers shift flexibly between languages as needed in order to accomplish these tasks. Translanguaging is the broader set of practices that bilinguals engage in as they leverage the tools in their toolkits to do things in the world. Growing up in bilingual and multilingual communities makes language brokering and translanguaging practices part of everyday life.

The first article in this issue, by Kristen Perry, invites us to understand how very young children—the children of Sudanese refugees in the Midwest—broker language for their families in their everyday lives. Perry contributes to our understanding of the practices of language brokering by emphasizing children’s brokering of literacy genres. She also shows how very young children taught their refugee families about language and culture, and how families valued their work. More generally, she directs our focus to the experiences of a population that has received little attention even in studies of migration. Perry suggests how teachers might value children’s literacy-brokering skills in ways that are consonant with families’ cultural values and build on them in school.

Next, Steven Alvarez shows language brokering as a dimension of the translanguaging practices enacted by children, parents, and tutors who work together on homework in the context of an after-school program. Alvarez helps us to see the shifting forms of expertise between participants who work together, pooling their linguistic resources in order to accomplish specific tasks. He helps us to think about what happens with the homework we assign to students, and how we might design tasks that take translanguaging practices and community resources into account.

The third article, by Robin Griffith, Cecilia Silva, and Molly S. Weinburgh, details a classroom assignment in which immigrant children interviewed their families about the specific and unique
language they used in their places of work. Teachers supported children in becoming “linguisticians” (a word coined by the children): people who use principles of investigation to reflect on, analyze, and share their understanding of language. By documenting this learning experience, Griffith, Silva, and Weinburgh show us some promising possibilities for engaging children in meaningful language inquiry.

The final article, by Jacqueline D’warte, takes us to the continent of Australia, and reminds us that multilingualism is the way of the world. D’warte describes a language study project in which she worked with teachers and students in three classrooms to document youths’ ways of using language in their everyday lives. In doing this, all participants came to see the variety and richness of their language competencies. D’warte asks what it would mean for schools to start with the assumption that all kids have rich language experiences that could be built upon in school, and not only in the service of developing the dominant language.

Also featured in this issue is a dialogue between Ofelia García and Marjorie Faulstich Orellana in “Conversation Currents.” García is renowned for her work on translanguaging, including the design of learning environments that treat multilingualism as a resource. Orellana’s ethnographic work has centered on language brokering in immigrant communities. This conversation bridges their work and offers further suggestions to teachers who are struggling with how to put such pedagogical approaches into practice.

Our Research and Policy section features an essay by Patricia Sánchez that places these issues in the larger sociocultural, political, and historical context. She provides an in-depth overview of policies that have affected the lives of immigrants, including (but not limited to) language policies. This overview points to important dimensions of the immigrant experience that teachers should be familiar with in order to understand their students and build on their experiences.

The Professional Book Reviews department highlights books that teachers can use as resources to inform their teaching and to learn more about the language practices of students from nondominant communities. The Children’s Literature department features “a splash of books” spanning multiple genres.

We hope this special issue will prompt teachers to think about the unique set of linguistic resources that students in their classrooms bring to school every day, to treat those everyday language experiences as valuable, to learn with and from their students, and to help their students deepen and broaden their capacities for using these linguistic tools.

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and can be reached at gseis.ucla.edu. Ramón A. Martínez is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin and can be reached at rmartinez@utexas.edu. Danny C. Martínez is an assistant professor at the University of California, Davis, and can be reached at dcmart@ucdavis.edu.