Editors’ Introduction

The Teaching of English

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Saying that we care is easy and trivial. Making such caring manifest consistently in every class is neither easy nor trivial. I believe that consistent manifestations of caring can take place only if the teacher has first a deep understanding of her students as developing people and learners, a thorough understanding of the subject matter taught, and a consistent willingness to depart from the tried and trite to explore better ways of teaching so that the subject matter becomes the vehicle for the student-teacher interactions that lead to the personal, moral, and academic development of young people.

—George Hillocks, 2005

In this, the 50th year of the journal, we’ve taken it upon ourselves to consider deeply the three central words in its title. The introduction of issue 49.4 took up the word English and proposed a more expansive understanding of it, while the introduction of issue 50.1 examined the word Research in light of story to invite a conceptual turn from research report to shared and mutually created understanding. At the risk of being predictable, in this issue we take up the last remaining word in the title of this journal: Teaching.

Relationships, and therefore power, are at the heart of all teaching. At its best, teaching can create pluriversal possibilities of knowing; it can delink education from its long legacy of imperialism (Mignolo, 2011); and teaching can weave thorny social problems into the conversations, curriculum, and assignments of English classrooms in ways that facilitate the learning of all students. Since the seminal works of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Apple (1982), and Apple and Weis (1983), education has been understood as an inherently ideological endeavor that cannot escape its social structuring functions. Thinking beyond and from a different standpoint than these neo-Marxist understandings of schooling, Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) remind readers in Learning to Unlearn that “the control of knowledge and subjectivity through education and colonizing the existing knowledges . . . is the key and fundamental sphere of control that makes domination possible” (p. 45). They ask readers to recall that entire bodies of knowledge
and understanding were and continue to be systematically erased in an effort to establish the common curriculum of schools and current educational practices. And they suggest that fundamental shifts to imperialist thinking are always possible when teachers, researchers, and students occupy border spaces: “The main problem of the twenty-first century is not just crossing borders but dwelling in the borders” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, p. 72, italics in original). Though not explicitly locating themselves in decolonial theories, the articles included in this issue help to reimagine what teaching is and can be, by paying particular attention to the types of relationships that make learning possible—relationships between and among teachers, students, and the words read, spoken, and written in classrooms. They also point to the relations between classrooms and the broader societies in which classrooms are embedded and in which they participate. These articles reveal ways that relationships can be developed in the process of generating shared meanings and understandings. And these articles reveal how developing relationships that facilitate everyone’s learning is no mean feat, especially given the vexed nature of the schooling context that has systematically erased or devalued competing positions, languages, backgrounds, histories, and assumptions about what count as important kinds and presentations of knowledges.

In “Silence as Shields: Agency and Resistances among Native American Students in the Urban Southwest,” Timothy J. San Pedro stories an understanding with and from the stories of three Native American students. These students share the ways in which their perspectives were excluded from the curriculum and their views were ridiculed and dismissed in everyday classroom microaggressions. Their agentive use of silence as resistance to these microaggressions helps San Pedro extend discussions in resistance theory by introducing the term critical silent literacies, “which are literacies that voice our agentive uses of silence as resistance” (p. 134). San Pedro goes on to discuss the types of relationships he and the students developed together through the listening and telling of stories. His article offers another important example of a methodology that sustains “dialogic, humanizing relationships with participants, which opened up shared storied spaces” (p. 134). These shared storied spaces model the types of trusting relationships that are possible for both researchers and teachers, but that were, unfortunately, less present in the everyday classroom interactions these students experienced.

As with Amy Johnson Lachuk’s article in 50.1, we continue in our efforts to publish articles that innovate the research report genre to include voices and methodologies that speak back to conventional research reports. From the storying San Pedro does with students, readers learn the ways these students used silence as a resistance strategy to protect their understandings, identities, and family and community knowledges from the daily humiliations and token mentions of Native Americans in history classes. Sadly, one place where students like these might hope to see their knowledges valued became the space where these students were judged, scrutinized, and ridiculed as the teachers and other students jockeyed for a position to speak authoritatively about American Indian peoples. Through a storying methodology, this article offers insight into the ways oppression unfolds.
in everyday interactions between and among teachers and students. The storying genre and method infused in the article, while perhaps novel to RTE readers, will be familiar to those versed in American Indian studies, where such methodologies have a long history and upon which San Pedro draws (Kovach 2010, Tuhiwai Smith 1999, Bishop, 1997). By storying this article as he does, San Pedro demonstrates a fresh way to begin to read silence as a strategy for resistance to classroom microaggressions.

The next article, by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, continues our theme of teaching as it relates to discussions of race and literature and the formation of classroom relationships through talk-in-interaction. In “‘We Always Talk about Race’: Navigating Race Talk Dilemmas in the Teaching of Literature,” Thomas considers how classroom talk about race and literature can participate in some of the broader societal discourses about race happening presently in the United States and globally. In a discourse analytic study, Thomas interprets the classroom discourse of two teacher-researchers who studied their own in-class discussions about race and literature. She inquires into the interactional strategies and tactics the teachers employed for engaging with race talk dilemmas in secondary English classrooms studying literature, examining how the teachers and their students interactionally negotiated dilemmatic discussions about race—that is, “moments in conversations about race that have the potential for conflict” (p. 155).

Thomas reveals (perhaps not surprisingly) that the teacher strategies for participating in classroom discourse seemed to offer opportunities for some students to participate, while limiting or discouraging the participation of others. She argues that “even the most skilled and well-meaning tactics of discursive silence, evasion, and ‘sidestepping’ in teacher talk encode race” (p. 171). In dialogue with the work of Anagnostopoulos, Everett, and Carey (2013), the study testifies to the difficulties of discussing race and literature. If, as we assume, discussions about literature are always imbued with, and part of, broader societal discourses about race, then this article makes an especially timely contribution to the discourse happening now in the wake of the deplorable Ferguson, Cleveland, and Charleston shootings. One persistent difficulty in societal discussions of such race-based violence lies in the human (in)capacity to openly and honestly dialogue across differences—especially racial differences as they intersect with religious, generational, social class, gender, and other differences. It sometimes seems as though humans are hardwired to talk with those who are like them when such racist violence occurs, rather than reaching out, speaking with, and learning from “the Other.” To put it more personally: How often and how openly do I dialogue with others who are different from me, who do not share my ethical (and other) frames of reference about painful racial wounds that “we, the people of the United States” seem to open, over and over again, and remain at a collective loss about how to heal?

Framing classroom race talk in light of broader societal discourses casts into high relief the challenges teachers face in facilitating open classroom talk about race (a theme also taken up by Borsheim-Black in issue 49.4). As teachers try to develop relationships that might foster open, even healing discussions about race,
they can actually and unwittingly reproduce problematic assumptions about, and practices involving, race relationships and racial identity (e.g., by forbidding the use of the word *nigger* or by subtly evading race talk). To be sure, the racial identities of teachers and students matter enormously in how such efforts unfold, and the greatest difficulties seem to emerge in conversations among people of different racial identifications. But Thomas suggests that tackling these conversations head-on—and openly acknowledging their difficulties—is a critical and urgent need for English teachers today. While it may be overstepping the conclusions to be drawn from Thomas’s study, we hold out hope that teachers taking such open and courageous stances toward classroom talk about race may also help bring our society one step closer to acknowledging and healing its racial wounds.

If teaching relationships include the possibility of making room for difficult conversations about race and literature, so too should they include the possibility of frank and open discussions about race and language ideology. Melinda McBeel Orzulak’s article, “Disinviting Deficit Ideologies: Beyond ‘That’s Standard,’ ‘That’s Racist,’ and ‘That’s Your Mother Tongue,’” explores the linguistic ideological dilemmas (LIDs) that preservice teachers faced when trying to explore and honor students’ language variation, given expectations that teachers remain the gatekeepers of standard English(es). Asking how preservice teachers learn to navigate these linguistic ideological dilemmas, Orzulak draws upon data gathered across three semesters with teacher candidates as they tried to create inclusive classrooms that would respect, value, and surface ideologies attached to language varieties, only to find that students’ and their own linguistic ideologies arose in ways that hampered learning. She reports that students would simultaneously use their English language varieties and denigrate these varieties in a process of linguistic subordination.

Even when students and teachers are aware of this linguicism (i.e., discrimination against someone based on his or her language, accent, or dialect [see Phillipson, 1998 and Pennycook, 1994]), however, the onus to change this perception typically remains on the shoulders of students who speak in the subordinate varieties of English and may have internalized such deficit perspectives of their own language varieties. Her findings demonstrate the limits of code-switching as a strategy for addressing language variation in classroom interactions. Orzulak also underscores the need for enhanced teacher preparation “about when, why, and how to have conversations about language variation, including greater understanding of language-related ideological triggers” (p. 176). Her findings are telling and important: For students, there continue to be linguistic ideological dilemmas that hamper their comfortable and fluent use of multiple English(es). For the preservice teachers, overcoming these internalized ambivalent ideologies was difficult, even though their theoretical training in language variations had prepared them to do so. For teacher educators, these findings suggest that preservice teachers need further strategies for responding to internalized ideologies that perpetuate linguicism and prevent the formation of relationships that foster language equity in the classroom.

The first three articles of this issue offer detailed classroom accounts of teacher and student relationships, interactions, dilemmas, and difficult conversations, which together demonstrate the workings of power in everyday language instruc-
tion and discussion around literature and writing. Widening the methodological lens of analysis on teaching, the last article, by research team Paul Anderson, Chris M. Anson, Robert M. Gonyea, and Charles Paine, presents findings from a large-scale, multi-institutional survey to identify the attributes of writing assignments that most influence student learning. In undergraduate writing within the disciplines, it has long been suggested that longer and more paper assignments translate to more students learning more content. To explore the veracity of this notion, this research team of writing program administrators from universities around the United States conducted a study through a partnership between the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). They examined survey responses from over 70,000 first-year and senior students who were enrolled at 80 bachelor’s degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States. Students reported experiencing writing assignments that emphasized deep learning strategies when they:

1. had opportunities to interact “meaningfully with instructors, classmates, and others during the writing process;”
2. “were challenged by writing tasks that required meaning-making;” and
3. “received clear expectations for their written work” (p. 220).

In other words, students reported engaging in deep learning when writing assignments and instruction in English classrooms were focused on both the substance and underlying meaning of the information they were writing about and when interactive processes and clear expectations were woven into the teaching. These findings are valid for two different populations of students: first-year and senior undergraduates. Also, these results can be extended to three NSSE scales that seek to determine students’ engagement with Deep Approaches to Learning (i.e., Higher-Order Learning, Integrative Learning, and Reflective Learning). Finally, these three constructs of impactful writing assignments appear to have the added bonus of helping students develop personally and socially. In the end, this report presents a new set of concepts, strategies, and evidence for identifying the contribution of writing to learning. This important article, then, provides evidence from a large-scale study we believe helps to underscore the themes about teaching that thread throughout this issue:

- Teacher-student and student-student relationships in classrooms matter to students’ learning.
- Types and kinds of meaningful and inclusive curricular assignments matter to students’ learning.
- Teachers providing leadership in classrooms in order to create inclusive, fair, and clear learning objectives matter to students’ learning.

We end this issue with the first in a series of forum essays that are guest edited by Peter Smagorinsky which will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the journal.
We open this series of forum essays with a tribute to George Hillocks, who passed on in November 2014. The loss of Professor Hillocks prompted us to engage in even deeper reflection on what stewardship of Research in the Teaching of English means, for few have had as much impact as he did on the field of research in the teaching of English. As a former student of George Hillocks, and a previous editor and current board member of RTE, Peter Smagorinsky graciously accepted our request to assist us in gathering former students to help memorialize George Hillocks. What better way to consider the impact of one teacher than by asking some of his former students what their relationships to George Hillocks as a teacher and researcher mean to them? The tributes offered to us by Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, Michael W. Smith, Carol D. Lee, and Peter Smagorinsky himself all provide lessons about teaching in English classrooms. As with many stories, these tributes bring us full circle to return to the idea of teaching presented in the epigraph that began this introduction: “Saying that we care is easy and trivial. Making such caring manifest consistently in every class is neither easy nor trivial. [We] believe that consistent manifestations of caring can take place only if the teacher has first a deep understanding of her students . . . , a thorough understanding of the subject matter taught, and a consistent willingness to depart from the tried and trite to explore better ways of teaching so that the subject matter becomes the vehicle for the student–teacher interactions . . . .”

We also notice within and across these articles and tributes a connection to the important themes of the 50th anniversary year of RTE taken up in our previous issue—storying and what stories researchers, data, and students may tell if researchers and teachers listen with openness and see anew while dwelling in the borders. Whether they are explicitly stated or not, stories and storying trace the power (a)symmetries unfolding in the everyday interactions in the classroom around curriculum, which can prompt every one of us to openly reflect on and hopefully transform social hierarchies of knowing, feeling, and being. Relationships between teachers and students, and among students, shape learning and engagement with course materials and assignments. Relationships also shape so much of the pedagogical work of editing that Peter Smagorinsky and Norbert Elliot undertook to help make this issue come to life in the rich and rigorous ways it has. As we noted earlier, Peter has led a team of writers to develop this issue’s forum essay. He’s reviewed nine essays, always with detail, thoroughness, insight, and great care for the work. He’s been an invaluable mentor to Mary and Ellen as well as a former editor of the journal and colleague. Norbert has been invited to become a guest editor on two of the articles we have published recently. In this capacity he has struck the hard-won balance between reviewer, editor, and teacher. He’s revealed himself to authors, found additional reviewers for articles that have particularly complex research designs, and has seen articles through several stages of review. He’s done so with graceful prose, generous heart, and keen intellect. We want to thank both Peter and Norbert especially for their incredibly generous input to our authors, for their readiness to help the RTE team, and for their brilliance as methodologists, thinkers, and scholars. Their kindnesses are too many to list here, but we greatly appreciate the time, effort, and energy they put into these
relationships with us and our authors. The important studies and Forum essays in this issue provide diverse authorship as well as a rich array of methodologies, foci, perspectives, and scales in an effort to reconsider—by dwelling in the borders—what constitutes Teaching.

REFERENCES

Correction
A typographical error in Todd DeStigter’s article appeared on page 12 in our previous issue. The quote by Bob should read, “We’re occupying AP Comp” rather than “We’re occupying AP CC” as printed. This correction was made within the PDF file of this article available online.

Call for Translators
The editorial team of RTE seeks Arabic, German, Hindi, and Spanish translators for abstracts that accompany articles we publish online. In addition to being deeply appreciated by the RTE editorial team, translators receive modest compensation for their work and are key to increasing the international presence and linguistic diversity of RTE.