The theme of this issue, *Kids as Researchers*, offers an interesting platform to talk about research: who is doing it and for what purposes? In past years, student research projects often involved index cards with “facts” about an animal, the state one lives in, or some faraway country. In some current-day classrooms, this practice still exists, except the student may use an Internet-based search engine (e.g., Google) instead of an encyclopedia. Take, for example, a recent assignment in a fifth-grade classroom. Students were assigned a country and asked to create a paragraph for each sub-topic following the letters of the alphabet (e.g., A: agriculture; B: banking; C: climate, etc.). This task was identified as *research*, and the teacher likely wanted to make sure students were attending to the ELA/Writing Anchor Standards of “gather, comprehend, synthesize, and report on information and ideas” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). While these Standards are the very practices in which researchers engage, the challenge lies in the intention/purpose of the task. Rather than viewing research as a set of cognitive skills to be learned, teachers and students can begin to view research as a way to address real problems or issues in local communities and beyond (Bomer & Bomer, 2001).

How research is understood and who conducts the research matters. Historically, children were viewed as “objects,” “innocent,” “in development,” and/or a *tabula rosa* (a blank slate) on which life is determined. This thinking has given way to more agentive perspectives with children as “collaborative,” “self-determining,” and “active.” The shifting constructions of childhood, fueled by technology advances, have also impacted how research is conducted, whether it is *on*, *with*, or *by* children (Malone, 2006). Research *on* children is conducted to understand from a distance the child and childhood; children are objects of study to measure development and normalize behaviors. Research *with* and *by* children, on the other hand, brings children’s voices and perspectives to the foreground of the process.

Research *with* children often takes the form of inquiry-based approaches, where traditional roles for teachers and children are transformed. Rather than disseminating information, teachers facilitate and support children as they actively research and generate knowledge on local and global concerns. Access to the Internet and other technologies enables children to take on critical perspectives and action toward significant issues (e.g., clean water, food shortages, AIDS, poverty, child labor). In doing so, children are positioned as knowledge brokers. They are active participants in their own learning, pursuing questions that are personally meaningful.

Research *by* children offers a more emancipatory approach, building on the notion that inquiry provides opportunities to disrupt inequitable relationships among researchers and those being researched. Agency and voice are highlighted throughout studies that honor the child’s stance as a researcher or co-researcher (Kinash & Hoffman, 2008; Malone, 2006; Norton, 2006). Kinash and Hoffman write, “We have learned that in order for...”
research to make a difference in schools and communities, children and adults must learn together, each teaching the other, and that the adults must trust the children to think and inspire them to really challenge themselves intellectually” (p. 90). The agentive nature of children as researchers leads to participatory agendas, whereby children pursue research questions about issues that matter and affect their lives. When given the authority to follow their own inquiries, children will likely prioritize different research agendas, ask different questions, and collect data in different ways—ways that emphasize shifts in adult–child power relationships (Kellett, 2005). These changes illuminate how research paradigms expand what it means to do research, for whom, for what, and by whom.

The articles in this themed issue of Language Arts invite us to consider how children take up research in their communities and lives. The first article by Wayne Serebrin is an account of children’s participation in research when they engage in an inquiry on birds living in a pond near their school. As Serebrin writes, “Chris’s [the teacher] second pedagogical purpose had been to support the children in uncovering what would genuinely provoke their engagement as inquirers” (p. 13). The children explored a variety of resources and used a range of sign systems to make sense of and share understandings. In doing so, the children came to appreciate the pond and see the power of authentic and meaningful inquiry.

Christine Leland and Stevie Brusas take a different approach with kids as researchers, inviting Stevie’s fourth graders to problematize how information is presented in textbooks and other official and sanctioned materials (e.g., films from the US government). In “Becoming Text Analysts: Unpacking Purpose and Perspective,” Leland and Brusas describe the inquiry process and activities that students engaged in as they learned to become texts analysts. Students began to question textbook “facts” and learned to “read more carefully than they used to because they never realized that textbooks weren’t always telling both sides of the story” (p. 32). This experience of examining multiple texts and multiple perspectives is an essential aspect of conducting research and supporting students as inquirers ready to take up critical literacies.

Third, Heidi Mills, Tim O’Keefe, Chris Hass, and Scott Johnson write of their work at the Center for Inquiry school in Columbia, South Carolina. They share engagements between teachers and children that embrace the notion of kids as researchers. The authors write, “When we invite kids to pose and interrogate questions, make careful observations, and interpret them from their unique perspectives, then share their findings, kids become our mentors” (p. 37). From this stance, Mills et al. go on to demonstrate how through different opportunities during reading instruction, in the cafeteria, and during citizen science projects, students research their own critical questions that can transform their futures.

Nadjwa Norton and Heather Oesterreich offer their own understandings and insights about conducting research with and by children and marginalized youth in “Conversation Currents.” They discuss their own beginnings in this work and some of the challenges and difficulties they’ve encountered when researching with children and youth. Their discussion is powerful testimony for agency and positionality in research.

Our regular departments provide more discussion and possibilities for inquiry and research with and by children. The Research and Policy department (guest authored by Vivian M. Vasquez) foregrounds the experiences of one young learner as she problematizes and questions gender relations and bullying in her kindergarten classroom. Through art, Hannah documents her thinking and experiences, which leads to new questions and conversations in the classroom. In sharing this language story, Vasquez reminds readers how current policies and mandates dismiss the critical views that
practitioner and student research have in shaping effective learning environments. The Professional Book Reviews department explores important new resources for supporting teachers and students as they inquire and examine their own teaching practices and discourses. These books offer readers possibilities for conducting research from critical and humanistic frames, inviting new ways of engaging children and colleagues in the difficult work of teaching and learning. The Children’s Literature Reviews department features a selection of transitional chapter books that support early readers. Noting the paucity of transitional chapter books with characters of color, the editors are intentional in identifying authors of color that contribute to this particular genre of text.

In this issue of Language Arts, we hope to offer new possibilities for children conducting research. The articles and departments provide rich examples of how new research communities can be forged, leading to more democratic spaces.

References

2014 NCTE Election Results
In NCTE’s 2014 elections, Middle Level Section member Susan Houser, Pinellas/Duval Counties, Florida, was chosen vice president. Houser will take office during the NCTE Annual Convention in November.

The Elementary Section also elected new members. Elected to a four-year term on the Steering Committee were Kathy Collins, Durham, New Hampshire; Julia López-Roberston, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Prisca Martens, Towson University, Maryland; and Kathryn F. Whitmore, University of Louisville, Kentucky. Elected to the 2014–2015 Nominating Committee were Deborah MacPhee, Illinois State University, Normal, chair; Tracey Flores, Arizona State University, Phoenix; and Chuck Jurich, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

On the NCTE website, see additional 2014 election results and details on submitting nominations for the 2015 elections (http://www.ncte.org/volunteer/elections).