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Is That It?

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Dana H. Maloney

From the Editor

To be an English Language Arts educator in the year 2013 is to feel the tectonic plates of change shifting beneath one's feet. At times one feels as if nothing is as it once was: New teacher evaluation systems are changing the definition of "teacher effectiveness"; the Core Standards are re-defining learning goals and even content; and the ever-changing possibilities of technology are changing the ways students receive and send communication.

In many schools and districts, SMART Boards have replaced chalkboards, and iPads have replaced books. Gone is the old-fashioned paper gradebook or even the idea of closing the classroom door to the world; with the electronic gradebook and online content, the classroom has become open to, and even interactive with, the world.

Of course, our students have changed too: These digital natives come from – and live in – a world different from the one in which their teachers were raised. These students are fully connected, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They live in a world of change, with new apps replacing old ones by the day and with constant access to "trending" stories on Twitter. They receive never-ending streams of new information in ever-changing forms; most recently, Snapchat and Instagram seem to have replaced much of their texting; social media have largely replaced one-to-one and face-to-face communication. With smartphone access to the world, these students never stop producing and receiving information.

In the fully connected global society in which we all now live, our students face a difficult economy. In this context, it is not surprising that "learning for the sake of learning" is questioned; the new Standards and related assessments remind us that learning needs to be directed toward "college and career readiness" (as defined by the Core Content State Standards and its related assessments, including the soon-to-arrive-in-New-Jersey PARCC).

So how do we, as English Language Arts educators, define and redefine English Language Arts teaching in the context of so much change? How do we maximize the opportunities presented by this world, to empower our students as insightful readers, as critical thinkers, as skillful writers, as impactful speakers, as careful listeners – and more?

According to the many voices captured in this issue, the answer is found in a combination of old and new: The writers of the articles, essays and poems in this issue convey passion for literacy development and for student development. The writers express many important thoughts on how we can help students develop and deepen their abilities to communicate with others and with the world. These writers express passion for literary texts, for the life-affirming and life-changing experiences literature offers to students; they also offer new perspectives on how texts can be taught and how skills can be developed. They also express many new ideas on teaching and learning.

As you read the many wonderful articles, essays and poems found in this issue of the *New Jersey English Journal*, I hope you also notice and appreciate the passion of the writers. These writers are problem-solvers; they answer the questions of "what" and "how" with a variety of wonderful solutions. These are educators who truly care about the discipline of English Language Arts education – and about the students impacted by such education.

Many thanks to all of the people who worked on this issue of the journal, including all members of the editorial board and the two student interns who helped put the journal together. Above all, thanks to the writers for sharing your words and ideas with us.

We hope you enjoy this issue. Please consider sharing your ideas with us. See page 3 for our 2014 Call for Submissions. We would love to publish your words and ideas in our next issue.