Dear Readers,

In this issue we offer a collection of articles around the theme of teaching English language learners (ELL). An enormous topic, to say the least, the theme is carried through four featured articles that, as a collection, speak not only to the diversity of the issues facing ELL teachers today but also to the diversity of settings in which ELL issues arise.

A third grade teacher from Oklahoma discovers the power of narrative writing as an inroad to engaging students in her dual-language immersion class. A Minnesota teacher of immigrant and refugee junior high school students adds a dimension to her teaching when she volunteers to teach adult language learners at a local university—and learns much more than she had anticipated. While teaching eighth-graders in New Mexico, another teacher pairs drama and language studies to draw out her bilingual students. Finally, a New York City university instructor whose classes often include English language learners focuses on the still-common five-paragraph theme, questioning its reputation as a surefire writing exercise and cautioning against using such one-stop methods to support students’ writing skills.

This collection, in addition to offering intriguing glimpses into four teachers’ work, suggests what most educators already know: language learners are not isolated to any given region, school, or curriculum area. The vast majority of teachers across the country will, at some point in their careers, encounter students whose native language is not English.

The Quarterly presents the following special section, hoping that readers will not only find inspiration in the varied perspectives and approaches of these teachers, but—more important—draw strength from what we all share as educators.

Sincerely,

Amy Blum

Want to Connect with Other Teachers Intersted in English Language Learners?

The National Writing Project English Language Learners (ELL) Network brings together writing project sites and teachers from across the country to support the teaching and writing of English language learners. The ELL Network supports education about and awareness of English language learners’ issues in writing project sites and sponsors opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice in relation to students learning English. And, as Dana Dusbiber, chair of the ELL Network’s National Leadership Team points out, any opportunity for teachers to examine their work—particularly in a collaborative environment—will certainly yield better results for everyone involved. Said Dusbiber, “We want to get better at what we do, and often the best way to do that is to talk about our practice and examine ways to make it better.”

In addition to maintaining an extensive bibliography and sponsoring sessions at the NWP Annual Meeting, the ELL Network offers immigrants to member sites to strengthen their work with language issues and sponsors an annual writing retreat for teachers writing about their work with English language learners. “Those of us who teach language learners,” Dusbiber stated, “have sought to have a voice as advocates for our students. We know that the work we do not only educates our students . . . but also pushes us toward a larger view of what it means to be an educator in this country today.”

To learn more about the NWP English Language Learners Network, visit www.writingproject.org/Programs/ell/index.html.