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Being Part of the Larger STEM Environment

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As you think about your teaching at the elementary, secondary, or tertiary level, I suspect that you care about the relevance of topics and skills to your students—your students’ current interests and their future interests. What do you think motivates your students? Hopefully, you can tap into their intrinsic areas of motivation to solve real-world problems and to care about their family, their neighbors, their community, and their more distant neighbors across the world. We face immense challenges as a society, and we need you and your students to enthusiastically take the initiative to address them. We are closing in on 8 billion people on the planet. The United States—about 5% of the world’s population—is responsible for nearly 30% of the world’s annual energy consumption. China has more than 20% of the world’s population and consumes less than 7% annually. Less developed countries consume even less than that. So, what would happen if those 5 billion people in less developed countries started using the amount of energy that we use? What would happen to climate change if all 8 billion people used an American amount of energy? This is a problem that you and your students can help to address. Furthermore, what are the social justice implications of those 5 billion people being prevented from using an American amount of energy? I’ve been struck recently by the importance of passion and critical analysis in helping to guide STEM learning and STEM teacher education. As you read the articles in this issue, I challenge you to think about how these authors are doing their part and how you can do your part to encourage students to take action on relevant topics and become agents for productive problem solving.