

# **TEACHING ENGLISH CREATIVELY**

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**Third Edition**

**TEACHING ENGLISH CREATIVELY**

*By*

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*For all of those creative teachers  
who are now or who once were my  
undergraduate or graduate students*



## PREFACE

With the third edition of *Teaching English Creatively*, it is still my intent to provide inservice and preservice teachers of English practical activities derived from sound educational theory and research to help make their job in the classroom effective and enjoyable. So often teachers hear “English is boring,” “Why do we have to do this?” and “What’s this got to do with me?” It is my hope that if teachers use the activities in *Teaching English Creatively, (3rd Ed.)*, they will not hear those expressions.

This third book keeps many of the activities that were included in the previous editions; however, I have added much so that this book represents the current research and effective practice in English education. The chapter on writing (Chapter 5) updates the research on assessment and the use of portfolios but also includes practice and theory concerning the use of Writing Workshop. In Teaching Literature (Chapter 6), I have updated the section on young adult literature and, in addition, included theory and practice in the use of “Literature Circles” and “Socratic Seminars.” Reading in the English Classroom (Chapter 7) has been completely rewritten. Professor Steve White, University of Kansas, has made a major contribution to the book with that chapter. Lastly, I have updated all the “Additional Reading” sections at the end of each chapter so that resources with the latest theory, research, and practice are noted for your use.

Again, I have made every effort to be as informal in my presentation as possible. I empathize with you the busy English teacher; therefore, I want you to be able to read this book quickly and easily. *Teaching English Creatively, (3rd Ed.)* is informal in language, tone, and style, although it reflects, I think, much scholarly thinking. I hope it is an easy-to-read and useful source for teaching English.





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# **TEACHING ENGLISH CREATIVELY**





## Chapter 1

### MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN AMERICA

I begin this book with an overview of middle and high schools in America because, I believe, it will serve as a threshold from which to begin the process of thinking creatively, teaching creatively, and, in particular, teaching English creatively. What I am about to suggest throughout this book is somewhat different from the traditional programs often found in middle and high schools. The theory and research clearly suggest a different way—a new way—of teaching English. In that regard, Susan and Steven Tchudi (1999) suggest that

the teaching of English language arts has undergone extraordinary changes in the past quarter century. An older tradition of spelling drills, grammar practice, literary surveys of the classics, and expository writing in the plain style has given way (not without controversy) to an integrated view of literacy instruction that extends the opportunities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking to every corner of the world, using any mode or medium of communication that helps make connections between people. (1)

School curricula in the language arts often are focused on thematic units in which all the components of English are integrated. Strategies including the reading/writing workshop, analytic models for writing assessment as well as portfolios for unit assessment, literature circles as well as many other creative approaches to teaching English find their way into modern classrooms.

These areas of the English classroom will be addressed in the forthcoming pages; however, it is important to know about the context in which teachers place this creative approach. Now before going any further, I should note that many excellent teachers are already using many, if not all, of the curricula and instructional suggestions that this book makes. And, I say BRAVO!! Lead on! Just when I begin to think that there are more of those who do than don't practice these creative approaches, I hear of the new grammar program instituted at a mid-

dle school; I hear of the new testing program that is being forced on the staff in a school district; I hear of the excessive report writing that is taking place in the fifth and sixth grades; and I hear that the accountability issue is so strong that teachers are sharing answers on standardized tests so that scores will be higher (Scandals A-3). That revelation knocks me back to reality, and I once again know that the school culture is not what it should be in order for educators to teach creatively or effectively as the research and theory suggest.

### THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The organization of schools in America has changed significantly since the early schools of many years ago. Traditionally, young people attending school spent eight years in the elementary school, often called the “grammar” school; and then spent four years in what we have commonly called the high school. While the junior high movement began and was the dominant pattern in the 1900s, it was not until the 1980s that almost all students attended a school system that had a three level organizational pattern. Specifically, the junior high pattern, which was dominant by 1970, included grades seven, eight, and nine. It was in the mid-1980s that a shift took place to the middle school concept which emphasized grades six, seven, eight, and sometimes nine.

As the shift to an elementary, middle, and high school organization began, it was evident that the program for the middle level should be different from that of the upper level. Early in the junior high movement, middle level students were to explore a variety of subject matter, primarily job opportunities, which could be studied in more detail later at the high school level. Specifically, the intended program for the junior high school can best be described by Gruhn and Douglas (1947) in *The Modern Junior High School*. In this text, the authors suggest that the optimal educational program for the early adolescents should be built around the following six functions of the junior high school: integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation (56-60). In reality, as the junior high school developed and matured, the educational program for the early adolescents was far from the optimal program suggested by Gruhn and Douglas. What

developed was an organizational unit containing grades seven, eight, and nine with an educational program almost identical to the program found in the high school. Very little integration occurred; one could almost say there was none. Very few exploratory courses existed which resulted in very little differentiation of curricula and instruction to meet the diverse needs that were apparent in the early adolescents. To say the least, the junior high did not meet the high expectations that educational leaders had for the early adolescents.

As a result of the inadequacies found in the junior high schools, the notion of middle schools as an alternative emerged. Interestingly, the notion of the middle schools came about not as a protest of the *concept* of the junior high but a protest against the *program* that was found in the junior highs. Therefore, the middle school folks wanted to build on the program that had been delineated when the junior highs were established. These concepts served as the theoretical foundation for the middle schools. In addition, the new middle school was to serve as the transition between elementary and high school and there was to be a blend of the child-centered nurturing that has been traditionally found in the elementary school with the subject-centered high school.

The recommended practices which serve as the foundation for the middle school included the following:

1. Interdisciplinary organization with flexible scheduling
2. Adequate guidance program, including a teacher advisory plan
3. Exploratory program including many offerings for students
4. Curriculum which includes personal development programs, continued learning skills, and basic knowledge areas
5. Varied instructional methodology to the needs of a diverse student body.
6. Orientation and articulation for students, parents, and teachers.

(Alexander, 1987)

Are these concepts actually found in middle schools or are they just a part of the philosophical base but not found in reality? A study by Binko and Lawlor (1986), while a survey of a small number of middle schools, seems to indicate that middle schools are a mixed bag. While they found some differentiation of teaching methods according to ability levels, some utilization of media by students and teachers, and creative ideas developed by students, there was not much interdisciplinary cooperation among staff members, there was little personal guid-