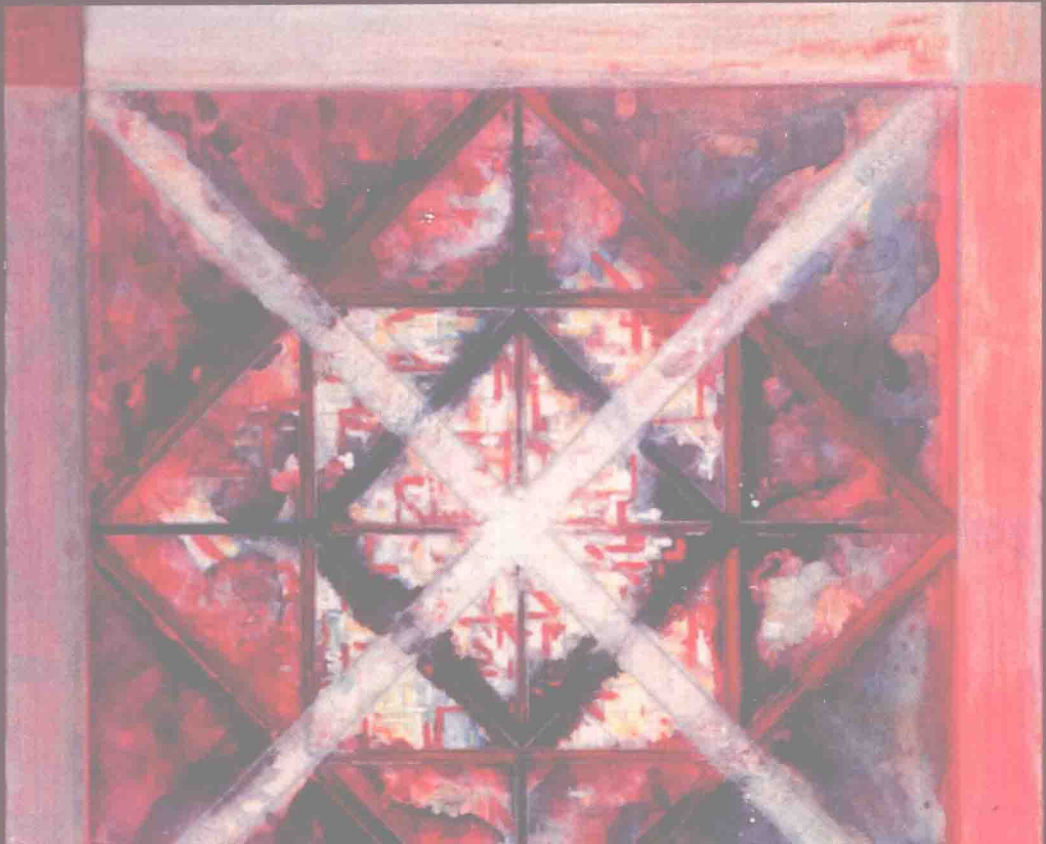

TEACHING ENGLISH IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SECOND EDITION

Rhoda J. Maxwell
Mary Jordan Meiser



Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools

Second Edition

RHODA J. MAXWELL

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Preface

Teaching is a difficult task; no one instructor or text can offer all of the answers to the complex questions facing teachers as they take over the responsibility of a classroom. Teaching can seem like a balancing act as teachers try to incorporate all the facets of teaching English, as well as planning for students who seem to have little in common with each other or with the teacher's own experiences. This book is not a panacea; rather, we offer a comprehensive view of teaching that takes into account the great variety of backgrounds, abilities, and interests of secondary students, so that novice teachers and their students have viable opportunities for success.

In developing this book we used a holistic, integrated approach to teaching the English language arts, including group activities throughout to provide listening and speaking opportunities in literature, composition, and language. We do not stress one curricular component of English over another, but we do emphasize the relatedness of all the parts: literature and reading; composing and writing; speaking and sharing; listening and responding; acting and creating; constructing language and meaning. Although we separate the strands of English teaching, we do so only to explore each area in some depth. Recognizing the importance of an integrated approach, we make connections among the strands in each chapter. For example, although oral language is a separate chapter, it also appears in chapters on literature, composition, and improving writing skills. Also, because our society continues to debate issues of basic skills, we devote a chapter to grammar and relate it to material in other chapters. We believe that teachers who understand the nature of language learning and the acquisition of skills can successfully integrate grammar throughout the curriculum. This type of integration appears in every chapter.

Research studies form the basis of teaching. We stress the practical application of theoretical ideas, basing our teaching suggestions on research and effective classroom practice. For this reason, we draw upon the experiences of middle and senior high school teachers, as well as college methods teachers nationwide. To achieve a balance between theory and practice, teachers must understand *why* they select certain activities and materials, not only *which ones* they select. Furthermore, we believe that the habit of reflecting on our decisions and the success or failure of their application is critical to professional growth and effective teaching. We thus ask readers to reflect on the nature of the English language arts and themselves as they read this text. We also ask readers to examine their assumptions and beliefs about teaching in light of the diverse learners in secondary classrooms, realizing that their own experiences may differ from those of their students. If teaching means helping students learn, then we cannot teach without first considering the experiences, personalities, and interests of our students. Such connections between teaching and learning guided the writing of this book.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

In Chapter 1 we provide a foundation for all the English language arts, the professional base of knowledge on which teachers build curriculum and instruction. We explore briefly the nature of the language arts as processes of making meaning and the holistic nature of learning. The real journey of discovery occurs throughout the text as readers find their individual way. Chapter 2 focuses on the students we teach, whom we believe to be the core of curriculum and instruction, not the subject matter. With students firmly in mind, we turn to curriculum and instruction in Chapter 3. We have noticed that not all contemporary methods texts include much information on curriculum, even though novice teachers are expected to understand it, deliver it, and develop it. Although terms like *scope and sequence*, *tracking*, and *inclusion* may appear “old hat” to experienced teachers, they are questions in the minds of novice teachers. We find, too, that novice teachers need more information on planning for classroom instruction, so we devote Chapter 4 to this important area. Learning to construct lessons and units from a student-centered, process-oriented perspective involves more than good intentions. We provide readers with examples of units and lessons developed by preservice teachers much like themselves. In the final chapter on becoming a teacher we ask readers to reflect on what they have learned, not only about teaching English language arts, but also about themselves.

Because of the pluralistic nature of our society, we devote sections in both the language and literature chapters to help prepare new teachers for the realities of their future classrooms. Another reality facing them is appropriate assessment, and we focus on this subject in a separate chapter and in individual chapters on literature, oral language, and composition. Chapter 12, “The Nature of Language,” and Chapter 13, “Varieties of American English,” cover language acquisition theory and practical ways of implementing theory into practice. In Chapter 7, “Teaching Literature,” and Chapter 8, “Selecting Literature,” we include literature by and about minorities and women and provide a wide range of resources for experienced and novice teachers. Also included are nonfiction selections, both contemporary and historical.

The organization of this book is somewhat flexible. The order in which the chapters are taught can vary depending on the structure of the methods course and wishes of the instructor. We suggest that Chapters 1 and 2 remain the introduction and foundation of the course; Chapters 3 and 4, on the other hand, could be used later, although they are designed to provide students with a context for considering each of the language arts. Chapters on oral language, literature, composition, and language could be used in any order desired. The book is designed to adapt to an individual instructor’s syllabus.

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We could not have written this book without the help of our students: those in secondary schools who unwittingly were a major part of our learning process; our undergraduate students who help us to understand the fears and uncertainties of becoming a teacher; our graduate students who, as experienced teachers, keep us aware of the

realities of the classroom. All of these students are *our* teachers, and we are grateful for the opportunities to learn from them.

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The English Language Arts

A PHILOSOPHY: SHAPING WHAT WE DO AND WHY WE DO IT

*One must learn by doing the thing;
For though you think you know it
You have no certainty, until you try.*

Sophocles

CREATING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Although they are uniquely satisfying, teaching and learning are indeed hard work. For the teacher, the creation of the learning environment—the struggle to structure inquiry in ways that capture young learners—is a primary concern. For students, maintaining commitment to the discipline of learning is the struggle. No matter how well we teach, learning does belong to our students. As English language arts teachers, we can structure, facilitate, and nurture learning, but we can neither impose nor control it. Nonetheless, the English language arts classroom can and should be a powerful catalyst to learning, a place where the intellectual joy of learning and mastery is evident even to the most reluctant learner.

How we view and subsequently structure our classroom and our teaching affects the learning and outlook of every student entrusted to us. A teacher who believes that English is a subject to be taught, mastered, and tested will structure learning differently from one who believes English is a process through which students seek to understand themselves and others. For example, a teacher who believes English is a collection of basic skills or a body of knowledge to be transmitted creates a different learning environment from one who believes students acquire basic skills through sustained, authentic experiences in oral and written language. Similarly, a teacher who tells students about literature, rather than asking them to respond to it, demonstrates