

Preface

THE ELEVATOR TALK VERSION

Elevator talk is a common business term. It means to concisely convey what you're up to in the time it takes an elevator to go from the ground floor to an upper-level floor. A real "cut to the chase" articulation of subject, purpose, intent—everything—in 30 seconds or so. Here's mine:

- A. This book is about building in its readers an awareness and a desire for seeing creativity as a part of living for everyone but, more important, as a necessary part of teaching and learning.
- B. This book is an interactive experience in learning, thinking, reflecting, playing with the types of thought patterns and structures that initiate creativity.
- C. This book is an attempt to both inspire and help transform all teachers into becoming more creative and thus more engaging and effective in their delivery of information, skills, and understanding.
- D. This book provides current research that explains why creativity is not an add-on but rather a necessary element in effective teaching for the 21st century.

THE VERSION THAT TAKES THE STEPS INSTEAD OF THE ELEVATOR

It was only in the last 10 years that I can remember taking the time to read the introductions or prefaces in the professional development books I would buy. I was usually in too much of a hurry and would go through the table of contents looking for whatever I might be most interested in reading. How did I pick a book? Well, if the topic was one I was interested in and the format was appealing, I would consider buying it. But for the most part, a friend's strong and enthusiastic suggestion was usually the best recommendation.

The book that had the most effect on me and consequently on my teaching wasn't even a professional development book per se; it was Julia Cameron's (1992) *The Artist's Way* that dramatically unblocked my creativity that I hadn't known was even blocked. This book was recommended by a workshop presenter. She had her favorite books on display for all of us to page through. I do that now myself—bring whatever books space allows for show and tell. For example, when giving a workshop on mind mapping, I have all of Tony Buzan's books to pass around for teachers to examine. When giving a workshop on the power of multiple intelligences, I pass around *Math for Humans* (Wahl, 1999) or the Sir Cumference series by Cindy Neuschwander and Wayne Geehan.

I envision a teacher at some point in time holding up this book during a workshop or faculty meeting and saying, "If you think you are a creative teacher, this book is for you! If you *don't* think you are a creative teacher but would like to be, this book is for you! This book will empower you to put the life and joy into your teaching that you know belongs there. This book is a mix of concrete teaching ideas, steps to improve your own creativity, philosophical musings on what role creativity plays in your own development. This book speaks to your longing as an individual to express yourself authentically as well as your longing to help your students do the same."

I hope teachers would find the whimsical sketches that punctuate the book to be delightful markers for important concepts and examples included. I hope teachers would enjoy the wisdom of master educators who have taken their time to give advice or a slice of their hard earned experience for us to think about. I'd like that. Personally, I think this book should serve as a cheerleader for the creative soul in each of us. The attitude that "if it can't be bubbled in, it isn't worth teaching" is short-sighted and dangerous. I hope that an open discussion on what creative teaching looks like and the energy and empowerment it produces will help change that mentality. I hope these discussions will move the fulcrum to provide a more balanced environment in which to teach and learn. While working through this book, you will find evidence of why you entered the profession in the first place as well as a way to keep you in it—a way to secure a sense of meaning and joy in your teaching.

With this book as the vehicle, you and your administrators and colleagues should begin the discussion on how a school's atmosphere and culture can strangle or nurture creative teaching. I want to make the case that creativity is the fuel, the juice, that should propel the educational focus of the 21st century. I give concrete steps on how all teachers, no matter what the level or course, can increase their innate ability to think and act more creatively in the classroom—and all while raising test scores rather than jeopardizing them. This is not the book to buy if you just want someone to tell you to do more coloring, cutting and pasting, and poster making with your students. That's not what creativity will look like here.

This book is an interactive experience in transformation through learning, thinking, reflecting, playing with the types of thought patterns and structures that initiate creativity. By talking with others about the material and working through the suggested activities, you will be tempted, if not positively motivated, to stretch and exercise your creative muscles. And we all know that once a creative muscle is stretched, it never goes back to its original size again. But most important, you will find yourself in this book—a self filled with the energy to try new approaches and bring serious play into the curriculum delivery equation. No matter how restrictive the educational environment you move in has become, there is room for you to be a creative teacher. In fact, the more restrictive the situation, the more necessary it is for you to constantly inject creative approaches and procedures. Let this book be just the invitation you need to begin.