



The Art & Craft of College Teaching: A Guide for New Professors & Graduate Students

Robert Rotenberg; Left Coast Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Chris Mayer, University of Virginia

In *The Art & Craft of College Teaching: A Guide for New Professors & Graduate Students*, Robert Rotenberg seeks to mentor graduate students and new faculty. His 30 years of teaching experience, service as a department chair and distinguished teaching professor, and passion for faculty development make him uniquely qualified to fill this role. Rotenberg's purpose in writing the book is both "to encourage young professors to think of teaching as part of the realm of scholarship" (p. xiii) and to provide a resource that brings together much of the research on "how college students learn and what effective teaching looks like" (p. 1). To accomplish this objective, Rotenberg has written a 305 page book which is divided into 17 parts and 116 chapters. Topics discussed range from research on learning and best practices in undergraduate education to practical advice on syllabus construction and effective grading. While he maintains an informal tone throughout the book, Rotenberg's advice is solidly grounded in research.

To emphasize the importance of teaching scholarship, Rotenberg begins the book by introducing readers to influential research on learning. He presents Bloom's Taxonomy as the "earliest effort to distinguish between children's lower-level learning and the higher-level learning of adults" (p. 11), and uses it as a reference point for evaluating other research. Following a brief discussion of Bloom's work, readers are taken on a journey that highlights research by Perry, Whitkin and Moore, Kolb, Gardner, Baxter-Magolda, King and Kitchener, and Fischer. Part two ends with a discussion of the current research of Wolcott, Lynch and Huber. Although readers acquire only an overview of the scholarship, the most important aspect of part two is its underlying claim that new faculty and graduate students must become familiar with research on learning if they are to become effective teachers. Rotenberg supports this claim by employing and referencing this research throughout the book.

Throughout the book, readers are introduced to concepts employed by effective teachers and scholars of teaching, yet they are also provided with practical teaching tips. For example, part 15 provides numerous techniques for effectively evaluating student learning through grading. More interesting, however, is the distinction Rotenberg makes between evaluation and assessment. He suggests that: "Evaluation is the feedback from the instructor to the student about the student's learning. Assessment is the feedback from the student to the instructor about the student's learning." (p. 103). This distinction plays a fundamental role in Rotenberg's discussions of evaluation and assessment, and is typical of his attempt to introduce readers to important concepts while still offering "how to" tips for teaching.

One of the most impressive aspects of the book is that it contains 40 chapters (115 pages) dedicated to different types of classrooms (Lecture, Discussion, Seminar, and Laboratory). Here, more than anywhere else, the author's passion for teaching and faculty development are evident. Within these chapters, Rotenberg offers tips on topics such as working with teaching assistants, making lecture classes more lively, structuring seminar courses, and employing numerous methods of pedagogy in the laboratory. He also addresses theoretical questions, such as the purpose of the various types of classrooms, their essential elements, and the research that focuses on them. After completing these chapters, readers will possess many of the tools needed to design and effectively teach, as well as conduct research on, each type of classroom.

Rotenberg anticipates the unexpected as he addresses difficult situations professors face in the classroom. For example, readers receive guidance on two potential problems in discussion classrooms: silence and students who dominate conversations. In his discussion on teaching controversial topics, Rotenberg is at his best when he argues that “the teachable moment lies in getting the sides to really listen to each other” (p. 225). He goes on to explain how these situations can be transformed into positive experiences for students. Readers will certainly want to seek further advice and conduct research on dealing with these contentious issues; however, the book provides a great starting point for resolving them.

Rotenberg’s book provides an informative and comprehensive resource for college teaching that reads like a conversation with a mentor and makes a convincing argument that teaching should be thought of as scholarship. Although there is a substantial list of references at the end of the book, I was slightly disappointed that Rotenberg did not list them at the end of each chapter to facilitate further research. Despite this fact, it is still a must-read for graduate students and new professors and would also be useful for experienced faculty. Ideally, it would first be read straight through and then used as a guide for further research and as a resource for answering questions.