

## College Teaching: Developing Perspective Through Dialogue

Michael W. Galbraith; Krieger Publishing Company, 2008.

Reviewed by Susan J. Marnell Weaver, Center for Teaching and Learning,  
University of the Cumberlands



Michael Galbraith uses a question and answer dialogue to address scores of questions that a person might have about how to succeed in an academic career. In 125 pages, he provides practical suggestions for dealing with issues such as how to construct a syllabus, maintain grading standards, incorporate technology, and balance role expectations. The book is short enough to read quickly, but each chapter has fodder for discussion. This makes it potentially useful for either a graduate student seminar or a new faculty reading group. It would also be helpful to senior faculty who want to develop or revise courses.

The book is divided into nine parts: Gaining Some Insight on Self, Preparing to Teach the Course, The First Class Session, Issues in the Classroom, Teaching Methods and Techniques, Teaching with Technology, Evaluating and Grading, Academic Advising, and Academic Activities Outside the Classroom. Each part provides the reader with an overview of both contemporary and classic literature. He varies coverage to be relatively comprehensive while highlighting key areas. For example, he provides an especially helpful discussion of evaluation that covers both formative and summative assessments as well as differences between norm, criterion, and contract based grading.

Galbraith maintains an admirable focus on transparency in the education process beginning with the importance of knowing ones own beliefs, values, attitudes, teaching style, teaching philosophy and perspective. His statement that “the process is more inclusive than the individual parts” (p. viii) provides an interesting twist to the concept of *gestalt* (the whole is greater than the sum of the parts). He shares excellent tips for creating effective lectures, improving social dynamics in discussions, and using demonstrations. Recent trends in the scholarship of teaching and learning generally characterize *effective lecture* as an oxymoron, but Galbraith argues that there are reasons for cycling varied formats including limited lecturing if properly done. He provides good insights into how to construct a lecture and use it to introduce other learning activities (p. 59).

The classic literature in this book is a real plus. One example is the typology of questions based on the 1993 work by Barbara Gross Davis. Awareness of question types (exploratory, challenge, relational, diagnostic, action, cause-and-effect, extension, hypothetical, priority, and summary questions) can be helpful in evoking critical thinking discussions (p. 69). Although Galbraith does not refer to Socratic questioning *per se*, understanding the distinctions among question types is a way to enhance the ability to use this method. Another example of classic literature referred to in this book is Stephen Brookfield’s 1990 typology of factors that might lead to student resistance to learning. This information can provide a valuable backdrop for a discussion of millennial students (pp. 52-55).

Mention of the classic literature is not meant to ignore his current references. For example, he has a unit on technology that includes ideas for using clickers (personal response systems), video streaming, and plagiarism detection software. He also offers advice for teaching online and for using technology to increase accessibility.

*College Teaching: Developing Perspective Through Dialogue* might be described as an updated “best of” book as it includes many ideas from his previous books in addition to newer ideas. One weakness in this approach is his reference to self-assessments that are in his earlier books. Additionally, a couple of areas could have benefited from more elaboration. For example, Galbraith offers a good discussion of establishing evaluation criteria but omits explicit reference to creating rubrics as a tool for clarifying expectations, increasing grading consistency, and saving grading time. There is information about learning styles but not about pedagogies that incorporate physiology of learning information as developed by Rita Smilkstein or James Zull. In discussing technology, Galbraith refers to commercial products but does not mention free sources of ideas such as merlot.org or tlgroup.org, open source course management systems such as Moodle or Sakai, or downloadable free videos found on youtube.com or google.com. However, one cannot fairly fault him for what he chooses to exclude, and he acknowledges in the introduction that more information could have been included. Information about missing topics is readily available elsewhere.

In summary, this book offers perspectives to use as a springboard for discussions about ethics issues (such as plagiarism, relationships, and incivility); practical issues (such as course design, assessment, and publishing); and typologies (such as pedagogy, politics, and learning style) plus much more. Although he could have added additional information, this book provides a good basic reference without being overwhelming, and it provides an opportunity to attune students to the importance of reading critically and seeking out innovations in the ever changing scholarship of teaching and learning.



[Table of Contents](#) | [Issues](#) | [Credits](#) |  
[NTLF.com Home](#)

© Copyright 1996-2008. Published by *James Rhem & Associates, Inc.*  
(ISSN 1057-2880) All rights reserved worldwide.