



## THE CRAFT OF TEACHING

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**K**enneth Eble has a distinguished career as a college teacher, administrator, and writer, and he has served in various capacities with national professional organizations. Having received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Iowa (1948, 1949) and his Ph.D. in English from Columbia University (1956), he is now a professor of English and University professor at the University of Utah. Among his many accolades are that he was a distinguished Visiting Scholar for the Educational Testing Service in 1973-74 and was one of ten finalists for the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's Professor of the Year in 1985.

The first edition of *The Craft of Teaching* was published in 1976 and has been referred to as "a classic on college teaching" and described as "one of the best books ever published on this topic." *AAUP Bulletin* said, "Eble's book is unmatched to date in its grasp

of the essentials of effective teaching," and from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* we read that the first edition "is, in small measure, a manual of ideas for new professors. If it were only that, the book would have great value, but it is far more; for older faculty members who are concerned with effective teaching, or would like to be, it offers the kind of impact that reading any good imaginative literature yields." These same quotes apply to the second edition, yet the second is better because it is an enhancement of the first edition with several new chapters and sections, and it includes references to very current literature, like Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (1987) and Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (1987). More importantly, Eble's new edition reveals the author's firm and intelligent grasp of what has happened in the past four decades in American higher education and brings us up-to-date with higher education's fascination in the '80's with writing across the curriculum, "critical thinking," faculty development, faculty evaluations, computers, and curricular reform. Besides being familiar with the literature in theories of education and educational studies as is obvious from his careful documentation, he is an English professor and refers effortlessly to various greats in western world literature. Selected quotes from such figures as Shakespeare, Thoreau, Emerson, Mark Twain, Henry James, and references to, among others, Socrates and Aristotle punctuate the book and are as unobtrusive as they are complementary to his task. Though English is this reviewer's discipline, his references to literature are neither pedantic nor intrusive and would not, therefore, serve to put those from other disciplines off.

Besides a broad grasp on the state of affairs in education on the national level, he also has an incisive focus on what happens in the classroom. For the students' perspective, he draws particularly from W.G. Perry's *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (1970), "the most influential book of the past twenty years with respect to studying . . . the way college students respond to learning." For the teacher's perspective, he

refers copiously to current studies and offers techniques, suggestions, and "discussion" as to what happens in a classroom, often quite candidly from his own experiences — what happens in the best of classes to what happens in the worst of classes. I found it refreshing and unmistakably healthy to hear him openly discuss some of the disasters that have happened even in his classes and which, whether we like to admit it or not, happen most assuredly to all of us at one time or another: "Every teacher experiences such classes, and it may be a comfort to the inexperienced teacher to realize that such bad classes don't entirely disappear with experience." He goes on to discuss what can make for a "bad" class, in a teacher and also in the students. The tone of his statements is conversational but with a background wealth of knowledge and experience so that the reader wants to continue reading to find out what he has to say. Never condescending and deceptively simple, the tone is that of a master and sage speaking to us from our time.

His views on teaching, teachers, and students are at once insightful, realistic, humane and very kind: "Good teachers I know are not all exemplars of even those virtues I choose to emphasize. Nevertheless, developing as a teacher can be described as becoming wiser and less judgmental, more generous, less arrogant and yet more confident; being more honest with oneself and students and subject matter; taking more risks; showing forth without showing off; being impatient with ignorance but not appalled by it." He spends some time at the beginning of the book explaining why he chose the title *The Craft of Teaching*. He believes good teachers are made rather than born and, therefore, teaching — good teaching — is a skill, a "craft" that is always being developed, being honed, always alive and responsive to changing dynamics. Though the book does have an extremely positive approach, one could not accuse Eble of being a Pollyanna who looks at an idealized classroom through rose-colored glasses. He has seen too much for such a perspective to be the case. He frequently throughout the book lets us know his perspective is grounded in reality: "in my observations of teachers on many campuses over the past decade, I have

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seen fewer charlatans than mediocrities and been less appalled by flashy deception than by undisguised dullness. And I have never encountered any evidence that a dull and stodgy presentation necessarily carries with it an extra measure of truth and virtue." What he does try to do is get us as teachers to do our best by being our best, and for him that is bringing the whole person — the teacher and the student — into the classroom: "I believe that teaching is a presence of mind and person and body in relation to another mind and person and body, a complex array of mental, spiritual and physical acts affecting others."

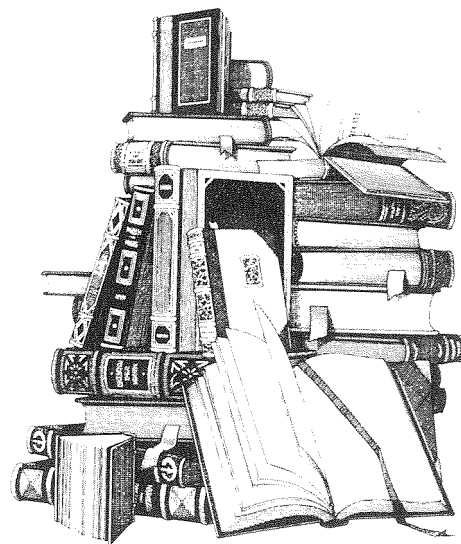
In keeping with the conversational tone, Eble's style is characterized, too, by a soft brand of humor. With his emphasis on the teacher's bringing his or her whole self into the classroom, he offers this advice to the new teacher: "Be yourself is as good advice for approaching a class as any. And if you have a crumby self? Then there's only one thing to do: Stay away from teaching." And later he talks about difficulties in motivating students because of competing factors in their lives: "Once in college, motivation waxes and wanes as do love affairs and often in concert with them." Then he goes on to make his point, characteristically with warmth and compassion: "Without advocating a counselor's relationship with every student, I think a teacher sensitive to these and related matters is likely to have some success in motivating students."

I was interested in comparing Eble's thoughts and experiences with my perceptions of Kennesaw State College. At one point he offered a rather lengthy discussion on the importance of covering at the beginning of each quarter information that most of our faculty have routinely been covering for years now in a syllabus. However, he related a technique he once used in a "bad class" in which nothing he tried had worked. He then proceeded to dismiss class for a week and found that when the class again met, they were able to talk candidly about "the problem" together, attitudes had changed, and the problem was resolved. For those of us at Kennesaw and on a nine-week quarter, dismissing class for a week is simply not a viable alternative. I thought of Kennesaw again when Eble discussed

what he labeled interesting current metaphors: "Like 'the cutting edge,' and 'the fast track,' [and 'the explosion of knowledge'], all are horrifying in their implications if one considers how explosives blow people up and knives cut them apart and speed shatters tranquility and order. Yet academics treat them as benign and lending excitement to a choice of life not exactly on the fast track." Once again, Eble's point is markedly sound and substantive, providing, as usual, considerable food for thought.

*The Craft of Teaching* is divided into four sections. Part One, Teaching and Learning, gives the author's main tenet in the book which is that good teachers are made rather than born and that good teaching can be nurtured into existence: "Potentially great teachers become great teachers by the same route [as athletes]: through conditioning their bodies, acquiring skills, and practicing in respectful competition with great teachers living and dead." The first section also discusses some common "myths" about teachers, for example, that the popular teacher is a bad and/or easy teacher, that teaching and research are complementary activities, that teaching a subject matter requires only that one know it. Part Two, The Skills of Teaching, is an extremely helpful discussion, beneficial for both new and also experienced teachers. Part Three, entitled Grubby Stuff and Dirty Work, is a discussion of just that: tests, assignments, grades, cheating, and other unglamorous aspects of a teacher's life. Part Four, Learning to Teach, summarizes Eble's thoughts on teaching. What follows are 13 pages of references used in his carefully documented work, and the book concludes with an index.

Upon completing this book and though it was a month and a half before Fall quarter was to start, I found myself looking forward to getting back in the classroom and trying some of his suggestions. Having been in college teaching nearly twenty years, I am not a new teacher but found *The Craft of Teaching* inspiring, and I came away equipped with new ideas and new skills to use. The 1988 edition gave me something valuable in terms of my learning and mental expansion. Thus, without reservation I enthusiastically recommend it to my colleagues. 🍎



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