

## Book Reviews

*This is an ongoing column, featuring reviews of books and other materials for ESOL teachers and students. Please send submissions to the column editor, Elizabeth Fonseca, at [columns@idiom.nystesol.org](mailto:columns@idiom.nystesol.org)*

### **Review of John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011.**

*by Maryanne Kildare*

Teaching writing and critical thinking involves student engagement and active learning. The book *Engaging Ideas*, by John C. Bean, shows effective ways to help teachers design engaging writing and critical thinking activities into their courses. The purpose of these activities is to turn passive learners into active learners while deepening students' understanding of subject matter. Although this book is intended for college faculty, all teachers in all courses across the curriculum can incorporate these activities into their disciplines.

*Engaging Ideas* has four parts and sixteen chapters. The first chapter introduces the four parts and the fifteen chapters within them, and gives eight steps teachers can take to integrate critical thinking and writing activities into their courses. It also lists four misconceptions teachers might have when developing a pedagogy integrating critical thinking and writing. Part One (Chapters 2–5) discusses pedagogical principles, rhetoric, and theory. Part Two (Chapters 6 and 7) addresses the problem-based writing assignments, formally and informally. In Chapter 6, Bean presents effective writing assignments and supports research that concludes “the use of writing to promote deep learning depends less on the amount of writing assigned in a course than on the design of the writing assignments themselves” (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, & Paine, 2009). These assignments have three features: *interactive component*, *a mean-construction task*, and *clear explanations of writing expectations*. The mean-construction task has two dimensions. Bean suggests giving your students a RAFT (Role or purpose, Audience, Format, Task) and a TIP (Task as Intriguing Problem); a mean-construction task covers both rhetorical directions, not only allowing critical thinking but also presenting the problem within a rhetorical context giving students a role or purpose. Part Three (Chapters 8–13) introduces different ways to promote active learning and instruct students to be better writers and critical thinkers. In Chapter 8, Bean lists ten strategies for designing critical thinking tasks. One of interest is “Assignments Requiring Role-Playing of Unfamiliar Perspectives or Imagining “What If” Situations.” This critical thinking activity enhances egocentrism and allows students to role-play and create imaginary “what if” situations that are unfamiliar and outside their own worldview. The last section, Part Four (Chapters 14–16), focuses on reading, commenting on, and grading student writing. It offers time-saving strategies to decrease time spent grading and commenting on papers.

All the chapters offer a significant amount of information instructors can use to engage students and promote active learning, but Chapter 6, “Formal Writing Assignments,” offers a bit too much. Although it is most likely one of the most important chapters in the book, it is long and sections can be confusing. Simplifying it might give clarity and keep the reader more interested. Part Four, on the other hand, could use more information. It

refers to online peer review systems and feedback, but does not tell teachers how to use technology for teacher comments and grading, a valuable tool for instructors and students.

### **References**

Anderson, P., Anson, C., Gonyea, B., & Paine, C. (2009). Using results from the Consortium for the Study of Writing in college. Webinar handout. *National Survey of Student Engagement, 2009*. Retrieved from <http://nsse.iub>.

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