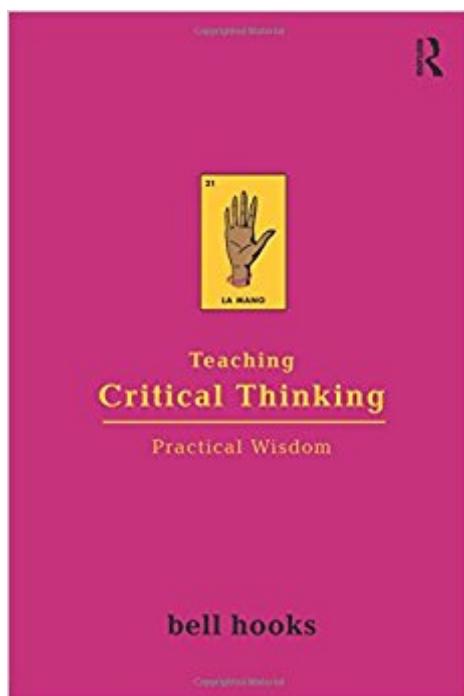


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# Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom



## **Synopsis**

In *Teaching Critical Thinking*, renowned cultural critic and progressive educator bell hooks addresses some of the most compelling issues facing teachers in and out of the classroom today. In a series of short, accessible, and enlightening essays, hooks explores the confounding and sometimes controversial topics that teachers and students have urged her to address since the publication of the previous best-selling volumes in her *Teaching* series, *Teaching to Transgress* and *Teaching Community*. The issues are varied and broad, from whether meaningful teaching can take place in a large classroom setting to confronting issues of self-esteem. One professor, for example, asked how black female professors can maintain positive authority in a classroom without being seen through the lens of negative racist, sexist stereotypes. One teacher asked how to handle tears in the classroom, while another wanted to know how to use humor as a tool for learning. Addressing questions of race, gender, and class in this work, hooks discusses the complex balance that allows us to teach, value, and learn from works written by racist and sexist authors. Highlighting the importance of reading, she insists on the primacy of free speech, a democratic education of literacy. Throughout these essays, she celebrates the transformative power of critical thinking. This is provocative, powerful, and joyful intellectual work. It is a must read for anyone who is at all interested in education today.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Positing education as the practice of freedom to balance against (or as an antidote to) the notion of

education as credential-collecting, Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom seeks to help engaged educators navigate the contradictions and challenges of the academy so as to fulfill our mandate to be of compassionate service to studentsâ•as whole people, not simply as someone's future employees." â“ Rain Taxi Â

bell hooks is a world-renowned intellectual, cultural critic, and writer who is also Distinguished Professor in Appalachian Studies at Berea College in Kentucky. Among her many books are the feminist classic Ain't I A Woman, the dialogue (with Cornel West) Breaking Bread, the children's books Happy to Be Nappy and Be Boy Buzz, the memoir Bone Black and the general interest titles All About Love, Rock My Soul, and Communion. She has published seven titles with Routledge: Belonging, We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity, Where We Stand, Teaching to Transgress, Teaching Community, Outlaw Culture, and Reel to Real.

Very interesting book. I read it for a WGS class along with Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Great combination as they both dig into teaching critical thinking -- not just the how to's but also a huge reflection on the part of the educator.

Great!

slow read but necessary for class

this is a great, quick read on topics we should all consider -whether we are a student or a teacher. I would recommend this to all my colleagues and my students, but especially my black women students. hear bell hooks' voice, then find your own!

Very eloquently written personal and professional experiential book on living learning and growing in the current political social and economic environment.

bell is a profound and provocative thinker. She causes us to think about what education can accomplish. Her cornerstone is that of critical thinking, a concept that is not taught often enough or from a child's early years. She clearly demonstrates the value of critical thinking in every person's life, not just those who are intellectual or academic. Peace, freedom, and democracy rest on the idea of critical thinking. To excel and feel alive and free we must all learn to think critically. Clearly

the masses do not know how to think critically, for they were never taught how and they don't recognize the value in it. bell hooks is passionate about her teaching and it this comes through so very loud and clear in the way she writes. Every educator should read this book. Every student should read this book. It addresses democracy, social change, feminism, critical thinking, racism, and freedom. Her book is a true pleasure to read.

We need to be taught by bell hooks. She understands the meaning of critical thinking and how to teach and positively influence our communities.

Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom (2010) is the third installment of bell hooks's Teaching Trilogy and is preceded by Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (2003) and Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (1994). hooks, a celebrated feminist cultural critic, critical race scholar, and educator addresses her critics and admirers alike in her most recent collection. While certainly a marked departure from canonical higher education and student affairs texts on pedagogy, learning, and critical thinking, hooks's anthology elucidates many issues regarding engaging students both in and outside of the classroom. Importantly, hooks provides another voice (albeit inadvertently) underscoring why student affairs educators are needed in higher education: educators in the field directly contribute to efforts of advancing critical thinking that hooks details. As she notes in her introduction, hooks was "excited to write these short commentaries; there are so many worthwhile issues surrounding teaching that are worth considering" (p. 5). Student affairs educators reading this work will connect to many of the issues hooks discusses. In Teaching Critical Thinking, hooks delineates 32 separate commentaries, which she titles "teachings", ranging from teaching and engaging styles to feminist epistemological stances on education to identity politics. Among the texts within the mainstream student affairs and higher education canon (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010), hooks's work is a clear outlier. Its style is a unique combination of prose and reflective autobiography. While classic works common among student affairs educators' professional libraries provide the reader with a robust literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, and case study methodologies, hooks's personalized account will provide the reader with an alternate lens through which to contemplate the role of teaching, meaning making, and one's identity as an educator. Expanding one's professional library to include divergent voices is akin to assisting students in considering multiple perspectives and positions. Teaching Critical Thinking, especially when read sequentially in the Teaching Trilogy, is an excellent access

point for student affairs educators. Several teachings are especially relevant for the student affairs educator audience. In teaching 1, hooks discusses her thoughts on critical thinking, asserting that the act of thinking requires collaborative efforts from students and educators alike. She writes, "[w]hen everyone . . . recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community . . . learning is at its most meaningful" (2010, p. 11). Teachings 9 and 10 underscore the importance of storytelling and story sharing; she argues that what makes the individual unique is often dismissed within the academy. Indeed, student affair educators are well positioned to engage students in meaningful conversations about identity, history, and purpose; hooks underscores the importance of this practice with conviction. Teaching 18, "Learning Past the Hate" creates a much-needed space for educators wherein they address hatred and misunderstanding and, importantly, grow and heal from it. She vies that educators are trained to silence those who agitate the learning community, which stymies the growth of the student and does nothing to address the psychological pain the educator and other students experience. In teaching 21, hooks boldly addresses self-esteem, something that she feels is lacking amongst students and educators alike. hooks contends that a "primary problem with self-esteem [in the educational setting] is that a great majority of teachers lack this very crucial character trait" (2010, p. 123). Student affairs educators who choose to engage with the text will undoubtedly see linkages among hooks's experiences, her thoughts on academic instruction and critical thinking, and one's personal experiences within the student affairs profession. While hooks's passion and commitments are infused throughout the anthology, a reader new to hooks altogether might be jarred: both her style and structure are marked departure from most educational texts common to the profession. Moreover, readers who have previously accessed hooks's works (either through her first two Teaching Trilogy texts or earlier writings on racism and sexism) might find this final text in the trilogy unsatisfying or muddled. Despite hooks's comments explaining her stylistic choices, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, reads as a somewhat insufficient end to what is otherwise a monumental contribution to critical examinations on education. The eponymous teaching 1 does not give critical thinking as an outcome due justice. Moreover, hooks does not provide continuity in how the other 31 teachings relate, explicate, or problematize critical thinking and the role an educator ought to play. Still, while hooks's wisdom, insight, and practicality are somewhat overshadowed by the text's circuitous structuring, the independent content is still meaningful and needed. Of note is hooks's titling of each teaching: they are intuitively named and allow the reader to quickly scan the contents for meaningful and pertinent passages (e.g., Teaching 28, Feminist Change, examines the roles feminism plays in shaping teaching and learning). Despite some of the its organizational limitations, *Teaching Critical Thinking*

has an immense amount to offer to those who work directly with students and for those whose research agenda includes student learning, pedagogy, and student development. Student affairs educators ought to first read the preceding installments - *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) and *Teaching Community* (2003). Doing so will provide the reader with a helpful framework for understanding her literary style and her philosophical beliefs regarding education. Notwithstanding this potential learning curve, *Teaching Critical Thinking* is an important, poignant, and emotionally powerful contribution to our collective understanding about what it means to be an educator, and how to facilitate and sustain critical thinking. Her body of work conveys a confluence of conviction, intelligence, and passion notably lacking in standard fare student affairs texts. As a public intellectual, hooks writes in a fashion that is as accessible as it is highly intellectual. Best read in sequence, *Teaching Critical Thinking* is a welcomed and direly needed addition to student affairs scholarship. References: Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: 7 research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2009). *Authoring your life*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge. hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge. hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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