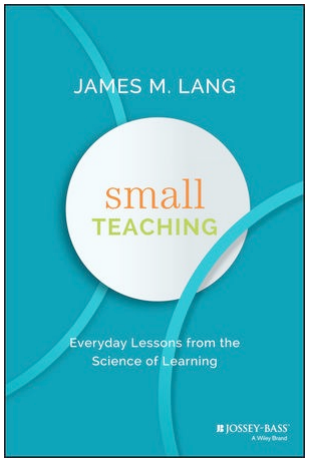


Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning

Lang, James M.
Wiley, 2016

Book Review

Tags: student learning | student learning goals | teaching strategies

Reviewed by: Steven Ibbotson, *Prairie Colleges*
Date Reviewed: November 30, -0001

James Lang has written yet another immensely valuable book for post-secondary faculty. Using the analogy of “small ball” from baseball, the author provides classroom activities requiring only a few minutes that can easily be incorporated into a course sporadically or regularly to improve learning. Each strategy is based on the latest research about the human brain, and Lang has witnessed their “positive impact in real-educational environments” (7).

The strengths of the book are numerous. First and foremost, it accomplishes the stated purpose. In each of the nine chapters, Lang explains the theory behind the learning principle, describes how the theory has been carried out in classroom models, and then summarizes the principles common in each model. Within the models, the reader finds activities that teachers can incorporate into any class and use randomly or repeatedly that enableing students to learn effectively.

Second, each learning activity is transferable across academic disciplines. For example, while discussing “predicting,” the initial research example is from the field of language learning. Lang then applies the principles to his discipline of teaching literature, before concluding with a kinesthetic example of learning an athletic skill. Additionally, Lang recognizes the increasing frequency of teaching and learning online. He also notes students’ access to social media and suggests ways to use the principles and activities of online teaching and social media in a non-traditional classroom format. Finally, while the focus is on in-class actions that take minimal time, he does identify how specific teaching concepts can be incorporated into course planning and the syllabus.

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The book is well-organized, not only in its presentation but in the ordering of learning from knowledge acquisition to understanding to learning inspiration (motivation), with three strategies explained in each section. Each concept and activity is well-supported by research noted in a full bibliography. For example, in discussing retrieving, Lang gives examples of opening or closing questions an instructor can use in the first or last five minutes of class that will prove effective for short-term and long-term recall, in light of a variety of studies. Where there are questions about the validity of an idea or activity, Lang acknowledges the issues and interacts fairly with contrary opinion. In short, it is hard to find a negative with this book.

Because each chapter is follows the pattern of theory, model, then principles, a theology or religious studies teacher can easily take the knowledge or concepts they desire to teach and adapt them to any of the teaching strategies.

From a rookie faculty member experiencing challenges midway through a course to an experienced professor looking to improve student learning in a well-developed curriculum, there is something in *Small Teaching* for everyone. If your college cannot attend one of Lang's professional development sessions, I would recommend academic deans purchase the book for faculty and together they could work through each chapter.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/small-teaching-everyday-lessons-from-the-science-of-learning/

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