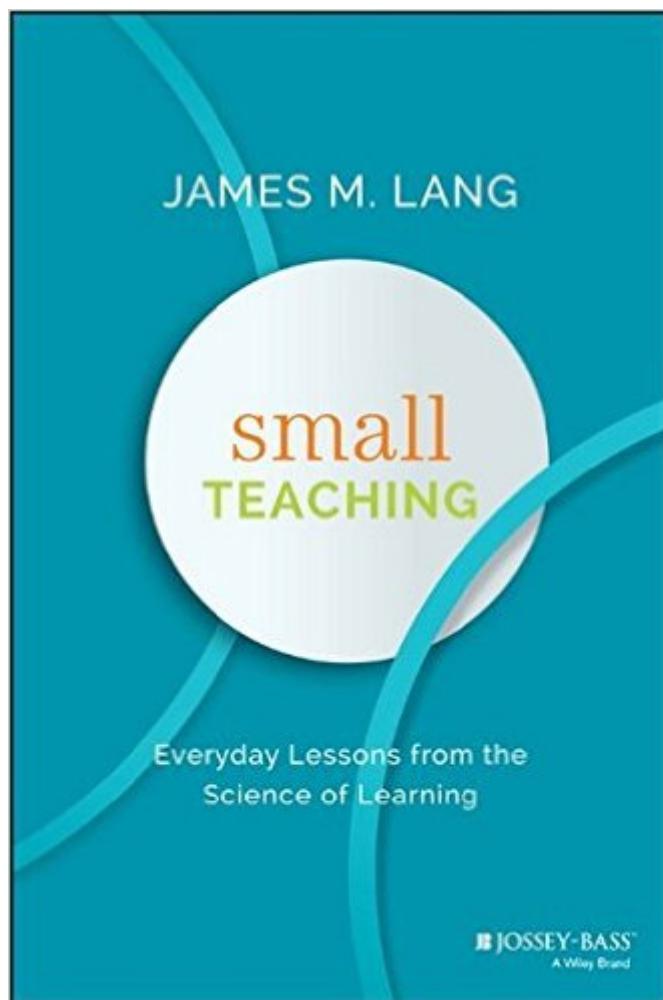


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Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons From The Science Of Learning



Synopsis

Employ cognitive theory in the classroom every day Research into how we learn has opened the door for utilizing cognitive theory to facilitate better student learning. But that's easier said than done. Many books about cognitive theory introduce radical but impractical theories, failing to make the connection to the classroom. In *Small Teaching*, James Lang presents a strategy for improving student learning with a series of modest but powerful changes that make a big differenceâ "many of which can be put into practice in a single class period. These strategies are designed to bridge the chasm between primary research and the classroom environment in a way that can be implemented by any faculty in any discipline, and even integrated into pre-existing teaching techniques. Learn, for example: How does one become good at retrieving knowledge from memory? How does making predictions now help us learn in the future? How do instructors instill fixed or growth mindsets in their students? Each chapter introduces a basic concept in cognitive theory, explains when and how it should be employed, and provides firm examples of how the intervention has been or could be used in a variety of disciplines. Small teaching techniques include brief classroom or online learning activities, one-time interventions, and small modifications in course design or communication with students.

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Customer Reviews

I had a number of discontents with this book, which came as an unhappy surprise, since I have read and mostly thought well of Lang's columns in the CHE. I am not in general a fan of reliance on sports metaphors in education. Unsurprisingly, then, I found the central small ball: small teaching trope to

be an unhappy one. Good teaching enables students to do more, and aims at doing things other than reinforcing students' views of themselves as 'players' whose principal concern is to learn how to win games (or game-equivalents) in life. Lang's pivotal use of the 'small ball' sports metaphor is yet another lamentable example of the embrace of a technical frame to shape education policy and assess the value of education--viz, does it help people get good (i.e., well-paying) jobs.

Perhaps Lang would not wholeheartedly embrace this narrow, technical, 'shovel-ready' view of education. But both his conflation of acquiring knowledge with the learning of new facts and his emphasis on the centrality of the acquisition of 'extensive factual knowledge' suggest that he has indeed drunk long and deeply from the pool from whence the shallow, technical notion of education (and teaching) flows. It is not that I disdain factual knowledge in the classroom or outside of it.

But--as I take pains to get current university science students to appreciate-- a large portion of the 'facts' that populate their giant biology textbooks won't be thought to be facts 25 years from now. Learning biology involves learning facts, of course. But more importantly, it involves the understanding of foundational concepts, development of an appreciation of context and of the formation of scientific theory, and (so) robust critical-thinking skills.

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