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## Second Annual Reading List

By JAMES M. LANG

### ON COURSE

Advice on teaching in the college classroom.

I intended my second annual [reading list](#) of books and articles on teaching to appear at the beginning of the summer, so you would have plenty of leisure time to peruse these great materials on the beach.

But who wants to think about teaching at the beginning of the summer?

Much wiser, I decided, to spend my summer taking road trips with my wife and kids, reading the final Harry Potter novel, doing some writing, playing music with my friends, and chasing around my rock-star dreams.

Now that the fall semester is upon us, however, more serious pursuits beckon. If you are like me, you are thinking about teaching again, so you might be more likely to spend some time these next few weeks checking out the books and articles on my second annual reading list. If not, save them for winter break.

Rather than simply listing all of my favorite titles, I went out to experts in the fields of teaching and learning in higher education and asked for their recommendations. The literature in that field grows so quickly that it seems impossible to stay current, especially when you're also trying to stay on top of what's happening in your own field.

I started my consultations with Mary Deane Sorcinelli, associate provost for faculty development at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and an associate professor of educational policy and research administration there, who has written and edited a wide range of books and articles on teaching and learning.

She began her recommendations with a book that has appeared in this space already, Wilbert McKeachie's *Teaching Tips* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). Now in its 12th edition, this classic text on college teaching has become a multiauthored affair, as contributors have supplemented McKeachie's practical tips by offering advice on new topics such as distance learning, teaching with technology, and working with international students.

Sorcinelli pointed me to a periodical as well: [The Teaching Professor](#), a 12-page newsletter published 10 times a year that offers a mix of theoretical and practical essays on teaching and learning. "I always learn something new from Maryellen Weimer," Sorcinelli says, referring to the newsletter's longtime editor, "and her faculty contributors -- all college teachers."

During the few years I worked in a teaching center, I was a regular reader of *The Teaching Professor* myself. It was brief enough to page through over a leisurely lunch break, but substantive enough that I always took away some new idea or technique to try out in my classroom.

I followed Sorcinelli's lead and contacted Weimer, hoping to learn something new from her for the resources list.

Weimer, perhaps thinking of the limited amount of time that most faculty members have to consult resources on pedagogy, offered articles instead of books. Her selections illustrate a point she made to me when I first asked for her recommendations: "The literature on teaching and learning is widely dispersed. It can be found in lots of different places and in places faculty wouldn't expect to look."

A case in point: Her first recommendation is an article from the July 2006 issue of the journal *Teaching Sociology*. "So much good scholarship on teaching and learning," she says, "is embedded in the disciplines." D. Yamane's "Course Preparation Assignments: A Strategy for Creating Discussion-Based Courses," offers what Weimer describes as "a carefully designed and very effective method for getting students prepared and ready to discuss before they

come to class" -- and one that will translate easily into other disciplines.

Her second recommendation, "Student Self-Grading in Social Statistics," comes from a crossdisciplinary teaching journal, *College Teaching*. Nelta M. Edward's essay, which appeared March 22, 2007, describes a system designed and tested by the author to allow students to grade their own homework and exams. Weimer claims that this innovative method "guarantees the integrity of the grading process at the same time it affords students a unique learning experience."

Finally, she has us crossing the pond for an essay in the British journal *Studies in Higher Education*. Gerlese S. Akerline took an interesting approach to thinking about teaching and learning in "Constraints on Academics' Potential for Developing as a Teacher" (which appears in the first issue of the 2007 volume): The essay considers teachers' attitudes toward their own potential for growth, and then explores how those attitudes might affect what they do in the classroom.

As soon as I read the summary of that article, I was reminded of an insight into teaching that I have come back to many times in my life: One of the surest ways to improve your teaching is to put yourself back into the position of a learner (taking a course or lessons of some kind) and to reflect on how your experiences on the other side of the desk might improve your teaching practice. Akerline's article gives this idea a slightly more specific twist but stems from the idea that how we learn as individuals, and how we think about our own learning, has a huge impact on how we teach.

My third and final expert detours us into unusual territory, one in which English professors like myself rarely venture -- the biology of learning. James Rhem edits the [National Teaching and Learning Forum](#), a bimonthly newsletter that contains both research and practical tips on teaching in higher education.

Rhem's recommended books address the question of how the biology of the brain, and the physiological foundation for thinking and learning, should affect our teaching.

He recommends James E. Zull's *The Art of Changing the Brain* (Stylus 2002), which, Rhem says, "combines solid research into the biology of the brain with the durable and always useful and insightful Kolb model of learning." (The Kolb model, developed by educational theorist David A. Kolb, places learners along two scales and creates four basic learning types.)

Rhem's second suggestion -- Robert N. Leamson's *Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning With First Year College and University Students* (Stylus, 1999) -- was one he passed on when he was working as an acquisitions editor for an educational press. Looking back, he says, he kicks himself. "What does a biology professor know about teaching and learning?" he thought at the time. "Well, I was stupid," he says now. "He knew a lot."

Leamson's book offers a similarly grounded approach to teaching and learning but is, according to Rhem, "even stronger on the biological science."

Factoring the biology of the brain into how we think about teaching seems like an obvious thing to do once someone points it out to you, but I will confess I hadn't thought much about it until Rhem made his recommendations to me. Both books are on my reading list for winter break.

Rhem offered one last recommendation, one that I look forward to checking out next summer (only nine months away, right?).

Edward Nuhfer, director of Faculty Development and professor of geoscience at California State University of the Channel Islands, runs an annual [Boot Camp for Profs](#) each summer. The camp, on the campus of Colorado Mountain College, in Leadville, immerses participants in teaching and learning, and provides them with a small library of books and notes on the topic.

The boot camp, Rhem says, is for faculty members who are "serious about wanting to recharge on solid pedagogical grounds."

The downside, of course, is that it will be summer, and you'll be thinking about teaching -- precisely what I tried to avoid over these past few months. But since the title contains the word "camp," it puts the weeklong event squarely

into a time-honored summer tradition.

Sure, you'll have to talk about your teaching. But maybe you'll get to do it while you're roasting marshmallows.

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