

TO: Students in Teaching Workshops

FROM: R. B. Taylor

DATE: 2/12/09

RE: Modifications

This memo shares revised expectations about what you need to do before the 2/20 workshop, what will happen at the 2/20 workshop, what I will be getting to you before then, and some thoughts about the readings for the 2/6 workshop.

#### What you need to do before the 2/20 workshop

Forget about the reading if you do not have the time.

Just

- make at least one entry in your reflection log,
- and prepare your 5 minute lecture for your course. Do or don't do a PPT or handout as you wish. NO BIG. The most important thing is just preparing to stand up in front of people and deliver a lecture portion.

#### What will happen at the 2/20 workshop

We will be taping, but NOT reviewing each other's video. Rather, I will email the clips to each person separately so you can review them on your own.

2/20 is all about classroom issues – what you do, what the students do, and how to respond. We will start, however, with just a short discussion of what to do on Day One of class. This was in the 2/6 handout but not covered. We will save time at the end for questions about or reactions to the readings, either for the first or second workshop.

#### What I will be getting to you before then

Comments on your teaching philosophies, your course goals, and course requirements.

#### Quick points about readings assigned for 2/6

I list below, by chapter, what I took to be some of the most important points/issues addressed in the readings for last time. Feel free to ask follow up with questions in class or before or after.

#### **Lang**

Preface

He explains this book is geared toward making your first year of teaching easier. He describes his own adventures in his book *My first year on the tenure track*. If you want to know what **solid**

**empirical research** has shown about how people approach the challenges of beginning to teach I strongly recommend Boice, Robert. (1992). *The New Faculty Member*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass. He found, based on work with large numbers of faculty in different types of universities, that many faculty failed to approach their first year in a maximally effective way. The flip side of what he examines in this work – getting totally overwhelmed with teaching – he addresses in another book (1990) *Professors as Writers: A Self-help Guide to Productive Writing*. Stillwater, OK: New Forums. **Strongly recommended** as a survival guide.

Before the beginning

P 1 – he talks about how writing the syllabus forces you to think about “what should students know or be able to do as a result of taking this course?” In eduspeak, what are the learning objectives?

Everything you put into your syllabus should relate to this key question.

For years I thought it was just about coverage.

Notice his point on p. 2:

The model you should follow in planning your course, and writing your syllabus, entails your thinking first and foremost about what knowledge or skills students should learn in your course, and then thinking about the best ways for them to learn that knowledge or those skills.

Week 1

What I like here is his discussion, starting on page 24, about what to do on the first day. Basically what he is saying is that this is the students’ first chance to see what you are about and what this course is about. If you say you will encourage participation in this course but do not do it on the first day, then students will wonder. There are many approaches to the first day. We'll talk about this a bit at the beginning of next workshop.

In this chapter Lang also talks about different ways to introduce the syllabus. Again, there many different approaches and we can chat about them if and as you wish.

Note also on page 37 a different approach which is to try and draw the students in with some interesting and big questions. You can do this through a lecture, discussion, and exercise, or something else.

Week7

This chapter provides you with a very short introduction to the idea that different students learn in different ways. Starting on page 157 he introduces the important idea of assimilation versus accommodation, taken from Piaget.

On page 161 is the key idea that students enter your class with preset approaches or what he calls mental models. Attacking them head on will not be effective.

Starting on 166 he talks about different stages of student understanding. Dualism, relativism, commitment.

I prefer the description in Ken Bain's book *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004) on page 42. The four levels of student learning are:

received knowers

subjective knowers

procedural knowers

and commitment

I think a lot of Temple students are in the subjective knowers stage where they think that everything is a matter of opinion and that all facts are equally fundamentally flawed. (Discussion on this?)

Week 8

In this chapter Lang gives you an approach for addressing students' problems or problem students. This is pretty subjective stuff. Absolutely key for everyone, however, is his advice on how to protect yourself as an instructor, starting on page 186.

Week 11

This chapter contains a wide array of interesting ideas about how to perk up your classroom. Peter Jones, for example, has had students in introduction to criminal justice prepare and present posters. The discussion of free writing on pages 239 and 240 is an interesting one. Trials or debates can also work.

The chapter also has a nice section about ways to stay fresh as you continue in your career as a teacher. I especially recommend the Chronicle columnists and strongly encourage you all to look at these on a regular basis. On page 246 he gives you the URL where you can find these.

If you've been in your teaching career for a while and you suddenly notice that 15 years have gone by without you preparing a new course, you might want to give it some thought.

Week 15

What I like about this chapter, and it may not make much sense to you folks at this point, is the way Lang talks about how we evolve as teachers over the course of a career. You will start out in

different places in terms of what you bring to the classroom. You are all going to follow different pathways.

I think his comment on page 295 "what kind of teaching persona you construct probably depends a lot on why you are teaching in the 1st place" is an important and insightful one.

Given that each of you will evolve as teachers, it is worthwhile to periodically revisit your statement about your teaching philosophy. For example, when I go back and look at my most recent statement, I find myself worrying a lot about ruts and how to stay out of them. I would not have highlighted this is a theme in my teaching philosophy 20 or even 10 years ago.

### **McKeachie**

McKeachie's book is a gold mine. I strongly suggest that at some point in the future you buy a copy. Be sure never to loan it to anyone. If you do it will never come back. This volume has an extraordinarily broad array of conceptual and practical things about teaching. For example, in my case, this book gave me the idea of having multiple versions of exams for large classes. I probably never would've thought of it otherwise.

### Chapter 2

What I like about this chapter is the idea that there is a run-up to opening day. There are certain things you want to have taken care of at certain points before the semester actually starts. Clearly, his guidelines assume you have lots of free time. You may not. Nevertheless, he presents you with an interesting checklist. Especially important are checking resources like your classroom, maybe trying to get a change, and e-mailing all the students before the first class.

### Chapter 15

Most of the writing students do in college counts for something. The key idea here is that in a variety of settings you can ask students to do low stakes writing. You might ask students to write down answers to a question before discussion starts. You might ask them to identify the clearest points from a class. You might give them a group worksheet to be completed. Writing engages a different part of our brains, is a higher level of processing, and therefore the more that students do this, inside or outside of class, the more likely they are to learn.

This chapter also has some interesting thoughts about ways to write comments on papers. His suggestions on pages 201 through 203 are pretty good.

### Chapter 16

This chapter addresses an extraordinarily complex and controversial area of teaching: group work. I strongly recommend Peter Jones' recent article in the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* about group work and ways to record individual effort.

## Chapter 17

This chapter talks about alternative strategies: teaching with cases -- more common in law and business schools -- and games and simulations. The readings on the blackboard site have some examples such as the M&M. simulation and an exercise on estimating blood alcohol content.

As a general rule of thumb, you will never get an exercise or a simulation correct the first time through. There are going to be glitches and flops. That's the nature of the beast. That does not mean they are not worth doing.

## Chapter 25

What I find of interest in this chapter is the idea of specifying what a teacher's responsibilities are. The list starts on page 329. These are things we usually don't think of.

Lang, James M. September 1, 2006. The Promising syllabus. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53 (2):C2.

He cites the *Teaching Sociology* article. If you are interested in experimenting with this "radical" approach to structuring a course, suggest reading this piece.

You also might want to cross-reference how Randy Pausch set up the course requirements in his virtual reality interdisciplinary course: it was wide open except sex and violence were off limits.