Book Review / Compte rendu

Lang, James (2013). *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*. **Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pages: 251. Price: $26.95 USD. Hardcover.**

Reviewed by: Susan Bens, Program and Curriculum Development Specialist, Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching Effectiveness, University of Saskatchewan.

James M. Lang is an associate professor of English at Assumption College in Massachusetts where he serves as Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence. Dr. Lang has been a regular contributor to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for more than a decade, especially on matters of teaching and learning in higher education and early career academics on the "road to tenure." A series of submissions in the *Chronicle* in 2013 using the title "Cheating Lessons" lead me to place an advance order for Lang's book by the same name. Since the book's release, James Lang has given several invited lectures on learning environments and academic dishonesty.

Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty offers a refreshing lens through which to consider the phenomenon of academic dishonesty in higher education. Steering the reader away from the "morally bankrupt student" theory of academic dishonesty, Lang brings readers to a more optimistic and constructive focus on the structure of learning environments themselves. Following parallel interests in academic dishonesty research and the field of cognitive psychology, Lang connects the two areas to bring our attention to "contextual factors" rather than students' entering characteristics or predispositions, peer-groups or campus-based features that have been reported to influence cheating behaviours. His connection brings forward strategies for "how to construct and teach a class that reduces the incentive and opportunity for students to cheat by increasing their desire and ability to learn" (p. 56).

Lang structures the book in three parts. He begins, in Part 1, by introducing the reader to the existing research in the area, characterized mainly by large-scale studies of self-reported incidence of student cheating. He next walks us through his theory of academic dishonesty using four illustrative case studies that focus on what makes learning environments inducing of academic dishonesty. The four factors at play according to Lang's interpretation of research and first-hand experience as a teacher are (1) an emphasis on performance by students, but also by assessment design, (2) high stakes riding on the outcome for students, (3) an extrinsic motivation for success on the part of students,

and (4) a low expectation of success by students. Part 2 contains chapters on fostering intrinsic motivation, learning for mastery, lowering stakes, and instilling self-efficacy. In these chapters, Lang describes exemplary teachers from diverse disciplines who employ the kinds of innovative, learning-centred approaches he recommends. He highlights the matter of intrinsic motivation on the part of students as the most important factor, and often, the most challenging to instill. Then, in Part 3, Lang adds a fifth factor that extends beyond the level of the individual teacher to the campus climate. Here he advocates for ongoing dialogue among all members of campus communities about *what* academic dishonesty means, *why* academic integrity is important, and *how* it is most consistently handled. Lang extends the thinking on honor codes, and their apparent positive impact, to an interpretation that rather than being a precursor of low cheating campuses, they may instead be artifacts of campuses engaged in the kind of dialogue he suggests.

I found the recurring point of interest for me in Lang's book to be the design of student assessment.   Perhaps this should be obvious, since cheating is thought to occur, for the most part, on graded assessments. The chapters of Part 2 offer many examples of teachers and of practices that could be thought of as innovative or just plain practical in this regard. One example is grounding student assessments in the unique experience of the course in terms of time, place, personal relevance, and interdisciplinary implications. Another is offering choice, within a structure of requirements that allows students to choose how they show what they have learned as in John Boyer's increasingly known course at Virginia Tech. (For more on Boyer's approach see www.thejohnboyer.com/new-education.) Further examples are giving students more practice with assessments and breaking assessments into smaller chunks so as to increase opportunities for students to receive feedback on how well they are demonstrating their learning as well as how much effort is required to do well.

The intended audience for *Cheating Lessons* is teaching faculty members and the administrators who support them. Lang's easy, and sometimes amusing, narrative style makes the book highly readable. Throughout, Lang regularly acknowledges his teaching experience as based in the humanities, and recognizes that disciplinary differences of importance exist when it comes to what it means for students to do their own work. Further to this, he also demonstrates an appreciation of the dilemmas and tensions faced by educators when it comes to adopting the practices and approaches that he advocates.

Recognizing that I am an enthusiast for the advancement of teaching and learning in higher education, I wonder if those with different vantage points would regard Lang's accounts, examples, and recommendations as personally realistic. As Lang asserts, it is "better to start small than not at all" (p. 58) and yet a wider faculty audience would likely benefit if he provided even more potential small starts. Perhaps what Lang ultimately provides is a launch pad for educational developers, like myself, to gather and develop resources of so called small starts for our campus teaching communities. Sources for more ideas are found in books referenced and endorsed by Lang--*How Learning Works* with Susan Ambrose as lead author and Ken Bain's widely read books on what the best teachers and students do.

The overarching benefit of Lang's book is that it calls on us to consider more deeply our own roles in the learning environment and to reflect on and commit to new courses of action that enable deeper learning, and as a byproduct, disable or at the very least deter

cheating. Fortunately, a commitment to preventing academic dishonesty does not need to be all about policing students but instead involves offering authentic and deep learning opportunities.   It is for this reason that I characterized this book at the outset as optimistic and constructive since, as Lang puts it, it presents that "happy juncture where more learning and less cheating meet and join hands" (p. 202).❧

References

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Bain, K. (2004). *What the Best College Teachers Do.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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