

According to higher education pedagogy expert Maryellen Weimer, “most faculty do not read a lot of pedagogical material. We are not expected to grow our pedagogical knowledge the same way we are expected to keep current in our fields.”¹ Thus, teacher development in higher education requires a track of its own. In the spring of 2015, a staff member at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.), Anita Gonzalez, recognized this need and inaugurated the Faculty Book Club (FBC), a group that meets three times per semester to share a meal at the cafeteria and discuss a book on some aspect of higher education pedagogy. Participants also share their own teaching experiences and exchange advice and feedback with their colleagues. No reports are required from the participants at the end of FBC, as the group currently focuses on developing opportunities for dialogue.

FBCs are a type of Faculty Learning Community (FLC). The research on the effects of FLCs has been overwhelmingly positive. They create connections and networks for isolated teachers, foster multidisciplinary curricula, and help construct community in higher education.² In addition, FLCs are an effective process by which educators gain insight into their practices and grow in their teaching ability, faculty cohesion, student retention, and satisfaction.³

FLCs have increased faculty interest in teaching and increased use of effective pedagogy, improved student learning outcomes, and assisted in promoting the scholarship of teaching.⁴ We (the authors) side with Parker Palmer who, in *The Courage to Teach*, stated that “the growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it. We grow by trial and error, to be sure—but our willingness to try, and fail, as individuals is severely limited when we are not supported by a community that encourages such risk.”⁵

As an institution new to formalized



Scott Moncrieff



Anneris
Coria-Navia

The How and Why of Starting a

FACULTY
BOOK CLUB

processes of support for faculty in their teaching responsibilities, Andrews University has had to find ways to provide ongoing, sustainable, and high-impact practices—within a limited budget. Since its first semester, the book club has grown, and has operated at or near its budgeted capacity of 30 members for several semesters. The leadership of FBC transferred to the director for the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, Anneris Coria-Navia, in the fall of 2016, and in the spring of 2017, professors Coria-Navia and Scott Moncrieff, from the Department of English, collaborated in qualitative research to assess the effectiveness of FBC in promoting self-reflection about teaching and changes in teaching practice.

During the first year, Gonzalez, Moncrieff, and Coria-Navia facilitated Andrews' FBC in fall and spring. Starting in the second year, faculty from different departments were invited to facilitate. Our current practice is that facilitators create discussion questions via Google Docs. The discussion questions serve as a springboard for conversation, but participants can discuss other topics related to the assigned reading. Faculty have begun sending recommendations of books they want

to read in FBC, and we select the books based on these recommendations.

An average of 25 faculty have voluntarily registered for FBC each semester via EventBrite (an online platform that allows individuals to plan and promote events). The director of the Center for Teaching and Learning delivers the book free of charge to the registered faculty, and an e-mail list is created through EventBrite for announcements. Faculty attend the club on the designated day and participate in the discussion. We offer three sessions on the same day, with an assigned leader for each group, and faculty can attend whichever session best fits their schedule, including switching groups on a particular day if necessary. The discussions take place at the cafeteria, where a free meal is provided to the participants. We alternate holding the sessions on Mondays in the fall and Thursdays in the spring in order to facilitate different teaching schedules.

A fuller discussion of our research is presented in an article that is in process, but it will suffice to say here that FBC has made a substantial positive impact on its participants in terms of how they think about teaching as

well as actual classroom practice. It was also clear from our interviews with participants that without a formal accountability and engagement structure such as an FBC, professors are much less likely to read books related to the pedagogy of teaching. The institution's cost for this professional-development activity is relatively small, approximately \$45 per faculty member per semester for the book and three meals, a modest investment compared to the encouraging outcomes reported by the participants. We believe FBC represents one good model of ongoing and sustainable teaching support for faculty.

In the remainder of this article, we present brief descriptions and personal reflections on the books we have used for FBC, in the hope that this will inspire other institutions without an FBC to consider implementing one, and to also give educators who are interested in effective teaching a list of excellent books to consider reading. Although we are discussing these books in a higher education context, most of the good ideas about teaching would apply or could be adapted to a K-12 setting. See our K-12 sidebar on page 44 for further ideas in meeting the needs of this setting.

***The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer (Jossey-Bass, 1998, 2007)**

The most striking aspect of Palmer's book is that he does not present pedagogical strategies for course design or everyday lessons. The principles in *The Courage to Teach* are invariably connected to the themes of identity, introspection, and community as key to the successful experience of the teacher. The chapters are built upon the underlying assumption that human relations are the most powerful and yet underutilized form of personal and professional support for educators.

Palmer explores the irony of teaching—that we form relationships with our students, but as faculty members, we typically work in isolation from one another: “Resources that could help us teach better are available

from each other—if we could get access to them. But there, of course, is the rub. Academic culture builds barriers between colleagues even higher and wider than those between us and our students. These barriers come partly from the competition that keeps us fragmented by fear. But they also come from the fact that teaching is perhaps the most privatized of all the public professions.”⁶

Palmer encourages readers to dig deeply into the core of who they are as individuals and teachers. The questions he asks are pertinent and relevant to the work teachers do every day, and will help them to have a developed big picture about why they teach.

A novel pedagogical principle in Palmer's book is the idea of a subject-centered education. Much like an experience that I (Anneris Coria-Navia) recently had with a colleague, who explained that we don't “cover” material in a course but rather we “uncover or discover,” the idea that the subject and not the student or the teacher is at the center of education is a semantic change that has motivated me to think deeply about the big principles in the disciplines I teach. This shift is an important one, as we are constantly faced with the rhetoric and challenge at the institutional level that we should be providing a student-centered education. Palmer's book leaves the reader wanting to engage in the big questions of *why*, *how*, and *what* we teach. Perhaps as we ponder and attempt to answer these questions, we can turn to the support of committed colleagues for answers and the search for truth. This can be the starting point of formative, supportive dialogue among educators.

***What the Best College Teachers Do* by Ken Bain (Harvard University Press, 2004)**

Bain researched best teacher practices at more than one hundred institutions and synthesized them in his seminal book. For instance, Bain shows how the best teachers inspire students

to make a paradigm shift from learning for a grade to learning for intellectual excitement. He encourages teachers to help students discern more clearly and objectively what is exceptional artistry and scholarship, not necessarily what will earn the best grade. Bain suggests that the best professors in his studies have made a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how students *think, act, and feel*.⁷

On a second point, for some time I (Anneris Coria-Navia) had been pondering the idea of sharing the power on the decision-making processes at the course level. Some of the questions that framed my thinking centered around who has control and who makes decisions about learning, and whether teachers should let go of the power and allow students to enter the dialogue and own the learning. Bain states that “Trust in the students also depended on the teacher's rejection of power over them. The educators we studied invited people to pursue ambitious goals and promised to help them achieve, but they left learners in control of their own education.”⁸ Bain also presents some principles on how this can be done. An idea that stayed with me is the syllabus language. Bain suggests that the syllabus should be an *invitation to a feast* rather than a collection of rules and regulations. In each of my education courses, I use a small excerpt where he describes this principle and invite students to engage with me in the course design during the first two weeks of a semester-long course. Students appreciate the opportunity to provide input and feedback, and the document is enhanced by their ideas and contributions. This book offers a good combination of big ideas and practical strategies.

***Leaving the Lectern: Cooperative Learning and the Critical First Days of Students Working in Groups* by Dean A. McManus (Anker, 2005)**

McManus recounts how transforming his pedagogical practices from lecture to cooperative learning stemmed from his being in an unhappy place.⁹

Though seemingly successful at teaching and even more so as an expert in the field of oceanography, McManus did not find joy in teaching in order to barely meet the expectations of the job. Although well into his career, after a “real” conversation with students, he realized that in order for first-rate student learning to take place, he had to change the way he had structured his courses for decades.

He details the changes he made and the trials and errors of the process, all the while showing how the research on teaching and learning supported (or not) his decisions. Though largely focused on only one cooperative learning strategy (the “expert jigsaw”), the process of change and the honesty and transparency with which he approached “leaving the lectern” makes McManus’s book interesting and valuable. With McManus and some of the resources he provides as a guide, an ambitious teacher could do a course redesign to take advantage of cooperative learning.

***Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel (Harvard/Belknap, 2014)**

Make It Stick categorizes and summarizes numerous experimental studies about how people learn most effectively. The first chapter, “Learning Is Misunderstood,” critiques some ineffective but widely used learning strategies, such as rereading and “massed practice” (doing the same thing repeatedly to build fluency). Instead, the authors argue that a more active learner role in “retrieval,” such as “low-stakes quizzing and self-testing, spacing out practice, interleaving the practice of different but related topics or skills, trying to solve a problem before being taught the solution, [and] distilling the underlying principles or rules that differentiate types of problems”¹⁰ are all more effective and empirically tested ways of improving learning retention and improving the depth of learning.

Make It Stick should help teachers weed out ineffective classroom learning strategies and replace them with better ones. For instance, I (Scott Moncrieff) changed my quizzing strategy for my literary theory course last semester. Learning how important regular retrieval is for student learning, I never missed giving my weekly quiz. And because I was more aware of the need of students to continue reviewing previously studied material, I devoted one-third to one-half of each week’s quiz to material from earlier in the semester. I also tried to regularly introduce integrative or comparative questions, to require students to synthesize current material with previous material.

It is extremely beneficial for teachers to have information about what strategies are most effective for improving student learning, so that course design can align with best practices. This improves teacher and student confidence and success. Teachers can tell students “I’m teaching this way or requiring you to do this because it is a proven way to improve your learning.” *Make It Stick* is a great book for this purpose.

***Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* by James Lang (Jossey-Bass, 2016)**

Lang uses humor, candor, and clear language to bring to life strategies that though seemingly simple at first sight, can make a significant impact on student learning. One of the most effective aspects of Lang’s approach is that most of the strategies do not require a course redesign, but rather can be integrated into tomorrow’s lesson. Reading the table of contents is enough to contextualize where and to visualize how these strategies have a place in our work as educators. The title words for each chapter represent its essence—such as “Predicting,” “Self-Explaining,” and “Motivating.”

Lang’s work is closely connected with the principles discussed in *Make It Stick*. It is very helpful to read both books, and affordable. (The Kindle total for both books is less than \$30.)

The last third of Lang’s book focuses on inspiring students. Of particular importance is his recommendation that we focus on “infusing learning with a sense of purpose, and especially self-transcendent purpose.”¹¹ Lang cites research showing that the “most powerful forms of purposefulness arise when students see the ability of their learning to make the world a better place.”¹²

Small Teaching influenced the way I (Anneris Coria-Navia) explain why we do things in the classroom. It helps students to know that when you are doing low-stakes quizzing two or three times per class period, it’s not just to see what they don’t know, but rather to assess what needs to be emphasized or relearned for long-term retention. My students have also appreciated being prompted often to think deeply about developing intrinsic motivation for learning and engaging with course materials and the world. Students have valued knowing the “why” and having strategies also that help them study better and engage more fully with the course and their peers. Lang’s small changes can make a big difference in student learning.

***Teaching and Christian Imagination* by David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch (Eerdmans, 2016)**

This book, written by professors at Calvin College, is the first explicitly Christian approach to higher education teaching we have used in FBC (Fall 2017). The authors talk about how in all fields, including science, business, etc., we constantly structure our understanding through the imagination and the use of metaphor, as in the constellation of battle imagery for “fighting” a disease. So they set out to use three capacious metaphors to frame the possibilities of teaching from a Christian perspective: going on a journey or pilgrimage, caring for a garden, and erecting a building.

Each metaphor is scrutinized in various contexts and nuances over several chapters. For instance, the pilgrimage

section identifies pilgrimage or journey language we use in educational contexts, such as “covering a lot of ground,” “falling behind,” “staying on track,” getting “stuck in a rut,” and covering material “step by step,”¹³ followed by discussions of the final destination or goal of the journey, the teacher’s relationship to the student, the difference between tourists and pilgrims, and the relationship of each day’s journey to the overall arc of the trip. Examining one’s own classroom practice through all this journey language definitely helps with rethinking where one has gone and how one might like to travel differently in the future. For instance, a chapter on “What Sustains the Journey?” examines what refreshes and renews both student and teacher throughout the rigors of travel through the semester and for the teacher, years and years of one semester after another. One of the ways my enthusiasm and interest in teaching is rekindled is from reading books like this, that ask me to deliberately think through the larger purposes of what I (Scott Moncrieff) am doing using new perspectives, and to see how those perspectives can inform what I do from class to class.

***Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* by Angela Duckworth (Scribner, 2016)**

We don’t often get to read a *New York Times* bestseller for FBC, but that’s the case here. Duckworth, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, defines *grit* as a combination of passion and perseverance. Her numerous stories and descriptions of research studies will inspire and instruct anyone who would like to come closer to achieving his or her potential. The book is divided into three sections: “what grit is and why it matters”; “growing grit from the inside out” (i.e., on one’s own); and “growing grit from the outside in” (i.e., in a team context).

Grit is useful reading in a higher education context in terms of academic advising—Chapter 8, on “Pur-

pose,” has an excellent discussion on finding and developing one’s calling. But the book as a whole will also be useful in helping teachers effectively articulate to students the role that effort plays in learning and achievement. There is some significant overlap between Duckworth’s “grit” and Carol Dweck’s famous “growth mindset,”¹⁴ and Duckworth explicitly builds on Dweck’s foundation in her “Hope” chapter, but I (Scott Moncrieff) see the books as complementary rather than redundant.

Although the book is not explicitly Christian, it is very congenial to Christian applications. Duckworth’s own passion is using “psychological science to help kids thrive,”¹⁵ and she consistently talks about how our grit can be used not just for personal achievement, but also to benefit others. Best of all, although some people may be naturally “grittier” than others, Duckworth cites numerous examples to illustrate that all of us can increase our grit. In the week following reading the book, I have been “grittier” on two or three occasions just because I could say to myself, “Can’t you show a little more grit?”

More Great Books on Teaching
***Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* by L. Dee Fink (Jossey-Bass, 2013)**

This is an update of Fink’s well-received 2003 book and highlights backward-design course planning: starting with significant student outcomes and designing course modules and assessment from these. Fink revises Bloom’s taxonomy of learning as part of defining “significant” outcomes.

***Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* by John C. Bean (Jossey-Bass, 2011, 2nd ed.)**

This is an update of Bean’s 2001 classic and addresses how writing can aid understanding and critical thinking in any class. Bean also gives

a number of helpful ideas about how teachers can streamline the feedback process while maintaining quality.

***How Learning Works: Seven Research-based Principles for Smart Teaching* by Susan A. Ambrose et al. (Jossey-Bass, 2010)**

The writers engage such crucial questions as: How does students’ prior knowledge affect their learning? What factors motivate students to learn? What kinds of practice and feedback enhance learning? and How do students become self-directed learners?

***Inspired College Teaching: A Career-long Resource for Professional Growth* by Maryellen Weimer (Jossey-Bass, 2010)**

Weimer delivers principles that guide the professor as he or she engages in lifelong learning about teaching. Of special interest is her substantial treatment of an effective reflection process, “Reflection for Growth and Change,” and her separate chapters addressed to the particular challenges and opportunities of new faculty, mid-career faculty, and senior faculty.

***Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck (Random House, 2006)**

Dweck’s classic text differentiates between the “fixed mindset”—believing that intelligence and ability are fixed—and the “growth mindset”—believing that intelligence and ability are malleable, and the implications these two mindsets have for the ability to learn. Virtually every book on education post-2006 cites Dweck on this concept, so crucial is it to effective teacher practices.

***Teaching Naked Techniques: A Practical Guide to Designing Better Classes* by José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson (Jossey-Bass, 2017)**

Bowen and Watson argue that residential colleges need to capitalize on what they can do better than online education: face-to-face (i.e. “naked”) interaction between faculty and stu-

Recommendations for K-12 Faculty Book Clubs

K-12 teachers typically have less schedule flexibility than teachers in a higher education setting. To implement a workable FBC, one option could be to meet first thing in the morning once or twice per month. Students would arrive at school at the regular time and be cared for by staff members in the gym or multi-purpose room. Teachers would have 45 to 60 minutes to meet as a learning community to discuss the book they are reading. This could be done as a school-wide community, by grade levels, wings, etc. If a morning time during the school day does not work, an afternoon time might be a possibility, during regular faculty meeting time. Ideally, this learning opportunity for teachers would take place during regular working hours. An online discussion group would be another option, especially for one- or two-teacher schools.

As far as K-12 pedagogical books to read, from our list we would recommend consideration of *Mindset, Grit, Make it Stick*, and *Small Teaching*. We would also recommend browsing through the Jossey-Bass catalog online, which identifies many K-12 oriented books, including *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (2014) by David Perkins; and *How to Be Heard: Ten Lessons Teachers Need to Advocate for Their Students and Profession* (2017) by Celine Coggins. One of the beauties of a FBC is that each school can choose books that address the felt needs of its teachers.

dents, with focus on critical thinking and active learning. Meanwhile, these authors believe that technology should be largely removed from the classroom and used to enhance learning outside the classroom. This is an update and application—with many instructive examples from teachers of different disciplines across the country—of Bowen's *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

Tools for Teaching by Barbara Gross Davis (Jossey-Bass, 2009 2nd ed.)

This is a fairly comprehensive book for a new teacher, addressing everything from course design to diversity in the classroom to leading an effective discussion and grading. Davis adopts a terse style to cover so much ground, but the book is beautifully organized, with multiple short sections with references to further reading, so it works very well as something to pick up when you have a specific question, or as a gateway to further study.

* * *

At this point, the Faculty Book Club is a well-established program at Andrews University and it meets a definite need for faculty who want to discuss and improve their teaching and expose themselves to new and chal-

lenging ideas about how to teach better. We already have next year's (2018-2019) discussion leaders and books selected, which will focus on capitalizing on the potential strengths of diversity. In the fall, we will be reading *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Forces That Keep Us Apart*, by Christena Cleveland (InterVarsity Press, 2013), and in the spring, *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making It Work*, by Daryl G. Smith (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). ✍

This article has been peer reviewed.

Scott Moncrieff, PhD, is a Professor of English at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. He earned his doctorate at the University of California in Riverside, California, and is a specialist in Victorian literature who has published and made presentations on novelists Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. Dr. Moncrieff has written previously for JAE on dealing with difficult content in novels and film. He has also written on Adventist attitudes toward fiction and reviewed many Adventist novels for Adventist Review.

Anneris Coria-Navia, EdD, is Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Andrews University. She earned her doctorate at the University of Southern California. Her research interests include social networks in education, and effective practices in K-20 learning organizations and in professional development.

Recommended citation:

Scott Moncrieff and Anneris Coria-Navia, "The How and Why of Starting a Faculty Book Club," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 80:2 (April-June 2018): 40-44.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2011), Foreword.
2. Milton D. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities: New Directions for Teaching and Learning," *Building Faculty Learning Communities* 97 (May 2004): 5-23.
3. Diane R. Wood, "Narrating Professional Development: Teachers' Stories as Texts for Improving Practice," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 31:4 (December 2000): 426-448.
4. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities," 5-23.
5. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998, 2007), 148.
6. *Ibid.*, 146.
7. Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 74.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Dean A. McManus, *Leaving the Lectern: Cooperative Learning and the Critical First Days of Students Working in Groups* (Boston: Anker Pub., 2005), 4-6.
10. Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 21.
11. James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons From the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 174.
12. *Ibid.*, 175.
13. David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch, *Teaching and Christian Imagination* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 71.
14. Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016).
15. Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 159.