Small Teaching Creates Big Faculty Discussion

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SMALL TEACHING CREATES BIG FACULTY DISCUSSION

Faculty meet twice a month to talk about small steps to improve teaching.

Dr. Melissa Lindsey was so inspired last summer when she read *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* by James M. Lang that she, after talking with administration, decided to gather a group of faculty to read and discuss the book together. In September, Lindsey sent out an email to gauge interest.

Twenty-five faculty members signed up.

“We were taken aback at the number of faculty who were excited about taking time out of their busy schedules to learn how to teach better,” says Lindsey. “We have members of nearly every division represented: professors of education, business administration, mathematicians, theologians, and biologists. Some professors are in their second semester of teaching, while others have been here for decades.”

The title of the book— *Small Teaching*—is a reference to the concept of “small ball” in baseball. “Small ball” is a batting strategy that focuses on smaller strategies, such as bunts and singles, rather than home runs, to advance runners.

*Small Teaching* takes that idea and applies it to pedagogy. “Often professional development workshops suggest changes that require major overhaul. That’s what I like about this; it suggests small steps that you can actually implement.”

—Dr. Valorie Zonnefeld, mathematics professor

The group of faculty has met twice a month since January. At the first meeting of the month, they discuss a section of the book, and each member commits to trying a particular method. Then at the second meeting, they share how they put that method into practice.

“One thing I’ve loved about this book club is having these conversations with people across different disciplines,” Lindsey says. “Hearing how Dr. John McInnis might implement a technique in his music class, or Dr. Tony Jelsma in biology, it is easier to imagine what it might look like in my math class.

Branching out and hearing from other disciplines is a different and wonderful learning experience.”

The discussion of *Small Teaching* was funded by a teaching innovation grant, an internal Dordt grant that any faculty member can apply for.

“I really appreciate that Dordt supports these kinds of things and makes it possible to get together with others and dream,” says Zonnefeld. “Dordt is really good at supporting faculty in doing their jobs well.”

“It’s so delightful to work at a place where faculty care so much about their teaching that they’re willing to sit and have these conversations,” adds Lindsey. “And it reinforced to me the culture of Dordt—that everyone cares first and foremost about the development of students.”

KATE HENRECKSON