

Reading Group Annual Report

Members: Jeff Sommers, organizer; Daphne Eldridge, Nancy Ferguson, Mike Hieber, Lizz Howard, Darius Prier

Book: *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer

Activities:

Our group convened five times during the academic year, three times in the first semester and twice in the second semester. We discussed individual chapters at the first three meetings and focused on two chapters at a time during the spring meetings, thus covering the entire book by the time we had finished. We used our funds to purchase six copies of the book and to provide refreshments for our lunchtime meetings. The actual budget expenses are attached.

Conclusions: In our final session we reflected on our time together and reached several conclusions:

- The sessions were like a trip to a grocery superstore in that there were always lots of ideas being shared, but none of us actually “bought” all of them. We each loaded up our cognitive, emotional, and spiritual (Parker Palmer would insist on this) grocery carts with the delectables that we found most to our liking. But we definitely enjoyed the wide variety of options available to us.

- We discovered that “learning never fails.” In other words, we didn’t all get the same ideas from the book nor did we always agree with Palmer’s take on teaching, learning, and the life of the mind and spirit, but we all learned something about ourselves and each other as we continued to meet and talk.

- We “got into each other’s heads.” As we read, some of us found that we were cognizant of how others in the group would react to certain passages and ideas. This is perhaps the most striking evidence that we created a reading community amongst the six of us that made reading the book unique. Rereading it with a different group of partners would be worthwhile, but it would be different.

- The activity emphasized that we are linked by our engagement in the educational enterprise regardless of our job descriptions. We all encounter students in learning situations, be they in classrooms, bookstore aisles, campus offices, Room 1, you name it, and we all function as educators when we do.

Suggestion: While it’s certainly likely that a homogeneous group of faculty or staff would have found discussions of the book stimulating, our strength was our diversity. We would certainly recommend that diverse groups like ours consider creating reading groups of their own in the future.