

Certain Kinds of Understanding

English professors win award for article on teaching fiction and film

[Campus News](#) | Posted on May 17, 2016



(Photo by Delbee Dalton)

By: Danni Francis

In April, [Department of English](#) faculty members [Scott Moncrieff](#), professor of English, and [Vanessa Corredera](#), assistant professor of English, received honorary mention by the notable Associated Church Press (ACP) for their coauthored article, “Fiction and Film: Thoughts on Teaching Potentially Controversial Narratives,” originally published in the October/November 2015 edition of “The Journal of Adventist Education.” The pair accepted the award at this year’s ACP convention, which took place in St. Louis, Missouri.

The ACP is a professional organization dedicated to supporting excellence in journalism within the Christian community. Each year the ACP recognizes the “Best of the Church Press” by awarding faith communicators’ best work. New and established newspapers, newsletters, magazines, journals, bloggers and writers are all recognized for their material.

In their article, Moncrieff and Corredera discuss the logistics behind teaching fiction in an Adventist setting and the concerns that arise with teaching controversial material, and offer tips

for both selecting fictional materials and teaching them. The article concludes with five tips for discussing difficult content with administrators and/or parents.

Both educators maintain extensive experience with difficult content in the classroom. Moncrieff specializes in Victorian literature with publications and presentations on novelists including Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot. He has dealt with challenging content in both novels and film, as he teaches an Understanding Movies course. Additionally, Moncrieff has written and commented on Adventist attitudes toward fiction for the “Adventist Review.”

Likewise, Corredera studies depictions and intersections of race and drama in Renaissance drama and its modern adaptations. Her courses expand on these interests, touching on challenging content dealing with gender, race and class among Renaissance and modern texts. Furthermore, Corredera has presented to both Andrews faculty and students about dealing with and confronting difficult content in the classroom.

This is their first coauthored piece. The union came about when “The Journal of Adventist Education” approached Moncrieff about addressing this topic.

“I said I would—with Professor Corredera, who has excellent background in this area,” says Moncrieff.

“I felt that this topic was important, both personally and professionally,” says Corredera. “In other words, it was certainly worth the time. I had spoken on the topic on campus, so this was an opportunity to refine my thinking. Furthermore, coauthoring is uncommon in the humanities; it was a great opportunity to try something new with a colleague and friend.”

While receiving an award for their work was fulfilling, both Moncrieff and Corredera agree the real privilege lies in their ability to work together on such an important topic.

“The real reward was to go through the process of thinking through the issue and writing the article with Professor Corredera,” comments Moncrieff.

Corredera agrees. “I echo Dr. Moncrieff’s comments. The best part was thinking about and working through the issues we addressed together. But I admit that hearing about the award was a delightful surprise at the end of term, when everything is rather hectic.”

Both Moncrieff and Corredera maintained goals they intended to accomplish with this article.

“I wanted to share with Adventist English teachers and administrators our thoughts on this touchy subject,” says Moncrieff. “It’s challenging to teach controversial material, but it’s also a great opportunity for learning if done well.”

Corredera comments on the impact she aims to have through this article. “Given the varied audience of The Journal of Adventist Education, my hope was to provide a helpful pedagogical resource for those who teach controversial material,” she says. “For those who might be anxious about teaching challenging material, I hope that this article can assuage

concerns by demonstrating the value of engaging with these texts and the mindfulness that goes into teaching them.”

Corredera believes that challenging stories are the most effective in helping us grow ideologically, personally and spiritually.

“Reading about others’ experiences—even if fictional—has made me a more mindful, thoughtful person and Christian,” she says. “I want to impart this same gift in the classroom, and hopefully, through this article, invite others to likewise consider the value of ‘difficult’ texts.”

Moncrieff concurs. “Narratives allow us to enter the lives of other people, to see how they think and act, to see what they live for, to see their scale of values,” he says. “To quote Marilyn McEntyre (‘Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies’), ‘There are certain kinds of understanding we have no access to except by means of story.’ It’s important for Christian students to deal with difficult issues and material, and to see how other religious and secular thinkers and writers deal with those issues.”

An online version of Moncrieff and Corredera's article will be available this fall at jae.adventist.org.

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