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Unit 5

As a middle school teacher, I try to keep in mind the future of my students, where can they go with what I teach them, is what I teach them important, what makes me effective. As the school year approaches, I look over my first day speech, which always includes “I would love for you to leave this year understanding all the math concepts I will teach, but what I really want you to discover are more strategies to find the knowledge you are looking for.” While reading *What the Best College Students Do*, by Ken Bain, I began to analyze how many of my students emphasized getting high grades compared to how many students left last year with a sense of understanding and better problem solving skills. In this book, Bain interviews multiple students that he defines as “best” and looks at their approach to learning, their struggles, and their successes. Bain defines the “best” students as being “deep learners”. Deep learners “want to understand the meaning behind the test and to think about its implications and applications, to search for arguments, and to distinguish between supporting evidence and conclusions.” One thing that he found that all the students had in common was how important reading supported their learning and helped guide them to be deep thinkers. Leah Price wrote in her article, *You Are What You Read*, about the “miraculous powers” of reading, how long ago there were things people did not want one to read, almost as if they knew reading would bring more curiosity and defiant arguments. Effective reading can open a world of possibilities, new knowledge, supporting evidence, and even contradictory view-points.

Bain states that not all reading contributes to deep learning. He describes “surface learners” as readers who try to remember as much as possible, looking “for facts and words they could memorize, attempting to anticipate any questions someone might ask them. Effective reading should include reading with purpose, speculation, making connections, and reflections. Bain’s “best” students spent hours at the library and were encouraged to read. They read for enjoyment; they read to get answers to their curious questions. Their purpose to read was information and answers. Tia Fuller said she carried a dictionary, a highlighter, and a notebook. She was prepared to learn and discover. Marry Ann Hopkins learned many skills from the *World Cup Encyclopedia*. Eliza Noh engaged so much in her reading that she “spoke up more in class, raising questions and making arguments, and that habit carried into other classes and subjects, transforming her into a student with deep-learning intentions.” The ability to read with plans to make connections to life, other subjects, or even opposing arguments, makes it possible to change your educational path. People who read on a subject just to memorize the facts can never really go beyond that concept. In Bain’s book, David Protess found that his connections to and understanding of what he read helped him make a fluid transition from veterinary studies to becoming an investigative journalist. To be a “deep learner” one must read with purpose and speculation, so why read anything one can’t connect to, reflect on. Curiosity leads to a deeper understanding and a way to find answers through effective reading.

I could never say that I was an avid reader, but as Bain contended, a form of reading can be listening and noting on a lecture. Many of Bain's "best" students took courses in college that they found interesting, sometimes leading those students to change their major. Some sought only classes with requirements for active communication and contribution. I feel that those are the classes where a student can confidently disagree with the professor's point of view and comfortably hold opposing ideas. When I was an undergraduate student, my degree only required two psychology courses; Psychology 101 and Child and Adolescent Psychology. It was during the lectures and readings of these classes that I discovered my fascination with human psyche; the reasons why people make certain decisions. I found myself taking not only all the psychology courses I could, but especially all those taught by Dr. Susan Ansivino. I was an education major taking courses like, Death and Dying, Psychology in the Cinema, and Psychology and Law. Through these classes I made a deep connection with what was going on in my life and the best part was that I was no longer looking at the importance of my grade; I just wanted answers for all the on-going questions that surfaced in my readings and discussions. Usually, I would dread any required reading; I would pick up the book, start reading, and by the time I finished chapter two, I would forget what chapter one was about. But when I read things for my psychology classes, my curiosity would ignite just by reading the title. The pages of my books would be filled with questions, ideas, and connections. And although I continued down the path to be an educator, my interest in psychology has empowered me to relate and understand my students, the choices they make, and how they perceive situations. Reading and researching interesting topics in psychology has brought me to a deeper understanding of the world and those around me; in fact, there is no question it has made me a better teacher.

Effective reading, including the qualities of having deep intentions, speculation, making connections, and reflecting, creates deeper learners. Bain considers deeper learners the "best" students. This top echelon of students, and I see many similar characteristics in myself, shows that a higher level of success can be wrought from the questions and understanding that effective reading cultivates. The qualities of effective reading leads the way to a learner to become a deeper thinker, a better student.