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Course Number: EAD 860
Date: August 4, 2019

5.11 Unit 5 Writing Assignment

This paper will focus on the Ken Bain book *What the Best College Students Do*. It will reflect on the author's accounts of deep learning. There will be special emphasis placed on his views concerning effective reading.

There was a good amount of useful observations Mr. Bain made towards the end of his book regarding reading. One area which stood out to me was section 4 where he directs the reader to consider making connections. I was drawn to this concept earlier when deep learners were first introduced. He described them saying, "They wanted to understand the meaning behind the text and to think about it's implications and applications, to search for arguments, and to distinguish between supporting evidence and conclusions." The discovery these types of learners have uncovered is to find the meaningful knowledge inside their query, rather than skimming the surface or strategically removing certain bits of information. They were not merely performing tasks in the way Japanese theorists would attribute to "routine experts." They were immersing themselves in the subject and sating their curiosity. The deep learners described in this book had a passion for learning that I likened to the *Freedom University* students Libby Sander wrote about. She described them noting, "The students don't care the classes aren't for credit, they come here simply to learn."

What I found most intriguing about the section *How Will You Read?* was the amount of strategy the "best students" applied to their reading. This is not to be confused with the "strategic learner" who only uses techniques to cherry-pick information that might result in a high score, rather it was an observation of the dedication the deep learners used in their approach. They deployed questions before the reading began and tried to speculate on what they might find.

I also appreciated how many of the subjects Mr. Bain wrote about sought areas of study that were outside the purview of their major course or destination. They were never linear. They learned things that may prove useful in the future when overlapped with other areas of study. They were also determined to learn and grow from their failures. The author's reflections on the virtues of a liberal education seemed well place here. I found the sentiments echoed in Leon Wieseltier's article *Education is the Work of Teachers, not hackers* where he stated, "Surely the primary objective of education are the formation of the self and the formation of the citizen." The subjects of this book always seemed driven by a deeper force and this was usually beneficial for more than themselves alone.

Regarding my own experiences and observations, I was really pleased to read section 11 where Mr. Bain wrote, "They read as if they plan to teach." I find that I do some of my best reading when I envision explaining the material to someone else. This could be something academic; perhaps preparing a science lesson for first graders. It could also manifest in reading for pleasure where what I've read might come up in conversation at a dinner party. Telling a story can be a bit like teaching in some respects.

The article from David Mikics struck a chord with me. His views on slow, careful, and especially offline reading I found agreeable. I've always been a "slow" reader, but I truly believe it's because I like to carefully consider what has been written. I enjoy his short statement, "books

help us discover ourselves." I've found taking the time to read something slowly over a longer period of time than I might need can lead to new and deeper understandings.

My favorite observation from the book was a quote from one of Mr. Bain's more famous subjects. "I hardly ever use the word intelligence," Neil deGrasse Tyson noted. "I think of people as either wanting to learn, ambivalent about learning, or rejecting learning." There was a lot of powerful quotation to draw from in this book, but I think this statement helped to characterize Mr. Bain's distinction between what he considered the "best" and the others. There were some cautionary statistics in David E Lavin's *The Other 75%: College Education Beyond the Elite.* While still considering the hurdles people of various backgrounds might face, I like to think of the positivity this reflection left with me. As long as someone falls in the category of "wanting to learn" and with enough intrinsic motivation, deep learning will result.