



### Who is Ken Bain?

- Currently serves as the President of the Best Teachers Institute (<http://www.bestteachersinstitute.org/home>)
- Founded and directed four major teaching and learning centers – three of which are among the most prominent in the country:
  - Vanderbilt Center for Teaching (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/>)
  - Northwestern Searle Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning (<http://www.northwestern.edu/searle/>)
  - New York University Center for Teaching Excellence: His efforts have since evolved to include the W.B. Berkely Innovation Labs / Learning Science and multiple centers for teaching innovation and excellence in colleges across the university.
- Bain has also served as Vice Provost of a large state university and later as Provost of a small public university.
- Aside from his groundbreaking contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), Bain is an historian whose scholarship focuses on the history of US foreign policy in the Middle East.
- *What the Best College Teachers Do* awarded the 2004 Virginia and Warren Stone Prize for outstanding scholarship on education and society.
- His follow up monograph, *What the Best College Students Do* awarded the Virginia and Warren Stone Prize in 2012.
- Currently working on two additional Best texts of interest to college-level staff and faculty: *What the Best College Administrators Do* and *What the Best Online Teachers Do*.

### Teachers Striving Each Day to be Better Teachers....

*"...teaching is one of those human endeavors that seldom benefits from its past. Great teachers emerge, they touch the lives of their students, and perhaps only through some of those students do they have any influence on the broad art of teaching. For the most part, their insights die with them, and subsequent generations must discover anew the wisdom that drove their practices..." (3).*

- Indeed, as Bain suggests, for many of us, like Dr. Tom Philpott, our scholarship within our discipline will live on after our retirements or deaths – but too few of us chronicle our thoughts, practices, and scholarship about teaching.
- Even fewer of us share our thoughts with our colleagues. Too often, **our best practices die....**
- Is it possible, as Bain proposes, to “do some **intellectual cloning**” of the best college teachers (2)?
- With *WTBCTD*, he hopes to “record not just what [the best college teachers] do but also how they **think**, and most of all, to begin to conceptualize their **practices**” (4).
- Each of the teachers Bain “put under [his] pedagogical microscope...achieved remarkable success in helping their students learn in ways that made a **sustained, substantial, and positive influence** on how those students **think, act, and feel**” (5).
- “Any teacher who causes students to hate the subject has certainly violated our principle of ‘do no harm’” (8).
- “...most of the highly successful teachers in the study **broke traditional definitions** of courses, convincing us that success in helping students learn even some core material benefits from the teacher’s willingness to recognize that human **learning is a complex process**” (8).
- These best teachers value – and **embolden students to value** – “critical thinking, creativity, curiosity, concern with ethical issues, and both a breadth and depth of specific knowledge and of the various methodologies and standards of evidence used to create that knowledge” (9).



### Have a Book to Recommend? Want to Facilitate a Discussion Group?

Do you have a book you would like to share with a group of colleagues? Would you like to facilitate a discussion group on a text that informs your practice? The CTI will sponsor your group, order (and PAY) for the texts, and help coordinate a time and location for your meetings! Please let me know at [sclevla@citadel.edu](mailto:sclevla@citadel.edu).





### WTBCTD BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)

- “Without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well. They are all active and accomplished scholars, artists, or scientists...” (15).
- They “follow the important intellectual and scientific or artistic developments within their fields, do research, have important and original thoughts on their subjects, study carefully and extensively what other people are doing in their fields, often read extensively in other fields...and take a strong interest in the broader issues of their discipline” (16).
- They use “their knowledge to develop techniques for grasping fundamental principles and organizing concepts that others can use to begin building their own understanding and abilities” (16).
- They “know how to simplify and clarify complex subjects, to cut to the heart of the matter with provocative insights, and they can think about their own thinking in the discipline, analyzing its nature and evaluating its quality”(16).
- Exceptional teachers treat their lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions, and other elements of teaching as serious intellectual endeavors as intellectually demanding and important as their research and scholarship” within their disciplines (17).
- “Simply put, the best teachers expect ‘more’” (17).
- The best teachers facilitate student learning in a “natural critical learning environment” that challenges – and supports – their students while “confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality” (18).
- The best teachers “reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can....Above all, they tend to treat their students with what can only be called simple decency” (18).
- The best teachers “have some systematic program...to assess their own efforts and to make appropriate changes” (19).
- The best teachers are not afraid to fail or to challenge disciplinary boundaries; indeed, “part of the success they do enjoy stems, in part, from the willingness to confront their own weakness and failures” (19).
- The best teachers are involved in creating a vibrant teaching and learning community on their campuses; they “frequently wor[k] on major curricular initiatives and joi[n] public conversations about how to improve teaching in the institution” (20).
- Accordingly, they engage in “vigorous exchanges with colleagues about how best to educate students and often cited something they learned from working with others” (20).

### Bain's Goal for WTBCTD

Bain hopes to inspire us, as teachers, “to make a systematic and reflective appraisal of [our] own teaching approaches and strategies, asking [ourselves] why [we] do certain kinds of things and not others. What evidence about how people learn drives [our] teaching choices?” Indeed, he wants us to approach our teaching “as serious and important intellectual and creative work” (21)....



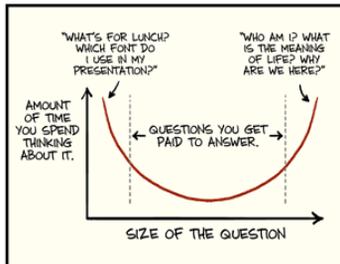
### Consider Your Practice

- How often do you reflect on your practice?
- Why do you “do” certain things in your class? ...and not do other things?
- Have you thought specifically about how your students learn?
- Do you foster a growth mindset in your students?
- How do you assess your students' learning...and your own teaching?



### What Questions Do You Ask Yourself When You Prepare to Teach?

- Bain maintains that, too often, in course and lesson design and preparation, teachers tend to “focus on what the teacher does rather than on what the students are supposed to learn” (48).
- In other words, “teaching is something that instructors do to students, usually by delivering truths about the discipline” (48). (i.e. – “transmission model”)
- The best teachers, however, view teaching as “engaging students, engineering an environment in which they learn” (49)? How do you do this? How do you create a classroom environment that engages students?
- On page 49, Bain identifies four questions the best teachers ask themselves in preparing to teach:
  - What should my students be able to do intellectually, physically, or emotionally as a result of the learning?
  - How can I best help and encourage them to develop those abilities and habits of the heart and mind to use them?
  - How can my students and I best understand the nature, quality, and progress of their learning?
  - How can I evaluate my efforts to foster that learning?
- He subsequently identifies and examines in detail 13 additional “specific planning questions” culled from his research:
  - “What **big questions** will my course help students answer, or what **skills, abilities, qualities** will it help them develop, and how will I encourage my students’ interest in these questions and abilities?” (50).
  - “What **reasoning abilities** must students have or develop to answer the questions that the course raises?” (50).
  - “What **mental models** are students likely to bring with them that I will want them to challenge? How can I help them construct that intellectual challenge?” (51).
  - “What information will my students need to understand...to answer the **important questions** of the course and **challenge their assumptions**? How will they best obtain that information?” (51).
  - “How will I help students who have difficulty understanding the questions and using **evidence** and **reason** to answer them?” (52).
  - “How will I confront my students with conflicting problems (maybe even conflicting claims about the truth) and encourage them to grapple (perhaps collaboratively) with the issues?” (53).
  - “How will I find out what they know already and what they expect from the course, and how will I reconcile any differences between my **expectations** and theirs?” (55).
  - “How will I help students **learn to learn**, to **examine** and **assess** their own learning and thinking, and to read more effectively, analytically, and actively?” (56).
  - “How will I find out how students are learning before assessing them, and how I will provide **feedback** before – and separate from – any **assessment** of them?” (57).
  - “How will I **communicate** with students in a way that will keep them **thinking**?” (58).
  - “How will I spell out the intellectual and professional **standards** I will be using in assessing students’ work, and why do I use those standards? How will I help students learn to assess their own work using those standards?” (59).
  - How will the student and I best understand the **nature, progress** and **quality** of their learning?” (60).
  - How will I create a **natural critical learning environment** in which I embed the skills and information I wish to teach in assignments...that students will find fascinating – **authentic** tasks that will arouse **curiosity, challenge** students to rethink their assumptions and examine their mental modes of reality? How will I create a safe environment in which students can try, fail, receive feedback, and try again?” (60).

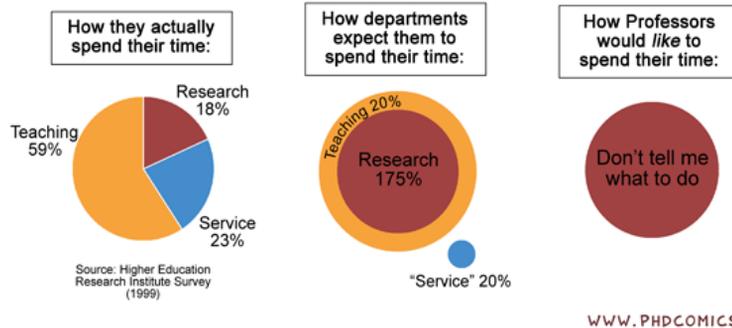




### Points to Ponder

- Bain asserts “the best teachers plan backward; they begin with the results they hope to foster” (50).
- Do you want your students to recall, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and/or evaluate? How do these actions / abilities differ? How might you shape a course/lesson differently to manifest the desired action/ability?
- How do you push students beyond rote memorization of facts to exercise the particular abstract reasoning abilities required of your discipline?
- Bain spends a lot of time talking about the mental models students bring to today’s classroom. What does he mean by this? What, exactly, is a mental model? What are some different mental models you have noticed in your classes? What is the most effective? ...least effective? ...most prevalent?
- What are the biggest obstacles for student learning here at The Citadel? How can we overcome these obstacles?
- Who do you think is the primary “actor” in the learning process? ...the teacher? ...or the student?
- How, specifically, do you help your students “understand more deeply” and “refine their reasoning capacities” (53)?
- How do you incorporate the conflict of ideas into your classes? How do you incorporate collaboration?
- Do you, as Bain seems to endorse, provide your students with a list of the major questions your course will consider?
- How do you draw connections between your course material and the “real world” or your discipline in practice?
- How do you define deep learning? ...surface learning? ...strategic learning? How do you promote deep learning?
- How do you arouse your student’s curiosity? How do you challenge them to rethink their assumptions?
- How would you define (and create) a “natural critical learning environment” in your discipline/classroom?
- Does rote memorization play a vital role in student learning? ... in your classroom?
- How does your research inform the way you prepare to teach?
- Do you, like Charlie Cannon at the Rhode Island School of Design, encourage your students to “immerse themselves in the soup of nonconclusion” in your coursework (66). What does this even mean?
- Ultimately, Bain concludes, “[h]ighly effective teachers design better learning experiences for their students in part because they conceive of teaching as fostering learning” (67). Do you? How so?
- How might you, as Bain recommends, use the questions and discussion posed in this chapter “to help build [y]our own understanding of powerful learning environments and the adaptive spirit and expertise to toss aside inhibiting conventions in search of better solutions” (67)

### HOW PROFESSORS SPEND THEIR TIME



### Sources

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### CTI Professional Reading Series Discussion Board

- Please participate in the CTI Professional Reading Series Discussion Board on CitLearn.
- Respond to as many (or as few) threads as you'd like.
- Feel free to post your own threads to ask questions, get feedback, discuss something you're trying in your classroom, or to solicit assistance.



#### What Do You Expect of Your Students?

- Bain opens Chapter 4 with a discussion about the impact of racial and gender stereotypes on teacher expectations of student performance. Do we expect different “things” out of different students? How do race, gender, or other identity markers inform our expectations of students?
- What do you make of Bain’s assertion that “[s]ome professors are convinced that the path to teaching awards is paved with lower standards and expectations, and that their own refusal to compromise accounts for the miserable showings they muster on student ratings” (71)?
- Bain insists, “[b]y any reasonable measure, the best teachers expect ‘more’ from their students” (71).
- But...expecting “more” from students does not mean piling on work. More work does not necessarily equal more learning.
- Bain identifies what he calls “an intricate web of beliefs, conceptions, attitudes, and practices driving the accomplishments of the best teachers and their students. Each strand of the web depends on all the others for its potency. Separated from each other they can even seem trivial and superficial” (72). So – what are they?
  - “...the best teachers tended to look for and appreciate the individual value of each student” (72).
  - “...they had great faith in students’ ability to achieve” (72).
  - “Students will be buoyed by positive expectations that are genuine, challenging yet realistic, and that take their work seriously” (72).
  - “Because these teachers understood that fear and anxiety reduce the capacity to think, they promoted intellectual excitement and curiosity rather than worry and doubt over ‘making the grade’” (73-74).
- Syllabus and Expectations: The best teachers, essentially, define their expectations by using their syllabus to tell their students “here’s what you will be able to learn/achieve in this class” (74).
- The “Promising” Syllabus: Privileges “[t]rust, rejection of power, and setting standards that represented authentic goals rather than schoolwork” (74).
  - Identifies what kind of questions the course will help the student answer. Identifies “what kind of intellectual, physical, emotional, or social abilities” it would help develop (75).
  - Explains exactly “what the students would be doing to realize those promises (formerly known as requirements), avoiding the language of demands and, again, giving the students a sense of control over their own education.
  - Summarizes “how the instructor & the student would understand the nature & progress of the learning” (75).
  - Ensures “trust succeeded because it was realistic” (75).
- The best teachers “looked for the diamonds in the rough, took all their students seriously, and treated each one with respect..., sincerity, ...earnestness, ...[and] diligence” (77).
- The best teachers have “a strong faith in their students’ abilities” (77).
- “When students had difficulty in class, the best professors looked for problems in their courses first rather than in their students’ preparation or intelligence” (78).
- **Bain argues vehemently that “the key to understanding the best teaching can be found not in particular practices or rules but in the *attitudes* of the teachers, in their *faith* in their students’ abilities to achieve, in their *willingness* to take their students seriously and to let them assume control of their own education, and in their *commitment* to let all [course] policies and practices flow from central learning objectives and from a mutual respect and agreement between students and teachers” (79).**
- Fundamental Ideas About Learning: “...the best teachers believe that learning involves both personal and intellectual development and that neither the ability to think nor the qualities of being a mature human are immutable. People can change, and those changes – not just the accumulation of information – represent true learning” (83).
- Less successful teachers “think of memory as a storage unit and intelligence as the capacity to use the information in that tank. In their minds, some people simply have both big tanks and great power to retrieve and use the contents of those containers, and other people don’t” (83).
- In fact, “the power to remember increases as comprehension and the use of that understanding in reasoning grows. Accordingly, the best teachers “begin to ask how mental models and their use shape how people think, act, and feel, and whether and how the models of reality, reasoning, capacities, emotions, and actions influence one another” (84).

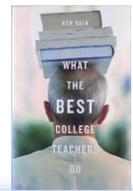


### **What Do You Expect of Your Students? (continued)**

- The best teachers “[g]ive students many opportunities to use their reasoning ability as they tackle fascinating problems and receive challenges to their thinking.”
- They ask students “to consider the implications of their reasoning, implications for themselves, for the way they view the world, for policy debates, for significant philosophical questions, or even for moral or religious issues” (87).
- The best teachers “teach students how to recognize arguments, distinguish between evidence and conclusions, comprehend the kind of evidence offered, recognize that agreements and disagreements can emerge in both belief and attitude, understand what kinds of questions need to be asked for each type of evidence and disagreement, identify assumptions, and explore the implications of conclusions” (89).
- What do you make of Jeanette Norden’s efforts “find ways ‘to confront students with questions of who they are as human beings” (92).
- The best teachers believe “that learning takes place not when students perform well on examinations but when they evaluate how they think and behave well beyond the classroom” (94).
- “The best teachers ask themselves what they hope students can do intellectually, physically or emotionally by the end of the course and why those abilities are important” (95).
- “Most significant, they help students shift their focus from making the grade to thinking about personal goals of development” (96).

### **How Do You Conduct Class?**

- What is the role of lecture in your class/teaching? Is lecture inherently “bad”?
- The best teachers:
  - “...tend to embed the[ir] discipline’s issues in broader concerns, often taking an interdisciplinary approach to problems” (101).
  - ...encourage their students “to compare, apply, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize, but never only to listen and remember” (102).
  - ...create an environment that “helps students answer ...question[s]” (103).
  - ...establish safe yet challenging conditions in which [students] can try, fail, receive feedback, and try again without facing a summative evaluation” (108).
  - “...consciously try to get students’ attention with some provocative act, question, or statement” (109).
  - “...make a deliberate and carefully measured effort to confront some paradigm or mental model that students are likely to bring with them to class” (112).
  - “...plan their courses backward, deciding what students should be able to do by the end of the semester, they map a series of intellectual developments through the course, with the goal of encouraging students to learn on their own, engaging them in deep thinking” (114).
  - “...trea[t] anything they sa[y] to their students – whether in fifty-minute lectures or in two-minute explanations – as a conversation rather than a performance” (118).
- Seven Unifying Principles:
  - Create a natural critical learning environment (99).
  - Get your students attention and keep it (109).
  - Focus first upon your students rather than the discipline (110).
  - Seek commitments to the class and to learning from your students (112).
  - Be available to and help your students learn outside of class (114).
  - Immerse your students in discipline-specific thinking (114).
  - Create a wide and diverse range of learning experiences (116).
- The best students have “the ability to talk and the ability to get students to talk” (117).



### How Do You Treat Your Students?

- Bain uses Chapter 6 to examine how the best teachers treat their students. How do we treat our students?
- What strategies do you use for students who work diligently, seek consistent feedback and additional assistance, but continue to struggle mightily?
- How do you nurture your students' self-confidence within your discipline? ...within life?
- What is "special" about your practice? What do you do better than anyone else?
- Conversely, what do you need to work on to improve your effectiveness within the classroom?
- Bain insists, "personality play[s] little or no role in successful teaching" (136). Do you agree?
- Note some of the adjectives and adverbs Bain uses in this chapter to describe these "best teachers": patiently, meticulously, mischievous, nurturing, dedicated, special, exceptional, compassionate, bashful, bold, aggressive, assertive, humble....
- Not all of these best teachers approach their students the same way, of course. Some "treated their students quite formally while others broke down virtually all the conventional social barriers between teacher and learner" (137). Where do you fall on this continuum? Was this a conscious decision – or have you just "landed" here over time?
- Bain maintains his team's research identified "an elaborate pattern of beliefs, attitudes, conceptions, and perceptions behind the way outstanding teachers treated the people who took their classes" (137).
- What do you make of Bain's discussion of "Dr. Wolf", whom students describe as "arrogant" and one who "did not care about students, ridiculed some people in class, often bragged about the high numbers who flunked her course, and set harsh, arbitrary demands" (138).
- Some students categorize Dr. Wolf as a "'control freak' who wanted to let his students know how much he knew, how little they knew, and how much power he had over their lives" (138).
- Others likened in class discussions to an "opportunity to duel with someone intellectually" until the professor finally prevailed.
- "Everything seemed to revolve around her needs, including the desire, as one student put it, 'to be the star of the show'" (138).
- Ultimately, Bain maintains, such professors see themselves as superior to students, whom they view as subservient.
- These teachers see class as "an opportunity to exercise....power or to display brilliance – sometimes at the expense of the students – or both" (139).
- By contrast, "the best teachers we studied displayed not power but an investment in the students" (139). These teachers "communicate that we have an investment in the students" and believe that "we do what we do because we care about our students as people and as learners" (139).
- These teachers view their engagement with their students as a manifestation of "a strong bond of trust – between the teacher and the learner" (139).
- What do you make of Bain's assertion that "[o]utstanding teachers recognize that ... rules [course requirements, assignments, syllabus, etc.] do not constitute intellectual or artistic standards. Thus rules can be changed to fit individual needs whereas the standards of achievement cannot" (139).
- Note how much time and energy Bain spends in his discussion about what he calls the "trust" required between a teacher and a student.
- I found the following passage particularly compelling: "Professors who established a special trust with their students often displayed a kind of openness in which they might, from time to time, talk about their intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage students to be similarly reflective and candid" (141).
- An environment of "trust and openness" in the classroom results in "an interactive atmosphere in which students [can] ask questions without reproach or embarrassment, and in which a variety of views and ways to understand [can] be freely discussed" (142).
- The best STEM teachers are "no longer high priests, selfishly guarding the doors to the kingdom of knowledge to make themselves look more important. They [are] fellow students – no – fellow human beings – struggling with the mysteries of the universe, human society, historical development, or whatever" (144).
- "When my teaching fails...it is because of something I have failed to do" (145).
- Bain's Bottom Line: The best students are invested in their students – and in building trust with their students.



### **How Do You Evaluate Your Students?**

- How can we create assessment instruments that accurately reflect the intellectual and personal achievements of our students?
- Bain maintains “...testing and grading are not incidental acts that come at the end of teaching but powerful aspects of education that have an enormous influence on the entire enterprise of helping and encouraging students to learn. Without an adequate assessment, neither teachers nor students can comprehend the progress the learners are making, and instructors can little understand whether their efforts are best suited to their students and objectives” (150).
- The best teachers ensure “evaluation and assessment become intertwined, supporting each other in ways that deliberately benefit learning” (151).
- Effective “evaluation and assessment stress learning rather than performance” (151) – learning (or student-centered) approach vs. traditional performance-based approach.
- When designing an assessment (or a class) – the best teachers ask (and answer) the following question: “What kind of intellectual and personal development do I want my students to enjoy in this class, and what evidence might I collect about the nature and progress of their development?” (152-153).
- Do you agree with Bain’s discussion about late paper policies?
- Do you emphasize performance over learning? ...or vice versa? Is it really a black-white/either-or distinction?
- Note Bain’s discussion of using assessment consultations with specialists from a teaching center. We in the CTI would love to help in this regard!
- Bain offers a method for evaluating student performance:
  - Deliberately collect information about individual students and how they learn.
  - Clearly articulate “the kinds of comprehension and reasoning abilities expected” to meet course and lesson objectives (161).
  - Clearly articulate and help students understand assessment criteria.
  - Ensure student learning is cumulative – create examinations/assignments that emphasize true learning and understanding - not just memorization and dumping.
  - Routinely and deliberately reflect upon, examine, and revise (as necessary) course and lesson learning objectives.
- Might you use the following questions to guide your assessment of student learning (164)?
  - Is the material worth learning and appropriate to the curriculum?
  - Are my students learning what I think I am teaching?
  - Am I helping and encouraging my students to learn?
  - Am I an obstacle or a doing any harm to my students’ learning?
- Evaluating Teachers: teaching portfolios, peer and supervisor teaching observations, self assessments, student / course evaluations, grade reports, assessing course materials (syllabus, assignment prompts, examinations, student work)
- Bain’s Final Thoughts:
  - First, do no harm.
  - Effective teaching is not telling.
  - Effective teaching maximizes a student’s ability to learn.
  - Effective teachers are lifelong learners within their discipline and in the science and art of learning.
  - Effective teachers embrace the “entire enterprise of learning, scholarship, and teaching” (175).