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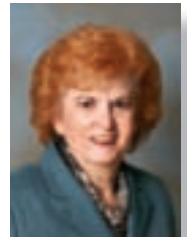
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What the Best Teachers Do



During a recent plane flight, I reread Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press, 2004) and reflected on the kinds of articles this journal can print that will enhance teaching in Seventh-day Adventist schools.

Bain's research identified a number of commonalities among excellent college teachers, many of which doubtless are shared by good teachers at the K-12 level. Here are some of his conclusions:

"Without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well" (p. 15). These teachers follow closely the important developments in their fields and read extensively in their discipline and other fields. They are excited about the subject(s) they teach. They can do intellectually, physically, and/or emotionally what they expect from their students.

But more important than their impressive mastery of facts, the best teachers create a "natural critical learning environment" in their classes (p. 18). They simplify and clarify complex subjects to enable their learners to grapple with ideas and information and to construct new understandings. First-rate teachers "help students keep the larger questions of the course constantly at the forefront" (p. 38) and build a solid connection between their questions and their students' lives and interests.

Exceptional teachers are open about their own intellectual journey and discuss their sense of awe and curiosity about life. In so doing, they seek to "stimulate students to ask good questions and take charge of their own education" (p. 55).

Quality teachers expect more of their students. This does not mean that they "pile on" the work; rather, they choose assignments that confront learners with authentic tasks, challenging them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, examine their mental models of reality, and grow intellectually.

Good teachers believe that students want to learn, and assume, until proven otherwise, that they can. These teachers create a safe environment in which students can try, fail, receive feedback, and try again. They describe clearly the intellectual and professional standards they will use in assessing students' work. Such teachers provide feedback before—and separate from—their assessment of students.

Highly successful teachers use verbal reinforcement and positive feedback to motivate students to learn. Rather than pitting students against one another, these teachers encourage cooperation and collaboration. They give their students a sense of control over their own education and design courses and units that meet the needs, interests, and current abilities of each student. And "above all, they tend to treat students with what can only be called simple decency" (p. 18).

The best teachers systematically assess their own efforts and make appropriate adaptations. They have a strong sense of commitment to the academic community, and "maintain vigorous exchanges with colleagues about how best to educate students" (p. 20).

Adventist teachers, too, should be committed to superlative teaching and to inspiring students to excellence. But they will not be content with their students merely achieving mastery of subject matter. Ellen White describes it thus: "Teachers do a high and noble work by cooperating with the divine purpose in imparting to young people a knowledge of God, and in molding the character in harmony with His. In awaking a desire to reach God's ideal, they present an education that is as high as heaven and as broad as the universe. This education cannot be completed in this life, but will be continued in the life to come" (*True Education*, p. 13).

—**Beverly J. Robinson-Rumble**