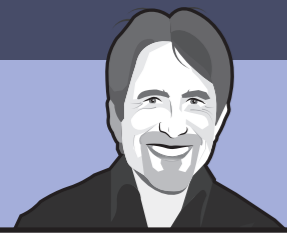


Reference: 'An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students'
Ron Berger, Heinemann, 2003.

An Ethic of Excellence

Cultivating a Culture of Craftsmanship and Pride in the Classroom



Ron Berger
Chief Academic Officer, EL Education

Ron Berger's An Ethic of Excellence

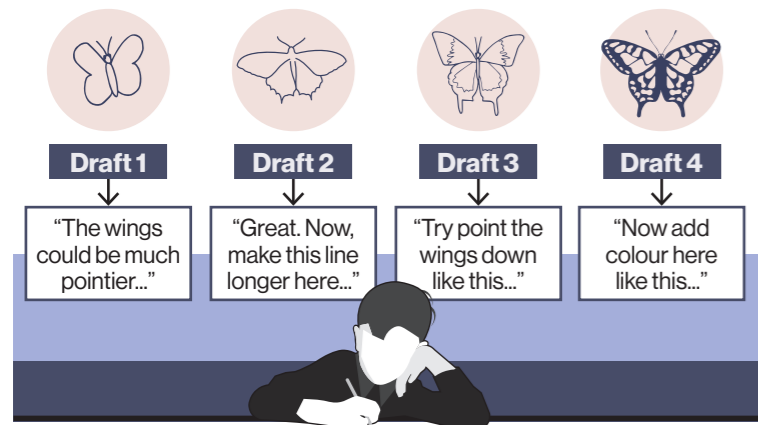
Cultivating a Culture of Craftsmanship and Pride

Ron Berger's 'An Ethic of Excellence' offers a blueprint for fostering deep, meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond traditional academic boundaries. At the heart of Berger's ideas is the belief that all students are capable of producing work of exceptional quality when nurtured in an environment that emphasises craftsmanship, critical feedback, and a persistent pursuit of improvement. This one-pager delves into the core principles of Berger's approach, illustrating how a culture of excellence can be cultivated in educational settings to inspire students to achieve their fullest potential. The inspiring story of "Austin's Butterfly," underpins the power of iterative learning, the significance of peer critique, and the transformative impact of holding high expectations for all students.

Austin's Butterfly

The Transformational Impact of Achieving Excellence

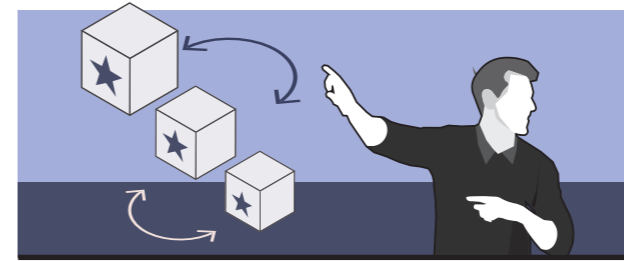
'Austin's Butterfly' is a compelling example used by Ron Berger to illustrate the power of critique and revision in achieving excellence in student work. It tells the story of a first-grade student named Austin from Boise, Idaho, who was tasked with drawing a scientific illustration of a butterfly as part of a school project. The story unfolds through a series of drafts Austin creates, each improving upon the last through specific, kind, and helpful feedback from his classmates. The process begins with a simple and inaccurate drawing, but with each iteration—guided by the constructive critiques of his peers—Austin's drawing becomes more detailed, accurate, and lifelike. 'Austin's Butterfly' exemplifies key principles of Ron Berger's Ethic of Excellence, showcasing the transformative impact of revision, the value of constructive peer critique, and the importance of a growth mindset. Through Austin's iterative process and attention to detail, the story underscores how dedication and thoughtful feedback leads to high-quality work and a deep sense of pride in one's achievements.



Excellent Work

Make High Standards the Status Quo

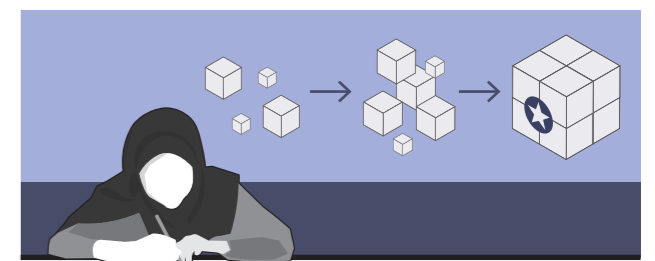
Berger says, "work of excellence is transformational. Once a student sees that he or she is capable of excellence, that student is never quite the same; they're never quite satisfied with less". Berger's philosophy is to develop students into motivated and resilient learners who have a growth mindset. By embedding this ethos in classroom practices, students not only strive for high standards in their academic work but also carry this pursuit of excellence into all aspects of their lives. To establish this, teachers can act as facilitators and coaches, guiding students through the process of setting high expectations, providing meaningful feedback, and encouraging the iterative process of critique and revision.



Models

Provide and Analyse Models of Excellence

Quality models give students clear examples of excellence that they can visualise and carry with them. Models provide students with something concrete which they can use to support and construct their own thinking. Berger explains, "No amount of words can convey what one good model tells me... I want my students to carry around pictures in their head of quality work." Teachers should actively seek out and present diverse examples of high-quality work to inspire students to elevate their own work to match or surpass these standards. Furthermore, showing students how to critically analyse examples can help them internalise the inherent qualities that make them successful.



Multiple Drafts

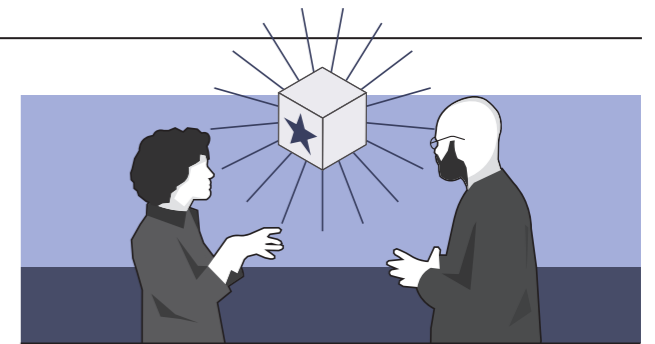
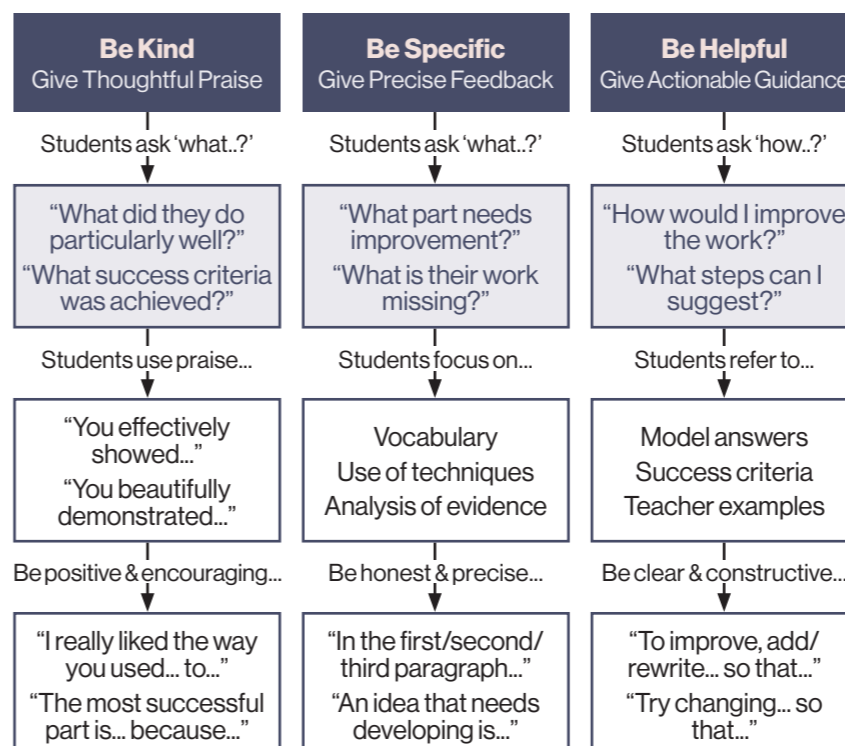
Dedicate Time for Crafting and Drafting

Berger poses the question, "What high-quality work can be achieved in just one draft?" He advocates for the understanding that true quality comes from revision, refinement, and improvement. Berger suggests that the process of creating, receiving feedback, and revising is essential for students to produce their best work. Through multiple drafts, students learn that excellence is a journey rather than a destination, and that deep learning and understanding come from the process of revision and improvement. With this mind, teachers should provide structured opportunities for peer and teacher feedback and dedicate substantial time for independent practice.

Critique

Facilitate Constructive Feedback

Ron Berger places significant emphasis on the power of critique in fostering excellence in student work. He advocates for a structured, kind, specific and helpful critique process that enables students to give and receive constructive feedback. According to Berger, effective critique sessions are not about pointing out flaws but about helping each other improve and strive for higher quality work. This collaborative process builds a supportive classroom environment where students learn to value feedback as a tool for growth. Berger's approach to critique is grounded in the belief that through careful observation, respectful communication, and a shared commitment to excellence, students can elevate not only their work but also their collaborative and critical thinking skills. The word diagram to the right is a useful scaffold to structure effective peer critique.



Celebrate Work

Share Students' Work Publicly

Berger underscores the importance of making student work public and celebrating excellence as a means to drive high standards and increase motivation. He explains that when students know their work will be shared beyond the classroom, they are more likely to invest effort and take pride in their achievements. This public exhibition, whether through presentations, displays, or digital portfolios, provides a real audience and purpose, strengthening the authenticity and relevance of the students' efforts. Berger's idea of celebrating excellence not only acknowledges students' hard work but also builds a community of learners who inspire and learn from each other.