



TEACHING OF EXCELLENCE



Teaching of excellence

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“An Ethic of Excellence is not a rejection of innovation; it is a reminder of what innovation is for”

Teaching of Excellence

Berger argues for something more complex: teachers are designers of experiences whose goal is to help students.

In Berger’s model, the teacher matters more than ever. It’s what we mean by “teacher” that needs to change. In short, we should stop distinguishing between what we need from teachers and what we need from students and instead expect from them the: **excellent work** and the **time** and **support to create it**.

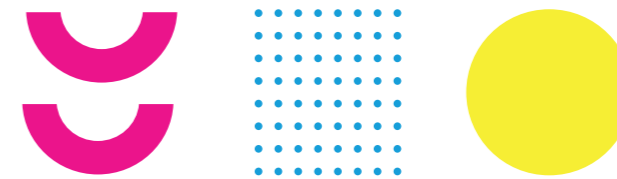
If they take pride in doing their best . . . they have an ethic of excellence.

How would you define excellence

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Notes

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THE ETHIC OF EXCELLENCE

I believe that work of excellence is transformational. Once a student sees that they are capable of excellence, the student is never quite the same. There is a new self-image, a new notion of possibility. There is an appetite for excellence. After students have had a taste of excellence, they’re never quite satisfied with less.

Ron Berger



THE CRAFTSMAN

Ron Berger

An ethic of excellence (2003) Building a culture of craftsmanship with students is a look back on his 25-year career as a public school educator and professional development coach.

Berger defines “**excellence**” as student work that has **real-world relevance** and is assessed against **professional standards**. This kind of work, he argues, represents centuries-old values of education, values that still matter but that modern schools have lost sight of.

Craftsman

Craftsman- someone who has **integrity** and **knowledge**, who is dedicated to their work and who is proud of what they do and who they are. Someone who thinks carefully and does things well. ‘If you’re going to do something, you should do it well. You should sweat over it and make sure it’s **strong** and **accurate** and **beautiful** and you should be **proud of it**’

‘I want them all to be craftsmen. Some may take a little longer to produce things, some may need to use extra strategies and resources’.

Toolboxes

Berger’s book cuts through the noise of innovation and insists that the singular representation of a school’s purpose is — and should be — **the work its students produce**.

Berger identifies three “**toolboxes**” schools need to **nurture an ethic of excellence**.

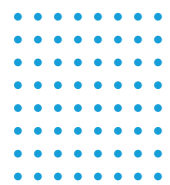
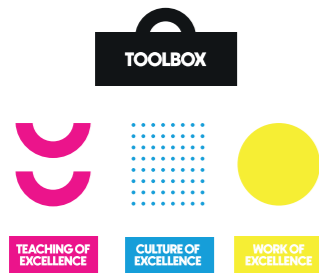
Culture of Excellence

“The key to excellence is this: It is born from a culture. Once those children enter a culture with a powerful ethic, that ethics becomes their norm. It is what they know.”

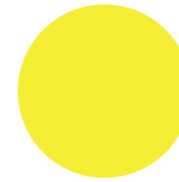
A key theme of Berger’s book is that ongoing reflection about and open discussion of core values, creating physical and psychological safety, encouraging openness and transparency, and engaging the community building the foundation of a culture of excellence. Nurturing that culture is the job of everyone in the school.

When designing a curriculum it is vital that all aspects align with that culture, in general, the attitudes and achievements of students are shaped by the culture around them: Students adjust their attitudes and efforts in order to fit into that culture.

Schools need to consciously shape their cultures to be places where it is safe to care.



CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE



WORK OF EXCELLENCE



Quality of work



Rules for critique



Constant critique

Work of Excellence

“Art is everything and everything is art.”

Powerful Projects

It may sound obvious, but the first step in encouraging high-quality student work is to have assignments that inspire and challenge students.

Not all projects are major endeavours or community service efforts. Small projects that are good vehicles for teaching skills are done with care and can be shared with a wider audience.

Appeal of the aesthetic

The question for me is not whether we can afford to keep arts in our schools but how we can ensure that students put artistic care into everything they do.

Every written or graphic presentation of work, every oral presentation or performance can be, and should be, prepared with aesthetic consideration, critiqued, and refined aesthetically, and viewed with aesthetic eyes.

Modelling

If you want a student specifically to write a strong essay, to design a strong experiment, you need to show them. No amount of words could convey what one good model can demonstrate.

‘I beg, bargain, and plead with students to loan me their work as models ... I spend my life collecting good work’

Build a culture of critique

Formal critique sessions build a culture of critique that is essential for improving students’ work. The rules for group critique:

Be kind; be specific; be helpful.

“The teacher uses the critique session as the optimal opportunity for teaching necessary concepts and skills. Through this process, students have regular experiences of being able to improve the quality of a piece of work as a result of feedback from others.

Multiple drafts

In most schools, students turn in first drafts – work that doesn’t represent their best effort and that is typically discarded after it has been graded and returned. In life, when the quality of one’s work really matters, one almost never submits a first draft. **An ethic of excellence requires revision.**

Portfolio of work

We send home progress reports consisting of long narrative descriptions of student’s strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, **accomplishments**, and **goals**. And we require students to take **ownership** of their own learning through keeping portfolios of work.