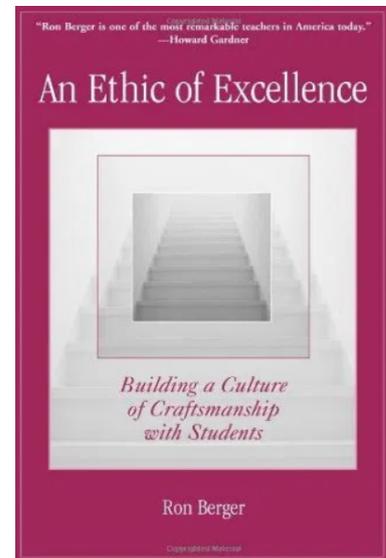


An Ethic of Excellence by Ron Berger

Book Review by Natalie Aveyard

A short read that is bursting with the author's passion, enthusiasm and real desire to ensure his students have pride in everything they do. I smiled so many times throughout the book at his genuine warm stories as he recanted tale after tale of students showcasing examples of them taking pride in doing their best.

Ron Berger is an American teacher with a wealth of experience who has been teaching for 25 years as well as being a carpenter. I found this to be a key fact about Ron as I really think when we are reading educational books it is important that they are written by teachers for teachers.



I was sceptical at first just with the title alone 'An Ethic of Excellence' as I very naively thought it would just focus on securing neat work in pupils' books, however this is a book which clearly outlines that we need to strive for excellence in everything we do. Ron explains that staff and students should be motivated together about quality. To become excited about doing a good job. To establish such an ethic is a long term commitment – it's a way of life. That our concern as educators should be centred on "what we can do in our schools and communities to bring out the best in kids." It has a real link to us demanding excellence and the work we have started with this, in the fact that the ethic becomes a norm, it is what our students know.

The book is broken down into 4 chapters with the first taking the role of setting the scene for excellence with Ron sharing his vision with sub sections on evidence in the work, in the students and a library of excellence. The next 3 chapters take it in turn to explain each of Ron's toolboxes for excellence; a school culture of excellence, work of excellence and teaching of excellence.

My favourite chapter looked at ensuring students gain self-esteem from accomplishments, not compliments; "We can't first build the students' self-esteem and then focus on their work. It is through their own work that their self-esteem will grow." Ron also takes the time in this chapter to outline the

importance of models and showing students work of quality. The role that models have in inspiring students as well as creating a focus for discussion around the strengths and weaknesses. Schools, corridors and classrooms need to be filled with attractive displays of high-quality student work – original work, not just commercial worksheets – and good literature or academic subject appropriate reading. This carefully links to the idea he raises that students need to know from the outset that quality mean rethinking, reworking and polishing – this made me think back to the Austin butterfly video we have all seen. Furthermore on an individual pupil level their work goes through many drafts and isn't considered complete until it represents high-quality work for that child. The book emphasises the need to give students a reason to care, that they know their work is important. An 'ethic of excellence' is a culture, an approach, a way of thinking!