

## Five Practices That Support Classroom Excellence

In this 2006 article in *The Fourth and Fifth Rs: Respect and Responsibility*, teacher/consultant Ron Berger shares pedagogical practices that he believes are the secret to getting excellent results for all students:

- *Assign work that matters.* “Students need assignments that challenge and inspire them,” says Berger. For example, Boston middle-school students studied vacant lots in their neighborhood, interviewed neighbors for ideas, and presented their findings to the Mayor, who saw to it that one of the sites was developed into a community garden.

- *Study examples of excellence.* Before launching a project, students look at models of high-quality work done by previous students and by professionals. “What makes a particular science project, piece of writing, or architectural blueprint so good?” they ask. “What was the process of achieving such high quality? What mistakes and revisions were probably part of the process?”

- *Build a culture of critique.* Teachers use peer review of first drafts to teach concepts and skills, giving students regular experience improving the quality of their work based on feedback from others. The rules of group critique are, “Be kind; be specific; be helpful.” Classmates are taught to lead off with positive comments and phrase their suggestions as questions: “Have you considered...?”

- *Require multiple revisions.* “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,” says Berger. “In life, when the quality of one’s work really matters, one almost never submits a first draft. An ethic of excellence requires revision.”

- *Provide opportunities for public presentation.* Final drafts of students’ work are presented to a real audience – perhaps to a kindergarten class, the principal, or community members. “The teacher’s role is not as the sole judge of their work,” says Berger, “but rather similar to that of a sports coach or play director – helping them get their work ready for the public eye.”