

DOUG LEMOV

Teach

LIKE A

CHAMPION

~~62~~⁶³ TECHNIQUES
THAT PUT STUDENTS
ON THE PATH
TO COLLEGE

3.0

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TEACH LIKE A CHAMPION

3.0

**63 Techniques That Put Students on
the Path to College**

DOUG LEMOV

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DENARIUS FRAZIER

THIRD EDITION

For Mike and Penny Lemov, my first teachers

Acknowledgments

This book would have been impossible without the team of people whose work is reflected in almost every line. My colleagues on the *Teach Like a Champion* team have made untold contributions, both direct and indirect. There are hundreds of their insights about videos or techniques in this book—and in the rest of the work we produce. But they have also contributed something that's harder to define. The moments when they offer a phrase to describe exactly what a teacher is doing or when we roll back the tape because they've seen something fascinating in a student's response are just as likely to come right after some moment in which they laugh with self-deprecating humor at something they've said, acknowledge a teammate's efforts, or defer credit to someone else. They are wise, gracious, funny, humble, discerning colleagues, this is to say, who create an environment where doing the work of studying teaching is rewarding, challenging, and even fun.

When we get teachers and school leaders together for professional development—in person or, now, virtually—our goal is always to honor people by helping them get better at such important work and to ensure that everyone—us and them—learns a lot, but also to have fun doing it—to make teaching a team sport marked by joy and camaraderie. Teachers deserve to work in that kind of environment, and I know that because I am lucky enough to appreciate it firsthand.

That team includes Emily Badillo, Jaimie Brillante, Dan Cotton, John Costello, Colleen Driggs, Dillon Fisher, Kevin Grijalva, Kim Griffith, Brittany Hargrove, Joaquin Hernandez, Tracey Koren, Hilary Lewis, Rob Richard, Jen Rugani, Hannah Solomon, Beth Verrilli, Michelle Wagner,

Darryl Williams, and Erica Woolway. I am grateful to each of them, though several played roles in the production of this volume who deserve particular mention.

The videos in this book—and all the videos we use in training and study—were edited and produced by Rob Richard and John Costello. Theirs is both technical and intellectual work—not just showing what a teacher has done on screen but then making it optimally legible to viewers by focusing in on the good stuff without distorting the reality of the classroom overall. This can mean removing the moment when the classroom phone rings or the child in the third row knocks everything off his desk or deciding that two *great* examples of a teacher using *Cold Call* is more useful than five *pretty good* examples. Every video is a sort of visual poem, and John and Rob have authored them all while also building a system to keep track of thousands of such poems. Think for a moment about what it means to keep 20 years of video organized so a team of people can say, “Remember that classroom from the school in Tennessee that we watched about four or five years ago?” and later that day we're all watching it again.

Hannah Solomon serves many roles on our team but one of them was developmental editor for this book. It might not have been “herding cats,” exactly, but only because there was just one cat and “herding” implies that he is heading in the right direction—or at least making something like progress—and you are merely nudging him back on course. Hannah's work included project management—keeping me on task is hard enough; doing that and keeping track of the all the tasks, not to mention all the drafts, is an order of the highest magnitude; now imagine doing it with your most disorganized and distracted student who very earnestly tells you over and over he'll have it by Wednesday when in your heart you know otherwise. Meanwhile, Hannah also provided round after round of gracious and candid

feedback on drafts, gathered and designed support materials, helped to select videos, and generally offered good advice and counsel in a hundred ways. There were dark and hopeless hours in writing this book. But then I would get my draft back and she would have taken the time to spell out exactly why she liked a phrase or a paragraph in the most supportive way and I would keep going. I am profoundly grateful for that and also for the many times she pushed me to change my thinking as we reflected on and revised the techniques.

Emily Badillo also played a critical role in the writing of this book. If the name is familiar it's because her videos appear throughout the book as well. She too was invaluable in reading and marking up drafts—and in drafting sections and sourcing support material, as well as screening and recommending videos.

As I was writing this book, my team and I were also providing training and curriculum to thousands of teachers in the United States and abroad. We had an organization to run, in other words. Every leader brings their own unique skills to such an effort. My own leadership skills include leaving emails unanswered for months, making sure meetings begin awkwardly and sometimes before everyone knows about them. Also: hiding in my office for days at a time to obsess over a paragraph while deadlines go hurtling past. Thus my partners in leading Team TLAC, Chief Academic Officer Erica Woolway and Co-Managing Director Darryl Williams, deserve a double dose of thanks and credit—for their ideas, insights, and deep understanding of teaching, as well as for their ability to gently manage around my “skills.” I couldn't ask for better partners.

Writing can be a slow process, but the process of writing this book was especially challenging given that it was done

during the year 2020. Amy Fandrei and Pete Gaughan at John Wiley & Sons were supportive and understanding, not to mention unflappable, throughout. I hope the result seems close to worth the headaches I caused them.

Rafe Sagalyn continues to guide and support my work as an advocate and agent, and I am grateful to have the guidance of someone so wise whose goal is to help me find my own vision for my writing and bring it to reality.

This book also reflects the insights of a broader community of teachers and educators—in the United States, in England, even around the world—who share their insights and observations with me and each other. Many days I think social media is a pox on civilization but it is also a means through which, thanks to the thousands of teachers who see it as a tool to share knowledge and insights positively and constructively, I have been able to learn an immense amount very quickly. I have tried to quote a few of the teachers whose comments have particularly struck me. I describe a few cases where, in a pickle, I asked a question of my Twitter colleagues and found myself blessed to share in their wisdom and insight. Thank you, then, to everyone who teaches and thus does the most important work in society, and doubly so to those who have shared their knowledge of that work with me.

Finally, as I have written and rewritten three volumes of this book, my own three children have grown up. Needless to say, I love them immensely and am proud of them. They are bigger now, they were littler then, and yet still there is no sacrifice I wouldn't make for them. But you knew that and I mention it here because the work that I do has always been connected to my own parenting. I wake at night and struggle with some anxiety about my children and I know other parents lie awake struggling too, often with even greater anxieties. I think often of those parents who love

their children as deeply and as profoundly as I do mine but cannot rely on sending them to schools and classrooms that provide them with the fullest opportunity to learn and thrive. This book is an effort to ensure the best possible classrooms everywhere—for my own children and for every other parent's children.

I'll close with the biggest thanks I owe: to my wife, Lisa. To thank her for making this book possible is a bit unfair when there's so much more to be thankful for in a thousand ways. So, Lisa, thank you for the sunshine, which, among other things, creates the light by which I've been able to write.

The Author

Doug Lemov is a managing director of Uncommon Schools and leads its Teach Like a Champion team, designing and implementing teacher training based on the study of high-performing teachers. He was formerly the managing director for Uncommon's upstate New York schools. Before that he was Vice President for Accountability at the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute and was a founder, teacher, and principal of the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School in Boston. He has taught English and history at the university, high school, and middle school levels. He holds a BA from Hamilton College, an MA from Indiana University, and an MBA from the Harvard Business School. Visit him at www.teachlikeachampion.com.

About Uncommon Schools

At Uncommon Schools, our mission is to start and manage outstanding urban public schools that close the achievement gap and prepare scholars from low-income communities to graduate from college. For twenty years, through trial, error, and adjustment, we have learned countless lessons about what works in classrooms. Not surprisingly, we have found that success in the classroom is closely linked to our ability to hire, develop, and retain great teachers and leaders. That has prompted us to invest heavily in training educators and building systems that help leaders to lead, teachers to teach, and students to learn. We are passionate about finding new ways for our scholars to learn more today than they did yesterday, and to do so, we work hard to ensure that every minute matters.

We know that many educators, schools, and school systems are interested in the same things we are interested in—practical solutions for classrooms and schools that work, that can be performed at scale, and that are accessible to anyone. We are fortunate to have had the opportunity to observe and learn from outstanding educators—both within our schools and from across the United States—who help all students achieve at high levels. Watching these educators at work has allowed us to identify, codify, and film concrete and practical findings about great instruction. We have been excited to share these findings in such books as *Teach Like a Champion* (and the companion *Field Guide*), *Practice Perfect*, *Driven by Data*, *Leverage Leadership*, and *Great Habits, Great Readers*.

Since the release of the original *Teach Like a Champion*, Doug Lemov and Uncommon's Teach Like a Champion (TLAC) team have continued to study educators who are

generating remarkable results across Uncommon, at partner organizations, and at schools throughout the country. Through countless hours of observation and analysis, Doug and the TLAC team have further refined and codified the tangible best practices that the most effective teachers have in common. *Teach Like a Champion 3.0* builds off the groundbreaking work of the original *Teach Like a Champion* book and shares it with teachers and leaders who are committed to changing the trajectory of students' lives.

We thank Doug and the entire TLAC team for their tireless and insightful efforts to support teachers everywhere. We hope our efforts to share what we have learned will help you, your scholars, and our collective communities.

Brett Peiser
Chief Executive Officer
Uncommon Schools

Uncommon Schools is a nonprofit network of 57 urban public charter schools that prepare more than 22,000 K-12 students in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts to graduate from college. A CREDO study found that for low-income students who attend Uncommon Schools, Uncommon “completely cancel[s] out the negative effect associated with being a student in poverty.” Uncommon Schools was also named the winner of the national Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools for demonstrating “the most outstanding overall student performance and improvement in the nation in recent years while reducing achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color.” To learn more about how Uncommon Schools is changing history, please visit us at uncommonschoools.org.

Preface to the 3.0 Edition: Equity, Justice, and the Science of Learning

I've called this opening section of the third edition of this book a "preface," but only because I had to call it something. I mostly skip prefaces and perhaps you do, too.

Please don't skip this one. I am going to tell you the story of this book's relationship to a rapidly changing world: How it fits within larger questions of equity and social justice. How it connects to the growing insights of cognitive science on learning.

Whether you're a TLAC veteran or new to the book, it will help you to make sense of what you read in the rest of this volume.

In the summer of 2019 I set out to revise *Teach Like a Champion* for a second time. I'd revised it once before, sharing what I'd learned from further study and tapping into the wisdom of teachers who'd adapted the original techniques. I'd watch them teach and think, *I never would have thought of that* or *How could I have not thought of that?* And so version 2.0 came about.

This time around I again wanted to tap into that wisdom, but I wanted to make a bigger change as well. I wanted to discuss research in cognitive psychology that was rapidly adding to our knowledge of how the human brain worked and how learning happened. The fact that what University of Virginia cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham calls the "cognitive revolution" was not showing up in classroom instruction was, to me, an equity issue. Students deserved teaching informed by science. It was no longer viable to leave the connections to research implicit in my own book, or not to use the research to understand more clearly not

only *what* was (and wasn't) important to do in the classroom but *why*.

Great teaching “always begins with clear vision and a sound purpose,” Adeyemi Stenbridge writes in *Culturally Responsive Education in the Classroom*. “The teacher who deeply understands this is often able to evoke brilliance from even the most mundane of strategies.” But if a clear purpose could make mundane strategies brilliant, a lack of clarity about purpose could also cause an effective strategy to fail. To know why is to be several steps closer to consistently knowing how.

I wanted to do more of that. If you knew that, as Willingham puts it, students remember what they think about, you could be intentional about using *Everybody Writes* and *Cold Call* to help ensure that everyone thought deeply about the lesson content; if you knew that students learned best when they felt psychological safety, you could be intentional about using *Habits of Attention* to wrap them in a culture that ensured constant messages of support from peers.

So version 3.0 began to take shape. I replaced the chapter on lesson planning with one on lesson preparation. The two things are not the same, of course. Preparation is what you do *after* the plan is written—by you or somebody else—to get ready to teach it. Time spent in schools was convincing me of its profound importance—and the frequency with which it is overlooked. The first technique in that chapter is *Exemplar Planning*—writing out the ideal answers you want students to give to important questions you'll ask during class.¹ That might seem like a superfluous task. You might think, *I already have a good sense for what students should say*. But writing it out helps clear your working memory and this has a very important effect, I now understood.

I'll discuss working memory—essentially what you are conscious of thinking about—more in [Chapter One](#), but when you are thinking hard about something and your working memory is full, the quality and depth of your perception is reduced. If you're driving a car while talking to your significant other on the phone, you're far more likely to misjudge the rate of approach of an oncoming vehicle and have an accident. It's not so much that your *hands* aren't free but that your working memory isn't. In critical moments, doing one thing implies not doing another. That's true for students and it's true for teachers. If you're trying to remember the answer you wanted students to give while they're answering you, you won't hear what they say as accurately as you could. But write the answer out and glance at it even briefly and it will make a profound difference. You will hear your students' thinking more clearly.

Cognitive psychology was also increasingly clear about the importance of background knowledge and long-term memory so I added new techniques based on how teachers were applying *Retrieval Practice* and *Knowledge Organizers*. Dylan Wiliam has called Cognitive Load Theory “the single most important thing for teachers to know,” and you'll see its relevance throughout the book and especially in [technique 21](#), *Take the Steps*. Eventually I decided to add [Chapter One](#), as well, which summarizes key principles that might compose a strong mental model of classroom instruction—a mental model being itself something cognitive psychologists had identified as necessary to guide strong decision making.

That the book was changing was inevitable—not only because of the useful and sometimes brilliant adaptations I saw teachers make but also because of honest and earnest mistakes. There were classrooms I'd visit that took my breath away and also classrooms where a teacher was

“doing TLAC” and I didn't like what I saw, and that, too, was cause for reflection. How could it be that I would see two teachers using similar techniques in nearby rooms and one made me feel pride and exhilaration and the other distress?

I say that without judgment. One of many broader life lessons I've learned from great teachers can be found in [technique 59](#), *Positive Framing*, and specifically in the section on *Assume the Best*, which involves avoiding the urge to attribute negative intention to an action unless it's unambiguously the case. When a couple of students don't follow your directions, for example, if you are assuming the best, you might say, “Guys, I must not have been clear enough about how to do this; I'd like you to work silently,” or “Pause. A couple of us forgot that this was supposed to be a silent task. Let's fix that now.” Assuming the best—*I must not have been clear or you probably forgot* versus *you don't care or you ignored the directions*—not only builds stronger, more positive relationships but it causes you to perceive your classroom—and the world—differently because what you practice seeing is, in the end, what you come to see. In *The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor calls this the Tetris Effect. If you play the game Tetris long enough, you begin to imagine its brightly colored shapes falling everywhere. If you make a habit of naming things you are grateful for each day, you come to see a world full of things worthy of gratitude. If you practice assuming good intentions you see a world striving for goodness and this makes you happier, more optimistic, and probably a better teacher.

It's the same for students, incidentally. When we help them to make the most charitable interpretation possible of their peers—are you *sure* she meant to push you? are you *sure* he meant that as a slight?—we give them a better world. As John Haidt and Greg Lukianoff point out, having a

charitable, positive, and optimistic mindset is a healthier way to go through life.²

All of which is a bit of a digression—at least if thinking about student well-being is ever a digression. My point is that as teachers, remembering to assume the best and say to students “My directions must not have been clear enough” rather than “Some of you weren't listening to the directions” actually causes us to interrupt our own tendency to make the fundamental attribution error³ and instead ask: *Actually, were my directions clear enough? Perhaps not.*

When I saw classrooms where techniques I'd described were used in a way that did not feel right, I strove to ask myself: *Were* my directions clear enough? *Why* might people forget? Was the reason techniques were occasionally misapplied a result of what I'd written—or of what I had left unsaid?

The answer, of course, was sometimes *yes*. How could it not be? Teaching is difficult work done under complex and often challenging conditions. It would be impossible to get everything right—for a teacher and certainly for someone seeking to describe what teachers did or might do.

I return to this topic later, but for now I'll describe one resulting change in this version of the book: Keystone Videos. These are extended videos (most are about ten minutes long) intended to show a longer arc of a teacher's lesson where they use multiple techniques in combination. They convey a broader sense of what the culture and ethos of exceptional classrooms look like and the ways techniques combine and interact. I've added them because to show a technique with clarity sometimes requires a degree of focus that both reveals and distorts a teacher's work.

Take Christine Torres: You'll see several videos from her classroom in this book. I first saw her teaching on an impromptu visit to Springfield Prep in Springfield, Massachusetts, and the moment I stepped into her room I was blown away. Her lessons were impeccably prepared. I would use the word *scholarly* to describe the rigor of the content and the ideas her students developed. She expressed her belief in their capacity for excellence in everything she did, and while she expected effort and focus from students, love, joy, and even playfulness also shone through.

I had observed as one of her students, making a comment intended for his peers, had muttered inaudibly while facing away from them as he spoke. "*Don't talk to the wall 'cuz the wall don't ca-are,*" Christine sang in a lilting voice. The student turned and smiled cautiously, noticing his classmates' supportive gazes looking back at him. The wall might not care but his classmates were telling him with their eye contact that they did. He braced himself and offered an insight about the novel in a halting but clear voice, and you could see, afterwards, that he was happy—and just maybe a tiny bit surprised. He had done it; *he could do it*. This was a classroom that raised you up—it drew your best out of you.

Christine's classroom was, to use a phrase I will return to, a *bright mirror*. It *reflected* her students, revealing and appreciating who they already were, but it also *changed* them by bringing out things that had not been visible. It didn't just *give them an opportunity*, it influenced them intentionally to engage in positive behaviors they might not have risked, might not have even known existed, without the light of an intentionally supportive culture shining on them. *Every* environment socializes the people within it to make certain choices and exhibit certain behaviors, Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler explain in *Nudge*. *There is no*

neutral case. There are merely cases of greater or lesser intentionality. A classroom where students react with disinterest to their classmates' comments is no more "natural" than one like Christine's where they react with encouragement. One is just harder to create.

Later we sent our cameras to Christine's classroom and among the things we cut from the video was a series of tiny moments where Christine did some version of what she had done when she sang, "Don't talk to the wall 'cuz the wall don't care" and socialized her students to speak audibly and *to* one another. "Loud and proud" was how she most often put it.

It would be hard to understand how she does that—the speed, the tone, the variation in the phrases she uses—if you didn't see a series of examples in rapid succession. You need a montage—a series of moments when she took those actions spliced together tidily. But if you only saw the montage you'd only get part of the picture. You'd also need a taste of what I'd seen and felt standing in the back of Christine's classroom that first morning—a sense for how rigorous her teaching was and of the love her students felt from and for her. You'd need to see those things to understand how her use of *Format Matters* ([technique 18](#), which includes pushing students to speak audibly) interacted with the other things she did. So we added the keystone videos, which you can read descriptions of in the introduction. They are often taken in classrooms from which you can also see shorter, more focused clips that demonstrate a specific technique; my hope is that watching the Keystone videos will give you the bigger picture.

* * * * *

That was where this version of the book stood when, suddenly, 2020 happened.

It goes without saying that the disruption resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic had profound effects on schools and teaching. Some of that is reflected in this book—I've included sidebars with examples of techniques used in an online setting on the assumption that remote teaching will play a role in schooling in some capacity even after schools come back to (or closer to) normal.⁴

But growing urgency in the movement for social justice and social change also exploded in 2020 in the wake of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis,⁵ the most recent example of a horrifying pattern of Black and Brown citizens being killed by law enforcement. And of course it recalled the long history of systemic inequities in other institutions, including schools. This stirred me and my colleagues to more explicitly define the role we wanted to play in the fight for a more equitable and just society.

I want to say as directly as possible that *Teach Like a Champion* is and always has been a book about social justice. (The systematic inequality of the American education system has been obvious to anyone who cared to look since long before 2020.) Its premise is that students not born to privilege and opportunity—often Black and Brown—deserve schools and classrooms that don't just provide them an *opportunity* to achieve—implying that the chance is there if they choose it—though far too many go to schools that fail that test. Its premise is that the opportunity to sit in classrooms where one can cautiously pursue an interest in scholarly endeavor is not good enough. Social justice means (to me, at least, and I hope to the people who read this book) every student's right to be in classrooms that consistently ensure they can pursue their dreams of becoming scientists, engineers, and artists, the presidents of banks, organizations, and nations in classrooms that socialize scholarship and protect and

create the optimal conditions for achievement. They deserve schools that encourage and push them to engage in behaviors that foster their own learning and the learning of those around them. And they deserve something that the author and literacy expert Alfred Tatum calls “disciplinary equity.”

“There are dozens of disciplines taught at the university level in which it feels like there is a Black eraser,” Tatum wrote recently. It's imperative that “all disciplines belong to all groups,”⁶ he noted, but the feeling of erasure exists (in engineering and computer science and biochemistry, for example) because we do not sufficiently “provide the foundation in elementary, middle and high schools.” Providing that foundation requires strength of academics and strength of culture—a bright mirror in every classroom that reflects students and draws them into the light.

The moment when Christine's student turned hesitantly to face to the room—unsure that he could do it—and saw not only encouragement and support in his classmates' eyes, but also a social norm reflected, one that said: *we participate with enthusiasm Ms. Torres' room; we are unabashedly intellectual*, and so found that he could do it—that was a moment of social justice.

When culture is *not* strong like that, when it does not foster positive and productive engagement as the norm, teachers make compromises. A lesson plan's primary attribute must then be its capacity to win students' attention with something catchy because they are not expected and socialized to pay attention. The question *How rigorous can I make this lesson?* is off the table.

This trade-off is by no means limited to certain schools. As you read this, there are tens of thousands of students across almost every strata of American society sitting in classrooms in various states of compromise, where a quiet

tyranny—more or less invisible but still potent—exerts itself. TNTP's 2018 report, *The Opportunity Myth*, suggests how endemic this quiet tyranny is. Following nearly 4,000 students in five diverse school systems, TNTP found that even when they had completed the work they were given, even when they strove to give their best and set a goal of further study, students were routinely, overwhelmingly not on track to accomplish the things they aspired to. The work they did in school was not challenging or demanding enough. Even those who received high marks were not prepared. “Their lives,” the authors wrote, “are slipping further away each day, unbeknownst to them and their families—not because they can't master challenging material, but because they're rarely given a real chance to try. Students spent more than 500 hours per school year on assignments that weren't appropriate for their grade and with instruction that didn't ask enough of them—the equivalent of six months of wasted class time in each core subject.”

Social justice to me is classrooms that are *radically better*, classrooms that foster academic achievement and that prepare every student to accomplish their dreams. If a classroom does not operate as if the young people in it were capable of greatness, it will never be a just classroom. But operating as if young people are capable of greatness does not mean pandering. It means loving young people enough to push them, with warmth, grace, and humanity, to work harder than they may be inclined to. It means loving them enough to set limits, with humanity, constancy, and steadiness, of course. Those of us who are parents know this is true with our own children.⁷

The term *social justice*, I am aware, means different things to different people. Different teachers will in good conscience answer the call of equity in different ways,⁸ but if students attend schools that do not foster in them

excellence in reading, writing, science, and math, and therefore leave them unprepared to achieve excellence and leadership in their chosen field, we have not created a more socially just world, no matter how committed to action we may be. Equity starts with achievement.

Further, as one of the best school leaders I know observed,⁹ if our students do not bring knowledge and analytical skills *to the discussion of social justice itself*, we risk giving rise to lethal mutations—poorly thought-through best intentions that are more harm than good. In 2021, educators in Oregon received an official document advising them that asking students to show their work on math problems was a form of “white supremacy.” A friend shared an online discussion in which educators argued that homework and grading were “colonialist constructs.” It's hard to tell how many people believe specious arguments that striving to reach the highest levels of achievement, accomplishment, and excellence is somehow antithetical to people of color or tantamount to “embracing Whiteness.” It's alarming to even have to wonder. This book is written in the belief that such propositions are not just wrong but destructive and that academic achievement is the enabling engine of equity and social justice.

One of the most memorable texts I've read in the past year or so is Damon Tweedy's *Black Man in a White Coat*, a memoir of the author's experiences during his medical education and as a practicing doctor. If nothing else, the COVID crisis has proven that, as with almost every other benefit of our society, quality medical care is unevenly distributed. To anyone who had read Tweedy's book this could not have been a surprise. If we aspire to a just, equitable, and fair society it will require an abundance of doctors of every background but, doubly so, doctors from communities of color and others who are poorly served by the medical field. Social justice likewise relies in the long