

# TEACH LIKE A CHAMP

You don't have to be a superhero to succeed in the classroom, says Doug Lemov—just learn a few simple techniques.  
By Caralee Adams



Doug Lemov didn't set out to write a book about the tools of the teaching craft. Working as a managing director of a group of urban charter public schools, he was just trying to get some answers for his teachers. They were hungry for tips on how to really engage kids and solve problems that were getting in the way of their teaching. Chances are, you can relate.

"Many of the questions came from the best teachers. They were painfully aware that even good teaching wasn't sufficient to close the gap for poor kids," Lemov explains. "They wanted every tiny thing that could make them better because they saw how high the stakes were and how challenging the task." Lemov decided to observe great teachers in action and share their best techniques. As more people started to ask about his research, he figured he was on to something.

The resulting book, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College*, gives teachers practical ideas on how to run a more efficient, inspired, and

joyful class. His simple yet powerful techniques help focus kids' attention and squeeze the most learning out of every minute in the classroom. Lemov is founder of School Performance, an Albany-based nonprofit that provides diagnostic assessments, performance data analysis, and academic consulting to high-performing charter schools.

## » Can every teacher teach like a champion?

Emphatically, yes. One of the things that strikes me about watching great teachers is they come in every stripe and shape and color and variety. They are extroverts and introverts. They are funny and straightlaced. They are hip to popular culture and out of it. They are everybody. Anyone can be a great teacher. I really believe that. It's so important for the profession to know you don't have to be born someone who can change lives. It's a matter of adapting, finding the version of yourself that works.

## » What aren't teachers learning in education school?

Schools of education teach things that are intellectually rigorous as opposed to more productive for teachers to do in the classroom. I describe a lot of the mundane things in the book (such as quick methods for passing out papers) that many think are not worth talking about, but ironically that's what we should be teaching. Some people talk about strategy all the time. My book is about teaching techniques. Strategy is a one-time decision you make.

Teaching is a performance profession. You are live. Every other performance profession that I know doesn't call it professional development; they call it practice. Before they get in the game, they practice it over and over again. If I stood in front of a room full of teachers and asked them how often they practice what they do before they go in the game, the answer would not only be zero, they would look at me funny. Schools of education think about strategy, making teachers better by teaching philosophically about what they do in the classroom as opposed to making teachers better by actually practicing.

## HEALTHY BODIES, HEALTHY MINDS

INCORPORATING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH AWARENESS INTO YOUR CURRICULUM can energize your students, build motivation and self-confidence, decrease behavior issues, and even boost test scores. New York Road Runners offers a variety of free youth programs, lessons, and easy-to-implement activities designed to help educators empower students through running and healthy choices.

We've selected some of our latest active lesson plans and videos to share with teachers on our new microsite with Scholastic, including: ANIMAL TAG • THE CENTIPEDE • LOOPY LAPS • VEGETABLE SCRAMBLE • A WHAT?! • FOOT FIRE

[www.scholastic.com/nyrr](http://www.scholastic.com/nyrr)



PHOTO: © BENJAMIN NORMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## WIN A TRIP FOR TWO TO NEW YORK!

Enter the New York Road Runners Sweepstakes and win a trip for two to New York City, including hotel and airfare, plus two \$500 gift cards for books and athletic equipment.

Total prize value: \$3,000.

Five runners-up will be chosen to receive a \$100 gift card—one every week. Deadline to enter is April 8, 2011. To enter and for complete legal rules visit [www.scholastic.com/nyrr](http://www.scholastic.com/nyrr).

SCHOLASTIC  
Professional Media



NEW YORK  
ROAD RUNNERS

» You went into the trenches to find practical advice for teachers. Why?

I have a fundamental belief that the answer to teaching resides in the classroom. Teaching doesn't have an attracting-people problem; teaching has a keeping-people problem. I want to keep our best people doing this work in the hardest part of the field, for the longest possible time. To do that, they really have to feel that they win, and see that their kids are learning, and see their classroom is an orderly place to do the work they want to do. That's urgent. I love teachers. They do the most important work in the world. I felt a moral

imperative to tell the story of what incredible people do in their classrooms every day. It makes me sad that great teachers aren't honored more.

» You say in the book that great teaching is an art. What do you mean by that?

The easiest thing to misperceive about the book is that, because there are techniques, that I'm saying there is a formula. It's quite the opposite. Yes, there are techniques. Yes, there are things that you learn that are quite concrete. But the right technique at the wrong time is as wrong as the wrong technique. The master teachers have a corpus of techniques that they

rely and put their own spin on, and they have a great sense of when to use them and when not. Whenever I do a training, I show a video of three or four teachers using a given technique. I want teachers to understand they have to find a vision of themselves. When you look at most artistic endeavors, they have fundamental elements of technique that people tend to overlook. The artistry is in the application.

» Much of what you describe is helping teachers to be more efficient. How vital is it to make the most of the time in the classroom?

It seems like such a small issue because time drifts away in seconds here and there, so you never perceive yourself as wasting an entire class period. But it's life and death. There is so much we can do with every minute if we are more intentional about it. If there is one thing I want teachers to take away from the book, it's a healthy obsession with time.

» You also sound like you are trying to inspire teachers to inspire students.

There is a certain leap of faith when you step in front of a class. You think, I'm going to show enthusiasm and energy and be inspired by the work and not let my cynicism pervade the way I approach kids. I think those things are self-fulfilling prophecies. If you are enthusiastic and energetic, ultimately the kids will be energetic and enthusiastic. If you are pessimistic, it will ultimately show up in your students.

The exciting thing about these techniques is that if you do something very concerted and simple, you can see the difference by the end of the day. For example, with the technique "What to Do," it's a shift from saying "don't" all the time to giving clear directions, such as "Turn your body to face me. Bring your legs around. Put them under the desk." It bolsters the teachers' faith that they do control the classroom and that their decisions matter. Then they are willing to take the leap of faith because it's going to matter. They aren't afraid of not being successful.

» Is it possible to implement these techniques without the support of your principal?

This is great if people can do it as groups. I talk a lot in the book about shared vocabulary. One of the greatest powers is peer-to-peer influence of teachers. There is a real benefit to social networking. You can now tie into a virtual network of teachers to achieve this. It helps to have a supportive administration, but I also believe you can make a classroom better even if you live on an island.

» What are your top picks among the techniques in the book?

People ask this all the time. One of the challenges of the book is that there is way too much information to process. I tell teachers to choose two techniques—one you are good at and one you aren't. If you look at a technique that you already do, then focus on getting 20 percent better at that.

New teachers should try to accomplish the following.

■ **POSITIVE FRAMING** Make interventions to correct student behavior in a positive and constructive way

■ **STRONG VOICE** Command the classroom through fewer words, saying things that are worthy of attention; avoid engaging in other topics; use appropriate body language and quiet power

■ **COLD CALL** Call on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands

■ **100 PERCENT** Strive to get 100 percent of students to follow a direction in your classroom

■ **DO IT AGAIN** When students fail to complete a basic task you've shown them how to do, having them do it again until they do it right is often the best consequence

» What about the teachers who say they are overworked and don't have time to learn one more thing?

That's almost the argument for it. These are things, if you can invest time in them, that can save you time in the

end. The payoff in time saving in the classroom is huge—you'll get back so much calmness it will make your life more efficient. You deserve to love your work and be proud at the end of the day. Teachers will never be paid like investment bankers. The work will always be hard. You deserve to feel successful and to have your personal-

ity shine through in the classroom. We do this for the joy of the material. That is the greatest gift of this: It lets you love your job. □

Doug Lemov is a managing director of Uncommon Schools and oversees its True North network. He is the former president of School Performance. Visit him at [douglemov.com](http://douglemov.com).



## MAKE IT POSITIVE

One of the techniques that Lemov believes all teachers should master is what he calls "Positive Framing." Positive Framing corrects and guides student behavior by following these six simple rules.

**1 Live in the now.** Avoid harping on what students can no longer fix. Focus corrective interactions on the things students should do right now to succeed from this point forward. Say, "Keana, I need your eyes forward," not "Keana, stop looking back at Tanya."

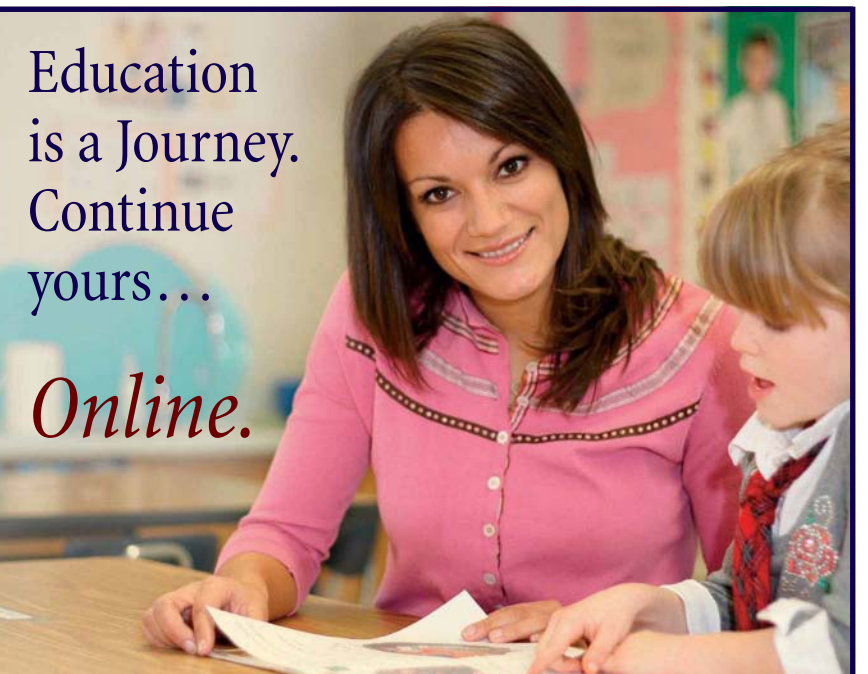
**4 Build momentum, and narrate the positive.** Perception, it turns out, is reality. Great teachers conjure momentum by normalizing the positive. They draw attention to the good and the getting better. "I've got almost everybody now" is better than "I don't have everybody."

**2 Assume the best.** Don't attribute to ill intention what could be the result of distraction, lack of practice, or general misunderstanding. Instead of "Some people don't seem to think they have to push in their chairs," say, "Some people seem to have forgotten to push in their chairs."

**5 Challenge!** Kids love to prove they can do things, can compete, can win. Exhort them to prove what they can do by building competition into the day, individually, in groups, and as a class. Example: "Let's see if we can get these papers out in twelve seconds. Ready?!"

**3 Allow plausible anonymity.** Correct students without using names when possible. If students struggle to follow your directions, say, "Check yourself to make sure you've done exactly what I've asked." In most cases, this will yield results faster than calling out laggards.

**6 Talk expectations and aspirations.** Talk about who your students are becoming and where they're going. Frame praise in those terms. When your class looks great, tell them you feel as if you're sitting in the room with future presidents, doctors, and artists.



Education is a Journey. Continue yours...  
*Online.*

Earn your Master's degree with Western Governors University.

- **Affordable, flexible**—Customized to fit a teacher's busy schedule.
- **Relevant, rigorous education**—Designed to help you become a more effective educator.
- **Competency-based**—Focused on your skills and knowledge, not class time.

**NCATE** @neacademy Partner

[www.WGU.edu/instructor1](http://www.WGU.edu/instructor1) 1.888.882.6182



**WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY**

ONLINE. ACCELERATED. AFFORDABLE. ACCREDITED.