

# DOUG LEMOV

# Teach

## LIKE A

# CHAMPION

~~62~~<sup>63</sup> 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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THIRD EDITION

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*For Mike and Penny Lemov, my first teachers*

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# 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, Jasmine Lane, 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.

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## 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](http://www.teachlikeachampion.com).

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# 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](http://uncommonschoools.org).

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# **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 need to feel psychological safety in order to learn, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 error<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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,<sup>5</sup> 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,”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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,<sup>8</sup> 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,<sup>9</sup> 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

run on our educating a diverse array of doctors and engineers, scientists and lawyers, artists, financiers, and tech entrepreneurs.

Here is an example: during COVID, pulse oximeters, the devices used to measure oxygen levels in the blood, were three times more likely to give incorrect readings for people with Black skin than with White, *The Economist* recently reported.<sup>[10](#)</sup> This is because the devices were designed with more translucent, white skin in mind. Unknown numbers of patients with darker skin in distress were sent home in error due to this design bias. And of course *design bias* exists in a thousand places and will likely continue to live in those places until greater diversity is achieved among the engineers who create and manufacture medical devices. That—per Alfred Tatum's argument—means “disciplinary equity”: highly trained and prepared students of color in advanced science and math courses—and in every other field.

So if social justice to you means marching in protest, I support you. Many of your students may line up behind you, too. But know also that some will want to engineer information systems instead<sup>[11](#)</sup> and this too is important. Some will choose to lose themselves in the color and composition of the painting they are working on. This too is important. Their right is to be prepared by our schools and our classrooms to go wherever those passions take them. That is also part of social justice: every young person made able to define and pursue their own dream. Is it necessary to point out for the majority of children of poverty, for the majority of Black and Brown children, and just possibly for the majority of children, period, this is not reliably the case?

While the role of teaching in a just and equitable society is my passion, I should note that I do not think that this is a



book about educating “poor kids” or “Black and Brown kids.” Kids are kids, even if schools are not always what they deserve. This is a book about teaching better, though it is true that I learned what I learned by studying teachers in the part of the education sector that is most important to me, personally.

But I am not foolish enough to think that because I have strong feelings for this aspect of social justice that I fully understand it or the experience of the communities I seek to serve, so part of writing this book involved a months-long process of learning and study of my own, often in the company of my colleagues on the Teach Like a Champion team. The range of the research I read expanded to include social theory, social justice, and culturally responsive teaching, for example. You will see some of the authors I read in that process referenced in the pages of this book: Zaretta Hammond, Lisa Delpit, Alfred Tatum, Rudine Sims-Bishop, and Adeyemi Stenbridge.

My entire staff also participated in an internal review of all of our work. This was led by my co-Managing Director, Darryl Williams—it's hard to lead the process of questioning one's own thinking—but involved feedback and insights from all of my colleagues as well as partners and school leaders who use *Teach Like a Champion* in organizations and schools. We discussed at length the techniques and terms in the book to ensure that the tone felt right and descriptions would reduce the possibility of misapplication or misinterpretation. We carefully watched and rewatched videos, paying close attention to how techniques were portrayed so that teachers would apply and adapt them successfully to dignify, uplift, and honor students. There were times, to be honest, when the videos or my writing did not accurately capture what we set out to convey and this resulted in my rewriting passages of this



book, renaming techniques or concepts within techniques, and retiring some videos.

I am aware that many readers of *Teach Like a Champion* may have heard critiques of some techniques—Format Matters and what was then called SLANT, for example. And it was with some surprise that, while engaging in the process of revision, I opened my copy of *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* to reread it and was surprised to find how little of what I believed about *why* and *how* I had included in some techniques. You will find those sections of the book in particular extensively revised to help frame them carefully and ensure that all readers fully grasp *why* as much as *how* so they can use them with confidence to help students thrive and succeed. I want to be clear—I think those techniques, done right, are among the most critical levers of success and social justice. You could see that in Christine's classroom as you will see it in a dozen more. But they are powerful tools, too, so it is important to get them right. Critiques that claim they are a form of tyranny or an effort to “control Black and Brown bodies,” when they are not informed by deliberate distortion, miss the point: The freedoms gained from a culture that asks students to track one another, and where students’ ideas are therefore deliberated, refined, and celebrated, far outweighs the supposed restrictions it imposes. That said, I, too, have been in a room where the application felt wrong. A flawed application does not indict a sound principle—but it does remind us of how important better and more responsive application is.

There were other areas of revision, too. In reading back over my original work I could occasionally see negatively framed examples and at times descriptions that seemed not to assume the best about students. Part of the reason for this was and is my deep appreciation for teachers. My desire for this book is that it will prepare teachers for the

most challenging scenarios they will face—the ones that erode their faith that they can succeed and cause people to leave the profession—as much as the happy and sunny times that inspire them and make teaching the best job in the world. There are precious few books that talk about those difficult moments. And so at times I have written examples that show students at their most challenging. It is not my assumption that young people are “usually” this way. My presumption is always that it is understood that educators love young people even—well, especially—when they set limits and provide structure for them, but I can see how some examples might have read otherwise. If nothing else I have gone back through them and tried to reduce any implication that students are out to misbehave. It is also important to be honest about the job, however. Students in any classroom anywhere represent a cross section of human nature. Any classroom anywhere is a room full of goodness and weakness, virtue and silliness, wisdom and folly. That's why the job is so hard. I'm grateful if, as a reader, you understand that the reason I sometimes give examples of challenging behavior is because it's a reality teachers deal with—too often in silence and without systematic support.

In the end, the process of self-reflection and examination has also helped me to be clear about what I believe. What I believe is that issues of social justice are inseparable from issues of teaching and that issues of teaching include the necessity of deliberately designing classroom cultures to ensure the most supportive culture for young people.

Some people are uncomfortable with this. They see engineering cultures as coercive, an exercise in the excess of power and authority. But I return to the Fundamental Attribution Error. We attribute other people's behavior to “abiding personal characteristics” and “minimize the influence of the surrounding situation.” We see permanent

traits—*he doesn't care*—instead of a person who might care deeply in a different context. We think insufficiently about environment—*how do I create conditions that make him want to care?*—and underestimate how people respond to cues and norms. At times those norms are practically shouting at us and yet we somehow cannot seem to hear them at all.

Yet another field of study that has been influential to me in writing this book is evolutionary biology, the net of which is that the humans who won out in the struggle for evolution won by coordinating in groups and have evolved to be exceptionally responsive to what is required for inclusion in the group—it is of the highest importance from an evolutionary point of view. We are creatures of culture first, supremely responsive to social norms, and every young person deserves to step into a classroom where social norms are as positive and constructive as possible.

Let me explain what I mean by describing a moment in the life of a student. We'll call her Asha. She is sitting in Biology class and has just had an idea. It's half developed—a notion still—but she wonders if she has thought of something that others have not. *Maybe this is something smart*. She's a bit scared to share what she's thinking. Her idea could be wrong or, just as bad, obvious already to everyone else. Maybe no one else cares much about DNA recombination and the fire it has suddenly lit in her mind. Maybe saying something earnest about DNA recombination makes you *that kid*—the one who raises her hand too often, who tries too hard, who breaks the social code. These sorts of thoughts have heretofore led her to adhere to a philosophy that counsels *Keep it to yourself; don't let anyone see your intellect; take no risks; fit in*. But somehow in this moment the desire to voice her thought overcomes her anxiety. She raises her hand and her teacher calls on her.

What happens next is critical to Asha's future. Will her classmates seem like they care about her idea? Will she read interest in their faces? Will they nod and show their appreciation? Ask a follow-up question? Jot down a phrase in their notes? Or will they be slouched in their chairs and turned away, checking their phones literally or metaphorically, their body language expressing their indifference? *Oh, did you say something?* Smirk. Will the next comment ignore her idea? Will there *even be* a next comment, or will her words drift away in a silence that tells her that no one cared enough to acknowledge or even look at her after she spoke?

These factors are Stations of the Cross in Asha's journey. They will influence the relationship she perceives between herself and school and her aspirations. She is a vibrant soul, full of ideas she does not ordinarily share and wondering quietly if maybe someone like her could become a doctor. She doesn't know anyone who's done that, but she finds herself thinking about it sometimes.

Obviously, those dreams don't all come down to this moment, but we would be foolish to dismiss its relevance. It could be the first tiny step on the path to medical school. Or it could be the last time she raises her hand all year.

Yes, it matters whether her teacher responds to her comment with encouragement—but perhaps not as much as how the social environment, the rest of Asha's peers, respond. If her teacher praises Asha's comment amidst scorn and resounding silence from her peers, the benefit will be limited. The teacher's capacity to shape norms in Asha's classroom matters at least as much as her ability to connect individually with Asha. Relationships matter, but the social norms we create probably matter more. That's a hard thing to acknowledge. It removes us from the center of the story a little bit. But it's a powerful thing to

recognize as well. In many classrooms there is no model for what the social norms should communicate while Asha speaks or after she has spoken and her words hang in the air. Is it really their business whether students show an interest in what their classmates say? Or perhaps there is a model, but it is mostly words—her teacher and maybe her school do not believe that what happens in that moment is within their control. Imagine what a headache it would be to try to make that happen with hundreds of students, many of whom “just don't care”? In the end, what happens in this moment and a thousand like it will most likely be an accident: lucky or unfortunate, supportive or destructive, with immense consequences for Asha and her classmates.

Something close to optimal culture, where Asha's classmates are communicating with eye contact and body language: *we are listening; we respect your idea; it interests us; keep raising your hand*, does not occur naturally or by accident. It occurs when adults cause it to happen.

Let me close with a short parable about something I call the Band-Aid Paradox.

At the beginning of his book *Predictably Irrational*, a study of “why people misunderstand the consequences of their behaviors and for that reason repeatedly make wrong decisions,” Duke behavioral economist and psychologist Dan Ariely tells a story about bandages.

Nurses often operate under the belief that that ripping bandages off quickly delivers less pain to patients than slower, more gradual removal. Fast bandage removal is proven to be the preferable form of treatment, many believe.

A burn victim during his youth, Ariely had a great many bandages removed by this method and was skeptical. His

feelings must have been strong, because studying psychology years later, he tested the idea empirically and found that slower bandage removal was in fact more preferable to patients.

Ariely returned to the hospital where he had spent months in recovery and presented his findings to the nurses there but was surprised to find that even in the face of his research, nurses persisted with suboptimal treatment.

Ariely had failed to account for the psychological discomfort nurses felt as they removed bandages. Patients expressed anxiety, fear, and discomfort as nurses slowly pulled their bandages. The feeling that they might be hurting someone was bad, even if they knew rationally that they were helping, and drawing those moments out made it even worse for the nurses.

Turns out that for caregivers, the psychological aspects of administering treatment—even clearly beneficial treatment—is a significant factor in determining the care they provide. I'm going to call this the Band-Aid Paradox. Caregivers' anxiety about treatment can cause them to choose a suboptimal form of treatment and *explain it via an argument apparently grounded in patients' interest*.

A similar Band-Aid Paradox influences practices in the field of teaching. Administering “treatments” often results in a conflict between what “feels good”—or feels safe or jibes with the practitioner's self-concept or perceptions about equity. Doubly so when, like doctors whose self-concept is based on being a healer, our identity is intertwined with beliefs about right and wrong.

Teachers are constantly faced with challenging and difficult tasks and must contemplate the very real possibility that they will struggle or fail, publicly and in front of an unforgiving audience, as they endeavor to execute them. It

is, we should always remain aware, easier to rationalize the preferential treatment for the caregiver than try the riskier one that will serve students in the long run. Faced with making a classroom where students are socialized to show they value one another's ideas through prosocial nonverbal actions including eye contact, the path of explaining why students should not be coerced to track their classmates in the first place beckons.

The harder the task, the greater the risk some educator somewhere will create a very smart or righteous-sounding rationale against it. That is certainly a far less risky path than the difficult and thankless work of shaping norms to ensure the rights of all children to learn in classrooms that truly prepare them to achieve their dreams.

I have written, in the margin of my version of *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*, a phrase that I have tried to use frequently in this book: *loving accountability*. That might not be a phrase that would naturally occur to a lot of people.

Admittedly, it took several years of writing about teaching for it to come to me. But it is deeply important. It reminds us, first, that moments of accountability can and should be done with a smile to remind students that we care about them, and, second, that accountability is a form of love.

When we *Cold Call*, for example, we are drawing students—sometimes willingly, sometimes hesitantly—into the conversation and thus telling them their voice matters. We are building for them a habit of paying attention more fully, and sustaining that habit of attention. As Zaretta Hammond writes, in a phrase I will return to, “Before we can be motivated to learn what is in front of us, we must pay attention to it. The hallmark of an independent learner is his ability to direct his attention toward his own leaning.” Building someone's attentiveness in class is a gift.

And if students feel a hint of anxiety, OK, that comes with growing sometimes. Knowing that learning requires you to speak up at times and knowing from experience that you are able; learning to pay attention—at first because you know your teacher is probably going to call on you to keep you honest and later because, well, it has become a habit—those are the gifts of a classroom led with love. A smile during the *Cold Call* reminds both your students and yourself—because pulling Band-Aids slowly is hard—that it's a good thing.

In the section on *Cold Call* you can see Denarius Frazier and BreOnna Tindall do this. They are smiling reassuringly and warmly at their students as they *Cold Call* and you can feel the love in those moments. They will remind you, I hope, that it is *not* a contradiction to call accountability a form of love. It's not always what students would choose at first if they were given a choice, but they often prefer it in the end when teaching informed by lovingly accountability—like Denarius's and BreOnna's and Christine's and a score of other teachers in this book—results in not only success but in engagement, when students lose themselves in the lesson and feel learning as a state of flow.<sup>12</sup> Then they are happier even if they never connect the happiness to the accountability that started it.

Even knowing that, though, some of them would *still* take the easier path. In such cases it is helpful to think of whom we serve in education. We serve the version of our students looking back on their schooling ten or fifteen years later, in light of its long-run effect on their lives. And we serve their parents, who are counting on us to push their children to create a future for themselves even in a world that surrounds them with distractions and messages that it's OK, cool even, not to do the things now that will create opportunity later. There is some tradition of young people not wanting to do what their parents say but coming, in the



end, to say the things their parents said to them to their own children. Education is a long game and parents are counting on us to take the long view. You can hear this in the interviews in Robert Pondiscio's outstanding *How the Other Half Learns*. Among the most gut-wrenching are the parents whose own educations were unsuccessful, and who seek schools and classrooms that will prevent the same outcome from befalling their children. "I got lost in the system," one mother tells Pondiscio, "and I refuse to let that happen to my son." The sense of desperation is palpable.

Part of teaching well is teaching students to choose a path that is steep and rocky, that they will sometimes complain about. It's a long way up and perhaps others appear to be on what seems like an easier path, even if it does not lead to the summit. The steeper path involves not just harder work but *psychologically* harder work—for teacher as much as student. It involves slowly pulling off Band-Aids. It involves knowing that love is sometimes paradoxical.

If you seek justification for doing what is easy, this book will not likely please you. That said, there are many books that will. If your purpose is to find the most effective and caring way to do what needs doing to best serve students, even when it is difficult—especially when it is difficult—my goal is to provide that. If that is the book you are looking for, please turn the page.

## Notes

- [1.](#) The idea began with Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and his team at Uncommon Schools.
- [2.](#) See *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018).

3. Fundamental Attribution Error: “The tendency to overestimate the degree to which an individual's behavior is determined by his or her abiding personal characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs and, correspondingly, to minimize the influence of the surrounding situation on that behavior” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, <https://dictionary.apa.org/fundamental-attribution-error>).
4. More thoughts on remote learning are included in the book my team and I wrote to support teachers during remote instruction: *Teaching in the Online Classroom*.
5. I don't mean to imply that Floyd's killing was the sole source of the outrage and anger so many felt. Obviously, the long string of killings of citizens of color in the care of institutions whose job was to protect them has been a source of ongoing consternation and frustration.
6. Tatum is the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at Metropolitan State University in Denver. His comments were made in a series of tweets on April 12, 2021.
7. When a small child would like to eat ice cream in lieu of dinner, all but the most indulgent parents understand that to love the child is to say no. When the child is older they will have days when they want to do what is hurtful to themselves in the long run or challenge the rules we set for their benefit: *I'm quitting the track team; I'm not writing my essay; I'm going to stay out past curfew*. Teenagers are wired to do these things; adults who love them are supposed to do what will help them thrive throughout their lives, even if it is difficult. To love them is to say, “Get your shoes; I'm driving you to practice,” “Let me help you start your thesis paragraph before it gets late,” or “I'll see you here at 11 sharp if you plan on

using the car again.” A loving adult says this even if it results in temporary resentment.

- [8.](#) To some it implies that teachers should encourage students to participate actively in social protest, for example. To some it implies that issues of social justice should be a major focus of the books students read and the topics they study. To others it is more important that students prepare themselves for professional success by more traditional means such as reading Shakespeare and studying cell structure.
- [9.](#) Brandi Chin of Denver School of Science and Technology. You should see her school. (Actually, you can see it, when you watch video of ace teacher BreOnna Tindall later in this book.)
- [10.](#) “Design Bias Is Harmful, and in Some Cases May Be Lethal,” Working in the Dark, *The Economist*, April 10, 2021.
- [11.](#) I am reminded of a quote from Adeyemi Stenbridge: “In any given school with any particular student, race may mean everything or nothing at all. We must make ourselves available for the discomfort inherently accompanying the topic of race and we must also be prepared to dismiss everything we know about race to allow students to show us who they are as unique individuals with agency and their own catalogue of concepts, contexts and lived experiences.” A responsive educator must always see and respond to the student he or she serves. Even when they do not share the interests of their teachers it is those interests we must serve.
- [12.](#) I discuss the idea of “flow” in learning in the introduction to [Chapter Six](#), “Pacing,” but *Cold Call* can

be a key tool to achieving the dynamic momentum that brings it about.

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# Introduction to the Third Edition: The Art of Teaching and Its Tools

Great teaching is an art. In the other arts—painting, sculpture, the writing of novels—great masters leverage a proficiency with basic tools to transform the rawest of materials (stone, paper, ink) into the most valued assets in society. This alchemy is all the more astounding because the tools often appear unremarkable to others. Who would look at a chisel, a mallet, and a file and imagine them producing Michelangelo's *David*?

Great art relies on the mastery and application of foundational skills, learned through diligent study —“craftsmanship,” if you will. You learn to strike a chisel with a mallet and refine the skill with time, learning at which angle to strike the chisel and how tightly to hold it. Far more important than any theory is your proficiency with the lowly chisel. True, not everyone who learns to drive a chisel will create a *David*, but neither can anyone who *fails* to master the tool do much more than make marks on rocks.

Every artist—teachers included—is an artisan whose task is to study a set of tools and unlock the secrets of their use. The more you understand the chisel, the more it guides you to see what is possible. Rounding a contour with unexpected smoothness, the chisel causes you to realize, suddenly, that you could bring added subtlety to a facial expression, more tension to the muscles of the figure. Mastery of tools does not just *allow* creation; it *informs* it. The process is often far from glamorous; an artist's life is a tradesman's life, really, characterized by calluses and stone

dust, requiring diligence and humility, but its rewards are immense. It is a worthy life's work.

Traveling abroad during my junior year in college, I saw Picasso's school notebooks on display at the Picasso Museum in Barcelona. What I remember best are the sketches filling the margins of his pages. These weren't sketchbooks, mind you. These were notebooks like those every student keeps: notes from lectures. The tiny sketches memorialized a teacher's face or Picasso's own hand grasping a pencil, with perfect perspective, line, and shading. I had always thought Picasso's work was about abstraction, about a way of thinking that rendered the ability to draw accurately and realistically irrelevant. His sketches told another story, bearing witness to his mastery of fundamentals and constant drive to refine his skills. Even in the stray moments of his schooling, he was honing the building blocks of his technique. He was an artisan first and then an artist, as the fact that he filled, by one count, 178 sketchbooks in his life further attests.

This book is about the tools of the teaching craft and so I hope it will be useful to teachers everywhere. But it takes a special interest in the sector of the profession that is most important to me personally: public schools, particularly those that serve primarily students of poverty and who therefore walk a narrow and uncertain path to the opportunity they deserve. It should not be that to be born with fewer financial resources restricts one's opportunity, certainly not in a nation that believes in meritocracy, but the truth is what it is. The price of failure in schools serving students on the wrong side of the privilege gap is often high, the challenges significant. Teachers there often work in a crucible where our society's failures are paramount and sometimes seem nearly overwhelming. Still, every day in every such neighborhood, there are teachers who without much fanfare take the students who others say

“can't”—can't read great literature, can't do algebra or calculus, can't and don't want to learn—and help, inspire, motivate, and even cajole them to become scholars who do. Impossibly, we often don't know who those teachers are, but they are everywhere—generally laboring unnoticed down the hall from one of the 50 percent of new hires in urban districts who leave teaching within their first three years. Think about that: It turns out that for those struggling new teachers, solutions to the challenges that will ultimately drive them out of the profession flourish just a few yards away. It turns out that for students, walking into the right classroom can pry the doors of opportunity back open. The problem is that we aren't serious enough about learning from the teachers who can provide these answers.

My goal was to find as many such teachers as I could and honor them by focusing on, and studying, their teaching. To write this book, I spent a lot of time standing in the back of classrooms and watching videotape of great teachers in action. I used Jim Collins's observation from *Built to Last* and *Good to Great* that what separates great from good matters more than what describes mere competence. I wanted to know not what made a teacher pretty good but what made her exceptional, able to beat the odds. Were there consistent ideas that allowed them to more reliably transform lives? Were there words and actions the rest of us could copy and adapt? Were there general trends to provide a road map, were there principles behind the excellence? Or was their excellence idiosyncratic and unmappable?

What I found was that while each great teacher is unique, as a group their teaching held elements in common. I started to see both theme and variation, so I began to make a list of the things they did and the ways in which they did them. I gave those actions names so I could remember

them, and over time my list grew in both the number of topics and the level of specificity. Ideas coalesced into techniques. But I also found that great teachers came in every stripe and style: They were extroverts and introverts; planners and improvisers; quick-witted and serious. But in the aggregate, a story emerged. There *is* a toolbox for excellence even in the face of challenge, it turns out. The contents have been forged by ten thousand teachers working quietly and usually without recognition at the end of cracked-linoleum hallways. I am sure that some of my analysis of what they do is wrong. In fact, I have rewritten this book several times to try to capture more of what I am learning about what exceptional teachers do with better accuracy. One point I have tried to stress is that having a tool is not an argument for using it heedlessly. A painter has a case full of brushes and painting knives, but she does not use every one of them with each portrait or landscape.

If you're a teacher near the beginning of your study of the craft of teaching, my aim is to help you become one of those teachers who, for a long and distinguished career, unlocks the latent talent and skill waiting in students, even if previous efforts have been unsuccessful. If you commit yourself and your talents to this work, you deserve to be successful and to change lives. If you are successful, you will most likely be happy in the work, and when you are happy, in turn, you will do better work.

If you are a master teacher already, I hope a discussion of tools and their applications, the framing of a vocabulary for talking about the critical and sometimes overlooked moments of your day, will inspire you not only to refine your craft but also to love doing so and to feel the pleasure of committing (or recommitting) to the deepest possible mastery of the complex and worthy endeavor that is your life's work. I assume that in many cases this book may describe things you already know and do. That's great by



me, and in that case, my goal is to help you get a little better at them, perhaps seeing useful applications and variations you haven't considered. Either way, your growth is at least as important as that of a novice teacher. Teaching is the best and most important work in our society. Those who do it deserve to experience constant growth and learning. That, after all, is what we wish for our students.

If you lead a school, I hope this book will help you in helping teachers do this challenging work as successfully as possible. In our field, the first obligation of an organization is to help its people succeed. When teachers end the day with a sense of accomplishment, when they feel they are both successful and growing more so, they stay in our schools for a long time, do outstanding work, work joyfully, and inspire others, and thus pay the organization back many times over.

The pages that follow are an effort to describe and organize the tools used by game-changing teachers, and to reflect on how and why they use them so that you can make informed decisions of your own.

My work has not been to invent the tools I describe here but to explain how others use them and what makes them effective. This has meant putting names on techniques in the interest of helping create a common vocabulary with which to analyze and discuss the classroom. The names may seem like a gimmick at first, but they are one of the most important parts. If there were no word *democracy*, it would be a thousand times harder to have and sustain a *thing* called “democracy.” We would forever be bogged down in inefficiency—“You know that thing we talked about where everyone gets a say ...”—at exactly the moment we needed to take action. Teachers and administrators must be able to talk quickly and efficiently with colleagues about a

clearly defined and shared set of ideas in order to sustain their work. They need a shared vocabulary thorough enough to allow a comprehensive analysis of the wide range of often complex events that happen in a classroom. I believe that names matter and are worth using. Ideally, they will allow you to talk about your own teaching and that of your peers in efficient, specific language.

But I want to be clear. Despite the names, what appears here is neither mine, especially, nor a theory. It is a set of field notes from observations of the work of others, some of whom you will meet in this book, and many others whom you will not. I wish to thank them all for the diligence and skill that informed and inspired this work.

## **SPECIFIC, CONCRETE, ACTIONABLE TECHNIQUES**

When I was a young teacher, I'd go to trainings and leave with lofty words ringing in my ears. They touched on everything that had made me want to teach. "Have high expectations for your students." "Expect the most from students every day." "Teach kids, not content." I'd be inspired, ready to improve—until I got to school the next day. I'd find myself asking, "Well, how do I do that? What's the action I should take at 8:25 a.m. to demonstrate those raised expectations?"

What ultimately helped me improve my teaching was when a peer told me something very concrete like, "When you want them to follow your directions, stand still. If you're walking around passing out papers, it looks like the directions are no more important than all of the other things you're doing. Show that your directions matter. Stand still." Over time, it was this sort of concrete, specific, actionable advice, far more than reminders that I must

have high expectations, that allowed me to raise expectations in my classroom.

My approach in this book reflects that experience. I have tried to describe the techniques of champion teachers in a concrete, specific, and actionable way that allows you to start using them tomorrow. I chose to call these tools “techniques” and not “strategies”—even though the teaching profession tends to use the latter term—because to me, a strategy is a generalized approach that informs decisions, whereas a technique is a thing you say or do in a particular way. If you are a sprinter, your strategy might be to get out of the blocks fast and run from the front; your technique would be to incline your body forward at about five degrees as you drive your legs up and out ahead of you. If you wanted to be a great sprinter, practicing and refining that technique would help you achieve more than refining your strategy. And because a technique is an action, the more you practiced it, the better you'd get. Mulling over your decision to run from the front a hundred times doesn't make you any better; practicing a hundred sprints with just the right body position does. This is why, I think, focusing on honing and improving specific techniques is the fastest route to success.

It's also worth noting that this set of techniques is not a “system.” For me, the benefit of considering individual techniques is that they are small, discrete units of inquiry. You can choose something that interests you and study it, improving quickly and seeing the results. And you can incorporate a new technique into what you already do without having to redesign your entire approach or buying in to everything in the book. As Chip and Dan Heath point out in their book *Switch*, how people encounter useful information has a lot to do with whether they are successful in using it to change and improve their lives. Oftentimes what we conclude is resistance to change—by

teachers, say—is in fact lack of clarity about what concrete thing to do next to begin the change: “OK, I get that I should be more rigorous, but how do I do that, or start to do that in a concrete, manageable way?” Giving people tools to try might seem less efficient than giving them an overarching system that encompasses everything they do, but trying to do everything at once is a recipe for lack of action. Having a manageable focused idea to work on can help make change and improvement safe and easy to pursue, with the result that the technique becomes part of your life. We often achieve more change over the long run via small changes in the short run.

Another key observation from *Switch* is that we tend to assume that the size of a solution must match the size of the problem. You were observed; there were criticisms; it seems you have to make wholesale changes to everything you do. Or do you? Perhaps just connecting with a few students who appear disinterested via *Cold Call*, or preparing differently so you can listen better during your classes, would make a huge difference and cause other things to fall into place. Little changes can often make a big difference.

## **THE ART OF USING THE TECHNIQUES**

Many of the techniques you will read about in this book may at first seem mundane and unremarkable. They are not always especially innovative. They are not always intellectually startling. They sometimes fail to march in step with educational theory. But used well and responsively they yield an outcome that more than compensates for their occasionally humble appearance. They are worth your time and effort sometimes *because* they are so mundane and easy to overlook. *Simple* and *useful* can be beautiful words. But I want to emphasize that

the art is in the discretionary application of the techniques. I've tried to help artisans be artists, not because I think the work of teaching can be mechanized or made formulaic. There is a right and wrong time and place for all of the tools. Effective application will always fall to the unique style and vision of great teachers. That, in a word, is artistry. Great teaching is no less great because the teacher systematically mastered specific skills than is *David* a lesser reflection of Michelangelo's genius because Michelangelo mastered the grammar of the chisel before he created the statue. I believe that given the tools here, teachers will make insightful, independent decisions about how and when to use the techniques of the craft as they go about becoming masters of the art of teaching.

## DEFINING WHAT WORKS

If you've read previous versions of this book you know that my process of finding teachers to study began with test scores. I looked for individuals and schools that, controlling for poverty, were positive outliers. These were teachers (and sometimes whole schools) who worked with students in neighborhoods where often only a fraction of students graduate from high school, never mind go on to college, or where typically only 10 or 20 percent of students might pass a given state test (an incomplete but still important measure of progress) in a typical year. And yet working in that same landscape, the teachers I was studying helped their students achieve at a dramatically higher rate than anyone would have predicted: they might have double the number of students passing ... or *four times* the number of students passing. Sometimes every single kid passed. Sometimes they had more kids score “advanced” than teachers in surrounding schools had kids score “proficient.”

Their results often closed the gap between kids born to poverty and kids born to privilege.

Test scores of course are an imperfect measure. They tell us a lot but not nearly everything and are often best used to generate and test hypotheses: You watch a series of teachers with unusually strong results and start to see trends and commonalities. So whenever possible, I tried to use as much additional data as I could get, and to look for signals that were durable over time—sustained results as opposed to one-time blips. When a school was successful for a long time, I also considered the principal's guidance and input in sourcing teachers. Although there are data to suggest that the average principal is only so-so at identifying the best teachers, very good principals are, of course, different from the average. One could argue that the reason they are successful is their ability to understand whose teaching is especially effective. And over time I came to rely on my team—by now they've spent hundreds and hundreds of hours studying and discussing classroom video—to spot moments that would be useful for teachers to study—moments that were replicable, and adaptable, and likely to help teachers help students thrive.

## **THE KEYSTONES**

As I mentioned in the Preface, one major change in this third edition of the book is the inclusion of longer Keystone videos that show how a selection of truly exceptional teachers use and combine techniques over a sustained arc of their lesson. Sharing these videos shows how the pieces fit together and helps balance the inevitable distortion of seeing only a single technique in sharp focus. Here's a list of the Keystone videos and some of the things I appreciate about the craft of the teachers they profile. I hope you will watch them multiple times. If you're the head of a school or

train teachers, I think they're ideal for repeated viewing and study.

*Julia Addeo* (North Star Academy HS, Newark, NJ): Julia's outstanding Checking for Understanding ([Chapter Three](#)) is enabled by *Exemplar Planning* ([technique 1](#)). Her review of the *Do Now* ([technique 20](#)) relies on a balance of *Means of Participation* ([technique 36](#)) that includes *Cold Call* ([technique 34](#)) and *Show Call* ([technique 13](#)). There's not a minute of wasted time.

*Akilah Bond*, then of Leadership Prep Carnasie Elementary School, is reading a Cam Jansen story with her second graders. Her Wait Time is exemplary. She uses *All Hands* ([technique 29](#)), asking students to put their hands down so their classmates don't feel rushed, and she ensures productive *Wait Time* ([technique 33](#)) by prompting thinking skills. She consistently holds out for “all the way right” answers (*Right Is Right*, [technique 16](#)). When Anthony answers you can see both how he uses *Habits of Discussion* ([technique 44](#)) to show he's been listening and how supportive his classmates' *Habits of Attention* ([technique 48](#)) are in making him feel confident as he strives to explain his own thinking. And when Michael crushes it, his triumph is in part brought about by clear Procedures and Routines ([Chapter Ten](#))—students know not to call out while he is thinking.

*Jessica Bracey*: Reading with her fifth-grade students at North Star Academy Clinton Hill Middle School, Jessica executes gold standard *FASE Reading* ([technique 24](#)), with her students, showing pleasure and skill in bringing the book to life. She *Fronts the Writing* ([technique 40](#)), asking them to respond in writing before they discuss the book. Her exemplary Procedures and Routines ([Chapter Ten](#)) mean they transfer all their thinking to the page and her *Silent Solo* ([technique 39](#)) means they're thinking deeply

and industriously in complete sentences the whole way. No wonder they're so eager to share out! When they do, you can see a combination of *Habits of Attention* ([technique 48](#)) ensuring that they listen well and *Habits of Discussion* ([technique 44](#)) building the listening skills that make for a real discussion.

Na'Jee Carter: I write about Na'Jee's *Cold Calling* ([technique 34](#)) in the clip extensively in [Chapter Seven](#) but note also his outstanding *Habits of Discussion* ([technique 44](#)): his students listen as well as they speak. His impeccable Procedures and Routines ([Chapter Ten](#)) not only help keep his reading group on task and make sure transitions are efficient but they ensure that the students not in his reading group are happily and productively engaged the whole time. His *Accountable Independent Reading* ([technique 23](#)) is super productive because he is so clear on the annotation task and this allows him to observe clearly how his readers are doing, but before he sends everyone off to read he *Replaces Self-Report* ([technique 6](#)), asking students a series of questions to assess their understanding of the task instead of merely asking them if they understand.

*Denarius Frazier* (Uncommon Collegiate Charter High School): I discuss a section of this video extensively in [Chapter Three](#), Check for Understanding. Denarius models almost every technique in the chapter, starting with Active Observation and ending with *Show Call* in manner that is fundamental to understanding the reality of how productive and enduring relationships are built in the classroom. But notice also how he moves to the corner and uses *Radar and Be Seen Looking* ([technique 53](#)) and a *Least Invasive Intervention* ([technique 55](#)) to ensure that everyone is attentive. And notice how his *Emotional Constancy* ([technique 62](#)) assists him in building a *Culture of Error*



([technique 12](#)) that makes students willing participants in the task of learning from their mistakes.

*Arielle Hoo* (North Star Vailsburg Middle School) asks her students to write at a key moment in the lesson about how they'll know a solution is correct. Notice the word "conjectures"—it's a great example of a formative prompt that not only makes it safe to be wrong but socializes students to think of writing as something you do to discover new insights, not just explain them. This is a key aspect of *Everybody Writes* ([technique 38](#)). Notice the *Silent Solo* ([technique 39](#)): Everyone is writing right away. Notice how the exemplary discussion she has, full of keen insights and technical vocabulary, starts with her, like Denarius, moving to "Pastore's Perch" and using *Radar and Be Seen Looking* ([technique 53](#)) to ensure that everyone is with her. Sidney kicks off the discussion (so well!) and the eye contact and pro-social body language she receives ([technique 48](#), *Habits of Attention*) remind her—and everyone else—that *what you are saying is important*. Next Sadie speaks, hesitating while using the technical term *coincidental* to describe two lines. Possibly it's the first time he's used this term. Notice how he persists and takes the risk of doing so. The Habits of Attention help but so do a larger nexus of Procedures and Routines ([Chapter Ten](#)): No one shouts out the answer or waves their own hand in the air or says anything distracting while he struggles for the right word. The sequence ends with students revising their original conjectures in writing, an example of the revision you can read about in both *Front the Writing* and *Regular Revision* ([techniques 40](#) and [42](#)).

*Sadie McCleary* (Western Guilford High School): Sadie's Pacing ([Chapter Six](#)) and *Means of Participation* ([technique 36](#)) are brilliant—perhaps the latter leading to the former—and I discuss them both at length later in the book, not to mention her *Board = Paper* ([technique 22](#)), *Turn and Talk*

([technique 43](#)), and *Call and Response* ([technique 35](#)). She's successful at all of these because her *What to Do* directions ([technique 52](#)) make it just so clear to students how to participate and be successful. Sadie's easy, warm, gracious style expresses loving accountability.

*Narlene Pacheco*: Working with her kindergartners at the Immaculate Conception School in the Bronx, Narlene is crystal clear on how to participate successfully through a combination of economy of language (see [technique 58](#), *Strong Voice*) and *What to Do* ([technique 52](#)) directions, which she combines with immense warmth. She's also great at carefully observing for errors (*Active Observation*, [technique 9](#)) while building a *Culture of Error* ([technique 12](#)), correcting mistakes without a hint of judgment or negativity.

*BreOnna Tindall*: Watching this class at Denver School of Science and Technology first led me to coin the term “bright mirror”—the idea that BreOnna is changing students while also letting them reveal themselves. She is both bringing out something that is new and giving students the chance to show what is already there. She begins with an impeccable *Turn and Talk* ([technique 43](#)), but notice how her system allows her to vary shoulder partners (next to you) and desk partners (across from you). All of this is built into habit and shows how impeccable Procedures and Routines ([Chapter Ten](#)) lead to a warm, trusting, and supportive environment. The warmth of her *Cold Call* ([technique 34](#)) shows just how inclusive this technique really is.

*Christine Torres*: You've already read a bit about Christine's teaching at Springfield Prep in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the Preface—the magic with which she brings *Format Matters* ([technique 18](#)), *Habits of Attention* ([technique 48](#)), and *Habits of Discussion* ([technique 44](#)) to life. [Chapter](#)

[Two](#) starts with a discussion of her preparation. To make the keystone I had to cut from two sections of her lesson—the vocabulary review and the discussion—because I've rarely seen a class where students participated with such effort and openness and her playful personal style combined with constant loving accountability makes this class sing.

*Nicole Warren:* This lesson with her third graders at Leadership Prep Ocean Hill Elementary Academy positively crackles to life from the outset. There's a quick chant that everyone is all-in on (Procedures and Routines, [Chapter Ten](#), will help you do this). Then it's right into a *Turn and Talk* ([technique 43](#)). She *Cold Calls* coming out of it ([technique 34](#)) before transitioning to independent practice. It's also *Retrieval Practice* ([technique 7](#)). The movement from each activity to the next is a model of the sort of flow that a well-paced lesson can build ([Chapter Six](#)). Notice in particular how well she *Brightens the Lines* ([technique 28](#)) with lightning transitions like “Tell your partner” and “Go to work!” as well as economy of language (part of [technique 58](#), *Strong Voice*). The tiny *Call and Response* ([technique 35](#)) of “Happy Birthday” leaves Crystal smiling. There's also top-of-the-line *Active Observation* ([technique 9](#)) and *Standardizing the Format* ([technique 8](#)) that allow her to know how students are doing and to build the positive and warm relationships you will undoubtedly notice.

*Gabby Woolf:* Reading *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* with her year 10 English class at King Solomon Academy in London, Gabby models *FASE Reading* ([technique 24](#)) beautifully as her students make meaning audible. Next there's a bit of *Cold Call* ([technique 34](#)) as she *Replaces Self-Report* ([technique 6](#)) with targeted questions to review the passage. She makes sure to reinforce that discussion starts with being heard by stressing audible format from *Format*

*Matters* ([technique 18](#)). Her *Circulate* ([technique 25](#)) is outstanding and her *What to Do* directions ([technique 52](#)) keep everyone on task: “Text in front of you, please.”

There's a great *Stretch It* ([technique 17](#)) in there too when she asks, “What are we imagining when we read the word ‘clubbed’?” “Neanderthal,” replies an astute student. It's a good answer and Gabby honors it by following up with more questions: “Why?” and when he explains, “So that links to the character of Hyde how?” The message is: The reward for right answers is harder questions, though his answer—he notes that Hyde has devolved—is a sort of reward too.

*Sarah Wright:* Reading *Esperanza Rising* with her fifth-grade boys at Chattanooga Prep in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Sarah proves that the best way to have students take pleasure in learning is to have clear procedures ([Chapter Ten](#), Procedures and Routines) so things work right and students know how to do things. Her students write first before bursting into a *Turn and Talk* ([technique 43](#)). Her circulation here allows her to overhear some great answers and she honors one student by *Cold Calling* him. Notice also how when Akheem reads his sentence, everyone in class is looking at him and showing with their body language that his words matter ([technique 48](#), *Habits of Attention*). Notice how the *Turn and Talk* snaps to life because she has such a clear in-cue for it, because students have practiced it, and because they know every classmate is going to join in enthusiastically along with them. Notice how the *Turn and Talk* ends quickly when needed because she also has a clear, practiced procedure for calling the class back to order. Notice how she has a system that she uses to let students celebrate one another's work and how, as eager as they are to answer, the boys don't shout out their answers; this lets Sarah *Cold Call* and give Akheem just the right chance at just the right time. The joy is

palpable, and the clear procedures, the structure, the systems, and routines are not its antithesis but part of its source.

## **BEYOND THE BOOK**

### **How to Access the Videos**

Access the videos in the text (as well the videos for all of your *Teach Like a Champion* books) at [my.teachlikeachampion.com](http://my.teachlikeachampion.com). Follow the instructions on the website to create an account or to add new books to an existing account.

Companion files to accompany this book can be found at [www.wiley.com/go/teachlikeachampion3e](http://www.wiley.com/go/teachlikeachampion3e) and at [teachlikeachampion.com/3.0/welcome](http://teachlikeachampion.com/3.0/welcome).

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