

FOREWORD

By Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli,
and Janie Scull

Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College* is a publishing phenomenon. Since its release earlier this year, it has hovered within or near the top 100 books on Amazon.com, in the same league as Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. What Lemov is selling is clearly in high demand. But why is it in such short supply? The sobering data in this study, drawn from an elaborate survey of education school professors, shed much light on that question.

Lemov's book provides some important context. His forty-nine techniques—culled from observing uber-effective teachers—seem commonsensical, even obvious. But they are precisely the nitty-gritty tips and practical tools that can keep a new teacher afloat in her first year in the classroom—and can make her much more effective much more quickly. For instance, when discussing “engaging students in your lessons,” Lemov details Technique 24, “Pepper”:

For decades baseball players have warmed up for games and practices by playing a game called Pepper. In a group of four or five players, one holds a bat, and the rest stand in a ring in front of the batter, a few yards away, gloves at the ready. One player tosses the ball to the batter. Without stopping to catch it, the batter taps it back toward the group using the bat; the nearest player fields it and, again, without stopping, tosses it back to the batter, who hits the toss back to another player. The game is fast, providing dozens of opportunities to practice fielding and hitting skills in a short period of time and in a fast-paced and energetic environment. Unlike formal practice, it doesn't propose to teach new skills or game strategy; it's a reinforcement of skills.

Pepper, the teaching technique by the same name, also uses fast-paced, group-oriented activities to review familiar information and foundational skills. A teacher tosses questions to a group of students quickly, and they answer back. The teacher usually does not slow down to engage or discuss an answer; if it's right, she simply asks another student a new question. If it's wrong, she asks the same question of another student, though sometimes the same student, always keeping moving. That's Pepper: a fast-paced, unpredictable...review of fundamentals with lots of chances for participation in rapid succession.

Within the category “setting and maintaining high behavioral expectations,” Lemov details Technique 41, “Threshold”:

The most important moment to set expectations in your classroom is the minute when your classroom students enter...The first minute, when students cross the threshold into the classroom, you must remind them of the expectations. It's the critical time to establish rapport, set the tone, and reinforce the first steps in a routine that makes excellence habitual...Ideally you will find a way to greet your students by standing in the physical threshold of the classroom—astride the door, taking the opportunity to remind students where they are (they are with you now; no matter what the expectations are elsewhere, you will always expect their best), where they are going (to college), and what you will demand of them (excellence and effort).

Parents, voters, and taxpayers—and would-be teachers—might well suppose that such tips and tools are exactly what aspiring teachers acquire in our colleges of education and other teacher preparation programs. After all, isn't the whole point of teacher training programs to take reasonably knowledgeable, caring, charismatic, and organized people and turn them into effective classroom practitioners?

So you might well think. But you would be wrong, at least in the eyes—and according to the priorities—of most actual education professors.

The pages that follow report on the first national survey of education school professors in a dozen years.¹ The key finding: A majority of the professoriate shrugs off the mission of transmitting Lemov-style tips and tools to aspiring teachers. For example:

- Only 24 percent believe it “absolutely essential” to produce “teachers who understand how to work with the state’s standards, tests and accountability systems.”
- Just 37 percent say it is “absolutely essential” to focus on developing “teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.”
- Just 39 percent find it “absolutely essential” to “create teachers who are trained to address the challenges of high-needs students in urban districts.”

To be fair, many professors also think these things are important—just not *that* important. What’s *more* important to them is forming “change agents”—new teachers who push back against school practices and resist modern reforms, reforms that have little to do with the romantic view of schooling that so many of Dewey’s descendents so ardently espouse. The professors see themselves as philosophers and evangelists, not as master craftsmen sharing tradecraft with apprentices and journeymen.

This is nothing new. Stanford University’s David Labaree, a respected historian of education, explains that as far back as the early twentieth century, school system reformers were pushing for efficiency and utility, while education school professors wanted schools to help individual children blossom and develop a lifelong love of learning. Eventually the professors lost that argument and the K–12 system embraced the efficiency movement. But this outcome cast education professors as little more than vocational instructors, preparing their charges to enter a uniform teaching force and school system—a system which eschewed the professors’ idealistic educational values.

And they didn’t much like it. As Labaree writes, “It was a job, to be sure, but not much of a mission.” So the professors clung to the “individual child” ideology, no matter for what the system was calling, and no matter what children actually needed. By assigning a higher purpose to their work—instilling in new teachers the romantic belief that every child’s path is unique—they sought to legitimize their own profession in the eyes of the public.²

1. That survey is Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson, with Ann Duffett. 1997. *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education*. New York: Public Agenda.
2. Labaree, David F. 2005. “Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education: An American Romance.” *Paedagogica Historica* 41: 275–288.

In 2010, the United States has grown very practical and very demanding when it comes to K–12 education. Measurable academic achievement and college readiness are the coin of the realm. So is economic competitiveness. Teacher effectiveness in the classroom is beginning to influence key personnel decisions. Schools’ failure to narrow achievement gaps may well lead to total restructuring, including replacement of staff. Families have more control over which schools their children attend. Elected officials and employers are watching schools like hawks. Technology is coming of age in education—and threatening to displace some flesh-and-blood instructors. And in a time of flat or shrinking school budgets, efficiency and productivity count more than ever.

There’s very little margin for error—and little space for romanticism. That’s why real-world insights and practical tips such as Lemov’s are in such demand. That’s why “alternate routes” into classrooms are gaining popularity. That’s also why criticism is mounting of traditional education schools and teacher-preparation programs. Americans now demand that new teachers hit the ground running—and continue running, dodging all obstacles in their path, so as to boost student achievement and help schools realize their learning objectives.

As you will see in these pages, most of the professoriate simply isn’t there yet. But there’s modest good news here, too. We find a sizable minority of professors that is both critical of standard education school practice and also willing to see their role as preparing teachers for the real world of today’s schools. For instance, about 40 percent of respondents believe that it’s “absolutely essential” to train teachers “in pragmatic issues of running a classroom such as managing time and preparing lesson plans.” We also find “adjunct” faculty members (versus the full-time, tenured ones) to be more concerned about teaching lesson planning and classroom management. Minority professors tend to be more focused on the challenges of high-needs students. And those with recent classroom experience of their own are more attuned to weeding out unqualified teacher candidates than those who have been out of school classrooms for twenty-plus years.

Some of the professors’ views are also surprisingly reform-minded. They favor tougher policies for awarding tenure to teachers, financial incentives for those who work in tough neighborhoods, a core curriculum that teaches the classics—even Teach For America. Most also assert that their institutions should be held accountable for the quality of the teachers they graduate and that teachers should be made to pass tests demonstrating proficiency in key subjects before

they are hired. And the study even identifies a 12 percent segment—labeled “Reformers”—that is strongly dissatisfied with the status quo and is agitating for change.

Not that the professoriate is ready to back everything the reform camp proposes. They are divided in their support of value-added measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness, for instance, and barely one-third want to see financial incentives for extraordinarily effective teachers.

Still, what’s clear is that education school campuses already contain some potential allies for reformers. There are cracks in the Ivory Tower—cracks that might be widened with a little encouragement from the outside.

This isn’t the first time we have examined the views of the education professoriate. In 1997, Fordham initiated and supported a groundbreaking Public Agenda report. *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education* surveyed education school professors at a time when Teach For America was cutting its teeth, the charter movement was crawling, and standards-based accountability was getting its learner’s permit. We wanted to know how professors viewed their role as teacher educators and what, if any, impact these new developments were making on teacher preparation. We learned a lot—much of it troubling.

Keen to find out which of their views, if any, had changed over the past dozen years and what they think of some big developments that have taken place in American K–12 policy and practice during that period, we engaged The FDR Group, led by veteran survey researchers Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett, who also crafted the 1997 study. They surveyed over 700 education school professors across the land and held focus groups in the Midwest, the Northeast, and on the West Coast. This report, like so many conducted by Farkas and Duffett, showcases their diligence, accuracy, and reader-friendly analyses. They’ve again done superb work and we’re grateful indeed.

Generous support for this project was provided by The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, The Louis Calder Foundation, and William E. Simon Foundation. This study was also supported in part by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Shannon Last served as our adept copy editor and House9 Design created the nifty layout. Thanks also go to Fordham research director Amber Winkler, public affairs staffers Amy Fagan and Daniela Fairchild, policy analyst Stafford Palmieri, and intern Amanda Olberg.