

## How 'Champion Teachers' set High Expectations Geoff Petty

What do really exceptional teachers do, that good teachers don't? This is a very under-researched question but we are beginning to get some answers. What makes brilliant teachers brilliant is not who they are, but what they do in the classroom, and some of the techniques they use anyone could adopt.

Doug Lemov works in America, and he went to some of the very best achieving schools in the worst areas of social and economic deprivation. Then he asked these schools if he could watch their very best teachers, and camped out in their classrooms. He found these exceptional teachers often used similar strategies, which were key to their success, but often under the radar of most educational research.

One such teacher achieved the top mathematics results in his county, but 80% of his kids claim free school meals, almost all were from minority ethnic backgrounds, and 90% counted as poor. Yet his students achieved a 100% pass rate, surpassing the results of others from privileged areas.

Lemov studied about 50 such teachers, and found that they used a great deal of Whole Class Interactive Teaching (See 'Teaching Today' or 'Evidence Based Teaching') with very high expectations and very high participation rates. They were strict but caring, and saw these qualities as two sides of the same coin, "tough love". (Doug Lemov (2010) 'Teach Like a Champion'. Jossey-Bass)

**These techniques each set high expectations. Separately the techniques are very powerful, combined they would revolutionise almost all classrooms.**

Lemov says that students should get very roughly 70% of questions right during such dialogue, arguing that 100% right means there is no challenge, and 50% right means there is too much failure going on. The teacher can of course break down difficult questions into sub-questions to help the class address a difficult point.

### No Opt Out

This technique deals with a student who doesn't know the answer or who gets the answer wrong. (Like all these techniques it can be adapted to situations where there is no 'right answer' though lots of wrong ones. For example when interpreting a poem a student is expected to give a personal response or opinion. But the teacher will expect this response to be backed up with reasons, particularly evidence from the text. All these techniques can be adapted to this situation)

Here is a bit of dialogue showing the No Opt Out technique being used to teach students how to calculate percentages. The teacher has already explained and demonstrated the process, and is now getting the class to calculate 7% of 320, with her guiding and writing on the board:

**Teacher:** What's the first thing we do with this one? William?

**William:** Don't know

**Teacher:** Carl?

**Carl:** We need to divide 320 by 100.

**Teacher:** Good, why?

**Carl:** Because dividing by 100 gets us 1 percent.

**Teacher:** So what's this first thing we do William?

**William:** Divide by 100

**Teacher:** Yes. And why?

**William:** So we know what 1% is.

So the teacher *goes back to the student who "failed"*, to get him to try again, and to succeed. This will only work of course if the teacher almost always goes back each time to any student who doesn't succeed with a question. Then students will expect this return, and so prepare their

answer. They will listen very carefully to the other students getting the answer correct, and to their justification of why that is done, knowing that they will have to explain this themselves in a moment.

You will need to use this technique with some skill if you are to avoid two problems: students giving incorrect answers, and students repeating an answer they don't understand. Let's see a teacher using No Opt Out while dealing with both these problems. It is a weak Level 2 catering course.

**Teacher:** Why do we store food in a refrigerator? Harry?

**Harry:** To keep it cool.

**Teacher:** Yes, and why do we want it to cool?

**Harry:** Tastes better.

**Teacher:** Well, partly. Who can help Harry?

**Alex:** Germs don't like it cold.

**Teacher:** What is the advantage of that? Susan?

**Susan:** Stops food poisoning.

**Teacher:** Why?

**Susan:** Because the bugs don't grow in the cold.

*....(remember it was Harry who gave the initial unsatisfactory answer)....*

**Teacher:** Germs don't grow in the cold. Okay Harry, so why do we use fridges?

**Harry:** To keep food cold so we don't get food poisoning.

**Teacher:** And how does the cold stop food poisoning?

**Harry:** Because it stops the germs growing. The cold does.

**Teacher:** Excellent.

Teachers often don't ask enough of these "why?" questions but without them students will not understand, and so will quickly forget.

Some supplementary questions that help these dialogues are:

'Who agrees with that answer?'.....often followed by 'Why?'

'Who disagrees?'..... often followed by 'Why?'

This No Opt Out technique has other advantages:

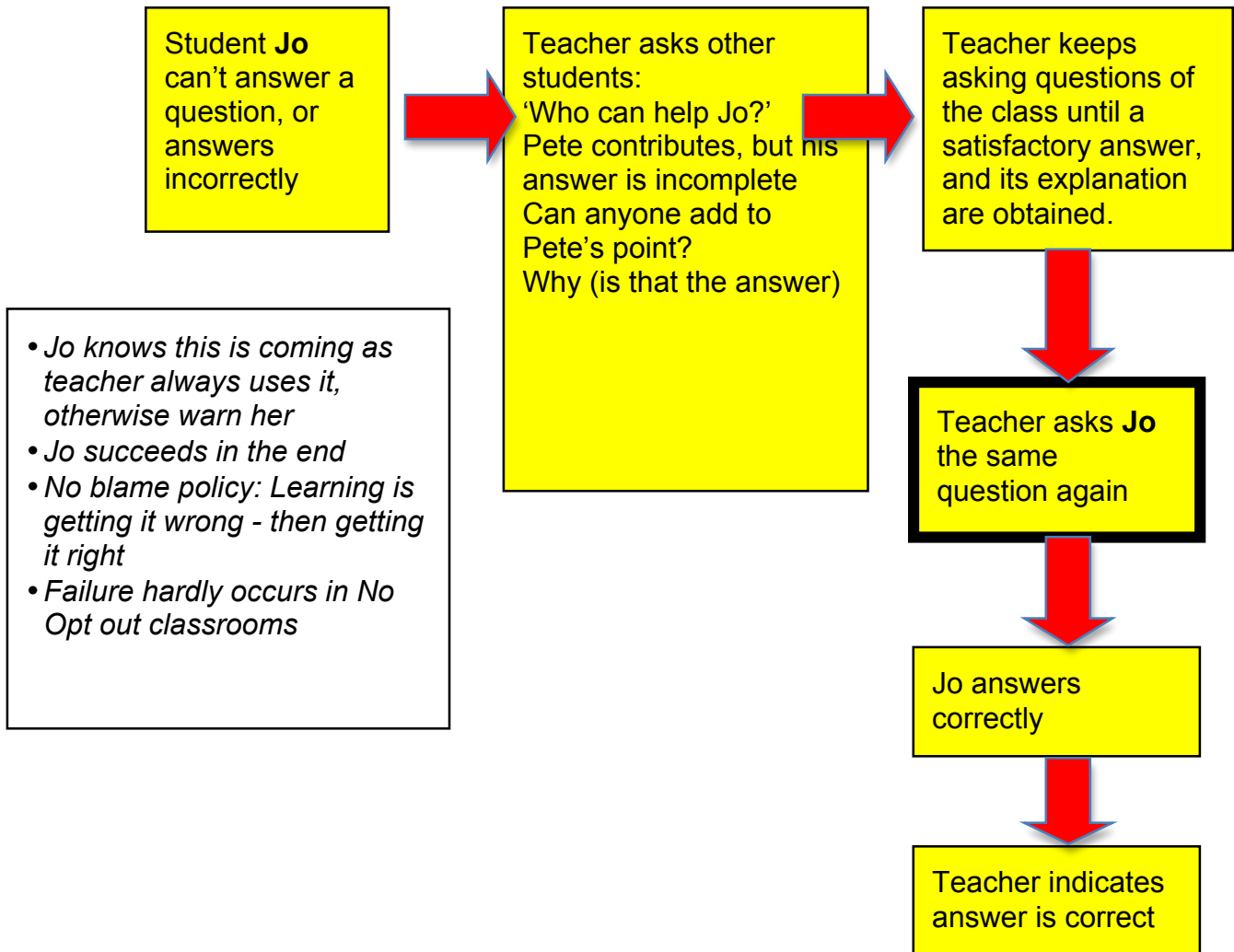
- Weak students end up succeeding, this fixes their misunderstandings, but also raises their self belief as learners
- There is a hidden message that success depends on doing the right thing, listening, and attending. The technique demonstrates that everyone can succeed if they try. Lemov points out that "Get it wrong; then get it right" is the fundamental process in learning, and this technique makes that happen.

"No Opt Out" embeds high expectations and could be used at any academic level and in any subject. But don't expect any new technique you experiment with to work straight away. You will need to get used to it, and so will your students. You could use it just in sections of your lesson, first warning your students. You might need to explain why you are using the technique, and how it works. Try it on a reasonably good class first.

As with any new technique, ask your students how they feel about it afterwards, and whether it would help their learning if you did it slightly differently. But don't give up on it if they tell you they don't like it because it makes them work harder!

There is a lot of talk about 'high expectations', less talk about how it can be achieved in the classroom. There is a lot of talk about ensuring all students succeed, and again less about *how* this can be done. Studying excellent teachers is beginning to show us how, but we need to do this so much more.

## No Opt out in diagrammatic form:



## Right is Right

This technique can be used in conjunction with the No Opt Out technique, or on its own.

The idea is that the teacher questions the class until it comes up with a near perfect answer given in scholarly language. Earlier answers are used as stepping-stones, and are gradually improved to arrive at the near perfect answer. Here is some text from Lemov's book, which he also provides in video form, which shows the technique in action in a maths class:

**Armstrong:** We're going to do a couple of things with volume today. Then we're going to practice volume and then surface area. Can someone give me a definition for volume to get us started? Mark?

**Mark:** Volume is length times width times height

**Armstrong:** You're telling me how we're going to solve for volume. If you say "length times width times height" you're giving me a calculation. What I want to know – and you probably know this too, Mark – is what volume is. What is that amount? Yeritza?

**Yeritza:** Volume is the amount of square cubes that takes up something.

**Armstrong:** Okay but I want to refine what you said – “the amount of cubes”. What should we say? What’s the technical definition instead of just cubes? What were you going to say Wes?

**Wes:** The amount of cubic inches that a rectangle of prism or a three-dimensional figure takes up.  
(Many teachers would have accepted this answer, or a previous one.)

**Armstrong:** Right, any three-dimensional figure. But I don't want to just say cubic inches because it's not necessarily inches. It could be feet; it could be centimetres ; it could be yards.....

**Wes:** cubic units.

**Armstrong:** (writing on the overhead) so the amount of cubic units that an object takes up... and Donte,I know you know the other word. What's the other word for “takes up”?

**Donte:** Occupies

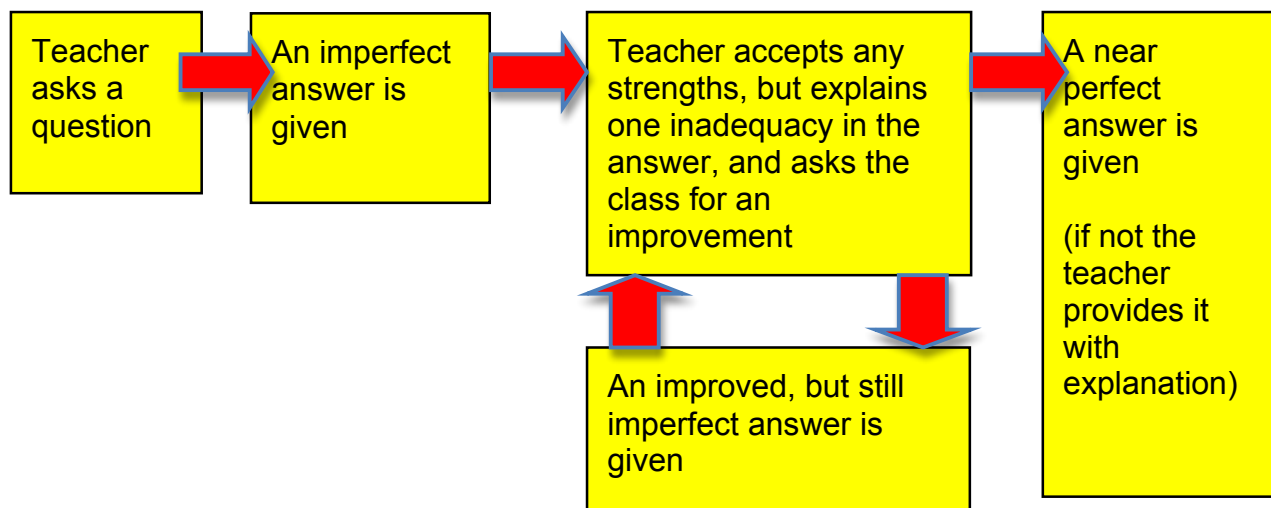
**Armstrong:** Yes. *Occupies*. Volume is the amount of cubic units that an object occupies.

(Is it any wonder Armstrong's students are among the top-scoring maths students in the state of Massachusetts?)

Above text from **Doug Lemov (2010) ‘Teach Like a Champion’**. Jossey-Bass

The aim is to get the students to do as much of the cognitive work as possible. The teacher only steps in when no-one in the class can do the work. Lemov writes about the ratio of cognitive work done by students compared to that done by teacher. The ratio was exceptionally high in his ‘Champion’ teachers.

**Right is Right technique in diagrammatic form:**



### **Some useful supplementary questions and techniques:**

*Who can tell me like a scholar? Can anyone say that using technical vocabulary? What's the maths word for 'taking up space?' Can you say that in maths? (i.e. in maths language)*

*And what else? Say a bit more about that. Can you develop that further? Can someone develop that? Who could say a bit more about that? Who can help here?*

*How did you get that answer? Why do you think that?  
Is there another way to get that answer?*

*Does anyone agree? (Followed by) Why?  
Does anyone disagree? (Followed by) Why?  
Phil, what do you think of Alice's answer?*

*'Punching the error' e.g. Student: 'They was angry', Teacher: 'They was angry?'*

Lemov's 'Champion teachers' often encourage dialogue within the class by thanking students who disagree with a class view: *'Thanks for disagreeing Tania. Let's give Tania a clap for pushing us to think'*

### **Teaching students to discuss.**

'Champion' teachers often teach students to use dialogue procedures such as:

*I agree with X because...  
That's true because...  
I would like to add to what X said...  
I don't agree with X because...  
I understand what X is saying but...  
I would like to ask X .....*

### **Cold Call**

Lemov's Champion teachers often nominate a student to answer a question they have asked, rather than take volunteers, a technique Lemov calls 'Cold Call'. He thinks this the single most powerful technique in his book. His teachers did not use it as a disciplinary technique, but saw it as a chance for students to shine. There was an upbeat and positive tone, and it was not stressful for students.

They used a 'pose, pause, and pounce' procedure. That is pose the question, pause for thought, then pounce on someone to answer it. If the question was hard they often asked student to write their own answer down individually during the 'pause' phase, this is a useful technique in itself called 'Everybody Writes'. The teacher reads over shoulders to find useful answers.

First questions of weak students were often quite easy, and in some cases even involved the student being given a warning. *'Mark, I'm going to ask you for your answer to the first homework question soon, get ready.'* Later questions for stronger students are more difficult of course.

Cold call is not used all the time, and the teacher signals its use in advance: *"I'm cold calling now"* so that students know not to put their hands up. Lemov says the teacher should plan questions in advance. This method uses up questions at a huge rate if you want most or all of the class to contribute, so prepared questions will certainly help.

Some 'champion' use 'Earn Your Seat' where all students stand, and only when a student answers a question correctly are they allowed to sit down.

My worry about Cold Call is that it does not leave a chance for students to discuss possible answers before presenting them to the teacher and the class. But you could of course ask

students to discuss in pairs before you Cold Call. If you do this, then it is worth asking students to explain their answers, so you know they are not just repeating a peer's answer without understanding.

Another worry is that some students who have just answered will think it won't be their turn for a bit, so they can go on mental leave.

There are many versions of Cold Call in my 'Evidence Based Teaching' e.g. Assertive Questioning, and of course Right is Right and No Opt Out can be used with it. Some of them involve the teacher saying 'thank you' for an answer rather than evaluating it as being correct or incorrect. Surprisingly, this technique doesn't appear in Lemov's book.

## One-word instructions

Teaching time is precious, and time can be saved with one-word instructions. The instruction would need to be explained first:

'**Voice**' - meaning speak up

'**Sentence**' – meaning please answer in a complete sentence. It helps students to get used to expressing themselves in complete sentences.

'**Grammar?**' – meaning can you say that with proper grammar?

## Call and response

Language teachers use this method routinely, perhaps we should all use it. It gets 100% participation, is more fun than it seems, and is best used for simple recall of really important learning.

**Teacher:** Class - Power is measured in....

**Class:** Watts!

**Teacher:** Energy is measured in.....

**Class:** Joules!

Etc

Students enjoy this collaborative work more than you might expect, and the teacher can usually see if a student is not participating.

The teacher signals that call and response is about to be used by saying 'Class' or 'Everyone', or non verbally, for example by holding up both hands palms towards the class.

## Normalize Error

The learning process is 'Getting it wrong then getting it right' so error is necessary, and students mustn't feel bad about it, or rib each other about it.

## Combining techniques

Clearly the above techniques could be used **together**, indeed they will be more powerful then. There might be a case for practising them separately first though, if only to get your class used to them.

My 'Evidence Based Teaching' has a chapter on teacher questioning with many more interactive strategies, 'Teaching Today' has a chapter on questioning too.

Lemov's book 'Teach Like a Champion' has many more strategies than those described here and is well worth getting. Many of the more 'schooly' strategies I have not described here.

**Which of the above strategies do you think you could try in your own classroom?**

## How 'Champion Teachers' Manage Behaviour

Geoff Petty

Doug Lemov's 'Champion' teachers work in secondary schools, for the most part with younger secondary students. Some of these techniques could be adapted for use with older learners however.

One feature of the Champion teachers' approach that struck me forcibly was that they did not ask students to behave for the teacher. Their approach is to convince students that in order to better themselves, to become the best they can be, they need to learn, and so need to behave. 'Don't do this for me, do it for yourself' is their mantra.

Rather than the teacher getting angry with students the teacher remains positive, but still sets very high expectations for student behaviour. And they get it. Remember, these teachers are working with pupils from areas of marked social and economic deprivation.

### Warm/Strict.

Lemov argues that most teachers see warmth and strictness as being opposite, but his 'Champion' teachers see no contradiction between them, indeed see them as mutually supporting.

### SLANT

The Teachers make use of this acronym which is a convenient shorthand for their expectations: **Sit up; Listen; Ask and answer questions; Nod your head to show agreement or understanding; Track the teacher or student speaker, meaning, look at the person who is speaking in the class.**

They make use of this by asking for it: 'Slant everyone'. You could of course devise your own acronym that expresses your own standard behavioural expectations.

### Routines

Lemov's teachers have explicit routines, for example for entry and exit of the classroom, collection of homework etc. Many have a task on the board for students to do as soon as they arrive in the classroom.

The equipment students need for the class is explicit. The purpose of all this, which is made clear to students, is to be quick and efficient so as to maximise the time spent on learning.

Routines are practised over and over until the class gets them right.

### Do it again

If students failed to complete a basic task well, perhaps for example they did not enter the classroom quietly, or when doing a call and response they were rather half-hearted. They are then asked to do it again... and again, until they do it right. The task is set positively "Let's line up again and prove we are the best reading group in the School."

### No Warnings

Champion" teachers don't use warnings, for example by allowing two warnings before putting a student in detention. One teacher explained that a warning gave students "a free pass". Instead the teacher nearly always responds with a consequence for misbehaviour, and the severity of this consequence escalates.

For example imagine a student is continually:

first offence: student repeats the action properly. (For example if a student has been calling out, he is asked to put his hand up and wait, if he has been talking he is asked to sit quietly – 'that's better'.)

Second offence: the student is asked to apologise

third offence: a privilege is removed, for example the student must leave the class last

of all.

Fourth offence: the student is given a task, for example tidying the classroom at the end of the lesson.

Etc

Lemov's teachers assume that their students have the best of intentions, and assume that their misdemeanours are due to forgetfulness, misunderstanding, distraction, or a lack of practice at doing it correctly. "Some people have forgotten to push in their chairs"

## Positive framing

Expectations are stated positively and in a forward-looking way, rather than negatively, or in a blaming way.

Not: "stop talking Tim"

But: "I need your attention.....Tim"

"Show me your best SLANT Charles"

Not: "Okay, listen everybody. Come on! Shut up!"

But: "I have almost everybody"

"I need three people. Make sure you fix it if it's you."

"I need two."

"Almost there."

"Ah! Thank you. Lets get started."

His teachers thank their students in advance sometimes. For example, just before working alone on a task: "Thank you for working quietly alone."

## 100%

If you direct students to do something - all must do it. One of Lemov's teachers says "I'm a stickler for 100%. If you accept 90% you are already on your way to 80%, or 70%."

When waiting for quiet, teachers might say some of the following to achieve 100% quiet.

"Track me" – meaning, look at me, even if I move around the classroom.

"Still waiting on everybody"

They will intervene nonverbally: for example by standing close to students who are talking, and giving them eye contact.

They might state a positive correction: "You should be quiet and ready"

"Show me your best Quentin (explaining if necessary)

They might praise good behaviour: "Looking sharp back row"

Give anonymous correction: "Still need two people"

Give individual correction: "I have John. I don't have Carol"

And show appreciation when they get quiet: "Much better!"

Some teachers use a count- down approach, 5,4,3,2,1.

**Teacher:** "five, four, Joe is ready, three, two, Bob is ready to roll, one, let's go!"



The students often get quite more quickly using this approach:

**Teacher:** “five, four, three,... and we don't even need the rest!

**If you find these techniques remotely useful you will benefit from buying the book, or lending it from your library. The reference is given below.**

**Geoff Petty 2011**

Further Reading

**Doug Lemov (2010) ‘Teach Like a Champion’. Jossey-Bass**

Champion Teachers make use of whole class interactive teaching and interactive dialogue, see: Geoff Petty (2009) ‘Teaching Today’ 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Nelson Thornes - see chapter 24 on Whole class Interactive Teaching

Geoff Petty (2009) ‘Evidence Based Teaching’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Nelson Thornes – See chapter 9 on Whole Class Interactive Teaching, and chapter 15 on dialogue, questioning, and the self correcting classroom.

