

# Finding some common ground

A US specialist in teaching training maintains that educators are not being taught well once they're in schools, reports **RUSS THORNE**

Imitation may or may not be the sincerest form of flattery, but for one speaker at this week's Education Reform Summit it's certainly a key part of a successful approach to education reform and teacher training.

Doug Lemov is a managing director at Uncommon Schools, a network of 42 free public schools in the eastern US. He also heads the Teach Like a Champion Group, which focuses on teacher training derived from the practices of high performing teachers, and is the author of *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*.

Uncommon Schools have had significant success in raising the standard of education in urban, often low-income areas, and for Lemov a teacher-centric strategy has been a big part of that. "Happy, successful teachers are better teachers, so we think a lot about the organisation from their perspective."

For Lemov, offering teachers financial incentives for high performance and seeking the top talent are not irrelevant approaches, but "they don't work to allow a culture that's better at making people better." It is, he argues, the "dirty little secret" of

education: that educators themselves are not being taught well once they're in schools. "The assumption behind giving someone a financial incentive to get better is that they know how to," he says. "But teachers often don't feel that way."

Instead, Lemov advocates a kind of teacher-led reform, in which educators improve by studying, analysing and adapting the techniques of their successful peers. "We always want our teachers to be developing and growing. We want them to see teaching as a craft that they refine."

This won't be achieved by drive-by training, though. "Something that schools often get wrong about teacher development is that it isn't built into the fabric of a school's culture," he says. "People call someone in to run a workshop and they think that's going to achieve better practice in their school."

Simply offering information on what to do differently isn't helpful and doesn't work, in Lemov's view, especially once teachers leave the training area and return to the complex challenges of the classroom. "It's something that you have to practice constantly and come back to."



Teacher development needs to be built into the fabric of schools **GETTY IMAGES**

He uses cold-calling training – the practice of calling on students in class who don't have their hands up in response to a question – as an example. "It's one of the things we noticed first about high-performing teachers. They ask students to answer questions or respond to what the class is studying even when their hands aren't up."

A typical training scenario looks at motivations for and methods of cold calling, along with analysing videos of teachers in action. Teachers then practice multiple times, first in very simple settings and then in harder ones. The idea is to let them build in new techniques in a controlled environment, rather than testing them for the first time on a sceptical history class.

"If you're trying to keep all the details of the Battle of Hastings and the activities you have planned straight in your mind, you're not going to be very successful with the cold call," suggests Lemov. "To be successful you have to have done it 10 or 20 times first."

To make sure ideas and techniques stick, the follow-up period is as important as the training itself. "Training is only powerful when it's embedded in the life of a school and when it's a shared conversation between the entire staff," says Lemov. To that end, staff hold each other accountable for trying new techniques.

The Teach Like a Champion group's techniques are relevant beyond Uncommon Schools, with teachers worldwide benefiting from them. Jayne Welsh, Reading Recovery Manager at St Alban's Academy says their sessions gave her "many wonderful ideas and tools" after attending a US workshop. "Well worth the 16-hour commute from England."

"A school's first obligation is to have great teachers, and the way to help them get better is to find high performers and study them, see what they do and adapt and replicate it," concludes Lemov.

## Classified Advertisement

# Stay ahead of the learning curve

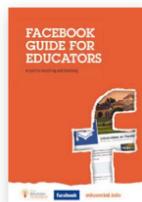
Top education leaders and practitioners share their views on the future of education and learning in these major publications and guides



### Education Britain

*Education Britain: the Journey to Education Reform* details the thinking of 35 education leaders and practitioners on the future of education and learning in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Contributors include: Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, Ruth Binks, Rod Bristow, Professor Sonia Blandford, Rachel de Souza, Dr Antony Edkins, Emeritus Professor David Egan, John Ellison, Leslie Evans, Professor Tony Gallagher, John Griffith-Jones, Jan Hodges, Hugh Howe CBE, Sally Hunt, Joanne Jacobs, Asha Khemka OBE, Lord Knight of Weymouth; Brian Lightman, Tony Little, Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall, Munira Mirza, Baroness Perry of Southwark, Stephen Pisano, Lynne Sedgemore CBE, Sir Anthony Seldon, Dr Elizabeth Sidwell CBE, Graham Stuart MP, Dr Bernard Trafford, Professor James Tooley, Greg Whitby, Brett Wigdortz, Hywyn Williams, Honor Wilson-Fletcher MBE, Rachel Wolf and Professor Yong Zhao.



### Facebook Guide for Educators

The Education Foundation was commissioned by global technology company Facebook to produce the UK's first guide for the use of the platform for teaching and learning. The Foundation worked with two schools – London Nautical and Wellington College – to write and advise on the guide.

We have also recently launched [www.edusocial.info](http://www.edusocial.info) to provide guidance and support a growing network of educators, using social media to support teaching and learning.



### Technology in Education: a System View

The Education Foundation in partnership with European Electronic and Samsung have published a new report on the future of technology and education.

The report was launched at the House of Commons by Matthew Hancock MP, Minister of Skills, Department of Education and Graham Stuart MP, Chair, Education Select Committee. The publication identifies emerging solutions to the barriers of using technology for improved learning in schools and shares emerging "areas of promise".