



Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America

By Jay Mathews

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When Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin signed up for Teach for America right after college and found themselves utter failures in the classroom, they vowed to remake themselves into superior educators. They did that-and more. In their early twenties, by sheer force of talent and determination never to take no for an answer, they created a wildly successful fifth-grade experience that would grow into the Knowledge Is Power Program (Kipp), which today includes sixty-six schools in nineteen states and the District of Columbia. Kipp schools incorporate what Feinberg and Levin learned from America's best, most charismatic teachers: lessons need to be lively; school days need to be longer (the Kipp day is nine and a half hours); the completion of homework has to be sacrosanct (Kipp teachers are available by telephone day and night). Chants, songs, and slogans such as "Work hard, be nice" energize the program. Illuminating the ups and downs of the Kipp founders and their students, Mathews gives us something quite rare: a hopeful book about education.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Many people in the United States believe that low-income children can no more be expected to do well in school than ballerinas can be counted on to excel in football, begins *Washington Post* education reporter Mathews (*Escalante: The Best Teacher in America*). He delves into the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and follows the enterprise's founders, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, from their days as young educators in the Teach for America program to heading one of the country's most controversial education programs running today. Luckily for many low-income children, Feinberg and Levin believed that with proper mentors, student incentives and unrestrained enthusiasm on the part of the teachers, some of the country's poorest children could surpass the expectations of most inner-city public schools. Mathews emphasizes Feinberg and Levin's personal stakes in the KIPP program, as they often found themselves becoming personally involved with the families of their students (in one case Feinberg took the TV away from a student's apartment because the student's mother insisted that she could not stop her child from watching it). Mathews' innate ability to be at once observer and commentator makes this an insightful and enlightening book. (*Jan.*)

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Review

"Mathews does a smart, respectable job here. Frankly elucidating the major struggles and roadblocks inherent in attempting to reform how underprivileged children are taught, he nonetheless leaves readers convinced of the truth in Levin's idealistic statement on his Teach for America application: "an educator could change lives." A grand example of humanitarianism in the classroom: Naysayers who believe there's no hope for America's inner-city schools haven't met Feinberg and Levin."--**Kirkus**

(*USA Today*)

"A vivid account of two young men who transform themselves from 'terrible' first-year teachers into visionaries."--**USA Today**

"The improbable story of how KIPP was founded in 1994 by David Levin and Michael Feinberg, two young Teach for America alumni in Houston, is thrilling and worthy reading."?Slate

"A lively account of the way two young guys with more passion than knowledge overcame bureaucratic and financial barriers, garnered knowledge from experienced teachers, and made those ideas and techniques core KIPP ideas. Mathews makes his book as entertaining as any novel by weaving personal and professional stories and by surrounding his two stars with interesting characters." ?**World magazine**

About the Author

JAY MATHEWS covers education for the *Washington Post* and has created *Newsweek's* annual Best High Schools rankings. He has won the Benjamin Fine Award for Outstanding Education Reporting for both features and column writing and is the author of six previous books, including *Escalante: The Best Teacher in America*, about the teacher who was immortalized in the movie *Stand and Deliver*.

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Carla Floyd:

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Rachel Wessels:

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