



Class Struggle

by Jay Mathews

By Jay Mathews | February 26, 2010; 5:30 AM ET

Training teachers like ice skaters

Here is how Mike Goldstein, one of the most creative people in public education, describes the latest trend in the recruitment and training of young teachers for impoverished schools by [Teach For America](#) and other hard-working organizations:

"The focus thus far has been on selection of workaholics who have certain traits, and stripping off the ed school stuff perceived by some as counterproductive."

That's pretty accurate. Goldstein knows the environment. Ten years ago he founded the [MATCH Charter Public High School](#) in Boston, one of the nation's most successful inner-city charters. Like other charter school leaders and Teach For America supervisors, he has been working a long time with the almost frighteningly motivated young people who have jumped into those programs right out of Yale, Georgetown, Stanford, the University of Texas and other selective colleges and universities.

He says he has come up with a different way to get those kids ready for their jobs. The teacher trainees he works with are members of the MATCH Corps, recent college grads who provide the all-day tutoring that is one of the secrets of the MATCH school's success.

What is happening at Teacher For America and similar programs is mostly on-the-job training. Bright but inexperienced teachers are tossed into classrooms full of students below grade level. They are given as many tips and pep talks as there is time for, but mostly let them figure it out.

Goldstein wondered if there were some way to more effectively teach them what they need to do in those classrooms before they start. He saw the worth of what we might call the ice skater model, in honor of the winter Olympics.

People trained in very complex skills, such as ice skaters, chess players, violinists, quarterbacks or surgeons, often do something called deliberate practice.

"A kid who practices 10 hours playing sloppy pick up basketball with his friends might develop less than a kid who has a focused two hours of practice with measurable, highly specific, small chunk feedback," Goldstein told me in a long email. "Similarly, a rookie teacher who simply student teaches or acts as an assistant teacher might simply be repeating the WRONG moves.

"Deliberate practice means (1) specific & technique-oriented, (2) high-repetition, and (3) paired with immediate feedback which includes telling the novice what to do.

"That's what we do: 'Do X. Now you say it, right in front of me. Tone needs to be firm: do it again.' High dosage feedback, after every day of student teaching. And feedback that is directive. Don't say 'Here's 5 different ways you could try.' Cut through that.

"This is labor-intensive but, we think, has big payoff."

On the MATCH Web site is an interview with one of the current MATCH Corps members and participants in the teacher training, Elizabeth Pace, Brown University class of '09. She describes what she and other corps members

do at the school each day BEFORE they practice their teaching moves. Teacher training is usually done on Friday and Saturday, and in the summer. Keep in mind that they live at the school on a floor of the building that reminds me of my basic training barracks in 1967.

"On a morning when I do not have breakfast duty, I wake up at 7 a.m. and am at my computer by 7:30 checking email and prepping for tutorials. The first bell rings at 7:45 and students can enter the building for breakfast and homework turn-in. When first period begins at 8:30, I head downstairs to tutor a repeating freshman in a one-on-one tutorial in Algebra I. From 9:30-10:30, I tutor three sophomores in English. After that, I have a prep period to grade papers and gather materials for my next periods.

"After a 30-minute lunch, I have a Readers Workshop group from 12-1 p.m. where I lead 5 freshmen in an hour of independent reading and reading skill-development. From 1-2 p.m. I have another hour to grade and work on my Administrative Assistant job. Corps members have 'secondary duties' of being either Teaching Assistants (TAs) or Administrative Assistants (AAs) and I am the AA for School Logistics. I am in charge of planning the student, room, teacher and tutor distributions for any classes and events that differ from the normal schedule.

"From 2-3 p.m. I work with my sophomore girls again – this time in Geometry and Algebra II. From 3-4 p.m., I am back with my freshman student to study Fiction and Non-Fiction. At 4 p.m., I have my last prep period of the day, where I often work with my sophomores again in study hall or plan/distribute logistics information.

"From 5:15-7:15, I tutor another freshman student one-on-one in the Student Intervention Program (SIP). Students in SIP are failing one or more classes and are required to stay after school for extra help."

Goldstein believes those daily efforts to strengthen the academic work of easily discouraged teenagers is key to the success of the new teacher training method. "We fundamentally reject the notion that by reading lots of psychology articles, a teacher can develop a meaningful, usable sense of how kids learn," he said. "Instead, to develop an intuitive sense for how kids learn, we think 1,000 hours of sitting next to kids and tutoring, 1-on-1 or 1-on-2, is the way to go. This frees you from classroom management issues, and gets right to the heart of actual learning and learning breakdowns."

Those MATCH Corps members are also getting experience in building relationships with students and parents, using methods that Goldstein and his team have developed through trial and error over the years. Goldstein said much of the teacher training method stems from the work of the school's founding principal, [Charlie Sposato](#), who died of cancer in 2007.

The MATCH teacher trainees also practice mastery of classroom management. Lack of that skill explains most failures of young teachers. "We have very specific moves," Goldstein said. "You can't even begin student teaching until you pass The Gateway -- simulated classroom environments with real kids executing coordinated small potatoes misbehaviors."

Goldstein is not saying he has created the New Super Ed School that will sweep away the big university campuses that teach [John Dewey](#), but not how to teach. "We're just claiming that we're trying something new," he said. "The MATCH concept in 1999 was originally a media-themed school, and that is totally gone, replaced by tutoring and AP For All. So I'm not dumb enough to think that what I'm telling you above won't change radically in the coming years, if we keep our eye on the results."

He is sending graduates of this experiment out to teaching jobs in charter schools of the No Excuses variety, places that pride themselves on gains in student achievement. Amy D'Angelo, principal of an [Achievement First](#) school in Brooklyn, called one MATCH trained teacher, Ellie Brown, "the best first year teacher I've ever seen." Jason Singer, who runs a high school that is part of the [KIPP](#) charter network in California, said another MATCH product, Laura Einhorn, was "light years beyond a traditional first year teacher," according to Goldstein.

Goldstein also asked visiting experts--all of them experienced principals--to evaluate new teachers in charter schools without telling them which ones had come from MATCH. His sample is very small, he said, but his graduates scored 25 percent higher on average than the non-MATCH teachers.

I think the effort of a new generation of educators to improve the lives of our poorest kids is the story of the last decade and of this new one. They all fail in some way, and then look for ways to keep that from happening to next year's crop of novices. That is the heart of Goldstein's method. It is raw, but worth a look.

Goldstein is not kind to traditional education schools, and neither am I, but I hope some of their professors apply their analytical skills to what Goldstein and Co. are doing, and see if they might learn something.