

## A Feasible Solution to Teaching's Quarterback Problem

Malcolm Gladwell's article, "Most Likely to Succeed," aspired to not only expose readers of *The New Yorker* and education leaders alike to a significant quandary ailing the discipline of teaching, but to also submit a solution. Implementing the use of analogy and a logical tone to convey his ideas to his audience, Gladwell took the position that it is impossible to identify those most likely to succeed as teachers because there is no way of predetermining who will and will not excel in the position. Due to the fact that almost nothing can be learned about candidates before they start to help predict how they'll do once they're hired, Gladwell proposed to test out four teachers to find one good one, one that has the particular mixture of abilities that culminate into what he called "withitness." Gladwell delivered many insightful notions, all of which, if implemented, would bolster America's educational system, as well as benefit society by providing its children with better teachers.

Gladwell stressed that there indeed exists a spectrum of teacher ability, with the very good teachers being vastly separated from the very bad teachers. Gladwell unequivocally asserted that reform efforts should be focused on hiring teachers with potential, instead of centralizing on other educational facets such as curriculum or funding. Above all else, a teacher who exhibits "withitness" would be of far greater asset to schools, children, and inherently society. However, as Gladwell ascertained, choosing such teachers is a daunting task, for there simply does not exist means of judging which candidates would display this characteristic; there is no way of predicting how a teacher will fare until he/she is placed front and center in a classroom of eager children, chalk in hand.

In order to solidify this argument, Gladwell identified that other occupations suffer from the same dilemma. The example most relevant and correlative to teaching's selection problem was that of college football. The author revealed that even the best college quarterbacks, statistically-sound in every aspect, have the possibility of performing poorly in the NFL. Gladwell, eliciting economist findings, portended that no connection whatsoever exists between college performance and how well one plays in the professional setting. Gladwell coined this predicament "the quarterback problem," which is very similar to teaching's selection problem.

So, if it is just as useless to judge teaching candidates on test performances and credentials as it is to judge NFL quarterback hopefuls on college success before they begin the job, what are some criteria for which they can be evaluated? Gladwell delineated several facets that can be used to juxtapose a very good teacher to a very bad one. Regard for student perspective, personalization of material, passion and energy, willingness to help, and individualized feedback are all harbingers of effective teaching. This is why past teaching reform efforts have failed to bring their intended changes into fruition: academic and cognitive requirements were focused on opposed to behavioral traits, or what Gladwell classified as "withitness."

Mr. Gladwell structured his proposal on how to select and retain teachers with the aforementioned characteristics around the financial-advice field, where financial advisers are

selected in the correct manner. The key to selecting qualified teachers should be exactly how Ed Deutschlander, the co-president of North Star Resource Group, chooses his advisers. Teaching standards should be lowered instead of raised because standards have proved to be inadequate representations. This would allow for the door to the teaching profession to be left wide open to “anyone with a pulse and college degree,” where three or four “good” candidates would be tried out instead of belaboring to find the “best” candidate. Because prediction is impossible in this field, Gladwell proposed that the current tenure arrangement be swapped for an apprentice system in which teachers are rigorously evaluated after they have started their jobs, not before. To accommodate this change, the current rigid salary structure should be exchanged for one where teachers are rated on their actual performance, and compensated accordingly. Following Gladwell’s proposal would take patience and a hefty investment, but one that would yield a highly skilled teacher force. Moreover, it would prevent the squandering of thousands of dollars on someone unsuitable for the job during that person’s first few years.

After breaking down Gladwell’s proposal into component parts, it becomes obvious that it is nonsensical to base how a teacher might do when none of his/her prior credentials have any perspicacity. Degrees, book smarts, and test scores all fail to predict a candidate’s future as a teacher. Instead, a thorough and rigid trial of a vast pool of teacher candidates should exist in order to find those who have “withitness.” This method would undeniably improve America’s educational system by replacing the bottom six to ten percent of public-school teachers that currently hinder it. Heeding the acumen found in Gladwell’s proposal would allow America to accrue a strong infrastructure of skilled teachers. Although it would be cumbersome on taxpayers, this proposal would most significantly reverse Gladwell’s observation that society places more emphasis on finding adequate financial advisers than teachers. America’s just-below-average ranking on the world scale can attest to the fact that the present “prediction based” method of selecting teachers is faulty. Gladwell’s proposal recognized that trying to predict who would make the best teachers is prejudice, for “prediction in this field is not possible.” It should therefore be clear to any leader in the education world that the present system is flawed, and that Malcolm Gladwell’s proposal is a pragmatic and well-contrived remedy to teaching’s very own quarterback problem.