

Recently I've spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of career I can see myself thriving in. Consequently, I've also compiled a list of jobs I could not fathom doing. Included are podiatrist (too gross), taxi cab driver (terrible sense of direction), and teacher. Sure, people are quick to point out that teachers get tenure, summer vacation, and solid union protection. However, these benefits seem like the least society could offer the people who are perpetually going to school to obtain expensive continuing education units, who are incessantly shifting lesson plans to accommodate a lawmaker's idea of a better curriculum, and who are for the most part, poorly compensated. In his article, Malcolm Gladwell suggests an innovative, stringent new method of hiring teachers to address what he has coined the "quarterback problem." Essentially meaning that for certain jobs, anything an employer can learn about a job candidate prior to his or her holding that position, does not necessarily predict how successful they will be in that job. Though Gladwell's proposal would be a drastic upheaval of the current hiring process, it is not the cure all for the greater educational reform that needs to take place in the United States so that education may be as valued as wealth and prosperity.

It seems as if over the past several years government funding for education has only put more emphasis on standardized test scores. Gladwell calls this "value-added" analysis and he states that over time this system will begin to reveal the subpar teachers. Using this method would be a cold, calculating way of getting rid of the bottom five to six percent of teachers that Hanushek, cited in Gladwell's article, says would make the United States an academic contender in the world. However, there are just too many internal and external variables to rate teacher performance so narrowly. In his article, Malcolm writes, "A teacher is not solely responsible for how much is learned in a classroom and not everything of value that a teacher imparts to his or her students may be captured on a standardized test." Just as Malcolm recognizes in the

“quarterback problem” that what makes a good teacher can’t always be measured in degrees and certifications, a good student can’t always be measured by standardized tests. What about the study skills the teacher taught or if a student has test anxiety? Rating a teacher solely on test scores doesn’t leave room for underfunded schools, outdated resources, school violence, or family life. Moreover, the decline in teacher performance could be a result of teachers being forced to teach to standardized tests to keep government school funding.

Students instinctively know which teachers are excellent and which are poor. I have been taught by both in my academic career and it is true that the best teacher I’ve had possessed what Kounin described as “withitness” and “feedback.” These are qualities that seem impossible to test and the underlying cause of the “quarterback problem.” Because Gladwell’s idea is a far departure from the present system and would not be cost effective or feasible in the current economic climate, making a modification to how teachers are educated could be a small step to educational reform. Gladwell observes that the teaching profession “needs an apprenticeship program that allows candidates to be rigorously evaluated.” Maybe the only way to teach the unquantifiable “X-factors” of good teachers is for teaching hopefuls to observe a good teacher in his or her element. Extending the student teaching period may be a step to cataloguing the attributes of excellent teachers. Whether observing an excellent or mediocre teacher, seeing the difference could be beneficial if the student teacher knows what to look for.

The most outstanding reason Gladwell’s proposal won’t work is money. Teacher salaries are paid by the taxpayers and asking people to gamble their hard earned dollar to find a couple teachers who have an unquantifiable “X-factor?” Not realistic. Deutschlander, the financial advisor who operates the hiring process that inspired Gladwell said “ ‘most firms sink between \$100,000 and \$250,000’ ” and often nothing of those investments come to fruition. Though

educational reform does need to happen in America, Gladwell's idea is either vastly ahead of its time or too unrealistic. It brings to light the "every man for himself" mentality that is so prevalent in schools. Parents care about the success of their child alone and the next kid is someone else's problem. This mentality keeps taxpayer wallets zipped shut when it comes time to vote for educational reform. Though voting yes on a levee for the local public school may help future generations of kids, if it's not helping their kid right now and it's raising their taxes, it's not happening. As Gladwell summed it up, "What does it say about a society that it devotes more care and patience to the selection of those who handle its money than of those who handle its children?"

Educational reform is an investment in the future but I don't think the reform needs to start with the hiring process of teachers. Although the football analogy Gladwell used may have oversimplified the issue, it did at least use a popular pastime to hopefully bring the issue to more people. And that I believe is the first step: getting more people to care about and value education again in the United States.