

Dan Shonka, a National Football League (NFL) scout, has followed the college careers of countless quarterbacks forever searching for the next star. Unfortunately, college football varies tremendously from the professional game, leaving Shonka to wonder “How will that ability translate to the National Football League...This is the quarterback problem” (page 1). This is also the educator problem; “no one knows what a person with the potential to be a great teacher looks like” (page 2). It takes unique individuals with certain characteristics to be impeccable teachers. Gladwell’s proposal in his article, “Most Likely to Succeed,” regarding selecting and retaining teachers has potential to enhance the current education system in the United States exponentially. He thinks that the administrators should run their districts similarly to a business. In this process, the employers would higher many potential teachers, filter them, culminating in retaining only the best. This process would not only increase the time required to reach tenure status, it would also reward the best employees.

Bob Pianta from University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education leads a team of researchers looking for those special elements required to be a great teacher. “Pianta’s team has developed a system for evaluating various competencies relating to student-teacher interaction” (page 4). In their research, the group has determined a few essential qualities: have regard for student perspective, offer support, and present concepts creatively. Remarkably, professors cannot teach these attributes, as they are not cognitive; the individual already possesses these traits. While the reformation of United States school systems calls for higher academic standards of teachers (page 5), the reality is soaring standardized test scores cannot determine a great teacher. However, Pianta’s researchers have found those key traits necessary for effective teachers.

One of the most important characteristics determined by Pianta's team is a teacher's regard for student perspective. Gladwell offers an example of a preschool teacher instructing her students on the alphabet sounds. The lesson appears typical aside from two squirmy girls in the circle. "One of the things the teacher is doing is creating a holding space for that. And what distinguishes her from other teachers is that she flexibly allows the kids to move and point to the book. She's not rigidly forcing the kids to sit back," said Pianta (page 4). The preschool teacher acknowledges that her students are four-years-old; thus, she permits her pupils to learn in the way most comfortable to them. Bridget Hamre of Pianta's team notes the difficulty in educating new teachers the idea of student perspective because, to an outsider, squirming children seem to be chaotic (page 4). Actually, it is quite the opposite.

Pianta's group also found that those who offer support embody outstanding teachers. They utilize a geometry teacher to exemplify this essential feature. Stereotypically, math teachers stand in the front of the room lecturing and writing examples on the board. On the other hand, this teacher wrote a problem, and then circulated the room offering one-on-one advice to each student encouraging them to try it out. Repeatedly he said, "If you can't we'll all do it," (page 5). As Gladwell previously stated, education-reformers often think that smaller class sizes can achieve this level of attention to all students. He also says that successful teachers, those offering support among other imperative characteristics, produce these results as well.

Finally, great teachers discover various exciting methods to educate their pupils. One teacher Pianta's group researched did a lesson on emotions about how one's face transforms to show how one feels. When the instructor asks her students how they can tell if someone is happy or sad, they do not understand. Then she asks if the eyes or mouth give a clue, and still they do not know. Repeatedly, she asks the same question growing frustrated; meanwhile, the children lose

interest in the lesson. Pianta's team as well as Gladwell knows that repetition is not repeating the same phrase but rather teaching the same concept in a different way. Lamentably, this particular teacher does not know this.

In the final analysis, Gladwell's proposal to treat the education system as a business is the best method in reforming American schools. Ed Deustchlander, co-president of North Star Research Group, a financial services firm, explains that last year, his firm hired forty-nine people, weeded out those who struggled in the field, ending with twenty-three apprentice advisors. "Even with the top performers, it really takes three to four years to see whether someone can make it," Deustchlander says (page 6). This approach has worked in the business world; therefore, it would be beneficial to try in the education system. Gladwell proposes that the education system adopt a similar system of hiring new teachers, taking into account the essential traits found by Pianta's team. With his suggestion, it would take much longer for teachers to reach tenure status, which ensure the best teachers remain in the classroom resulting in children learning the most possible.