

For the RECORD

A compilation of facts, large and small, about our community

- Average income needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Multnomah County: \$17,720
- Average annual Social Security payment for retired workers in Multnomah County: \$12,861
- Number of hours per week a worker earning minimum wage must work to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Multnomah County: 71
- Meals served to homeless and at-risk youth through New Avenues for Youth drop-in center and transitional housing program in fiscal year 2013: 63,428
- Percentage of youth who were stable when they exited case management at New Avenues for Youth in fiscal year 2013: 87
- Percentage of callers to 211 who are hungry who also need help paying the rent or paying the electric bill: 52
- Homes built by Habitat for Humanity of Oregon in fiscal year 2013: 75
- Families served by Habitat for Humanity of Oregon in fiscal year 2013: 127
- Average number of people per year who move from the streets to transitional housing through Central City Concern: 1,300
- Percentage of Central City Concern's housing that is permanent, not transitional: 65
- Number of unemployed Oregonians for every job opening, as of October 2013: 4
- Loaded guns confiscated by the TSA at PDX in 2013: 17
- Children who get meals from the Oregon Food Bank emergency food boxes in an average month: 92,000
- People deported from Oregon, Washington and Alaska in 2013: 4,525
- Veterans registered in Portland between 2008 and 2012: 35,344
- Number of new billionaires in 2013: 210

Sources: Oregon Housing Alliance; New Avenues for Youth; 211info; Habitat for Humanity of Oregon; The Independent; Central City Concern; Oregon Employment Dept.; Oregon Food Bank; Eugene Register-Guard; "Working for the Few" OxFam

Gladwell's U-shaped curve, a disability can be an advantage

BY MIKE WOLD
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Does lowering classroom size always improve instruction? Can cracking down on crime increase the crime rate? Would nonviolent resistance have been useless against the Nazis? What are the limits of power?

Malcolm Gladwell's "David and Goliath" is a potpourri of challenges to accepted wisdom, centered around two related ideas:

David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants

By Malcolm Gladwell

that past a certain point, putting more resources into a particular strategy — whether occupying a country or teaching children

— reduces the chances of success; and that even overwhelming power is limited by the degree to which people see it as legitimate. It's an odd and engaging interweaving of themes, statistics and anecdotes; it jumps between topics such as finding a treatment for leukemia to surviving the London Blitz in a single page.

Gladwell suggests that there isn't a straight-line relationship between resources or power on the one hand and outcomes on the other. Rather, it's a U-shaped curve: When few resources are available, any increase improves the result; then there's a point where adding more resources has very little effect; and, finally, a point comes where adding more resources makes things worse.

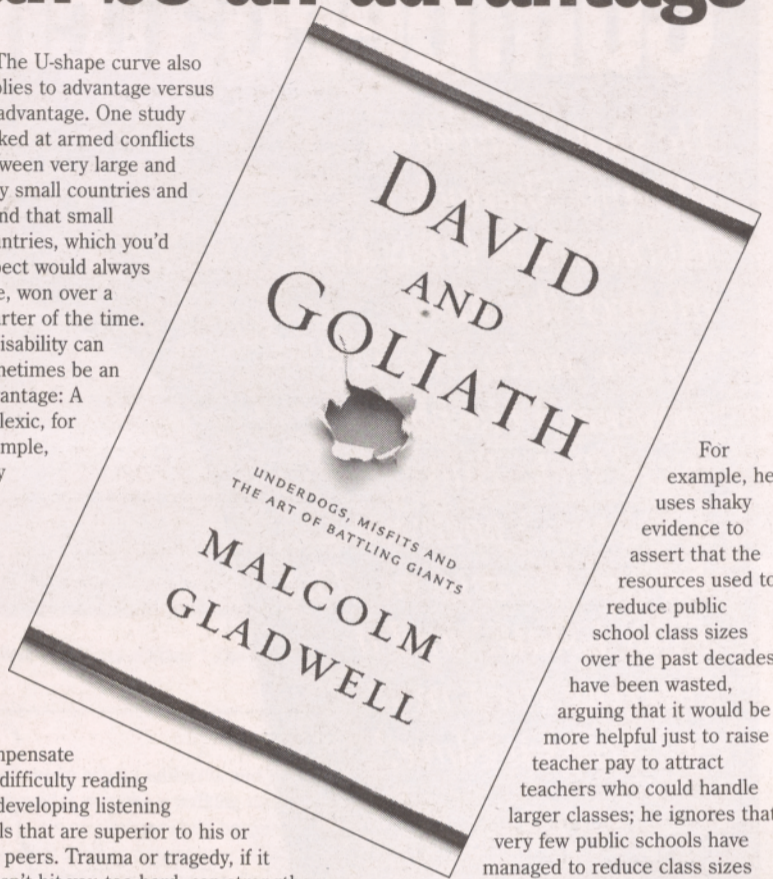
This idea is illustrated neatly by his discussion of the effect of "cracking down on crime" by increasing penalties and building prisons. Some policing would be better than none, but sending lots of people to prison starts to cause "collateral damage" as families lose income, kids lose parents and distrust of the police rises — all of which increase the crime rate. One study estimated that when more than 2 percent of the people in a neighborhood are in prison, crime would start to rise. And, as Gladwell points out, there's very little evidence that "tough on crime" policies work, partly because habitual offenders (like habitual gamblers) tend to give much greater weight to potential payoffs than to potential penalties. Meanwhile "three strikes" laws tend to jail repeat offenders at an age when the probability of reoffending drops sharply anyway.

The U-shape curve also applies to advantage versus disadvantage. One study looked at armed conflicts between very large and very small countries and found that small countries, which you'd expect would always lose, won over a quarter of the time. A disability can sometimes be an advantage: A dyslexic, for example, may

compensate for difficulty reading by developing listening skills that are superior to his or her peers. Trauma or tragedy, if it doesn't hit you too hard, can strengthen you. The London Blitz, rather than destroying the morale of the English people, fortified it: the people who weren't killed or seriously injured in the raids started to think of themselves as invulnerable.

Gladwell applies these ideas to three political movements: the civil rights struggle in Birmingham, Ala.; the struggle against the British in Northern Ireland; and the saving of Jews from the Nazis by Huguenots in eastern France during World War II. In each case, the ruling authorities' assumption that their power made victory a sure thing was, simply, wrong. In Birmingham, the movement succeeded by getting the police chief, "Bull" Connor, to overplay his hand in front of national media. In Northern Ireland, the British army found that massive repression increased Catholic resistance. In France, the Huguenots had already survived centuries of repression; they knew how to evade being crushed.

While the book is inspirational, it suffers from the broad range of Gladwell's examples and interests, as well as his tendency to draw overly broad conclusions from the evidence he cites.



For example, he uses shaky evidence to assert that the resources used to reduce public school class sizes over the past decades have been wasted, arguing that it would be more helpful just to raise teacher pay to attract teachers who could handle larger classes; he ignores that very few public schools have managed to reduce class sizes below the point Gladwell thinks would have negative results.

Gladwell acknowledges that not every tragedy or trauma can be overcome. The percentage of successful entrepreneurs with dyslexia is higher than the percentage in the general population — but so is the percentage of prisoners with dyslexia. Losing a parent in childhood is associated with a higher drive to succeed — but it is also associated with higher rates of mental illness and trouble with the law. Not every disadvantage can become an advantage; sometimes there's no sugar around to make lemonade.

Rather, Gladwell is talking about the possibility of hope, even where you'd expect there to be none. As he puts it, "It was not the privileged and the fortunate who took in the Jews in France. It was the marginal and the damaged, which should remind us that there are real limits to what evil and misfortune can accomplish. If you take away the gift of reading, you create the gift of listening. If you bomb a city ... you create a community." And if people experience suffering and despair, "one time in ten, out of that despair rises an indomitable force."



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