

Well... I finished reading Rafe Esquith's book "There are no short cuts" and I am not sure what to think of him, his personality, and teaching methods. At some points in reading, I think he is a great teacher who works hard and has the highest expectations for himself and his students, at other points he looks like somebody who desperately needs to be in spotlight, and looks like an arrogant and unrealistic crusader taking on administrators, coworkers, and everybody else who thinks differently. However, this essay is about most and least attractive features of Room 56 as a model of schooling and I will focus on them.

"I have extended the number of school days and lengthened the hours each day so that they have more time to practice the skills that bring academic success" (pg. 48). The most attractive feature in my opinion comes from one of his mottos "work hard, be nice" or I should say the first part of his motto-work hard, as he is not always nice in his criticism of the education establishment. Throughout the book we have so many examples of Rafe and his students working hard and putting long hours. On page 49/50 Rafe gives us his daily schedule for his fifth-grade students and we can see that their day starts at 6:30 in the morning and ends up around 6pm in the evening. They come to his class during their vacations and on Saturdays. An average student at the school will read for 200 hours each year while his students will read for more than 500 hours each year. As an athlete and coach who knows what it takes to succeed in sports, I really love his example of a basketball great Magic Johnson and how he spent thousands of lonely hours perfecting his craft through discipline and enormously hard work. Here, Rafe shows us that it is possible for the students from less privileged backgrounds to succeed in life and go where ever their dream takes them. Some students might have "a better start" because they have a talent or belong to the wealthy families and can afford tutoring, books and other means to be successful. However, Rafe and his kids show us that in most cases what really matters is the hard work. I think that we do have a big issue here in today's society as so many things we take for granted. As a teacher in public school I see it firsthand how so many kids take their education for granted. They do not have to work hard for it; it will be given to them. I think one of the reasons for the success in Room 56 is that although most of the kids come from poor families, they know that nothing is for granted and they have to work hard if they want something. Yes, they do not speak English at home, their parents also do not speak English well and work all day long, but they come from the cultures (Vietnam, Korea...) where one has to work hard to survive and parents instill good work ethic in their kids. E.D. Hirsch writes in his paper The Knowledge Deficit that "Employers now often need to rely on immigrants from Asia and Eastern Europe to do the math that our own high school graduates cannot do".

"I lived about thirty miles from the Jungle and had to be up by 3:15 am to catch the three buses it would take to get me to the classroom by 6:00" (Rafe, pg 68). There are a few least attractive features, but I would go with one that I find most attractive too-hard work. Surprised? Rafe works really hard, takes on three jobs, doesn't have private life, gets so little sleep, but what is the point in all that? Yes, we want to teach kids commitment and hard work but what is the price we have to pay? If it destroys our health and relationship with our spouses or own kids, are we really doing right thing? Rafe himself admits that his health was deteriorating rapidly, and there were too many days when he snapped at children but he

should have been more compassionate and understanding. Any good coach knows that for a great performance, a proper rest is as important as a good practice. Do not get me wrong, I do not belong to 8 to 3 type of the teachers. I coach two sports, come and support all the activities, volunteer and chaperon all the time, and spend a lot of my free time with the high school kids, but the word Rafe is missing in his hard work is balance. We need to teach kids hard work, one that is going to be beneficial for them and not hard work that might negatively affect their lives or their relationship with the others.