

Transforming Urban High Schools

Spring 2015
Tuesdays, 4:55-6:35
EDLED-GE 2240

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General Course Description:

The American high school has been consistently identified as the “tough domain” for both educational reform and research, and yet is a central focal point for reformers attempting to redesign schooling, and for policy makers trying to move education into the 21st century. Policies create new demands to raise test scores, reduce dropout rates, and now to ready all students for college and careers. Reformers call for high schools to meet new expectations, reverse patterns of low performance, incorporate new technologies, and/or achieve increased equity.

This course explores the development of new models for urban high schools and the challenges of transforming old ones to meet these new demands. We will investigate the past (the formation and prior “transformations”), the present (challenges of teaching and learning in current contexts that drive the call for transformation) and possible futures (initiatives of “transformers” in school reform, i.e. small schools, charters, middle colleges, digital literacies, etc).

We will engage issues of equity and accountability in high schools and the subdivisions within them (such as departments, tracks, and cliques), and develop our thinking about issues affecting staff, students, and subjects. A central issue will be the role of leadership (from principals, teachers, and external providers) in creating organizational conditions and imperatives to promote learning for students and staff, and in supporting, sustaining, and scaling up the change process.

Each student will choose one ‘transformer’ (past or present, local or global, failed or successful) as a case for systematic study over the semester, culminating in a **research paper** and an executive **summary** and **presentation** to share with the class. Other assignments will include ‘**briefs**’ on specific issues, and **an identification of a site** where adolescents speak out on what transformations are needed. Class members will be expected to contribute to the learning of colleagues, as we read and critically analyze each other’s proposals and reports, so regular attendance and participation are essential.

Required Readings

Books are available in the NYU bookstore—except for Conant, which you can find through Amazon or access through Blackboard.

Other required (*) and recommended (***) readings are available on Blackboard.

Conant. (1959). The American High School Today. NY: McGraw Hill

Foster, M. (1997). Black Teachers on Teaching. NY: Norton

McDonald, Klein & Riordan, (2009). Going to Scale with New School Designs. NY: TC Press.

McLaughlin & Talbert, (1999). Professional Communities & the Work of High School Teaching. Chicago: University of Chicago

Nathan, L. (2009). The Hardest Questions Aren't on the Test. Boston: Beacon

Assignments and Assessment

Written work will be evaluated on the basis of: 1) engagement with the relevant ideas; 2) clarity of writing; 3) strength of argument; and 4) use of evidence. To help build toward your final paper, there will be 3 small papers (briefs) on your transformer to get you started, to give you feedback, and to share what you are learning with your colleagues. Presentations will be assessed on how well you demonstrate and convey what you have learned. There will also be small assignments to locate information, or bring materials into class.

Assignments include:

1. A 'brief' (1-2 pp) identifying your 'transformer' (a provider, a model, or state).
2. Two 'briefs' (1-2 pp) on how your transformer deals with key issues.
3. An analytic research paper (20 pp) on an effort to transform high school. This can be based on primary (survey or fieldwork) or secondary (a literature review or historical study) sources. **This can be done alone or with a partner or team.**
4. A 5 min. presentation and executive summary (1-2pp) to share with the class.

Course grades are calculated based on:

Attendance/Participation	10 points
Paper	30
Briefs	30
Presentation	20
Executive Summary	10

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity. **Please BEWARE!** It is easy to copy and paste from a website. It is also plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities

Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

SCHEDULE

- Feb 3** **Introduction--The Problem/ The Press for Transformation**
Who were you in high school? What was your school like?
Downing, The Little Red Schoolhouse (hand out)
Youtube.com/watch?v=Yie4q8LscBs
The Transformers (hand outs)
- Feb 10** **Formation—Forms and Functions of High School**
What are—and were—the purposes of high school? For whom?
Reading: * Siskin, Historical Background & From Realm to Realms
 * Foster, The Elders (from Black Teachers on Teaching)
 ***Angus & Mirel, Failed promise of American high school, Ch3
Assignment: Prepare to present on one elder
- Feb 17** **Transformation I—The Comprehensive High School**
What were the 20th c problems? The solution? The scale? The problems the solutions created?
Reading: * Conant, J. B. The American High School Today
 * Foster, Intro to Black Teachers on Teaching
 ***Hammack, What should be common?
Assignment: Brainstorm/web search Transformers—who is out there? (Bring descriptions/downloads from 2 that interest you)
- Feb 24** **High Schools Today: Policy, Probabilities, and Problems**
What is the ‘probability’ of high school today? The problems policymakers are trying to change?
Reading: * Powell, Farrar & Cohen, The Shopping Mall High School
 * Roderick, What is the value of high school?
 * What happened to the Class?
In Class: Students: The Way We See It video; Deloitte survey
- Mar 3** **High School Today: Possibilities**
What could a high school be like? What’s stopping us?
Reading: * Siskin, Is the School the Unit of Change?
 * Toch, HighTechHigh or Julia Richman; or PTech
 * Meier, Central Park East
 *** Husbands & Beese (www.aspeninstitute.org/programresults.asp)
Assignment: 1-2 pp **Brief** on your transformer, with their possibility/ vision

Mar 10 The Students: Challenge of Adolescence
How do we conceive of students? How do they perceive school?
Reading: * Card, Ender's Game
 * Fielding, Students as Radical Agents of Change
Assignment: Locate a source where students speak (a website, a student newspaper . . . who are students today? What do they have to say?)

March 17—Spring Break

Mar 24 The Teachers
What's different—and difficult—about high school teaching? How could it be organized differently?
Reading: McLaughlin & Talbert, Professional Communities
 * Brown & Gray, The people are the company
 * NEPCT, Creating teacher incentives for school excellence & equity
 *** Hargreaves, Balkanization
Assignment: **Brief** (1-2 pp) on Teaching Demands/Support in your project

Mar 31 The Content: Teaching What?
All students can learn. . . what? What knowledge counts? How does the subject matter?
Reading: * Siskin & Little, The Subjects in Question
 * Riordan, Changing the subject
 * Gutierrez, Teaching Math
Assignment: Look at what your transformer says about content

Apr 7 The Common Core, CCR, & Digital Literacy
What do students read? Where & what do they learn??
Reading: * Campbell, PowerUp-
 * boyd, Why youth (heart) social network sites
 * Siskin, Context of CCR
Assignment: **Find a site of online learning, and 'learn' a lesson**

Apr 14 Leadership-- Demands and Distribution
What should leaders do? Who should lead? Who supports them?
Reading: Nathan, The Hardest Questions
 * Wallace, The principal as leader
 *** Riggan & Supovitz, Geography of Leadership

*** Spillane, Distributed Leadership

Assignment Due: Brief (1-2 pp) on Leadership demands/support in your project

Apr 21 The Challenge of Change, Sustainability, and Scalability
If at first we do succeed. . then what? Can it grow? Survive?

Reading: McDonald et al., Going to Scale
 * Siskin, Changing Contexts
 *** Hargreaves, Sustaining leadership

Assignment: How does your transformer deal with change? Scale?

Apr 28 The Question of Evidence
What, and how, are the transformers doing? What's the evidence?

Reading: * Fleischman & Heppen, Searching for Evidence of Promise
 * Miracle Schools
 * Bloom, Thompson &Unterman, Transforming the HS
 Experience ExecSummary, www.mdrc.org

Assignment: Find evaluations, or research on your transformer for in class work.

May 5 Models of Transformation—Presentations
Assignment: Presentation & Exec summary (1 p)

May 12 Assignment Due: Final Paper