

Transforming Urban High Schools

Spring 2013
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 ready all students for college. 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, designing 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 and sustaining the change process.

Each student will choose one ‘transformer’ (past or present, local or global, failed or successful) 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.

- Card, O.S. (1994). Ender's Game. Tor Science Fiction (or any edition)
- 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 topic 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 sources (a literature review or historical study). 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.

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.

SCHEUDLE

- Jan 29** **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)
The Transformers (hand outs)
- Feb 5** **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 12** **Transformation I—The Comprehensive High School**
What were the 20thc 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 19** **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
- Feb 26** **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, High Tech High or Julia Richman
 * Meier, Central Park East
 *** Husbands & Beese (www.aspeninstitute.org/programresults.asp)
Assignment: 1-2 pp Brief on your transformer, with their possibility/ vision

- Mar 5 The 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?)
- Mar 12 The Challenge of Adolescent & Digital Literacies**
What do students read? Where & what do they learn??
- Reading:** * Campbell, PowerUp-
* boyd, Why youth (heart) social network sites
- Assignment:** Find a site of online learning, and ‘learn’ a lesson
- March 19—Spring Break**
- Mar 26 Teachers Work**
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
- Apr 2 Teaching What**
All students can learn.. . what? What knowledge counts? How does the subject matter?
- Reading:** * Siskin & Little, The Subjects in Question
* Gutierrez, Teaching Math
- Assignment:** Look at what your transformer says about content
- Apr 9 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 16 **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 23 **Models of Transformation- Research**
What, and how, are our transformers doing? What's the evidence?

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

Assignment: Find progress report, evaluations, or research on your transformer.

Apr 30 Teamwork on Transformers

May 7 **Models of Transformation—Presentations**

May 14 **Models of Transformation-Presentations**

Assignment Due: **Exec Summary on Transformer (20 copies)**
Final Paper