**Transforming Urban High Schools**

**Spring 2015**

**Tuesdays, 4:55-6:35**

**EDLED-GE 2240**

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**Office Hours:** Monday & Tuesday 3-4:30

**General Course Description**:

TheAmerican 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 adolescentsspeak 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 NYUClasses:

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

## Other required (\* ) and recommended (\*\*\*) readings are available on NYUClasses.

**Assignments and Assessment**

Written work will be evaluated based on: 1) engagement with the relevant ideas; 2) clarity of writing; 3) strength of argument; and 4) use of evidence. To help build toward the final paper, there will be 3 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’ (provider, model, school 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 HighTechHigh

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 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 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](http://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

\* Raywid, A school that really works

**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

\*\*\* 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. copies for all)**

**May 12 Assignment Due: Final Paper**