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.


**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 (1-2 pp) 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](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.
SCHEDULE

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 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 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