Entrepreneurs and Innovations in Public Education:
from A Nation at Risk to Race to the Top

Wesleyan University
Spring 2013
Day and Time: Wednesday, 1:10 PM to 4:00PM
Location: Allbritton Center Seminar Room, ALLB004

Instructors:
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Office Hours: Wednesday, 12:00PM to 1:00PM (or as announced), ALLB 209

Course Description:

“On resiste a l’invasion des armees; on ne resiste pas a l’invasion des idees.”

–Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

This course examines innovations in public education over the past thirty years through the work and writings of entrepreneurs who advanced curricular, pedagogical, organizational, technological, and other reforms. This timeframe roughly begins with the release of the A Nation at Risk report in 1983 and continues through to today. The course offers a broad survey of the key ideas and actors that have animated widely-recognized efforts to improve public schools as well as a critical examination of these initiatives. Students will complete the course with a solid understanding of the history of such innovations, the theories that animate them, and the evidence of their impact. These topics are relevant to students who intend to work in public education as a teacher or administrator, as an advocate for reform, and to concerned citizens.

Course Requirements:

Readings:

The required reading list is designed to provide students with a critical window into key innovations through the work of an entrepreneur closely associated with that idea. The recommended readings provide students with a deeper examination of each topic.

Students must complete required readings each week. In addition, pairs of students (to be determined at the first class meeting) will be asked to select a week’s topic to a.) review recommended readings and b.) help facilitate classroom discussion for that topic.

Students are also expected to remain current on education-related news by following Education Week, Digital Directions, Industry and Innovation, and other outlets.

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Discussions:

Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions.

Writings:

a. Students must submit five weekly reaction papers. These reaction papers should examine a key idea or innovation covered in that week’s readings and be no longer than one single-spaced page. The papers should not be a summary of the week’s readings but rather a reaction to them, drawing on the theoretical, historical, empirical and other analytical readings covered in and out of class.

b. Students are required to complete a term paper/project. Additional paper requirements will be provided. A paper proposal is due a few weeks into the class. A first draft is due on a date to be specified after the term break. Final papers will be due at the end of the term.

Grading:

Grades will be based on a combination of the following:

a. The quality of participation in classroom discussions, reaction papers and demonstrated mastery of course material and concepts, and

b. The quality of the term paper, including the extent to which the paper was improved from the first draft.
Syllabus Summary:

Spring Term Begins (Thursday, January 24th)

1. What is Entrepreneurialism in Public Education? (Wednesday, January 30th)
2. The Progressives: Small Schools and Democracy (Wednesday, February 6th)
3. The Businessmen: Schools and the Market (Wednesday, February 13th)
4. The Autonomous: Charter Schoolers and Choice (Wednesday, February 20th)
5. The Activists: Schools, Community, and Poverty (Wednesday, February 27th)
6. The Standard Setters: Goals, Assessments, & Accountability (Wednesday, March 6th)

Break (Weeks of March 11th and 18th)

7. The Teacher Leaders (Wednesday, March 27th)
8. The Funders: Venture Philanthropy (Wednesday, April 3rd)
9. The Framers: Advocates and Policy Entrepreneurs (Wednesday, April 10th)
11. The Intrepreneurs: The State’s Roles and Responsibilities (Wednesday, April 24th)
12. The Scientists: Cognitive Science & Learning (Wednesday, May 1st)

Last Day of Spring Term (Wednesday May 8th)
Required Texts:


Readings and Calendar: *(subject to change)*

† Indicates available online.
1. **What is Entrepreneurialism in Public Education?** (Wednesday, January 30th)

Questions to consider: *Who controls public education, who should, and how do they do so? What are the aims of public education? How are they decided? Who does, doesn’t, should, and shouldn’t deliver public education?*

*What is entrepreneurship in public education? What counts as an innovation? What roles do, can, and should entrepreneurs play in the control, aims, and delivery of public education?*

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


j. “A Nation at Risk: An Imperative for Educational Reform” (1983).†


m. Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review*, Dec (1962).†


2. **The Progressives: Small Schools and Democracy** (*Wednesday, February 6th*)

Questions to consider: What resources and conditions do innovators need to innovate in public education? What institutional, cultural, and political conditions support and impede entrepreneurs, and should they? How can good ideas “scale-up”? What are the characteristics of effective schools?

**Required Readings:**


d. Anthony Bryk, “Organizing Schools for Improvement,” *Phi Delta Kappa* (April, 2010). † (SKIM)


**Recommended Readings:**


o. Mike Klonsky, “Was the Annenberg Challenge a “total failure”?” (2008). †
3. The Businessmen: Schools and the Market (Wednesday, February 13th)

Questions to consider: Who delivers public education? Who should? What is the case for profit-seeking actors in the delivery of education? What is the case against it? Are certain types of services better provided through the market than others? What objectives are served through the market? What objectives are not? To what extent do the assumptions of market theory apply to education? To what extent do schools “take” preferences versus “make” them?

Required Readings:

a. Learning Matters/PBS Frontline “Public Schools, Inc.”(2003)†(YouTube)
c. David F. Labaree, “No Exit: Public Education as an Inescapably Public Good,” in Larry Cuban and Dorothy Shipps, eds. Reconstructing the Common Good in Education, (pp. 110-129).†

Recommended Readings:

4. The Autonomous: Charter Schoolers and Choice (Wednesday, February 20th)

Questions to consider: How is the “publicness” or “privateness” of an innovation determined? What is necessary for success? What is sufficient for success? What objectives has the charter sector served? What unintended consequences have resulted?

Required:


Recommended:


p. Christina Clark Tuttle, “Student Characteristics and Achievement in 22 KIPP Middle Schools,” (2010).†


5. The Activists: Schools, Community, and Poverty (Wednesday, February 27th)

Questions to consider: What should be expected of public schools versus other governmental agencies? How are expectations articulated and assigned?

Required:

b. Helen Zelon, “Hope or Hype in Harlem,” City Limits, (March 2010).† (ALL)

Recommended:

k. Richard Rothstein, “Equalizing Opportunity: Dramatic Differences in Children’s Home Life and Health Mean That Schools Can’t Do It Alone,” American Educator, (Summer 2009).†
m. Richard D. Kahlenberg, All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice, (2001)

Questions to consider: Who decides what children should learn? Who should? How are the interests of parents reconciled with the interests of the state? What are the intended and unintended consequences of a standard? How do standards change, and by whom?

Required:

a. Visit the Core Knowledge Foundation at http://www.coreknowledge.org/.
f. The Albert Shanker Institute, “A Call for Common Content: Core Curriculum Must Build a Bridge from Standards to Achievement,” (2011). (ALL)
g. “Closing the Door on Innovation: Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America,” (2011). (ALL)

Recommended:

BREAK (Weeks of March 11th and 18th)

Recommended:

7. **The Teacher Leaders** (*Wednesday, March 27th*)

Questions to consider: *What are the attributes of a profession? How does teaching meet or not meet these attributes? Are these attributes worth pursuing? How can they be pursued in a publicly-controlled system of education? How does the organization of schooling promote or impede teacher professionalism?*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


o. Doug McAdam, “Assessing the Effects of Voluntary Youth Service: The Case of Teach for America,” (2009). †


8. The Fun-ders: Venture Philanthropy (Wednesday, April 3rd)

Questions to consider:

What is the impact of philanthropy on school reform? On innovation? Are the two different? How is this impact measured? To whom are funders accountable? To what extent does history and evidence inform their grantmaking?

Required:


d. Sarah Reckhow, “Let’s All Grant Together Now,” Education Week, (October 2012)†(ALL)


Recommended:


(Wednesday, April 10th)

Questions to consider: Who sets the education agenda? Why do some ideas gain more currency than others? What “face” of public education dominates the current agenda? How does the agenda change?

Required:


Recommended:

10. The Technologists: On-Line Learning & Educational Technology (Wed. April 17th)

Questions to consider: To what extent can education be “disrupted” by technology? To what extent should it? What objectives are served by technology? What aren’t?

Required:

a. Watch Salman Kahn’s TED Talk “Let’s Use Video to Reinvent Education,” at www.ted.com/speakers/salman_kahn.html (ALL)
c. Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn, “How Do We Transform Our Schools,” (2008).† (ALL)
d. Education Week’s Digital Directions website and quarterly magazines at http://www.edweek.org/dd/?intc=thed (SELECTED READINGS)

Recommended:

g. Louis V. Gerstner, Roger D. Semerad, and Denis P. Doyle, Reinventing Education: Entrepreneurship in America’s Public Schools, Plume Books (1995).
j. Take a lesson at Khan Academy: http://www.khanacademy.org/.
11. The Intrepreneurs: The State’s Roles and Responsibilities (Wednesday, April 24th)

Questions to consider: What are the competing paradigms regarding the role of the state in the delivery of public education? How do the paradigms inform school reform efforts today? Is entrepreneurial activity more welcome in one paradigm versus another, and does it matter?

Required:


Recommended:


12. The Scientists: Cognitive Science & Learning (Wednesday, May 1st)

Questions to consider: To what extent is the work of school reformers and entrepreneurs informed by, supportive of, or at odds with the most cutting-edge research into cognition and learning?

Required:


-OR-


Recommended:


Questions to consider: What’s an entrepreneur to do? What’s an activist to do? What’s an educator to do? What’s a parent to do? What’s a policymaker to do? What’s a funder to do?

Required:


Recommended:


g. Mike Goldstein, “Revisiting Good To Great: What Happened To Those 11 Companies? Hmmm…..” (2011).†

Wednesday May 8th: Last Day of Spring Term