Developing Effective Interventions and School Reforms for Children Facing Risks  
Winter 2017  

Graduate School of Education, GSE-H310W  
Kennedy School of Government, SUP-425M  

January 3-13, 2017  
1p-4p  
Larsen G06  

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Course Overview  
How can we develop more effective interventions for children facing risks? This module addresses this question with a focus on children in poverty and children suffering social and emotional risks. Students’ primary work will be to develop a proposal for an intervention that they will then present to program or school leaders. Students may select an intervention designed to improve students’ academic performance; to reduce children’s social or emotional risks; or to promote social, emotional, or moral development. The module will consider not only whether these initiatives ameliorate deficits and troubles, but whether they nurture strengths and resiliency; new models of resiliency will also be examined. Attention will be given to the different sources and different expressions of risk and resilience across race, class, and culture. For each of the interventions, we will explore several questions: How convinced are we – based on the available evidence – that the intervention will, in fact, be effective? In what sense is the intervention effective? For example, what kinds of children are helped by these interventions, how much are they helped, and who is left behind? What is the “theory of change,” and what are the major ingredients of the intervention? What are the factors, including political factors that determine whether a program or school leader supports an intervention? How can interventions best be sustained over time? What determines
whether interventions can be effectively scaled up? Classes will be a combination of discussion, lectures, and guest speakers involved in interventions, but will also be devoted to students presenting their intervention proposals at various stages.

**Class Meetings**
If students cannot attend these sessions, they are required to listen to an audiotape of the session before the next class. Sections will be arranged.

**Readings**
There are no required texts. Required readings are available through iPa©, online or on reserve, as noted in the syllabus.

**Course Requirements**
In addition to the required readings, all students are required to present, either alone or in a group, an intervention to a program or school leader. Students will also be required to give each other feedback on their interventions as they’re being developed.

Grades will be based primarily on the quality of students’ presentations. Strong class participation can boost students’ grades.

**Class Schedule**

[READINGS TO BE UPDATED]

**January 3: Class 1**

**Understanding “Risk” and Poverty as a Risk Factor**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Study Questions**

1. What does it mean to be “at-risk” in childhood and how are academic and emotional risks related—and unrelated—to economic class?
2. What kinds of poverty-related problems are most likely to affect children’s school performance?
3. How do the causes and consequences of academic and emotional risks differ in low-income versus middle and upper class communities?
4. What do these different types of causes and consequences mean for interventions?

**January 4: Class 2**

Resilience, the Debate about “Grit” and What Makes an Intervention Effective?

**Required Readings**


Resources on Grit and Perseverance, (2016), [https://www.edutopia.org/article/grit-resources](https://www.edutopia.org/article/grit-resources)


[Note: The following Luther & Brown article is dense, you may want to skim for key points.]

Recommended Reading

Study Questions
1. What conceptions of resilience are most faithful to the dynamics and complexity of children's development?
2. What conceptions of resilience are most useful in the design of school and community interventions?
3. Is “grit’ a useful concept for improving academic performance in schools and community programs?
4. What are some of the different ways that those involved in school and community interventions define an effective intervention? How should “effectiveness” be defined?
5. What are the key elements of effective interventions?

January 5: Class 3
School-Community Partnerships and Comprehensive School/Community Interventions: The Pros and Cons

Required Readings
Dobbie, Will and Fryer, Roland G. (2009). Are high-quality schools enough to close the achievement gap? Evidence from a bold social experiment in Harlem. Harvard University. (iPa®)


Canada, G., Harlem Children's Zone website: http://www.hcz.org/

= priority readings

**Recommended Reading**


**Study Questions**
1. What are the potential advantages and drawbacks of school-community partnerships and school-linked services?
2. What strategies are likely to increase the advantages and reduce the drawbacks?
3. What kinds of services and supports are likely to have the greatest impact on academic achievement?
4. What are the potential advantages and drawbacks of comprehensive interventions?
5. Is the Harlem Children’s Zone an effective model for alleviating risks and promoting resilience?
   What are the challenges to replicating HCZ?

**January 6: Class 4**

**Funding**

**No Readings**

**Study Questions**
1. How do funders tend to think about and define effective interventions for children facing risks?
2. To what extent do funders tend to be reactive to current thinking about school reform and effective interventions and to what extent do they influence current thinking?
3. What are funders both explicit and more tacit criteria for funding interventions?

**January 9: Class 5**

**Scaling and Sustaining Interventions**

**Required Readings**


= priority readings

Study Questions
1. How effective are typical efforts to scale-up successful interventions? What commonly happens to strong practices when they are introduced to other settings?
2. What are the obstacles to replicating and scaling up interventions effectively?
3. What lessons can be learned from successful replication efforts?
4. Why is it so commonly difficult to sustain interventions?
5. What are effective strategies for sustaining interventions?

January 10: Class 6
Practice Presentations

January 11, 12 & 13: Classes 7, 8 & 9
Presentations