



It's game time today for me – I am teaching a new course at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and today is the first meeting of the new course. The course is named “Remixing Education: Innovations in Blending K12, College and Career Pathways.” I have the pre-game butterflies that I should have – I want the course to go well for the pioneering students and to help me move my thinking forward at the cutting edge of my pursuit of education innovation.

I want to share with you, my network of colleagues, friends, allies and former students from the course I have taught for more than a decade at HGSE, my reasons for being excited about this. Getting the opportunity to teach at HGSE starting more than a decade ago (thanks for believing in me, former Dean Kathy McCartney) was revelatory for me. I realized that in addition to whatever value I could provide to students, clearly the right top priority for any course, I too got a lot out of the process. When your mind is on fire about a topic, getting to refine how you describe it and sharing it with others just stokes you up even more and improves your own knowledge and thinking. And this new course adds some new challenges and opportunities for me too. Here are my top four reasons that I feel like the legendary Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy, who would say to his team in the locker room before every game – *Where else would you rather be than right here, RIGHT NOW?!?!*

Reason Number 1– *I think the topic on which I am teaching – Education Remixing – is one of the most exciting and important topics on which I have worked in my education policy and innovation career.*

I define Education Remixing as the embedding into a traditional K12 or college pathway of an authentic learning and practice strand from a field outside of that core education pathway. I cite three examples:

- Early College High School where traditionally underserved high school students take significant amounts of college courses while still in high school;
- Youth Apprenticeships where high school students work as paid apprentices in companies for 2, 3 or even 4 days a week while continuing some high school studies; and
- Coop Colleges where college students undertake as many as three, six-month, full-time paid coop placements in workplaces where they are fully part of the employers' teams.

Each of these reflect education remixing that is deeply silo-crossing to gain the benefits.

The core premises of the course are (1) the “college and career readiness” paradigm that has underlain our era has failed to deliver the college and career success we have sought, especially for the students and populations we have historically underserved; and (2) remixing education is an innovation in approach that I believe can make a significant positive impact on this goal but demands more and different from our education systems. I think the former is obviously true and has become clearer as our state longitudinal systems have allowed us to see outcomes better. For example, in Massachusetts, difference in college success across lines of difference in race and socioeconomic status are huge and troubling – our most recent longitudinal data shows that Whites, Asian and non-low-income students are all about 50% likely to earn a college degree within six years of their high school graduation while Blacks, Hispanic and low-income students are all mired around 20-25%. These are morally unacceptable gaps and are a growing barrier to our economic health and success as well.

My own experience with “remixing education” comes from my work on Early College High Schools, the top priority I have had over my eight years as Chair of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. I have had the incredibly rewarding experience of helping catalyze, in partnership with leaders from across the K12 and Higher Ed silos and fueled by support and action from Governors and the Legislature, a new policy regime in Massachusetts that created enabling conditions and financial support for willing partnerships of a college and a high school to form a qualifying Early College High School. The resulting state-designated Early Colleges primarily target students who are low-income, first gen and of color and offer them the opportunity, with strong academic, social-emotional and guidance support, to earn significant amounts of college credit while they are still in high school taking thoughtful sequences of courses offered by the partner college that count towards degrees at both levels.

What’s important is that it has been working really well. It has tapped into local values and motivations far more successfully than any other education innovation I have seen with 50 such partnerships formed now across our state serving about 7,000 high school students this Fall after just five years. And most excitingly, we have worked to ensure we track impact from the start and the data is very encouraging – students who participate in Early Colleges are considerably more likely to matriculate to college right after they graduate and to persist to a second year of college (a strong predictor of likelihood of eventual successful graduation). EC participants are about 15 percentage points more likely to clear these hurdles compared to well-matched controls with the same demographics, baseline state MCAS test scores, attendance rates and so on and attending comparable high schools. These gains are as large for the subsets of students of color and low-income students and among students across the spectrum of baseline academic achievement from failing 8th grade tests to reaching advanced levels. There is always room for improvement, not every program is equally effective and we have a long way to go to reach the scale we need to bend the overall curves in our state, but this is as positive, robust and encouraging a set of progress measures as I have ever seen in education. And it replicates

similar successes across the over 1,000 Early Colleges in dozens of US states that have emerged over the past couple of decades.

At first, I thought I would teach my new course just on Early College. But as I thought about it more, I realized, in a big aha moment for me, that Early College is one of several different innovative approaches to education that I dub “remixing education.” Inspired by Early College and college and career pathway thought leader Jobs for the Future’s (JFF) conceptual vision they call The Big Blur, I started to think harder about the broader idea of creating hybrid, remixed education offerings that mix in a strand of very different activity and learning for students into a traditional form of education. Suddenly, I saw a real commonality across at least three such remixes – Early College where college is mixed into high school, Youth Apprenticeships where work-based learning in apprenticeships are blended into high school and Coop Colleges where six-month, full-time work coops are interspersed with traditional college courses.

I have developed an initial common framework for studying education remixing, which I aim to refine and evolve, that I think covers what are some of the exciting strengths of these silo-crossing remixes as well as what are some of the real barriers to mixing together strands from silos separated in so many ways from how they are financed and regulated, to where and when they are offered to their cultures and accountability systems.

But I also believe they represent proof that we may be able to do far better by remixing than by continuing to depend on our ability to improve how we deliver “readiness.” ***Why leave it to any one education system – high school or college – to determine how to define and achieve readiness and leave students the task of crossing chasms to their next stage when we can create remixes where students get to develop their battle-tested readiness and gain real traction actually doing the next phase (college or career) of their lives?*** As my Early College ally and colleague Erika Giampietro likes to say – the best predictor of college success is college success! And the same can be said about work success in Youth Apprenticeships and Coop College remixes.

I hope to spend a significant share of the next decade of my career exploring, catalyzing, developing and proselytizing this approach to the overall mission of education equity, excellence and opportunity so many of us share.

Reason Number 2 – ***Teaching in Harvard’s innovative Online Educational Leadership (OEL) Master’s Program is challenging and exciting.*** Harvard offers only one degree (outside of its extension school) across all of its various schools that can be earned entirely online without being in residence at Harvard – this new Master’s at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Born of necessity during the pandemic, this two-year, part-time equivalent to HGSE’s main one-year, full-time, in-person degree draws a different group of mostly mid-career students who can’t or don’t want to take a year away from their jobs but do want to gain new skills, knowledge and credibility.

I believe online education will be a very important component of the future of postsecondary education, especially for “lifelong learning,” a widespread concept still being

actually birthed. But online education is so fundamentally different because the medium is different and part-time, working students spread around the country and world are also different.

I find it exciting and challenging to take this on. For one thing, I am trying a true “flipped classroom” where all of the content I would normally have put into in-class lectures comes through materials I have created for asynchronous consumption by the students before each week’s class. This requires me to be far more prepared in advance than I have ever had to be but might just mean better content and more discussion. We shall see!

Harvard has a Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL) that provides me with amazing levels of support in course design and development. The small team assigned to me have been great and have really pushed me to develop a far better offering than I ever would have on my own. I have greatly appreciated their insights, help and graciousness.

Reason Number 3 – ***Putting together and executing a course is fun!*** Aside from the stress of mixing course development into my already overcommitted life and showing that even a 63 year-old veteran of a lot of things can have some “imposter syndrome,” the process offers a lot of fun. For one thing, I now have a logo! The TLL folks have graphic design people and they helped me develop a cool overall design for the course which is at the top of this posting.

Cool, right?

And since I decided to use the metaphor of “remixing” with roots going back in multiple fields (e.g. collage) but best known for its use in modern music, I have had to find remixed theme songs for the course like [this great mashup](#) of Pink Floyd’s Another Brick in the Wall with the Bee Gees Stayin’ Alive.

More importantly, I love learning and creating and I have had to try to do a lot of both and fast to put the inaugural version of the course together. I knew less than I wish I did about Youth Apprenticeships and about Coop Colleges and I had more I could learn about Early College too. The time do research and the privilege of many colleagues, friends and allies in education who took the time to turn me onto ideas, literature, reports and Web sites has been much appreciated. The goal to knit these together under a single framework has been creatively stimulating and challenging.

I am particularly grateful for the support from my colleagues at Empower Schools. Mary Beth, my longtime EA, is instrumental in managing course logistics, student communications and much more. Chessye Moseley has agreed to help throughout the course. Lauren Hall Riggins is my sherpa on Youth Apprenticeships and will co-teach that class with me where we will focus on work she brought to my attention in Indianapolis. Alyssa Morton, our CEO, has really encouraged me to see this as part of how we at Empower share our thought leadership. And Sarah Robb, a Partner focused on some of this work in both Indiana and California, is a key thought partner along with Cara McKenna, another Partner, who works with me on Early College policy work we are doing in New York State.

Because I like to teach my courses as primarily case studies where we can go deep on exemplars that are as contemporary as possible (students want to know about what is happening

now and will happen in the future, not golden hits of the past), I get to video interview some great folks and bring a guest speaker to class each week. I find that I always learn a lot this way and that the relationships with fellow travelers deepen in some important ways when we get to collaborate on the work of the course.

Reason Number 4 – *It's a privilege to teach the great students at HGSE.* Probably this should always go first but why not close with it. These young (and now mid-career) students always bring unique perspectives from which I genuinely learn and they offer a great reminder of the importance of the work. They are committed to education for the common good and to urgently making our systems better and that is powerful refueling for those of us who are banging away at what can sometimes feel like Sisyphean tasks or even like windmill tilting (to mix my literary metaphors).

I have had over 200 students take the course I have taught for more than a decade and I have enjoyed every class every year. Many alums join a LinkedIn network I offer where I try to vector job openings and send occasional missives. Some alums stay in touch. Some pursue careers where they end up appearing in meetings I am attending or in workstreams where I participating. A few even work full-time with me. Regardless, they all become a part of me and I hope I am a little part of them too. That's the magic of teaching and learning together and what a high that is. Now I will be getting it twice a year in two different formats (online and in-person) and on two different subjects about which I am passionate. I count my blessings.