

Syllabus for “The Global Achievement Gap” Online Book Discussion Group
WVIZ/PBS ideastream®

Session/Segment 1

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4 hours

Topics to be Addressed:

Preface

Introduction

Chapter 1: The New World of Work and the Seven Survival Skills

Chapter 2: The Old World of School

Discussion Questions:

- Wagner asserts that contemporary curricula do not prepare students for careers in science and engineering, and that the U.S. has a damaging lack of people currently at these jobs. Do you think your classes, or any classes you’ve observed, prepare students for any career or industry in particular? How should this affect the way that class is taught?

- Wagner asserts that high school should prepare students for college, work and citizenship. How big a role should high school play in preparing students to be citizens? Please look over the official study materials for the civics portion of the New Naturalization Test (available below as a PDF). Should students have to pass this test? How else might students learn civics?

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=2de5bece24e7b110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=2de5bece24e7b110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD>

- On page 26, Wagner quotes a Mike Summers, a V.P. at Dell Computers. “Kids just out of school have an amazing lack of preparedness in general leadership skills...They lack the ability to influence versus direct and command...Students have a naïveté about how work gets done in the corporate environment. They have a predisposition toward believing that everything is clearly outlined, and then people give directions, and then other people execute until there’s a new set of directions. They don’t understand the complexities of an organization—that boundaries are fluid, that rarely does one group have everything they need to get a job done. How do you influence things that are out of your direct control?” What is the best way to learn skills like leadership through influence and persuasion, rather than directives? Would this be an appropriate use of classroom time?

Please respond to these questions thoroughly, and discuss all elements of the questions. Use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Learners must also respond thoughtfully to the responses of three other learners with at least four sentences. They should explain their responses and contribute to the discussion. They should also use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Session/Segment 2

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4

Topics to be Addressed:

Chapter 3: Testing 1, 2, 3

Chapter 4: Reinventing the Education Profession

Discussion Questions:

- There are many statistics showing American students' educational deficiencies relative to the rest of the world. Wagner and many others attribute these deficiencies to American schools' focus on teaching to standardized tests. Ironically, the statistics that rank students are often gathered from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a standardized test. How are the stated goals of the PISA, which Wagner quotes on page 94, different from the stated goals of the SAT Reasoning Test, which you can find here:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/SATI.html> You can download a sample PISA as a PDF from the link below. Please look it over and discuss whether or not it makes sense to replace the SATs or other state tests with the PISA.

http://www.oecd.org/document/31/0,3343,en_32252351_32236191_41942687_1_1_1_1_00.html

- On page 143, Wagner describes a conversation with Randy Moore, the assistant facilities manager for the Hawaii public school system, "What kind of help did you get as a new teacher?" I asked. 'Everybody meant well,' Randy replied. 'But they all had their plates full. Everybody was so busy. In hindsight, I understand that the problem of getting real support for teachers is that no one in school has time. It's a systematic problem, not a case of neglect. Everybody reports to the principal, which burdens him with far more direct reports than he can effectively lead, manage, and support. He can't supervise and evaluate seventy people effectively—especially when some of the teachers are brand new.'" This makes it seem as if simply adding more staff could solve issues in high school. Would more teachers, administrators and support staff solve the issues Wagner outlines in this book? Is this ultimately a matter of funding? What issues couldn't be solved with more staff or funding?

- On page 144, Wagner continues his conversation with Moore, who says, "The only reason you have a union in your shop is because of a historical failure of management that led employees to believe that the only way to redress their grievances was to unionize. If you wave your wand and the union vanishes, all the problems are still there...The major problem in education is the adults, not the students. They came through the system, and they were successful...It's all they know." Is a fair statement? Wagner seems to be critical of unions, making them out to be more a symptom of an issue than a cure. What is your impression of non-unionized industries? Do they suffer the same problems as equivalent industries that are unionized? Are there any aspects of non-unionized industries that might be borrowed to make education more effective?

Please respond to these questions thoroughly, and discuss all elements of the questions. Use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Learners must also respond thoughtfully to the responses of three other learners with at least four sentences. They should explain their responses and contribute to the discussion. They should also use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Session/Segment 3

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4

Topics to be Addressed:

Chapter 5: Motivating Today's Students—and Tomorrow's Workers

Chapter 6: Closing the Gap: Schools that Work

Conclusion: A Few Answers—and More Questions

- On page 205, Wagner quotes Michael Jung, senior consultant at McKinsey & Company, who says, “there are only three reasons why people work or learn. There’s *push*, which is a need, threat, or risk, but this is now a less plausible or credible motivating force [in the industrialized countries] than it has been, even for the disadvantaged. There’s *transfer of habits*—habits shaped by social norms and traditional routines. But this, too, is becoming weaker now, because of the erosion of traditional authority and social values. That leaves only *pull*—interest, desire, passion.” This contrasts with Wagner’s description the way schools motivate students on page 113, “The assumption seems to be that if there’s a problem with motivating students, then the threat of not passing the tests and not receiving a high school diploma will take care of it. All stick and no carrot.” These schools of thought are two extremes in regards to motivation: either the looming threat of failure or the freedom to pursue personal curiosity. Neither would be effective or practical on its own. How do you think they might both be effectively incorporated? How can educators expand the overlap between a student’s personal interests with mandated content and skills?

- On page 183, Wagner quotes two people who address the sophistication of students’ grasp on online media. “Tracy Mitrano, who works in the Office of Information Technologies at Cornell University, worries about the ways in which ‘this generation has been entertained to death.’ And Susan Metros, who holds a similar position at University of Southern California and is also a professor in visual communications, told me that college students today ‘are media-stimulated, but necessarily media-literate.’” What is your impression of the difference between having a grasp on media and simply consuming it? How are these skills being taught? How might a curriculum better shape a student’s perception of online media?

- On page 195, Wagner notes that students “crave dignity,” and observes, in a quote from John Seely Brown, how this craving is met by a societal hypocrisy: “As the corporate world moves more and more to barely reachable efficiency levels, they’re stripping all dignity from jobs. They say they want creative, innovative thinkers, but then they benchmark them for speed. In the U.S., a lot of service jobs have no dignity. By contrast, in start-ups, even secretaries get stock

options.’ What Brown has observed is that many companies do need workers who can innovate, but in many cases they have not yet created the working conditions and incentives that encourage employees to give their best. In effect, they are trying to play a new game by the old rules.’” How do you compare this observation with Wagner’s profile of High Tech High in Chapter 6, where students contribute directly to museum exhibits or books to be published. Do you think contributing to a tangible project give students the same kind of stake in the finished product as a secretary getting stock options? How might schoolwork be too bottom-line oriented?

Please respond to these questions thoroughly, and discuss all elements of the questions. Use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Learners must also respond thoughtfully to the responses of three other learners with at least four sentences. They should explain their responses and contribute to the discussion. They should also use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Session/Segment 4

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4

Essay response

Wagner thoroughly outlines the deficiencies of American schools and how they might be improved, but describes very little about education systems in other countries. Please research and present an aspect of a foreign educational system and how it might be positively incorporated into the American system. Please use graduate-level writing practices, at least three pages, double-spacing and 12-point Times New Roman font for your essay.

Please offer your insights and critiques into three of your peers’ essays with at least four sentences. They should thoroughly explain their responses and contribute to the discussion. They should also use proper formatting, grammar and spelling.

Rubric for “The Global Achievement Gap”

80 – 100% is S

Below 80% is U

Assignment	Total Point Value	Breakdown of Point Value
Week 1 Week One Discussion	20	10—The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed. 5—The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading

		<p>material.</p> <p>5—The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<p>Week 1 Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week One Discussions</p>	30	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 4 sentences to 3 other learners' comments.</p> <p>10—These responses are well thought out, and complex in terms of thought process.</p> <p>10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<p>Week 2 Week Two Discussion</p>	20	<p>10—The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed.</p> <p>5—The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material.</p> <p>5—The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<p>Week 2 Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week Two Discussion</p>	30	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 4 sentences to 3 other learners' comments.</p> <p>10—These responses are well thought out, and complex in terms of thought process.</p> <p>10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<p>Week 3 Week Three Discussion</p>	20	<p>10—The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed.</p> <p>5—The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material.</p> <p>5—The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<p>Week 3 Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week Three Discussion</p>	30	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 4 sentences to each of 3 other learners' comments.</p> <p>10—These responses are well thought out, and complex in terms of thought process.</p> <p>10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>

<p>Week 4 Final Project: Research Essay</p>	<p>70</p>	<p>70—Wagner thoroughly outlines the deficiencies of American schools and how they might be improved, but describes very little about education systems in other countries. Please research and present a positive aspect of a foreign educational system and how it might be incorporated into the American system. Please use graduate-level writing practices, at least three pages, double-spacing, and 12-point Times New Roman font for your essay.</p>
<p>Week 4 Responses to Other Learner's Essays</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 4 sentences to 3 other learners' essays. 10—These responses are well thought out, and complex in terms of thought process. 10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>