

# COURSE SYLLABUS

**Course:** Transforming School Culture

**Presenters:** Dr. Anthony Muhammad

**Credits:** 3 Graduate Credits

**Required eBook:** *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division* (Anthony Muhammad, Solution Tree Press, 2009)

## Course Overview

School improvement cannot happen in a toxic culture, one where teachers are in conflict and a negative attitude prevails. In this course, Dr. Anthony Muhammad sheds new light on the diverse issues of resistant staff, with an emphasis on developing a cohesive, positive culture. Teachers and administrators alike will recognize their colleagues as Dr. Muhammad describes them:

- The Believers – who believe that all students can learn, and that what they do in the classroom can and will make a difference
- The Tweeners – the idealistic new teachers just learning the ropes
- The Survivors – staff members who suffer from burnout, and whose primary mission is to make it through the school year
- The Fundamentalists – who are heavily invested in the status quo and a force to be reckoned with

Throughout the course, educators explore the root causes of staff resistance to change, and leave with immediate, accessible strategies that improve school culture. Dr. Muhammad provides the framework for understanding dynamic relationships within a school culture and ensuring a positive environment that supports the changes necessary to improve learning for all students.

## Presenters' Bios

**Anthony Muhammad, Ph.D.**, is a much sought-after educational consultant. Dr. Muhammad, a practitioner for more than 20 years, served as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, middle school principal, and high school principal. Dr. Muhammad's tenure as a practitioner has earned him several awards as both a teacher and a principal. His most notable accomplishment came as principal at Levey Middle School in Southfield, Michigan, a National School of Excellence, where student proficiency on state assessments more than doubled in 5 years. Dr. Muhammad and the staff at Levey used the Professional Learning Communities at Work (PLC) model of school improvement, and they have been recognized in several videos and articles as a model high-performing PLC. As a researcher, Dr. Muhammad has published articles in several publications in both the United States and Canada. He is a contributing author in *The Collaborative Administrator: Working Together as a Professional Learning Community* (2008).



## Course Objectives

After completing this course, educators will know:

- Why transforming school culture is essential to educational reform
- The characteristics of four groups of teachers and the impact of each group on school culture
- The role of school leaders (educators invested in school transformation) in creating the conditions that motivate people to change

## Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, educators will apply the following skills:

- Strategize to build on staff assets
- Reflect on his/her own contributions to the school's culture
- Overcome resistance and lay the foundation for a powerful learning environment
- Develop a plan for transforming school culture

### Unit 1: Why School Culture Matters (video)

Video Lecture.

### Unit 2: From Status Quo to True Reform (eBook)

In this video presentation and its companion eBook chapter, Dr. Muhammad makes the case for school reform, including statistics that reveal the costs of a failed education system. Drawing on organizational change theory and school culture research, Dr. Muhammad explains that technical change (i.e., changes in learning tools and structure) will not bring about highly desired school transformation. Dr. Muhammad contends that what's needed is far more profound: cultural change that gives a school new life by overcoming staff division.

#### Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The reasons for school reform
- The characteristics of positive and toxic school cultures
- Why transforming school culture is critical to school reform

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Identify the characteristics of their own school cultures



### Unit 3: Predetermination (video)

Video Lecture.

### Unit 4: The Framework of Modern School Culture (eBook)

Here, Dr. Muhammad looks at the mandate of No Child Left Behind, and the shift ushered in by the public accountability movement - from a focus on teacher intentions to a focus on evidence of student learning. He examines the unique human experiences that influence how school culture forms and how well a school operates: perceptual, intrinsic, and institutional predetermination. Educators share personal experiences that illustrate the potential effects of predetermination.

#### Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The role of teacher accountability as it is envisioned in a healthy school environment
- The role of perceptual predetermination, i.e., the impact of an educator's socialization on practice in the classroom
- The role of intrinsic predetermination, i.e., the messages students internalize from home, community, and school about the probability of their school success
- The role of institutional predetermination, i.e., the "system of sorting" that identifies students' proficiency and tracks them accordingly

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Analyze the role of perceptual, intrinsic, and institutional predetermination in their own schools or districts

### Unit 5: Encouraging Believers (video)

Video Lecture.

### Unit 6: The Believers (ebook)

In Unit 5 and its companion eBook chapter, Dr. Muhammad explores the first of four groups of teachers identified through the interviews and observations collected from public schools across the country: the Believers. Believers are the teachers administrators would clone if they could; they believe passionately in the goal of success for every student, and go to great lengths to achieve this goal. Dr. Muhammad describes what Believers bring to the culture of a school, and cites a need for Believers to become more active and aware in challenging day-to-day assaults on the belief system that frames their practice. Administrator interviews provide real-world examples of the Believers' role in a healthy school culture.



### **Objectives**

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The characteristics of Believers
- Believers' potential effect on school culture

### **Learning Outcomes**

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Identify the Believers in their schools/districts and implement steps to support them

### **Unit 7: Connecting Tweeners (video)**

Video Lecture.

### **Unit 8: The Tweeners (eBook)**

New teachers, aka Tweeners, are the topic of discussion here, and they are critical players in the quest for a healthy school culture. Loosely connected to the school and community and vulnerable to all of the stressors of the profession, Tweeners seek comfort and stability within the organization. Historically poor teacher retention rates make supporting new teachers an essential priority. (50% leave the profession after 5 years; this number grows to 70% in rural and urban areas.) School administrators weigh in.

### **Objectives**

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The characteristics of Tweeners
- Tweeners' potential effect on school culture, especially in light of research on new teacher retention

### **Learning Outcomes**

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Identify the Tweeners in their schools/districts and implement steps to support them

### **Unit 9: Supporting Survivors (video)**

Video Lecture.



## Unit 10: The Survivors (eBook)

Survivors represent the smallest group of teachers (just 2% of the practitioners interviewed and observed in Dr. Muhammad's study), but their psychological trauma makes them a real threat to student progress. Survivors are educators who have completely given up on practicing effective instruction and are focused on making it to the end of the school year – and in some cases, the end of the school day. A Survivor is burned out, clinically depressed, and this condition cannot be ignored or easily fixed. In this video and accompanying eBook chapter, Dr. Muhammad describes the protocol for handling this situation.

### Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The characteristics of Survivors
- Survivors' potential effect on school culture, and administrators' moral and professional responsibilities to minimize their impact on students

### Learning Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Recognize signs of teacher burnout
- Appropriately consult with central administration, union officials, etc., to assist Survivors and their students

## Unit 11: Reversing Fundamentalists (video)

Video Lecture.

## Unit 12: The Fundamentalists (eBook)

Here, Dr. Muhammad describes the fourth and final group of teachers identified in his research: the Fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are experienced educators who believe that there is one pure and undisputable way to practice: their way. They are the most aggressive and vocal combatants in the war of ideology, and represent the biggest obstacle to school reform. Their beliefs, and the factors that led to these beliefs, are discussed, and the arguments and techniques used to promote their views are explored.

Can Fundamentalism be reversed? Administrators provide candid and compelling examples from their own practice.

### Objectives



After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The characteristics of Fundamentalists
- Fundamentalists' potential effect on school culture
- How Fundamentalists use defamation, disruption, and distraction to avoid change
- The differences between the “Old Contract” vs. “The New Contract” - norms, values, and practices that defined the public school system before and after the accountability movement

### **Learning Outcomes**

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Consider the activities of Fundamentalists in their schools, and take appropriate action to minimize their effect

### **Unit 13: Overcoming Resistance (video)**

Video Lecture.

### **Unit 14: “Drop Your Tools”: A Lesson in Change (eBook)**

In this video and companion eBook chapter, Dr. Muhammad uses the research of Dr. Karl Weick as a template for categorizing human resistance to change. Drawing fascinating parallels between firefighters' responses to life-threatening forest fires and educator behavior in the face of reform efforts, Dr. Muhammad identifies four levels of Fundamentalism and identifies strategies for working with each group.

### **Objectives**

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The role of school leaders in creating the conditions that motivate people to change
  - By providing a clear and solid objective case for change
  - By leading with competence and character
  - By reducing fear by providing professional growth opportunities and incremental implementation of change
  - When all else fails, using monitoring and coercion to force change

### **Learning Outcomes**

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Examine and identify the causes of Fundamentalists' behavior, and take action appropriate to these causes



### Unit 15: Transforming Culture (video)

Video Lecture.

### Unit 16: Implications for Practice (eBook)

In this final video and chapter, Dr. Muhammad focuses on three areas for action within schools and school systems:

- Developing a systematic and schoolwide focus on learning
- Celebrating the success of all stakeholders
- Creating systems of support for Tweeners

Administrators provide practical examples that illustrate follow-through at the school level.

#### Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- Strategies for transforming school culture
  - Developing one or two universal academic goals, which in turn provide the framework for all other school activity
  - Celebrating the success of all stakeholders
  - Establishing new teacher mentor programs

#### Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, participants will apply the following skills:

- Use the strategies described above to transform the culture of their schools or districts

#### Methods of Instruction

- Videos (presentations consisting of lecture, interviews, and classroom footage)
- Readings
- Reflection questions (open-ended questions at intervals throughout the video presentations where participants are asked to reflect on the course content, their own practice, and their intentions for their practice)
- Quizzes (selected-response quizzes to assess understanding of the video presentations)
- Discussion forum (prompts after each unit that engage participants in online dialogue with their cohorts)
- Midterm (a project intended to get teachers to begin to develop their practice by putting to work in the classroom what they have learned)
- Final (a project that enables educators to reflect on their practice and assess their students' work through the lens of what they have learned)



## Plagiarism Policy

KDS recognizes plagiarism as a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else's work as one's own and includes failing to cite sources for others' ideas, copying material from books or the Internet (including lesson plans and rubrics), and handing in work written by someone other than the participant. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and may have additional consequences. For more information about plagiarism and guidelines for appropriate citation, consult [plagiarism.org](http://plagiarism.org).

## Percentage of Course Credit

- Reflection questions      25%
- Quizzes                              15%
- Midterm                              25%
- Final                                      35%

In order to complete the requirements of the course, the participant must complete all course work (e.g., reflections, quizzes, and any midterm and/or final), including watching all videos and participating in all discussion forums. We do not award partial credit.

## Grading Policy

- A: 3.4 – 4.0
- B: 2.7 – 3.3
- C: 2.0 – 2.6
- F: >2.0

## Reflection/Quiz Rubric

Activity	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<b>Quizzes</b>	90-100%	80-89%	70-79%	69% or below
<b>Reflection Question</b>	Participant has provided rich detail and supporting examples from the course content.  Participant has made responses to prompts personally meaningful and relevant to his or her teaching practice.	Participant has included appropriate content from the course content.  Participant has made thoughtful comments in direct response to the prompts.	Participant has included little that indicates consideration and comprehension of course content.  Participant has answered most questions directly but some too briefly.	Participant has included little to no content indicating consideration and comprehension of course content.  Participant has not addressed the specific questions posed.  Participant has not responded to all



				<p>reflection questions.</p> <p>Participant has copied from the course transcript without synthesis or analysis.</p>
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### Midterm

For your midterm, propose an educational initiative for your school or department, provide a rationale for the proposed change, and anticipate how Believers and Tweeners will respond to the initiative and how you might approach them to make your plan a reality. At the conclusion of the course, you will be asked to anticipate the needs and responses of Fundamentalists and Survivors and complete a plan for creating a positive school culture among all school constituents, with a focus on this initiative.

Note: Depending on your current role as an educator, please approach this assignment from the point of view of an administrator, or from the point of view of a teacher chairing a committee to solve a specific problem.

Please do the following:

**a) Describe the Initiative**

Describe an existing problem and a school or departmental initiative you'd like to launch in response. Be as detailed as possible in your description, including:

- Data indicating a need for change
- Research in support of the initiative you intend to launch
- Group to be served (targeted students, parents, etc.)
- Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change
- Timetable
- Resources

**b) Identify (anonymously) and describe Believers and Tweeners on your staff or in your department**

Consider your current staff members, and create the following:

- A list that identifies your Believers and Tweeners. Include a description of at least three faculty members in each of these categories who will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of your plan
  - Believers who might positively engage Fundamentalists resistant to change
  - Tweeners who might need extra support

**c) Describe ways in which you (as a teacher or school leader) will engage your Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with your initiative.**



### Midterm Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<p><b>Describe the Initiative</b></p> <p>Describe an existing problem and a school or departmental initiative you'd like to launch in response. Be as detailed as possible in your description, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data indicating a need for change</li> <li>• Research in support of the initiative you intend to launch</li> <li>• Group to be served</li> <li>• Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change</li> <li>• Timetable</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has presented a thorough description with illuminating detail and examples of an existing problem and school or departmental initiative he or she would like to launch in response, addressing at least each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data indicating a need for change</li> <li>• Research in support of the intended initiative</li> <li>• Group to be served</li> <li>• Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change</li> <li>• Timetable</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has described an appropriate existing problem and school or departmental initiative he or she would like to launch in response, addressing each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data indicating a need for change</li> <li>• Research in support of the intended initiative</li> <li>• Group to be served</li> <li>• Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change</li> <li>• Timetable</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has described an existing problem and school or departmental initiative he or she would like to launch in response, though the appropriateness of the problem and/or initiative is in question.</p> <p>Participant has addressed most but not all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data indicating a need for change</li> <li>• Research in support of the intended initiative</li> <li>• Group to be served</li> <li>• Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change</li> <li>• Timetable</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has not described an existing problem.</p> <p>Participant has not described a school or departmental initiative he or she would like to launch in response.</p> <p>Participant has not addressed less the half of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data indicating a need for change</li> <li>• Research in support of the intended initiative</li> <li>• Group to be served</li> <li>• Faculty and/or staff who will implement the change</li> <li>• Timetable</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identify (anonymously) and describe Believers and Tweeners on your staff or in your department</b></p> <p>Consider your current staff members, and create the following:</p> <p>A list that identifies your Believers and</p>	<p>Participant has identified and described with relevant supporting detail at least three faculty members in each of these categories, persuasively arguing that they will be pivotal to the acceptance and</p>	<p>Participant has identified and described three faculty members in each of these categories, indicating how they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers who might positively</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has identified though only minimally described three faculty members in each of these categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers who might positively engage</li> <li>• Fundamentalists resistant to</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has not identified three faculty members in each category.</p> <p>Participant has not indicated how they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p>



<p>Tweeners. Include a description of at least three faculty members in each of these categories who will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of your plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers who might positively engage Fundamentalists resistant to change</li> <li>• Tweeners who might need extra support</li> </ul> <p><b>Describe ways in which you (as a teacher or school leader) will engage your Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with your initiative.</b></p>	<p>success of the plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers who might positively engage Fundamentalists resistant to change</li> <li>• Tweeners whom might need extra support</li> </ul> <p>Participant has described multiple ways and with supporting examples how he or she, as a teacher or school leader, will engage the Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>	<p>engage Fundamentalists resistant to change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tweeners whom might need extra support</li> </ul> <p>Participant has described how he or she, as a teacher or school leader, will engage the Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>	<p>change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tweeners whom might need extra support</li> </ul> <p>He or she has indicated only vaguely how they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p> <p>Participant has described how he or she, as a teacher or school leader, will engage the Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative, though that description does not persuade he or she would be effective at those tasks.</p>	<p>Participant has not described how he or she will engage the Believers and Tweeners in developing the healthy culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>
<p><b>Formal issues</b></p>	<p>Participant has made no grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—</p>	<p>Participant has made a few grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and</p>	<p>Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that</p>	<p>Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.</p> <p>Paragraphs are not organized around main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.</p>



	i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.	eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.	communicates his or her thoughts but with no marked eloquence and insufficient attention to word choice.	
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**Final**

For your final, revisit the initiative you developed in the midterm.

Please do the following:

**d) Identify (anonymously) and describe Survivors and Fundamentalists on your staff or in your department**

Consider your current staff members, and create the following:

- A list that identifies the Survivors and Fundamentalists on your staff
- A description of at least three faculty members who are Survivors pivotal to the acceptance and success of your plan.
- A description of at least three faculty members who are Fundamentalists pivotal to the acceptance and success of your plan. Please identify each as a Level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist, and give evidence for your conclusion.

**e) Describe ways in which you (as a teacher or school leader) will engage Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with your initiative.**

**f) Ask two of your peers to review your proposed initiative and plan for engaging staff members in its implementation.**

- Discuss anticipated resistance to change.
- Brainstorm additional suggestions for “getting everybody on the bus, in the right seats, moving in the right direction.”
- Summarize your peers’ suggestions in 2 or more paragraphs.



### Final Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<p><b>Identify (anonymously) and describe Survivors and Fundamentalists on your staff or in your department.</b></p> <p>Consider your current staff members, and create the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list that identifies the Survivors and Fundamentalists on your staff</li> <li>• A description of at least three faculty members who are Fundamentalists pivotal to the acceptance and success of your plan. Please identify each as a level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist, and give evidence for your conclusion</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has identified and described with relevant supporting detail at least three Fundamentalist and three Survivor faculty members, persuasively arguing that they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p> <p>He or she has identified each as a level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist and offered compelling and detailed evidence to support those identifications.</p>	<p>Participant has identified and described three Fundamentalist and three Survivor faculty members, indicating how they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p> <p>He or she has identified each as a level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist and offered evidence to support those identifications.</p>	<p>Participant has identified though only minimally described three Fundamentalist and three Survivor faculty members.</p> <p>He or she has indicated only vaguely how they might be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p> <p>He or she has identified each as a level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist but not offered effective evidence to support those identifications.</p>	<p>Participant has not identified three faculty members in each category.</p> <p>Participant has not indicated how they will be pivotal to the acceptance and success of the plan.</p> <p>Participant has not identified each as a level 1, 2, 3, or 4 Fundamentalist.</p>
<p><b>Describe ways in which you (as a teacher or school leader) will engage Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with your initiative.</b></p>	<p>Participant has described multiple ways with supporting examples how he or she, as a teacher or school leaders, will engage Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>	<p>Participant has described how he or she, as a teacher or school leader, will engage the Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>	<p>Participant has described how he or she, as a teacher or school leader, will engage the Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative, though that description does not persuade he or she would be effective at those tasks.</p>	<p>Participant has not described how he or she will engage the Fundamentalists in developing the healthy school culture needed to move forward with the proposed initiative.</p>



<p><b>Ask two of your peers to review your proposed initiative and plan for engaging staff members in its implementation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss anticipated resistance to change</li> <li>• Brainstorm additional suggestions for “getting everybody on the bus, in the right seats, moving in the right direction”</li> <li>• Summarize your peers suggestions in 2 or more paragraphs</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has documented a discussion with two peers about his or her initiative and plan for engaging staff members in its implementation. He or she has offered a concise and precise summary, in 2 or more paragraphs, of his or her peers’ suggestions.</p>	<p>Participant has offered a summary, in 2 or more paragraphs, of two peers’ suggestions in relation to anticipating resistance from change and “getting everybody on the bus....”</p>	<p>Participant has summarized, in 1 paragraph, two peers’ suggestions though not specifically in relationship to anticipating resistance to change and “getting everybody on the bus....”</p>	<p>Participant has not summarized two peers’ suggestions to anticipating resistance to change and “getting everybody on the bus....”</p>
<p><b>Formal issues</b></p>	<p>Participant has made no grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made a few grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.</p>	<p>Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that communicates his or her thoughts but with no marked eloquence and insufficient attention to word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.</p> <p>Paragraphs are not organized around main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.</p>