

# COURSE SYLLABUS

**Course:** Transforming School Culture

**Presenters:** Dr. Anthony Muhammad

**Hours:** 45

**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)
- eBook (chapters from *Transforming School Culture*)
- 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 and eBook content)



## 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).

## Passing Requirements:

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.

- Quizzes 40% of total grade
- Reflection Questions 60% of total grade

## KDS Self-Assessment Rubric:

	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory
<b>Quizzes</b>	100% Correct	80% Correct	60% Correct	0-40% Correct
<b>Reflection Questions</b>	Participant provides rich detail from the content of the course in his or her responses Participant makes his or her responses to the questions personally meaningful	Participant includes appropriate content from the course in his or her responses Participant makes thoughtful comments in direct response to the questions	Participant includes some content from the course, usually appropriate, in his or her responses Participant answers the questions directly, not always fully	Participant includes no content from the course in his or her responses Participant does not address the questions posed