This course seeks to enable people from many different backgrounds to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that can help them to make productive contributions to the design, pursuit, and assessment of school improvement efforts of all kinds. My experiences leading this course over the past ten years have reinforced my belief that one semester of work can provide an important foundation for those who want to learn about school improvement but that long-term learning and reflection are also required in order to achieve the course goals. Complicating matters, from my perspective, achieving the kinds of “long-term” learning goals I have in mind really means providing support for school-improvement related learning throughout the careers of those who take the course.

In response to these concerns, over the past few years, I have been working on transforming this course. The transformation is designed both to create the resources, activities, and networks that can support and sustain student learning over time and to respond to the demands and opportunities for creating online learning experiences that can expand the reach and impact of conventional courses. Ultimately, I hope this work will lead to the development of a series of learning experiences or “modules” that focus on different aspects of school improvement and that are available both online and offline. Ideally, these modules will be accompanied by a series of events and networking opportunities that can help to build and sustain connections among a wide group of students, alumni and others who are working on issues of school improvement in New York City and beyond. Below, I lay out the goals, expectations and assessments for the course and then provide the class schedule for 2015. At the end of this document I have also included some additional background on the course and the changes I have made this year. The course modules that describe the weekly assignments can be found on the class website/blog at: https://schoolchangecourse.wordpress.com/

Please note: Due to the experimental nature of this course all grading will be on a pass/fail basis and no incompletes will be given.
Goals & Expectations

Broadly, the purpose of this course is to support the development of more effective school improvement efforts, including efforts to improve existing schools as well as efforts to create new schools and new forms of schooling. To fulfill this purpose, the course is designed to help students develop their capacity to contribute productively to school improvement initiatives in a variety of educational contexts. Specifically, I hope the course will help students:

- Develop their awareness of some of the key issues and debates in school improvement
- Deepen their understanding of why some improvement efforts have led to changes in schools while others have not
- Build the skills and abilities they need to analyze the underlying logic of school improvement efforts; to explain how those efforts work (and, often, fail to work as designed); and to design productive schools and school improvement efforts of their own
- Develop the dispositions and sensibilities that enable them to advance constructive discussions and debates about school improvement more widely

To achieve these goals, the course is designed in two sections. The first section provides a general introduction to some of the key issues and concerns in past and current school improvement efforts in the United States. The second section provides an overview of some of the main aspects of school design. To guide the work in the course, the readings and assignments are also organized to shed light on several key questions related to school change and school design:

- What is change? Why do some things change and not others?
- What are some of the key theories of action underlying previous and current approaches to learning, schooling, and change?
- What are your theories of action about learning, schooling and change?
- What are the problems and missing elements of predominant theories of action? Of your theories of action?

Through the investigation of questions like these, students will have opportunities to develop their understanding of the school improvement efforts of others as well as to develop their own perspectives and approaches to learning, schooling, and school improvement.

Primary Responsibilities

Primary responsibilities for students include:

- Regular and constructive participation in class, in class activities, and on twitter
- Completion of a personal letter or reflective journal entry (3-4 pages) describing their vision of an “ideal” learning environment
- Production of a critique of an organizational improvement effort or of a policy or program related to school improvement (4-5 pages) and feedback on the critiques of 2-3
classmates

- An outline of the theory of action of a school or school model (e.g. Success for All, Core Knowledge Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, KIPP, Uncommon Schools, The Big Picture Co., High Tech High etc.) underlying their approach to one aspect of school design (community engagement, professional development, or assessment and accountability) to be shared in class.
- Development of a design for a school in collaboration with a small group of peers and feedback on a draft of one peer design
- A reflection on their work in the course, what they will take away from the course, and ways the course could be improved in the future

Students will also be expected to post the work they produce in an online folder (password protected through Moodle).

**Readings**

There will be limited discussion of readings in class, but to facilitate their reading, students are encouraged to form their own face-to-face or virtual study groups and to participate in an ongoing Twitter chat in which they can discuss key quotes and ideas from the readings and share their questions. Specific assignments related to each week’s readings are also designed to help students focus in on some of the key concepts and issues.

All required and recommended readings will be available on electronic course reserves, but students are also highly encouraged to buy Tyack & Cuban’s *Tinkering Toward Utopia* from online or other sources. Students may also wish to purchase Bryk et. al.’s, *Learning to improve*. Students will be asked to read a book related to learning and might want to consider getting access to a copy of their book of choice early in the semester. A number of chapters from my book *Managing to Change* are included as readings for the course. You can find the book for sale online, but the required chapters are also available on e-reserves. Several chapters from Cohen & Moffit’s *The ordeal of equality* are recommended, but the rest of the book is also relevant for the class, particularly for those who are not familiar with, or have a particular interest in, the history of federal education policy in the United States.

**Assessments**

All written work should be submitted and posted in the appropriate folder on Moodle.

Please make sure to label all files with your last name and the name of the assignment e.g. hatchideallearning or hatchcritique.

**Descriptions of ideal learning environments (due Sept 9th)**

These descriptions should describe what your vision of an ideal learning environment. What does it look like? Who will you find there? What are they doing? Why do you think this is ideal? Is this vision based on evidence, research, readings, your own experiences, your values, your imagination? This environment could be inside or outside of school (or both) or online.

The descriptions can be produced in the form of letters, memos, reflective journal entries, multimedia or other formats; written products should be no longer than 3-4 pages. The products could be directed to your classmates or interested others or you can choose to make this a personal reflection (recognizing that your classmates will also have access to it)

This assignment is designed to give participants a chance to share their initial thoughts on
learning and schooling and to introduce themselves to the instructor and other class members. Participants are encouraged to make their products as engaging and creative as they wish. The letters will be shared with classmates and the instructor. All descriptions that are completed on time and are in good order will be considered satisfactory, but please note that these should be considered as reflections or “drafts” and should not take longer than an hour or two to produce.

Critique of an organizational improvement effort, school “model” or policy (due October 21st)

The critiques of an improvement effort should draw on the readings from the first part of the course to succinctly analyze the successes and failures of an improvement effort, school model or policy. Students are encouraged to focus on an improvement effort for which they have first-hand knowledge and that took place (or is taking place) at a school or in an organization with which they are familiar. Those who have never been involved in an educationally-related improvement effort, may, with the permission of the instructor, focus on an established school reform program or school model (such as Uncommon Schools, New Tech Schools, the Big Picture Company etc.) or the design and implementation of a particular policy. The critique should provide:

1. An introduction that highlights the key purpose, goal or problem on which the effort is focused and sets the context
2. A description of the theory of action
3. A description of what has and what has not changed (if the effort is just beginning the description should focus on what is likely to change and what may not change based on the analysis of gaps in the theory of action and the readings and discussions in the course)
4. An analysis that highlights gaps and issues with the theory of action and suggests how two or three of the authors we have read might explain what has changed and what has not (or what might or might not change)
5. A discussion of what could be done differently in the future or next time, given what we have learned in the course.

Theory of action outline (due December 2nd)

Identify a school or school model whose approach to community engagement, professional development, or assessment and accountability interests you. Use the available resources on their websites or published elsewhere to compare their approach to the other approaches you have read about in this class. Prepare an outline (ideally no more than a page) of the approach’s theory of action to post online and to bring to class and share with your colleagues. The outline should briefly address:

- What are the goals or what is the focus of the approach? What outcomes are expected?
- What strategies/activities do they use to achieve those goals/outcomes?
- What are the strengths of the approach?
- What is assumed or taken for granted? What might make it difficult to achieve the outcomes?

As part of the 1-page outline, please include links and/or references to any related resources that you think school designers might find helpful.
School designs (due December 9th)

Because of the complexity of developing a school design, the need for a variety of kinds of expertise and background knowledge, and the limits on time, all students are expected to work in groups of 3-4 to complete the school design. **Students are responsible for forming their own groups by October 14th.** The key elements of the design will be discussed in class (including items such as an executive summary, a schedule etc.). The structure of the design is based on the application used for opening a new school in New York City, but should be useful for other contexts. The draft of the 4-5 page executive summary should be a collaborative product and will be turned in for feedback from the instructors and from peers. The goal of the school design is to get the go-ahead to spend a year developing the school. Thus, the design documents should demonstrate that the design is original, thoughtful, and has the potential for success in the future; designs are not expected to be ready for immediate implementation. Students will be asked to create an exhibition drawn from the materials in their design portfolio that they can share with other members of the class.

Reflections (due December 16th)

As a final element of the class, students should complete a 3-4 page reflection on their work in the course, what they will take away from the course, and ways the course could be improved in the future. Students should be able to complete this reflection during class time on the last day of class. Class will not be held at that time.

Assessment

This course is designed to build the knowledge and understanding of each participant and to develop a deeper collective understanding of key aspects of school-based reform. Throughout, participants will be expected to share their work and observations with the rest of the class. While I hope that the course is engaging and challenging, I also expect it will be a lot of work for all of us and will require some flexibility and patience as we experiment with new technologies, activities, and assignments. I also hope students will contribute to the shaping and development of the course and share their reflections, ideas and feedback (in constructive and productive ways) throughout the semester and in the future. Finally, students should be aware that the class blog and other aspects of the course will be public, but please let us know if you have any questions or concerns about the expectations in general or the public nature of the course.

Due to the experimental nature of the class and the collaborative nature of the projects and the course, all grading will be pass/fail and no incompletes will be given.

The class relies on several norms and expectations that can help to support productive work and collaboration. These include:

- Respect for people and diverse ideas,
- Responsibility for preparing for class; for contributing regularly and constructively to the class website, class activities, and class discussions; and for facilitating the participation of others
- Regular and prompt attendance for class and for group meetings (in person and electronically) outside of class
- Use of electronic devices in class and in meetings outside of class primarily for class-
related work

In order to pass the course, students need to:

- Demonstrate that they are fulfilling the class norms and expectations
- Complete the ideal letter, the critique, outline, and the reflection
- Make a significant contribution to the development of a school/learning design

All written papers are expected to be produced double-spaced, with standard margins, in APA style.

**Teachers College Policies**

The Provost and Dean of the College in conjunction with the Faculty has adopted the following statements to be included on all Teachers College syllabi:

1. The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact the Office of Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities (OASID) for information about registration. You can reach OASID by email at oasid@tc.columbia.edu, stop by 163 Thorndike Hall or call 212-678-3689. Services are available only to students who have registered and submit appropriate documentation. As your instructor, I am happy to discuss specific needs with you as well. Please report any access related concerns about instructional material to OASID and to me as your instructor.

2. The grade of Incomplete will be assigned only when the course attendance requirement has been met but, for reasons satisfactory to the instructor, the granting of a final grade has been postponed because certain course assignments are outstanding. If the outstanding assignments are completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received and a final grade submitted, the final grade will be recorded on the permanent transcript, replacing the grade of Incomplete, with a transcript notation indicating the date that the grade of Incomplete was replaced by a final grade. If the outstanding work is not completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received, the grade will remain as a permanent Incomplete on the transcript. In such instances, if the course is a required course or part of an approved program of study, students will be required to re-enroll in the course including repayment of all tuition and fee charges for the new registration and satisfactorily complete all course requirements. If the required course is not offered in subsequent terms, the student should speak with the faculty advisor or Program Coordinator about their options for fulfilling the degree requirement. Doctoral students with six or more credits with grades of Incomplete included on their program of study will not be allowed to sit for the certification exam. (Please Note: Because of the collaborative nature of the coursework in C&T 4004, incompletes cannot be given except under exceptional circumstances.)

3. Teachers College students have the responsibility for activating the Columbia University Network ID (UNI) and a free TC Gmail account. As official communications from the College – e.g., information on graduation, announcements of closing due to severe storm, flu epidemic, transportation disruption, etc. -- will be sent to the student’s TC Gmail account, students are responsible for either reading email there, or, for utilizing the mail forwarding option to forward
mail from their account to an email address which they will monitor.

4. It is the policy of Teachers College to respect its members’ observance of their major religious holidays. Students should notify instructors at the beginning of the semester about their wishes to observe holidays on days when class sessions are scheduled. Where academic scheduling conflicts prove unavoidable, no student will be penalized for absence due to religious reasons, and alternative means will be sought for satisfying the academic requirements involved. If a suitable arrangement cannot be worked out between the student and the instructor, students and instructors should consult the appropriate department chair or director. If an additional appeal is needed, it may be taken to the Provost.

5. Sexual Harassment and Violence Reporting - Teachers College is committed to maintaining a safe environment for students. Because of this commitment and because of federal and state regulations, we must advise you that if you tell any of your instructors about sexual harassment or gender-based misconduct involving a member of the campus community, your instructor is required to report this information to the Title IX Coordinator, Janice Robinson. She will treat this information as private, but will need to follow up with you and possibly look into the matter. The Ombuds officer for Gender-Based Misconduct is a confidential resource available for students, staff and faculty. “Gender-based misconduct” includes sexual assault, stalking, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and gender-based harassment. For more information, see http://sexualrespect.columbia.edu/gender-based-misconduct-policy-students.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Please bring a laptop/ipad that you can use for work in each class

Module 1 – Key Issues In Educational Change And Improvement

September 2nd: Why change? Why not?
An overview of the course and introduction to key issues in school change

September 9th: What’s involved in change?
The nature of change and the complexity of the “change process.”


And:

OR

OR

For additional background, explore other chapters/works by your author

Due: 3-4 page Ideal learning descriptions

September 16th: What hasn’t?
A brief history of key events and issues in school reform: “Incremental” vs. “radical” change; how reforms change schools and schools change reforms; predictable failures; and the grammar of schooling.

Required:

Recommended:
September 23rd: Why don’t schools change?
The perils and the promise of school reform. A consideration of key critiques of the problems with current reform efforts.

Required:


Module 2 – Tools For Evaluating And Designing Improvement Efforts

September 30: How might schools change?
An introduction to theories of action and an examination of the theories and assumptions behind school reform efforts and recent policies

Required:
Cuban, L (2010). So much hype, so little mindfulness: The practical importance of knowing the logic of a reform-driven policy.

Recommended:

Due in class: 1-page description of an organizational improvement effort, school model, or policy. These descriptions should also serve as the basis for the critique due later in the semester.

October 7th: How can schools change?
An introduction to the “science” of improvement

Required:

Recommended:
Berwick, D. M. (2002). Escape fire: Lessons for the future of healthcare. New York: Commonwealth Fund. (See also a video of the related presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00aa6xc0Xf4)

Module 3 – Designs For Learning

October 14th: What can new schools look like?

Exhibition of previous school designs

Required:
Hatch, T. (2009). “Key practices for managing change.” Introduction to Part II in Managing to change: How schools can survive (and sometimes thrive) in turbulent times. New York: Teachers College Press. (Note: This introduction can be found at the end of Chapter 2 “Changing conditions, changing times”)

Selected school proposals and designs (TBD).

Due in class: Lists of group members for school design project

October 21st: School Purpose & Culture

What kind of school culture(s) reflect your purpose and the learning you hope to support?

Required:
Recommended:

Due: 4-5 page critiques.

October 28th: Theories of learning
What theories of learning underlie the design of a school? What are the goals? How will they be achieved?

Required:

And one of several books:

(Books “clubs” will organize their own meeting either virtually or face-face in lieu of a regular class meeting)

November 4th: Key elements of school/learning design

Presentations/discussions of theories of learning and meetings in design groups

Due Monday November 9th at 6 PM: Drafts of the executive summary and supporting documents for key elements of the design (such as curriculum and instruction materials or hiring criteria and professional development plans, etc.)

November 11th: Discussion of Initial Design Proposals.

Required: Executive summaries and supporting documents of group designs.

Due in class: Peer feedback for designs
In class, students will be divided into groups, with students having a chance to ask questions and give feedback to their colleagues on each design’s initial theory of action.

November 18th: Key elements of school/learning design (Cont.)
Discussions of Community Engagement; Professional Development; Or Assessment and Accountability. (Select one topic to explore in depth and come prepared to discuss the related articles with classmates.)

Community Engagement:
Who is your community? How does a school/learning design serve that community?

Required readings:

Recommended readings

Professional Development:
What role do educators play? What do they need to know and be able to do? What kind of support and resources do they require?

Required readings:
**Recommended readings:**
http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_missing_link_in_school_reform
University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

**Assessment and Accountability**
How will you know if your purposes are being accomplished and your goals are being addressed? How will the community know?

**Required:**

**Recommended for December 3rd:**
McDonald, J. *The dilemmas of planning backwards.* Providence, RI: Coalition of Essential Schools.

**November 25th:** *Thanksgiving Break. No class.*

**December 2nd:** Key elements of school/learning design (Cont.)
Come to class prepared to share with your classmates brief overview of similarities and differences in the theories of action behind two different approaches to community engagement; professional development; or assessment and accountability

**December 9th:** Exhibitions
Multimedia design exhibitions and discussions

**Due in class:** School designs
December 16th: Reflections (no class)

Due by 9 PM: Reflection (all other assignments should also be posted in the appropriate folders on Moodle by this time)
The past and the future of “School Change”

The course “School Change” was developed at Teachers College by Linda Darling-Hammond in the 1990’s. That course was itself modeled on a course being taught by Ted Sizer at Brown University. Sizer’s course was originally focused on encouraging and enabling students to start and develop their own small schools, and it included numerous site visits to schools up and down the East Coast. I actually had an opportunity to teach the course first, before I joined the faculty at Teachers College, when I was working as a Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and taught the course for Darling-Hammond when she was at Stanford University. At that time, the course was more conventional with only an occasional trip to a local school, but with a continuing focus on “school design.” Here at Teachers College, with many students who are working full time and who expect to be working in schools rather than designing new schools, I have maintained a practical focus but have broadened the course to work on school design as well as school improvement more generally.

Changing the course

While supporting “life-long learning” is daunting, it also provides a totally different starting place for the design of a course than end-of-semester learning goals. In particular, a life-long learning focus means creating opportunities for students at Teachers College as well as alumni to get and remain engaged in the learning activities, and it puts a high premium on keeping the learning experiences relevant and connected to the work on school improvement taking place in New York City and nationally. To that end, over the past two years, I have attempted to change a number of aspects of the course, including:

- making many elements of the course publicly available online,
- experimenting with new technologies, online tools, and online learning opportunities
- taking advantage of social media to develop networks and connections among students, alumni and others interested in school improvement

Overall, these “change” efforts have been satisfying as, for the most part, the student work has been powerful and provocative, the direct feedback has been positive and some connections to alumni from the course are beginning to grow. At the same time, I have found it difficult to create more opportunities for student choice and for self-directed activities while remaining constrained by the conventional one hour and fifty minute class period and the 15 week course schedule.

Nonetheless, I continue to discover new affordances and learning opportunities that I could not have imagined before I began these “change” efforts. In particular, I can now envision ways in which the one semester course can be expanded in the future to include a series of year-round activities as well as a set of learning “modules” that students could take on a flexible schedule that meets their needs. The main components of this approach over the span of a year would include:

Exhibitions of Designs for Innovative Schools and Learning Experiences – A reception/exhibition in the fall would involve alumni and others from NYC (and perhaps beyond) in sharing and discussing their efforts to create new schools and learning experiences. In the spring, a reception/exhibition in the spring would engage students
enrolled in the course in sharing the school designs that they have developed. These receptions would serve as face-to-face networking activities and would build on exhibitions that are already built into the course.

Public Presentations/Discussions on Current Issues in Innovation, School Improvement and School Design – These presentations would be designed to provide students and alumni with access to and information about the latest work in school improvement. For example, every year the School Change class includes events like panels with leaders from new schools, visits by members of the New York City Office of New Schools, and skype discussions with members of innovative schools in Singapore and elsewhere. For the most part, these events have been restricted to students taking the class, but they could be opened up to a broader audience in the future.

A Set of Learning Modules Focused on Key Topics in School Improvement – These would build on existing sections of the course and could include topics like the history of school reform and key aspects of school design. Modules could include classroom/online activities, learning resources (slideshows/podcasts, interviews etc.), readings, and links to related resources, programs, and organizations.

Ongoing Communication via Social Media – To foster connections, sustain engagement, and encourage the growth of the network, a Facebook group, a “school change” Twitter Feed, and a blog (all currently in some stage of development) would share resources and information developed for the learning experiences and could help to collect and share other relevant materials.

In order to explore some of these possibilities, in 2015, I have tried to organize the assignments into modules that could stand alone in the future, and I am trying to develop more direct connections with individuals and organizations in New York City and beyond who are engaged in school improvement and school change. Working with Deirdre Faughey, I am also continuing to explore ways that the course can serve as a source of support as alumni from the course move on in their careers. To that end, we have created a public wordpress blog as the main course website so that current students, as well as alumni and others interested in issues of school design and educational change can have access to course discussions, resources, and activities. Correspondingly, we will send out an email to course alumni inviting them to check out the site and follow along if they’d like to, and I will also be inviting last year’s students to share some of their school designs with this year’s students.