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. The three class modules contain the specific reading assignments for each week. In an appendix at the end of this document I have also included some additional background on the course and the changes I have made this year.

You can find the latest updates on the course, and the modules, assignments, and related resources on the public class website:  https://schoolchangecourse.wordpress.com/

Readings and other copy-written materials can be found on e-reserves or on Moodle. Work by students in this class can also be posted on Moodle.

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 hatchercritique.

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 2\textsuperscript{nd}: Why change? Why not?
An overview of the course and introduction to key issues in school change

September 9\textsuperscript{th}: 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 16\textsuperscript{th}: 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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00aa6xc0Xf4))

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**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

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)
Module #1
Key Issues in Educational Change and Improvement

Overview
This module provides an introduction to key issues of educational change and improvement. This module is designed to help foster a deeper understanding of the process of change and how it might apply to schools. In order to achieve this goal, the module raises several key questions including:

• What's the difference between change and improvement? How do we know?
• What facilitates and inhibits improvement?
• When and under what conditions are improvements in learning/schooling/education likely to occur?
• Why do educational reform efforts so often fail? Why and how is “failure” predictable?
• How can we see the “forest and the trees”?
• Why change/improve? Why not?

In order to address these questions the module is divided into three sections with related assignments:

September, 9th
Change #1: What’s involved in change?
An introduction to the complexity of educational change through readings by Michael Fullan, Peter Senge, Clayton Christensen & colleagues, and Andy Hargreaves & Dennis Shirley.

September 16th
Change #2: What has changed in K-12 education? What hasn’t?
An examination of the challenges and possibilities for school improvement and a succinct overview of some key developments and issues in the history of school reform in the United States, with readings from David Tyack & Larry Cuban’s Tinkering toward utopia.

September 23rd
Change #3: Why don’t schools change?
A comparison of three different perspectives on some of the problems with educational reform efforts, with readings from David Cohen, Richard Elmore, and Charles Payne.

You will have engaged with this module productively when you can address the central
questions and explain key terms and concepts in a discussion with colleagues in this class, and, ideally, with others outside of education.

**Introduction**

Recent work on change and improvement in many sectors reflects a dramatic shift from a classical, mechanistic understanding of change as a linear process with a beginning, middle, and end to a view of change as a dynamic, situated, and multidimensional process. In a “mechanistic” view, leaders develop a plan or strategy, initiate changes, and then strive to motivate others, organize resources, and carry out the activities that will lead to the desired goal. But a dynamic view of change recognizes that changes are always underway: people are growing, the economy is expanding and contracting; technologies are developing; communities are evolving; the ground is shifting... From this perspective, education leaders cannot simply plan or “make” changes, they have to understand change and learn how to pursue their visions and goals while dealing with the many changes that are always already underway.

This module builds on the idea that efforts to change and improve education often fail because those involved neither acknowledge nor understand the complexity of the change process. Therefore, this module offers readings and activities designed to provide a sense of that complexity and to highlight both the impossibility of controlling change and the possibilities for working within constantly changing conditions. In the end, the module may leave you wondering: “If you can’t control the change process, how can you be sure that your plans and designs actually lead to more powerful learning experiences?” But, ideally, it will also help you recognize that designing powerful learning experiences, begins with the idea that, while you can never be sure what the “right” plan will be, you can build on what others have learned in the past and you can prepare for the predictable and unpredictable challenges you will encounter along the way: “Ready, Fire, Aim.”

**Assignments**

**September, 9th**

**Change #1: What’s involved in change?**

In order to get an introduction to the complexity of educational change, please read the Fullan chapters, then explore several different perspectives on change, improvement, and innovation by reading one or more of the works by Senge, Christensen & colleagues, and/or Hargreaves & Shirley:

**Required reading:**

And works by at least one other author:


AND/OR

AND/OR

As you read,
1. Strive get an overall sense of what Fullan and the other the author(s) you chose are trying to say – what is their "thesis", "theory", or "argument"?
2. Note (at least) two or three key quotes/issues/concepts/ideas that you think are particularly important for school designers to keep in mind
3. Jot down any ideas/concepts etc. that you think need further clarification and/or any major questions the work raises for you

To help you consolidate and remember what you read, you are encouraged to share and discuss some of the key quotes/ideas and questions you identified with your colleagues.

September 16th
Change #2: What has changed in K-12 education? What hasn’t?
For a seminal analysis of the challenges and possibilities for school improvement and a succinct overview of some key developments and issues in the history of school reform in the United States, read Tyack & Cuban’s Tinkering toward utopia.

Required reading

Recommended reading:

As you read, please note some key terms and ideas that Tyack and Cuban (T&C) use including: the grammar of schooling, policy elites, policy churn, “real school,” “incremental” vs. “radical” change; “how schools change reforms.” You may want to come back and revisit some of these terms after an initial reading, and, if you want, try to define in a sentence or two what they mean to you. In addition, please pay special attention to T & C’s discussions of the “innovations” of the Carnegie Unit, kindergarten, Junior High School, the Dalton Plan, the proposals that were the focus of the 8-year study, and the Schools of
Tomorrow. How do they explain why some of these “innovations” took hold and were sustained and the others were not? (Not to spoil the suspense, but the terms/ideas above are a key part of their analysis...).

As you did for Change #1, please continue to identify one or two key concepts/ideas that you think are particularly important for school designers to keep in mind, and jot down any ideas/concepts etc. that you think need further clarification and/or any major questions the work raises for you. You are encouraged to share and discuss a few of your notes/quotes/questions with your colleagues.

September 23rd
Change #3: Why don't schools change?
To get a sense of the similarities and differences between three different perspectives on the problems with a variety of educational reform read three widely-circulated pieces from Cohen, Elmore, and Payne:

**Required reading:**

**Recommended reading:**

Please quickly skim each of the three required readings to get an initial sense of their main points and their similarities and differences. Then pick one of the readings of particular interest to you and read it with a few questions in mind (use the attached chart to take notes if you find it useful, but you do not need to turn in your notes):

- What does the author see as some of the key problems with current school reform efforts?
- Who do they see as the key participants in explaining whether reforms are likely to work?

After you've completed your reading, review your notes and consider:

- What (and who) does each author leave out of their analysis?

You may find it useful to work in a group and compare notes with colleagues who are focusing their reading on the other authors. If you are reading on your own, you may find it easier to answer the questions by comparing the perspectives of all three authors, as that...
will help to highlight their different points of view. Regardless of which author you focus on, one of the key points of the assignment is to recognize that there is always something missing from the analysis. There is no single, overarching perspective that can account for all possible problems and solutions. As in previous weeks, you are encouraged to share and discuss a few of the key ideas and any quotes/questions with your colleagues.
C&T 4004

**What are some of the similarities and differences in the Cohen, Payne, and Elmore’s explanations for why improvement efforts often fail?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>COHEN</th>
<th>PAYNE</th>
<th>ELMORE</th>
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<td>What are some of the key problems with improvement efforts from their perspective?</td>
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<td>Who are the key participants in reform efforts from their perspectives?</td>
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<td>What’s missing from their analysis?</td>
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Curriculum & Teaching 4004: School Change
Thomas Hatch
Teachers College, Columbia University

Module #2
Tools for Evaluating and Designing Improvement Efforts

Overview
This module introduces key approaches and tools for evaluating improvement efforts and for designing schools and learning experiences – theories of action and the emerging “science” of improvement. These approaches can be used to examine some of the prevailing (and often taken-for-granted) assumptions behind a variety of school improvement initiatives, programs and policies and they can also be used to interrogate our own assumptions and develop our own theories of action and improvement efforts. The primary goal of this module is to enable participants to describe how improvement efforts are supposed to work as well as to identify factors that can help explain why they might or might not work. In the process, this module raises several key questions, including:

• What are theories of action?
• (How) Can changes in policy contribute to improvements in practice?
• What “logic” drives improvement efforts and how can that logic be discerned, articulated and evaluated?
• What might make improvement a “science”? Why might that be useful?

In order to address these questions, the module consists of two main sections with related assignments:

September 30th
Tools for change #1: 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

October 7th
Tools for Change #2: How can schools change?
An introduction to the “science of improvement” and the recent work of Tony Bryk and colleagues at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

You will have engaged this module productively when you can explain the theory of action behind an improvement effort to someone involved in that effort and when you can point to or predict which aspects of the effort might be successful and which ones might not. Note, however, that the value of your analysis does not depend on the accuracy of your predictions; a productive analysis provides the participants with new insights into why their efforts might succeed or fail and some ideas about what they might do to improve
their work in the future.

**Introduction**

Theories of action are the beliefs and assumptions, often implicit and unarticulated, which lead people and groups to act in certain ways. Theories of action reflect the underlying logic that explains how particular goals are to be achieved (Cuban, 2003). For example, while members of a school may adopt a common goal such as enabling all students to reach high standards of achievement, the theory of action is also reflected in the way resources are allocated, the kinds of activities pursued, and the ways those goals are operationalized and measured. A school that focuses time and resources on monitoring how teachers are doing and in establishing rewards and consequences for meeting particular benchmarks suggests that increasing motivation is central to achieving higher standards. In contrast, a school that invests their time and resources in professional development to pursue new teaching strategies in the classroom suggests that further expertise needs to be developed before significant improvements can be made.

While the term “theories of action” is used widely, it is worth noting that it is used in somewhat different ways and for different purposes. For many evaluators, for example, identifying the theories of action reflected in the plans and in the work “on the ground” serves as a key means of gauging how well plans are working and of identifying gaps in plans/strategies that need to be addressed (Weiss, 1995). At the same time, many school leaders have also articulated specific theories of action that can be used to guide their efforts to improve instruction (City et. al., 2009) and/or as a basis for shared agreements with their boards (MacAdams, 2006). Recent efforts to develop improvement science build on both the work of evaluators and leaders to establish specific tools and strategies for identifying critical problems and “root causes” and for developing clear hypotheses and action plans that can be tested and revised to address those problems in relatively short periods of time.

This module begins by focusing on using theories of action to analyze the logic underlying policies, reform programs, school “models”, and improvement efforts. This approach begins with the premise that plans and strategies will always have some gaps and contradictions in logic that can be exposed even before implementation begins. However, theories of action can also be used to explain what is (and is not) working as plans and strategies are implemented and to predict what might happen in the future. The module also provides an introduction to improvement science and some of the tools and strategies that can help to structure improvement efforts. The work on improvement science builds on related work in health and other areas to support more systematic learning across organizations and fields.

**Assignments**

**September 30th**

**Tools for change #1: 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 reading:**
Cuban, L. (2010). *So much hype, so little mindfulness: The practical importance of knowing the logic of a reform-driven policy.*

**Recommended reading:**

**For further reading on different approaches to theories of action:**

To get a general understanding of the “logic” underlying reform efforts and how that logic can unearthed and critiqued, read the Coffman and Cuban articles. Then read the Hatch article for an in depth example of the problems that can result from the failure to articulate and examine the “logics” or “theories of action” underlying improvement efforts. For that article, pay particular attention to the fact that improvement efforts are usually made up of a host of different initiatives (and people), each of which and each of whom may operate with different implicit theories. In this case, the differences in theory included different assumptions about learning, about schooling, and about the process of change itself. Those who are interested in trying to uncover the logic underlying other reform efforts can read the recommended chapters in Cohen & Moffit. As you read, think about the theories of action that underlie the federal programs they describe (Title 1, NCLB etc.):

- What problems does the program focus on? Why? What’s the rationale?
- What strategies/activities do they pursue?
- What resources do they use to address the problems?
- What outcomes are supposed to be achieved?
- What is assumed or taken for granted? What might make it difficult to achieve the outcomes?
This same approach can be taken to analyzing contemporary policies like the Common Core and programs like Success for All, Core Knowledge, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and KIPP.

**October 7th**

**Tools for Change #2: How can schools change?**

An introduction to the "science of improvement"

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


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=00aa6xcOXf4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00aa6xcOXf4))

**For related tools and tips on improvement:**


Six Sigma, *Determine the root cause: 5 Why’s and/or BufferOpen, The 5 why’s process we use to understand the root of any problem*

Six Sigma, *The cause and effect (aka fishbone) diagram*


NHS (UK) Institute for Innovation and Improvement, *Driver diagrams: What is it and how can it help me?*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation Learning and Diffusion Group, *Defining and Using Aims and Drivers for Improvement: A How-to Guide*

To get an overview of one approach to the “science” of improvement read the introduction to *Learning to improve*. Then read the first three chapters of the book to learn how that
approach has been and can be applied in health and education. Pay particular attention to the discussion of the tools and examples in Chapter 3 and think about how those might be applied to identify and address problems in your own lives and work. For further examples and discussion of work in improvement (particularly in health care), explore the descriptions, articles and videos of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, particularly their Open School and the other tools.
Module #3: Designs for learning

Overview
This module provides an overview of some of the key elements that need to be taken into consideration when creating learning experiences and learning environments. The goals include:

- Developing an awareness of the variety of different kinds of designs for learning and school designs that are already being developed
- Deepening appreciation of the key role that theories of learning play in the design of educational environments
- Fostering understanding of the different elements of learning organizations (particularly curriculum, assessment, professional development, and community engagement)
- Developing abilities to reflect on and craft connections between the purposes for learning, the goals for learning, and the elements that support learning

While the focus of this module is on creating schools, the goals include raising questions about the need for schools (and the many conventional structures that go with them). The key questions addressed in this module include:

- Why learn?
- What is the purpose of learning/schooling?
- How do organizational cultures help to they shape learning?
- Who is the community and how does a school/learning design serve that community?
- 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?
- How will you know if your purposes are being accomplished and your goals are being addressed? How will the community know?
- How are the different elements of a school (curriculum, assessment, professional development, community engagement, etc.) related to one another, to the purposes and to the learning goals?

To address these questions, the module is divided into three main sections with related assignments:

October 14th & October 21st

Designs for learning #1: What goes into designing a school? & Purpose(s) & Culture(s)
A quick introduction to the elements and process of designing new schools, with a particular emphasis on the need to consider the purposes for (a) school and the kind of
culture(s) that may reflect those purposes

**October 28th & November 4th**

**Designs for Learning #2: Theories of learning**

An overview of some central ideas and concepts in the development of theories of learning and a consideration of some recent perspectives on learning.

**November 11th – December 2nd**

**Designs for learning #3: Key elements of school/learning design**

An introduction to several different approaches (and, at least implicitly, theories of action) related to key elements of school designs – community engagement; professional development; or assessment & accountability.

You will have engaged with this module productively when you can identify a purpose for learning, articulate a small number of related learning goals, and explain how the key elements of a design (for a school or other kind of learning environment) may help you accomplish that purpose and achieve those goals. Central here is the ability to develop a theory of action that explains the logic of your design. Such a theory of action will help to distinguish your design from a general description of the many features that may or may not be related directly to the purpose and learning goals.

**Introduction**

The focus of schools on learning is often taken for granted. In fact, schools serve a wide variety of purposes beyond supporting the learning of students (including for example, including housing young people during the day; sorting students into programs and roles etc.). Furthermore, schools are often assumed to be the location where learning should take place. Yet, learning takes place formally and informally, inside as well as outside of schools and classrooms. While schools or other existing educational organizations and environments might fit the purposes of learning well, the questions – why learn? And why go to school? – always need to be asked. As a consequence, educators and school designers need to be able to consider and reflect on their purposes, the learning goals that need to be achieved to accomplish those purposes, and the elements of their design that they think will support the pursuit of those goals and purposes. Such consideration is a central aspect of articulating the theory of action underlying educational experiences, determining what’s working and what’s not, and pursuing productive improvements.

In order to facilitate efforts to develop, examine, and pursue designs for learning, this module provides a brief introduction to the process and elements that go into design in general and designing schools in particular and it considers questions about the purposes, values, and cultures that are particularly relevant for school designers. The module also offers a quick overview of some key historical and contemporary theories of learning, and it introduces central concepts and theories of action that are reflected in recent approaches to three of the critical elements of schools today: community engagement, professional development, and assessment and accountability. Note that all of the materials and ideas in
this module warrant further examination and this module is not meant as a replacement for other courses that address any of these topics.

Assignments

Designs for learning #1: What goes into designing a school?

What do new schools look like? What can they look like? What goes into creating a new school?

Assignment for October 14th

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 designs and models (TBD)

For a quick introduction to some key ideas related to the design process, read the Brown article. In order to explore some of the key design considerations when attempting to develop schools and school-related learning experiences, read the Darling-Hammond and Hatch chapters. As you read, note the many different considerations that school designers have to take into account (e.g. budgeting, staffing, curriculum, assessment etc.), but pay particular attention to how and in what ways these different elements can come together in a coherent, powerful design.

Designs for learning #1 (Continued): Purpose(s) & Culture(s)

Why have a school? What purpose does it serve? Who does it serve? What kind of culture(s) will reflect/support your purposes and values? (How) can culture(s) be influenced/shaped?

Assignment for October 21st

Required:

Recommended:

These readings address issues of purpose and the challenges of trying to develop school culture(s) that are consistent with and support those purposes. While you read these articles, consider the relationship between purposes, practices and culture: What practices support the development of shared purposes and a productive school culture? What lessons and strategies do these readings suggest for school designers? Take note particularly of any ideas that you might be able to use to change or shape the culture in an organization with which you are familiar. In order to begin to apply what you are learning, reflect on your own or with colleagues on how the ideas in these readings may help you explain the culture(s) of schools (or other organizations) you have been a part of. What contributed to productive cultures? What factors contributed to dysfunctional cultures? What (if any) strategies were successful in changing cultures?

**Designs for Learning #2: Theories of learning**

How do people learn? What difference does that make for education?

**Assignment for October 28th**

**Required:**


And one of a selection of books:


Please read the Resnick and Hall article for an overview of some of the predominant theories of learning in the 20th Century. This article provides a quick overview of the similarities and differences in the work of Edward Thorndike and John Dewey in particular and an introduction to the contributions of key figures like Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. Central here are differences in what these leading figures see as the goals of learning (e.g. developing skills, abilities, dispositions, cognitive capacities etc.) as well as the the extent to which and the way in which they see context(s) playing a role in learning. The article also introduces the central ideas of social or “situated” cognition which suggest that abilities and dispositions are not just the property or characteristics of an individual but they also reflect the opportunities and constraints in the particular social, physical, and
cultural contexts in which those abilities and dispositions develop. As such, abilities and dispositions can be viewed as “distributed” across the tools, resources, and people in particular contexts and embedded within the particular situations in which people live and learn.

In order to facilitate your reading of the article, feel free to use the attached summary chart to help you zero in on some of the key differences in these theories and their implications for instruction. To familiarize yourself with some more recent views and approaches to learning, skim the introductions and conclusions of the other books in order to select one that you would like to read and explore more fully. (Note that while some books are explicit in describing a particular theory of learning, others – like the Garcia & Kliefgen, Hehir & Katzman, and Tough books – highlight particular educational approaches and the discussion of the particular theory of learning under those approaches may be more implicit.) Once you have read your book, meet together (face-to-face or virtually) with the others who have read the same book to have a “book club” discussion. The goal of these discussions is to produce a short overview of the key elements of the theory of learning explored in your book.

To help you prepare for your group discussions, after you read your selected book, fill in the attached blank chart with your own notes and plan to bring it to your group meeting. In lieu of a regular class on Wednesday, October 28th, book clubs should make their own plans for meeting. Groups can use the regular classroom to meet during class time, they can meet face-to-face at another time convenient for all members, or they can use Google Hangouts to meet online at some point during the week. If someone in your group is familiar with and can support an online discussion using a different platform, feel free to do so, but please let us know your plan. For the virtual meetings, please test out these platforms individually before your meeting time so that you can each be sure that your equipment is working properly and everything runs smoothly. By providing this opportunity for groups to arrange their own meetings (in person or online), we hope to accomplish the learning goals for the class at the same time that we explore some of the possibilities for teaching this course with a larger group of students, at least some of whom may not be in residence at TC.

**Assignment for November 4th**

Each member of the book group should be prepared to share the overview and answering questions about their book and the associated theory of learning with their colleagues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Traditional Approach (from Thorndike)</th>
<th>Progressive Approach (from Dewey)</th>
<th>Progressive Approach (from Piaget/Bruner)</th>
<th>New Standards/New Learning Approach (From Resnick)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Develop academic skills and abilities</td>
<td>Develop knowledge and forms of reasoning and social interaction needed to be good Democratic citizens</td>
<td>Develop sophisticated conceptual structures and reasoning capabilities (like those of adults, experts etc.)</td>
<td>Develop the skills, knowledge, and habits of high performance in relevant domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Learning</td>
<td>Develop bonds/associations through rewards and punishment; Aptitude/ability is “paramount” in learning, and it is largely hereditary</td>
<td>Learning takes place in context, in interaction with others</td>
<td>Students use their developing perceptual and conceptual structures to make sense of the world and develop coherent interpretations of phenomena.</td>
<td>People build mental representations that impose order and coherence on experience and information; knowledge is essential to thinking and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
acquiring new knowledge. Habits and beliefs are acquired through socialization

| Implications for Instruction | “stamping-in” and “stamping-out” of associations through practice, testing, and more practice; geared to the aptitude of different individuals | meaningful, “authentic” projects | Learning by discovery/doing (but it can’t be sped up – Piaget); learning by doing (anything can be taught to anyone at any time in an intellectually honest way – Bruner) | Disciplined invention; practice & experience; environments and tasks arranged to guide and support learning; modeling, observation, and scaffolding; |
**Guide for Theories of Learning Book Discussion**

**Book Title/Author:**

*Feel free to redesign the template below to meet your needs.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the main arguments they are making about learning/teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What key ideas/quotes should school designers remember?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions? (what’s the basis or evidence for the claims?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s problematic/missing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What questions do you have? (what are you confused about? What are you wondering about?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assignment for November 11th

In preparation for a “jigsaw” feedback session with members of other design groups, each design group should prepare a draft of their executive summary and post it along with any supporting documents for key elements of the design (such as curriculum and instruction materials or hiring criteria and professional development plans, etc.) by 6 PM on Monday November 9th. Everyone should come to class on November 11th with to share written comments/feedback on the executive summaries of at least two members of their feedback group (to be assigned).

Designs for learning #3: Key elements of school/learning design

This section of the module provides an introduction to several different approaches (and, at least implicitly, theories of action) related to community engagement; professional development; or assessment & accountability. Students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with all the required readings to get a sense of both some of the critical functions that need to be accomplished by schools and some of the predominant ideas/theories about how to fulfill those functions. However, students are only required to read the articles associated with one of the topics.

Assignment for November 18th:

After reviewing the articles, choose one of the topics and sets of readings to explore in depth. Each topic includes at least two readings that reflect at least two different ways of approaching the relevant issues. Once you have read the articles, note your responses to several key questions:

Key questions:

- What are the goals of the two approaches?
- What are their key strategies?
- What do you see as the advantages, challenges of each?

Bring your notes to class for a discussion with colleagues who have read the same materials.

Assignment for December 2nd:

After you have read the required readings for your topic for November 18th, identify a school or school model whose approach to the topic interests you. Use the available resources on their websites or published elsewhere to compare their approach to the other approaches you have studied. Come to class with a (1 page or less) outline of the approach’s theory of action:

- 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. In addition to providing an opportunity to build on and apply your understanding of theories of action, this assignment is also designed to “crowdsource” resources and information related to community engagement, professional development, and assessment and accountability that may help to support your design efforts. To that end, the assignment will be most useful if class members strive to outline different approaches.

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

**Required readings:**

**Recommended readings**

The Hatch & Warren articles describe a community organizing approach to improving schools while the Epstein approach describes a parent/community involvement approach and the Sanders article describes some of the theoretical background behind that approach. Read the four articles, paying particular attention to the roles and activities that parents and families are asked to take on in different approaches and the different theories of action these approaches suggest.

**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:

The Elmore and Birney article and Aldeman and Chuong discuss two different kinds of approaches to staff/professional development and building the “human capital” necessary for schools to make improvements. As you read, pay particular attention to the kinds of activities staff are engaged in each approach. What theories of adult learning and development do they suggest?

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:
Abelman, C. & Elmore, R. (1999) "When accountability knocks, will anyone answer?”

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

First read the Darling-Hammond and Snyder article to get an overview of some different kinds of accountability and accountability mechanisms. Then read the Abelman and Elmore discussion of accountability in schools in the US and Hatch’s discussion of the accountability-related systems in Norway and elsewhere and think about how those different accountability mechanisms are used in each approach. Note as well the key distinctions that Abelman and Elmore make between “internal” and “external” accountability and that Hatch makes between “answerability” for individual tasks and goals and “responsibility” for broader goals and collective purposes. What different goals and theories of action are suggested by these distinctions?

**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)
Appendix

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.