

**Urban Teacher Education Program  
Autumn Quarter 2018  
Final Project: A Systemic Analysis of Communities  
and the Implications for Urban Schooling**

*Urban Teachers and schools more generally, need support to develop and implement pedagogy that investigates and draws from the social contexts of the lives of urban youth...*

*Rather than presenting the community as a place to rise above, schools must equip themselves to draw from the knowledge that students bring with them to school - knowledge that is often not in their textbooks but is acquired from the streets, family cultural traditions, youth culture and the media.*

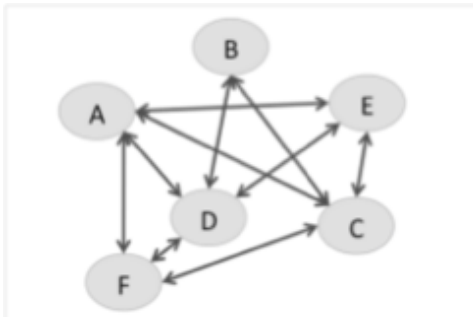
*-The Art of Critical Pedagogy*

by Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell

**Understanding the System**

Cities are regarded not simply as geographic locations, but as complex systems that are analogous to living organisms. To better understand Chicago as a complex system, each of you will be assigned to a group that will work with one of UChicago UTEP's Community Based Organization (CBO) partners. As part of your experience with a community based organization, you will engage in *Systems Thinking* to examine the web of interconnected relationships between issues and players, the timing of interactions, the creation or limitation of opportunities, and a deeper understanding of how communities are impacted by all of these. For example, it is helpful to reveal how educational outcomes of a community are not simply a result of individual choices, but rather, are a function of opportunities, economic mobility, access to quality healthcare, availability of high quality and affordable housing, reliable transportation, and access to healthy food options. Our work seeks to excavate the interconnectedness and multi-dimensional facets of what makes up a community and the function of schools in the larger system.

Systems thinking is a perspective of seeing and understanding systems as wholes rather than as collections of parts. It is a vantage point from which you can see a whole, a web of relationships, rather than focusing only on the detail of any particular piece. Events are seen in the larger context of a pattern that is unfolding over time. See the diagram below as an example:



Another part of Systems Thinking is to understand how issue A is connected to B, C, D and E in such a way that causation is *reciprocal, mutual, and cumulative*.

If we think about issues in isolation, we would consider A separately from B, for example housing separately from education, thinking that once we fix A, we can direct our energies towards fixing B. In practice, this often results in one group working on issue A and another working on issue B, and not working together even though A and B are linked. As aspiring teachers, we want you to be prepared to understand the dynamics of the Chicago system that produces consistently different housing, education, health, economic, and environmental outcomes in different communities. Our understanding can open up the possibility for children to engage in changing these outcomes through our ability to teach a multi-dimensional curriculum. We want to begin this practice of thinking as we prepare to teach in multi-dimensional communities, with multi-dimensional people, and to teach towards a greater understanding, navigation, and creation of systems that people can thrive in.

### **The Assignment**

In this culminating assignment for Autumn Quarter, you will prepare a final paper and presentation on your learning in one of the communities associated with the community-based organization you will be assigned to work with this quarter. By drawing upon course readings, fieldwork observations, reflections, CBO group conversations, and a variety of other evidence you collect throughout Autumn Quarter, you will construct a systemic analysis of this community. Your presentation will include a set of comprehensive reflections about your learning in response to the assignment. The completed project should establish a clear understanding of the interconnecting forces that shape community, supported with evidence from your documented observations and conversations, course readings, and historical documentation. ***Focus on thinking and writing from an assets-based perspective.***

There are three components to this project that build on one another---1) a descriptive, systemic overview of the community that demonstrates an understanding of interconnected relationships 2) an overview of working with community organizations 3) a personal reflection.

In addition to the content, a significant portion of learning in this project will come from the experience of having to interact with a variety of stakeholders with a variety of opinions and backgrounds. Be intentional about *who* you are engaging with and the types of questions you are asking, and be intentional about *how* you do this--position yourself as a learner, an active listener, ask follow up questions, and be open to having your assumptions challenged.

It is our hope that through this process, you will begin to internalize a way of seeing a community in a complex, dynamic, and multidimensional way. We hope that you apply the skills and dispositions you acquire in doing this project to your upcoming work in schools, always paying attention to the community in which you are working, your positionality and what it means to learn from all that community has to offer. We want you to gather a systemic understanding of the community and the impacts of systemic design in order to more fully inform your practice as an urban educator.

More specifically, our goals for the project include:

- To gain a deeper understanding of Chicago neighborhoods, within its historical, political, cultural, and community context
- To integrate a variety of data sources—academic reading, class discussion, conversations, observations, historical data, etc.—to begin to create a systemic analysis of the community
- To collaborate closely with cohort peers; to negotiate differences of approach, opinion, and lens
- To develop awareness of the position of being an outsider in a community

- To begin to understand membership in a community
- To begin to negotiate relationships with a community organization, dealing respectfully with leaders and staff around issues of access and exchange of information, with a stance of respect and reciprocity
- To begin to think concretely about the relationships between community and school
- To explore and deepen your understanding of the inter-relatedness of factors affecting life in a community
- To synthesize and apply learning

### **To Begin: Mapping**

Walk through the community. Write what you see, hear, smell, notice, and pay particular attention to how you are feeling, what you are thinking, what narratives come to mind as you observe the community and the people. Please use the following questions as a guide to take notes. Draw on our course readings as a guide. This exercise should be the beginning to your final personal reflection. While it does not have to be included in the final group paper, we highly suggest you share your experiences with one another to gain insight into multiple perspectives and lenses.

- What is your initial reaction to walking through the community? How do you feel before embarking on the assignment?
- What do you see as assets in the community? (Jot observations, draw a map, or a concept web if that's helpful.) *Why* do you see these as assets?
- What do you see as the challenges within the community? *Why* do you see these as challenges?
- What emotions and thoughts surfaced as you did this walk? What did you notice about your own thinking as a result of doing this walk? How will this impact your next steps?

## **Organizing the Paper**

### **PART I: SYSTEMS OVERVIEW (10 pages)**

For the first part of the project, you will collect various data in the form of conversations, interviews, observations, photographs, flyers and your own research of articles, newspaper clippings and historical documents, etc. to begin to develop a portrait of the community you are getting to know. You'll write short, descriptive vignettes for each of the following sections. Please know that the purpose of this assignment is for you to organize and extend your thinking about the community through multiple lenses. Use the questions and ideas associated with each section to launch your work rather than as an end goal or checklist. After you write up each section, you should develop an introduction and conclusion that highlights the themes that emerge from your analysis, with ***a particular focus on the interconnected relationships*** among the various aspects of the community.

#### **A. History**

Draw on your readings, conversations, and outside research to write a brief history of the community. Describe the community's informal and formal boundaries.

- How do community members describe the community?
- How did Burnham's Plan of Chicago in 1909 and/or Daley's urban renewal agenda affect the community?
- What are the "traditions" in the area -- block parties, summer sports games, long-standing families of the area, etc. -- and points of pride for community members?
- What actions or responses have people engaged in to address what they see as issues in their neighborhood?

## **B. Demographics**

- Describe racial and ethnic composition
- How do issues of segregation play out in the community?
- Use census data to determine mean age, income/class, etc.
- Change in demographics in this community over the past 100 years

## **C. Economics**

- Most common employment options in the neighborhood
- Do people commute or work within the community?
- What is the average income?
- Disinvestment and deindustrialization
- Infrastructure and public transportation in this community to support employment
- What businesses and commerce are in the area?
- How does the community make money?

## **D. Housing**

- Describe housing options in the area: single family, apartment complexes, retirement homes, assisted living, cooperative housing, group homes, etc.
- What is the presence of public housing and the involvement of the CHA?
- What is the average cost to rent or own in the neighborhood?
- What is the average of property taxes?

## **E. Education**

- What are the school options in the area?
- What kinds of goals do they have for students?
- Describe the facilities:
  - How old is the building?
  - Are there reported high levels of lead?
  - What is the enrollment in comparison to the size of the building?
- What programs are available for students?
  - Is there after school programming for students? Parents? Community members?
- Consider the relationship between the neighborhood and the school. How does the school see its relationship to the community? How does this relationship manifest in the day-to-day workings of the school?
- How do children get to school?
- How far do they travel?
- How are the schools ranked?
- What is the per pupil funding? How does that compare to the city/state average?
- What resources are available for students and parents?

## **F. Political landscape**

- Who are the political decision makers for the area?
- Who are the stakeholders in the area?
- What are they contributing to the growth and development of the neighborhood?

## **G. Culture**

- How is culture a part of the community?
- Describe the socio-cultural landscape of the community
  - What ethnicities are represented and how?
  - What languages are spoken?

- Are there traditions that are visible?

## **H. Transportation**

- What are the sources of transportation in the area?
- How are the conditions of the roads?
- Is public transportation easy to access?
  - Is it safe, reliable, clean, fast, and affordable?

## **I. Safety**

- What makes a neighborhood safe?
- What are neighborhood concerns?
- Is it safe to walk?
- What are the crime rates and statistics?
- Are there street organizations represented in the community?

## **J. Recreation**

- Where are the parks and places for people to gather?

## **K. Religious Organizations**

- What churches/mosques/synagogues/other places of worship are in the area?
- What contributions do they make to the community?

## **L. Natural environment**

- Describe the natural environment
- How much green space is available for public use?
- Are there environmental concerns?

## **PART II: AN UNDERSTANDING OF WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES (5 pages)**

In this section you will provide an overview, an analysis of the work, and a reflection on working together with a community organization. This portion will be a group reflection, schedule a time to debrief your experiences with one another and have a conversation about your learning. Again, use these questions as a springboard.

### **Overview**

Include a description of the function and role of the community organization in community development, its relationship to the larger, urban system, and the institutions and players impacting community outcomes.

- What is the work of the organization?
- What is their philosophy of organizing?
- Who makes up the organization?
- How does the organization operate?
- How is the organization managed?
- How are decisions made?

### **Analysis**

- How does the organization work with/against the system towards community led development?
- How does the experience of working with the community organization help you define community knowledge?
- How does the CBO define self-determination and how is it practiced?

- How has this experience helped you better your understanding of the complexity of Chicago's communities?

### Reflection

- How would you describe your group dynamics?
- What did you learn about the learning and working styles of yourself and others?
- Based on your understanding of Chicago's communities and the roles and actions of community organizations, what implications arise for teaching and learning?

## **PART III: Making our Learning Public: Reflections on Learning**

### **December 5th in class**

In our final class together you will present your final reflection on your learning. Presentations will be 10 minutes and a paper copy (3-5 pages) will be due on December 5th by 6pm. Your reflection and presentation should capture the following:

- Begin with your initial reflections on the community through the Mapping exercise.
- Describe the process of your engagement with the CBO you worked with.
- In what ways did this activate your self-awareness? How has your understanding of identity shifted?
- Were there moments that were uncomfortable? Where were these emotions situated?
- Were there moments that made you pause and listen before speaking?
- Did you feel privileged/marginalized in that space? How were you able to reconcile those feelings?
- What did you learn about yourself that you will continue to work on in relationship to working with communities?
- What connections can you make between the work of the CBO and your future work as a teacher?
- How does this experience impact your understanding of teaching in Chicago? And work in schools?

Please consider the following strategies in your final presentation:

- Visual Strategies
- Listening & Speaking Strategies
- Kinesthetic Strategies

### **Due Dates and Submission**

- Submit a Work Plan that outlines the asks of the CBO and how you each will utilize your 10 hours towards the work. Work plans will be due October 12 by 6pm. *One* student from each group should submit.
- Part I will be due November 21<sup>st</sup> by 6pm. *One* student from each group should submit electronically to Dr. Kay and Dr. Laura. Please cc all of your group members.
- Reflections on Learning Presentations: Wednesday, December 5th in class. Part III by 6pm
- Parts II and the CBO Research Brief will be due on December 10<sup>th</sup> by 6pm. *One* student from each group should submit Part II electronically to Dr. Kay and Dr. Laura. Please cc all of your group members. Part III should be emailed individually.

- Late submissions will not be accepted without prior communication.