PBPL 254(05): Child Poverty and Chicago Schools
Spring 2015; Tu/Th 1:30-2:50 p.m.; Cobb 116

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This discussion- and debate-based course begins with a sociological and historical examination of child poverty, focusing on its origin, experience, and perpetuation in disadvantaged Chicago communities. Class meetings will involve debating school reform efforts such as “turnaround” schools, stepped-up teacher evaluations, Teach for America, KIPP charters, and Promise Neighborhoods. Further, the barriers that have contributed to the failure of previous reform initiatives—barriers that include social isolation, youth violence, and problems endemic to the educational system itself—will be identified and analyzed.

Grading: 25% attendance/involvement
40% position papers (4 @ 10% each)
10% debate presentation
25% final paper

Participation/Attendance: I expect students to attend and be actively engaged (e.g., not on your phone) in all class meetings. An absence can only be excused if it is brought to Alicia’s attention before class.

Position Papers: A position paper is due before each of the seven debates (aside from your debate and two others of your choosing; so, four total). A position paper argues your position on the debate question and:

1) employs at least three readings on that topic from the syllabus in a substantive way;
2) is submitted before the beginning of class at Chalk (no extensions; late ones penalized);
3) is 600-900 words long, includes a title, word count, and your name in the heading;
4) uses in-text citations that include page #s for specific references—e.g., (Li 2010, p. 12);
5) and does not need a bibliography unless you include sources not on the syllabus (which is fine).

Debates: We will engage in a series of seven debates. It is my hope that we can have fun, civil, and stimulating policy discussions using this format. Please respect your classmates; come on time.

Final Paper: There will be one longer essay assignment (8-14 pages, double-spaced) with several options. My goals here are: 1) to set you loose on a policy topic related to child poverty and education policy that interests you; 2) for you to address that policy area in a comprehensive, original, and evidence-based manner; and 3) to serve as a replacement for a final exam. If appropriate to the topic, I encourage you to incorporate fieldwork into your final essay (e.g., one student interviewed ten Chicago-area teachers, another incorporated observations from her tutoring work). Good stuff! If you volunteer or plan to conduct interviews, be sure to take fieldnotes as you go and start early.

Required Readings:

# Section I. The Social-historical Origins and Lived Experience of South Side Child Poverty

**Rec’d:** *Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson; *There Are No Children Here*, Alex Kotlowitz; *Class and Schools*, Richard Rothstein; “Educating Homeless Children in Chicago,” Amy Dworsky, Chapin Hall  
**Rec’d media:** “Ghetto Life 101/Remorse,” L. Jones/L. Newman; HBO’s “The Wire” (Season 4); “Hoops Dreams” (documentary set in Chicago); “How Inequality Harms Societies,” Richard Wilkinson

### WEEK 1

3/31 (Tu): **Introduction**  
**Chalk:** Spear, *Black Chicago, 1890-1920*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 7  
**Chalk:** *Poor Kids in a Rich Country*, “Taking the Definition of Poverty Seriously” (pp. 1-11)  
**Watch at home:** School Project, “Chicago Schools: Worst in the Nation?”

4/2 (Th): Child Poverty in Chicago: Joblessness, Segregation, and the Neighborhood Effect  
**Chalk:** Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, Chapters 1 and 3  
**Chalk:** *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “The Neighborhood Effect”  
**Watch at home:** PBS NewsHour, “One NYC family’s struggle to survive on fast food salary” (9 min.)

### WEEK 2

4/7 (Tu): **Growing up on the South Side: The Importance of Adolescence**  
Jones and Newman, *Our America* (entire book) – Alicia leads class discussion today  
**Watch at home:** Frontline, “The Interrupters”  
Watch in class: Frontline, “Middle School Moment” (13 min.)  
**Resource:** **Chalk:** Chapin Hall, “Chicago Children and Youth, 1990-2010”  
**Debate sign-up**

# Section II. Race, Class, Environment, and the Mind of a Child

**Rec’d books:** *Poor Kids in a Rich Country: America’s Children in Comparative Perspective*, L. Rainwater and T. Smeeding; *Honky*, D. Conley; *What Children Need*, J. Waldfogel.  
**Rec’d resources:** WBEZ, “Falling before kindergarten: The 30 million word gap” (6 min.)  
A. Hacker, “*Is Algebra Necessary?”*; Dan Hurley, “*Can You Make Yourself Smarter?”*  
CCSR, “*Readiness for College: Noncognitive Factors*”; CDF, “*America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline*”

4/9 (Th): **Growing up on the South Side: The Importance of Adolescence II**  
Tough, *How Children Succeed*, Introduction, Chapter 1  
**Chalk:** Hirsch, review of *How Children Succeed*, “Primer on Success”  
**Listen at home:** This American Life, “*Harper High School, Part 1*” (57 min.)  
Watch in class: “Marshmallows”
WEEK 3

4/14 (Tu): Schools, Social Class and Character (or is it culture?)
  Tough, How Children Succeed, Chapter 2 (Chapter 5 rec’d)
  Chalk: Vaisey, “What People Want,” AAPSS (poverty and culture)
  Chalk: Rose, “Being Careful about Character,” Kappan
Listen at home: This American Life, “Harper High School, Part 2” (62 min.)
Watch in class: TED Talk, Christakis, “The Hidden Influence of Social Network” (18 min.)

4/16 (Th): DEBATE 1: Character, Intelligence, and the Achievement Gaps
  Chalk: Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, Chapters 1 (Chapter 2 rec’d)
  Chalk: Kohn, “How not to Teach Values”
Listen at home: This American Life, “Back to School” (57 min.)
Resource: Chalk: Fryer and Levitt, “Falling Behind: The Achievement Gap”
  Chalk: Nisbett, Intelligence and How to Get It, Chapters 1, 5, 6
Due: Position Paper

WEEK 4

4/21 (Tu): Gangs and Early Motherhood in Chicago: Dilemmas of the Early Teen Years
  Chalk: Lisa Dodson, Don’t Call Us Out of Name, Chapter 3, “Choice and Motherhood”
  Chalk: Kelling and Bratton, “Declining Crime Rates: The NYC Story” (“broken windows”)
  Chalk: Sampson, Great American City, Ch. 6, “Broken Windows’ and the Meanings of Disorder”
Watch at home: PBS NewsHour, “Gun Violence as Public Health Crisis in Chicago” (11 min.)
Possible in-class guests: Rudy Nimocks; John Walker, former governor, Gangster Disciples

4/23 (Th): DEBATE 2: Approaches to Violence and Safety in Chicago Schools
  Chalk: CCSR, “Preventable Failure: Focused on the Ninth Grade Year”
  Chalk: Chicago VOYCE, “Failed Policies, Broken Futures”
  Chalk: CCSR, “Student and Teacher Safety in Chicago Public Schools”
Due: Position Paper
Section III. Overhauling Chicago’s Schools

Rec’d resources: Catalyst Chicago, Chapin Hall; Consortium on Chicago School Research; Academy for Urban School Leadership; Chicago Tonight, “Turnaround Schools” (11 min.)

WEEK 5

4/28 (Tu): School Reform in Chicago

Chalk: Payne, So Much Reform, So Little Change, Introduction, Chapter 6 “Implementation”
Chalk: Bryk et al. Organizing Schools for Improvement, Introduction: A Rare Opportunity
Listen: WBEZ, recent stories on Turnarounds schools (Story #1, Story #2)
Resources: Chalk: CCSR, “Trends in Chicago’s Schools Across Three Eras of Reform”
Watch in class: PBS NOW, “A Radical Fix for Schools” (a turnaround school)

4/30 (Th): DEBATE 3: The Big 2013 Closings, School Turnarounds, and other Radical CPS Reforms

Chalk: Ayers & Klonsky, “Chicago’s Renaissance 2010” (critique)
Chalk: Arne Duncan, “Chicago’s Renaissance 2010” (response)
Watch at home: The School Project, “Chicago Public Schools: Closed”
Resources: Chalk: CCSR, “Turning Around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago”

Due: Position Paper

WEEK 6

5/5 (Tu): The Politics of School and Teacher Accountability

Chalk: Ravitch, Death and Life of the Great American School System, Chps. 1, 8
Listen: Freakonomics, “Is America’s Education Problem Really Just a Teacher Problem?” (34 min.)
Resources: Chalk: “Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation”
Chalk: Malin and Kershner, “Charter Schools and Collective Bargaining” (legal perspective)
Possible in-class guests: Dave Bevard, Illinois Federation of Teachers; others

5/7 (Th): DEBATE 4: Teachers, Unions, and Performance-based Pay

Chalk: Lavy, “Using Performance-based Pay to Improve the Quality of Teachers”
Watch at home: WTTW, Chicago Tonight, “The Messy Debate of Teacher Evaluations” (17 min.)
Resources: Chalk: Ewing, “Mathematical Intimidation: Driven by the Data”
Chalk: Jensen, “What Do We Know about Teacher Pay-for-Performance?
Chalk: Center for American Progress, “Teacher Pay Reforms”
Chalk: Mathematica, “Evaluation of Chicago’s TAP”

Due: Position Paper
Section IV. Scalable Approaches to School Reform?

Rec’d: Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland? Pasi Sahlberg; Good Schools in Poor Neighborhoods, Clewell & Campbell; Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us, Mike Rose; “What Americans Keep Ignoring about Finland’s School Success,” The Atlantic
Rec’d media: Frontline, “Fast Times at West Philly High”; Ken Robinson, “Do Schools Kill Creativity?”

WEEK 7

5/12 (Tu): Diane Ravitch, Wendy Kopp and Teach for America
Chalk: Ravitch, Reign of Error, Chapter 14
The Atlantic, “I almost Quit Teach for America”
Chalk: Wendy Kopp, A Chance to Make History, Introduction, Chapter 1
Chalk: TFA, “What Diane Ravitch Gets Wrong About Teach For America”
Watch in class: WTTW, Chicago Tonight, “Teach for America Lower on Recruits”

5/14 (Th): DEBATE 5: Teach for America
Chalk: Zuckerman, “Is Teach for America Good for America?” Harvard Magazine
Chalk: Schools, “How Do We Defend Democratic Education?”
Resources: Chalk: Heilig, “Teach For America: A Review of the Evidence”
Chalk: Kappan, “Teach For America teachers: How long do they teach?”

Due: Position Paper

WEEK 8

5/19 (Tu): The KIPP Model, Charter Schools, and Choice
Chalk: Ravitch, Reign of Error, Chapter 16
Chalk: Gladwell, Outliers, Chapter 9, “Marita’s Bargain,” Outliers
Watch at home: “Waiting for Superman” (documentary)
In-class guest: Urban Education Institute

5/21 (Th): DEBATE 6: The KIPP Model, Scalability, and the Charter Debate in Chicago
Chalk: “LEARN Charter School Network Charter Proposal” (skim)
Resources: Chalk: “Growing Pains: Scaling Up the Nation’s Best Charter Schools”
Chalk: Mathematica, “KIPP Middle Schools, 2013” (2015 report, if released)
Chalk: Lubotsky, “School Vouchers and Charter Schools in Illinois”

Due: Position Paper
**WEEK 9**

5/26 (Tu): The Big Idea from Harlem

**Chalk:** Tough, *Whatever It Takes*, Chp. 8, “The Conveyor Belt” and Chp. 9 “Escape Velocity”

**Chalk:** Steinberg, “Civilizing the Primitive”

**Watch at home:** Canada, *Ted Talk*, “Our Failing Schools: Enough is Enough”

Rec’d: This American Life, “Fist and Gun” (Geoffrey Canada interview, 1997)

Possible in-class guest: Members of the Woodlawn Children’s Promise Community

5/28 (W): **DEBATE 7: The HCZ, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Question of Scalability**

**Chalk:** Tough, *Whatever It Takes*, Chp. 11, “What would it take?”

*The Atlantic, CityLab,* “Why the HCZ hasn't been Replicated”

**Watch at home:** NBC News, “Squaring Off on Education Reform” (Canada vs. Ravitch)

**Resources:** **Chalk:** Brookings Institution, “HCZ and Bolder Approach to Education”

**Chalk:** Heckman, “The Value of Early Childhood Education”

**Chalk:** Dobbie and Fryer, “Are High-Quality Schools Enough?”

**Chalk:** Wilson, “Obama’s Proposals to Address Concentrated Urban Poverty”

Due: Position Paper

**WEEK 10 and Exam Week**

6/2 (Tu): Around the World: Education in Comparative Context


Rec’d: **Chalk:** Smeeding et al. *From Parents to Children*, “Advantage in Comparative Perspective”

Rec’d: **Chalk:** Hancock, “Why Are Finland’s Schools Successful?” *Smithsonian*

6/4 (Th) (if graduating) or 6/9 (Tu): Due: Final papers by 11:59 p.m. to Chalk