

Outreach and the Chelsea Public School System: From BU to CBO's?

Executive Summary

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Executive summary

The Superintendent of the Chelsea Public School District, Dr. Kingston, aims to further develop the interaction between the school system and community-based organizations (CBO's) in Chelsea. He is looking for ideas he can use to make a smooth transfer of leadership possible in the Boston University Chelsea Public School District Partnership. This report contains the ideas of parents, educators, social workers, and child developers living and working in Chelsea. Including some of my own.

Between May and July 2006, I have interviewed 24 professionals working in community-based organizations, parents, members of the school committee, and students in Chelsea. I have attended 10 public presentations by local officials. I have studied local reports. Furthermore, on many occasions, I have cruised the streets of Chelsea with one of the truancy officers in Chelsea. This way, I have witnessed the joined-up efforts partners in Chelsea make in getting students in Chelsea go to school everyday. I feel confident these sources represent the community. The consistency in the data suggests they do. Below are my findings.

Historical context

Long ago, the Chelsea schools turned out more doctors and lawyers than any other in the state, based on the 1.8 square miles area of the city. By the seventies, the quality of education had started to decline in Chelsea. Mr. John R. Silber, the *president of Boston University* (BU), was asked for his help by the city of Chelsea. The problems in the schools had become so enormous, that people became convinced that redirecting the downward trend in Chelsea needed an outsider to solve local problems. In 1988, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts made an Agreement possible between BU and the Chelsea Public School System (Charter 1989, 1994, 1999), rendering the educational powers in Chelsea to the Boston-University Management Team. John Silber, being an brilliant and committed educator, but reportedly with an intemperate personality at the time, was prepared to take on the management of the school system on two conditions: lend us the authority to lead the Chelsea Public School District, and maintain the same level of funding.

The leadership in the partnership was determined to solve the local educational problems and solve them fast. The schools were already starting to go down the drain. Silber was a strong leader, who believed in an excellent Early Learning Center. He was against the way transitional bilingual education was structured in Massachusetts at the time. He favored a model of immersion: learn English rapidly and well. This view was greeted with suspicion by parts of the Spanish speaking community in Chelsea. Some people felt their interests were not being taken seriously.

The school committee initially was ambivalent about the Agreement: four members voted in favor of the Agreement and three voted against it. It took a long time in reaching the agreement. A large, multidisciplinary study was undertaken. Among the parents and students, there was a lot of silent support for the agreement, but also opposition. There were hesitations about the amount of authority given to BU that was initially entrusted to the school committee by the voters. Some Spanish speaking groups in the city were strongly the Agreement. They called it the experiment. Michael Dukakis (Governor of Massachusetts) addressed their concerns. Together

with the State Department of Education, and local legislators, he took steps to convince the community to support the Agreement.

For years however, the community remained divided on the costs and benefits of the Agreement. In the years to come, a clash took place between parts of the Latino community on the one hand, and the school committee and the Boston-University Management Team on the other. The opposition consisted of self-described community activists. Several community organizers and groups of active citizens were fighting the Agreement. There was heavy opposition by a small group of protesters, not representatives, protesting on every possible occasion. By the unanimous vote of the democratically elected School Committee however, the Agreement was prolonged twice: in 1994 and 1999. Factional opposition however, lingered.

One interesting fact that surfaced from my research is the synchronistic occurrence of the date of the Agreement and the date of foundation of several community-based organizations in Chelsea. It all took place around 1988. CBO's agreed on one thing: the public school system belongs to the community and not to the university. This meant to them that the Agreement should include the elected school committee and also (representatives of) all the parents in Chelsea, including the Latino parents, the majority of the population in Chelsea. A group of activists started a lawsuit against the Agreement, on the basis that it violated people's constitutional rights. The lawsuit was lost. Elections for the school committee turned out the same members every time. Organizations and concerned citizens wanted to change the composition of the school committee, but were unable to achieve this. The interactions between the school committee and community based organizations were oppositional.

In 2004 community-based organizations managed to challenge the district voting system for the school committee. The district system changed from seven to nine districts. Two districts are predominantly Spanish speaking. From these districts however, no Latino candidate stepped forward in the school committee elections. It is rumored that voting for himself elected a non-Latino school committee member from a Spanish-speaking district.

The educational polity

For many years, the educational leadership in Chelsea failed to achieve political integration on how best to improve the education for all the students. This led to a fragmentation in the local educational polity.

Looking back over the years, a tight network of social workers and child developers has developed in the city of Chelsea. These workers operate on a clear vision on child development and community development, demonstrate a sense of partnership responsibility, and get results. The network of agencies in Chelsea appears to be stronger and more cohesive than in the surrounding communities. The professional workers have become partners in child development and community development. Combating the Agreement over many years seems to have made these community-based organizations increasingly focused, and the network closely knit. Has the conflict about the Agreement strengthened the local polity in Chelsea? Apparently so, if you look at community elite influence structures. The aphorism Thomas Jefferson

wrote in a letter to Jacob de la Motta, “Divided we stand, united we fall”, seems also to be the case among the elites of Chelsea.

Speaking about the community as a whole, we see a different picture, as is reflected in the lack of Latino candidates from the Spanish speaking districts. Small groups of local elites remain very influential in Chelsea. In other communities, comparable situations in the past have led to political fragmentation (Crenson 1983), leading to political self-reliance among elite factions of local residents. Also in Chelsea, the elites have been unable to mobilize a broad enough section of the local population for concerted action on educational issues.

A lot of families in Chelsea are not involved in the educational system. Supposedly, some of the newcomers feel they have no right to be involved and feel undeserving. Detachment of lower-class residents from community based organizations increases the difficulty of mobilizing the local population for concerted action on education in order to exercise more influence. The respondents in this research agree that parents should be more active participants in the schools, and also in the school committee, in the school-site councils, in the parent-teacher organizations. Not just volunteering in the school, but also making the decisions. In order to do so, first of all, parents need to be informed. Parents need to become politically aware. It is a known fact that it takes at least a generation before immigrant communities can get a grip at politics. And Chelsea is a gateway for immigrants. The political system takes a while to respond to new groups.

On the whole, the BU Management Team together with the school committee did a great job in improving education for the majority of students in Chelsea. The BU deal was part of the beginning of the rebirth of Chelsea as a community. To name a few of the accomplishments: an excellent Silber Early Learning Center was developed, new school buildings were built, there is a free dental clinic for Chelsea students, good reading and math programs, music, orchestra en choral groups have become part of the curriculum, etc. However, the school district made several mistakes in developing community outreach: wrong choices of superintendents, insulation policy, appointing weak academic leaders of Chelsea high school. The School of Social Work slowly stepped out of the partnership. The School of Management and the School of Education became dominant. The local officials tried to involve the community organizations and other local resources. And the school system would have worked better with the help of community organizations and more extensive use of other local resources, if both parties had been willing to cooperate. One of the reasons was the strong opposition of a small section of the population, supported by several community activists, mistrusting the Agreement.

Another reason was the high turnover of Superintendents. It made continuous relationships with CBO's difficult. The leaders and the elected officials of the school district were absorbed by the difficult task of leading a poor school district in a poor community that was politically fragmented on the issue of education.

From my interviews I have concluded that the biggest complaint from the community is that the BU Management Team for many years was not willing to talk about middle and high school issues, especially the average low attendance rate and the high drop

out rate. Although the drop out rate has declined over the years of the Agreement, it is still very high.

The role of recent district leadership

The present leaders of the school districts have increased the level of community outreach in the school system. They strongly addressed the local issues with school drop out and school attendance rates, as well as gang recruitment from one of the middle schools. According to all of my respondents, the present leaders are open to discuss these difficult issues with the community and the social workers and child developers in the community. They understand the local problems well because of their long personal and professional history in Chelsea. All of the respondents in this research agree with this observation. The community organizations are more eager now to work with the school system and address common issues.

Several initiatives have been taken to involve community resources in and around the school system. These address goal number 10 of the Agreement. According to almost everybody I spoke to, these initiatives need to be further elaborated. Both the school system and community organization have recognized they are facing the same problem: how to increase parental involvement to its maximum in order to raise student achievement, raise attendance rates and lower the school drop out? Addressing these issues effectively means recognizing that schools, parents, and community-based organizations are indispensable partners!

Depoliticizing or insulating the school system in the eighties, with a leading role for a private university organization, was a smart answer at the time to stop the downward trend. Now that many of the problems have been structurally solved, limited resources in the budget can be distributed towards the really hard issues of high school drop out and school attendance. Now that the school system and several social workers are in agreement on these important issues, a joined-up effort can be made to combat these problems.

The transition

When the Massachusetts Home Rule petition expires on June 30th 2008, the charter will probably not be renewed. Dr. Kingston has been asked by local officials to consider staying on as Superintendent of the school district in order to have a smooth transfer of leadership. The length for staying on is indefinite, and the plans have to be tentative for the next 12 to 18 months because the University will have also to agree. It is my informed opinion that doing so seems to be the best choice.

The School Committee is already working on a transition plan for the restoration of power to full local control. The plan will be ready before the Partnership ends. Effective partnerships in Chelsea depend heavily on a smooth transition of power from BU to the community of Chelsea. Educational leadership accompanied by strong local strategic partnerships for youth development can help to increase the quality of education in Chelsea. Part of the transition plan that the School Committee is now working on is to invite the community to engage in the upcoming transition plan. The transition plan is meant to be a flexible tool based on the principle of community outreach.

One important issue in the transition phase is the development of better District Attendance Policies and Procedures. School attendance in Chelsea is under the norm of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Despite efforts taken by the school district and community-based organizations to reduce it, the drop out rate in Chelsea remains high. Several respondents think that only the help of all parents, students, school officials and community-based organizations will render an effect that is strong enough to suffice.

Partnerships for protective trajectories

School drop out is a crucial issue in Chelsea under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). School officials, members of community organizations, individual parents, and students all agree on this. ROCA in Chelsea has worked with the innovative practice of encircling institutions for vulnerable youths. In cities all around the Western world, similar concepts have been developed. In the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands there is the CICA approach (City Instrument for Concerted Action), which uses a computer system to detect multiple problem signals and systematically assign case-directors so the multi-agencies would structurally work together effectively. It is a cheap system that needs no large-scale reallocation of means. In Birmingham, England, there is the Youth Offending Service, a strong local strategic partnership, consisting of multiple agencies, where multidisciplinary teams were formed that work successfully to increase the protective factors for families and students in need. These European examples show how joined-up efforts may help kids and families to cope with difficult circumstances. Chelsea seems ready for a local strategic partnership, consisting of a multi-agency's approach in order to help young people in difficult transition periods, through protective trajectories for social inclusion and prevent school drop out.

Effective schooling is only one part of the solution needed in Chelsea. Effective parenting is another important part. Good after-school programs are part of the solution. So are better jobs. Urban safety is important. Good dropout prevention programs seem to be a crucial part of the solution. Teaching and learning can only be successful when many conditions are satisfied. Over the years, the quality of education in Chelsea has improved much. The quality of living in Chelsea for many families has not. Helping students needs the help of many organizations and parents in Chelsea. Good education needs all the partners it can get.

If problems are interlocking, then so the solutions must be. A thing that organizations and parents can do together is: try to keep the kids in school for one or two years more. This will increase their lifetime earning capacities by more than a million dollars. Education in Chelsea needs a multi-partner, multi-action, integrated approach.

To get results, it is important to continue strong leadership in Chelsea like we have seen over the past 18 years. However, community outreach has to be a cornerstone of this type of strong leadership. The School of Social Work should get as involved in Chelsea as the School of Management and the School of Education. Part of the transition plan is the development of a clear Superintendent's Profile and Evaluation instrument. This is an important instrument, because the School Committee will soon regain the power to hire and fire the superintendent. A job description, protocol and rubrics for evaluation of the superintendent's work will be developed as instruments

for the School Committee to work with. Good community relations are important elements in the job description.

The future role of the university: supporting local strategic partnerships

Under the condition of continued strong educational leadership, the role of Boston University in Chelsea in the future could change to an advisory role. Social innovation is needed in youth issues in Chelsea, with regard to school attendance and drop out rates. Boston University can choose to assist local organizations in Chelsea with the development of evidence-based methods, implementation strategies for innovative procedures and an integrated approach for local strategic partnerships. Reducing the school drop out rate can be an operational target in which the School of social work of BU should be involved too.

BU-schools themselves can benefit from this too. A multidisciplinary vocational preparation of urban educators, social workers, child developers, health institutions and the police is a new market niche. Universities such as MIT, Harvard, Stanford, Columbia Business School in New York, University of London, University of Rotterdam, are now developing multidisciplinary curricula in business and public management, history, education, and social work for managers that increasingly have to work in a joined-up world.

Research should be aimed at problems, not at disciplines. By offering research programs that are multidisciplinary, BU can hope in a couple of years to be educating more well-rounded professionals, competent in combining knowledge of the broad social domain with knowledge in other fields. It is to be expected, moreover, that students who are capable of making connections between expertise areas in the domains of social work, housing, teaching, health, and police, might well have better job opportunities in the future. In many cities around the world, there is a great need for professional *generalists*; who can work with the concept of life integrity and the concept of regionalization. In Chelsea, BU can learn how to do so.

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Report

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Contents

1. Research Question and method adopted	10
2. Historical context	12
3. Local strategic partnerships	20
4. Future role of the university: from leadership to advisory capacity	24

1. Research question and method adopted

How should relationships between community organizations and the school department in Chelsea evolve in the transition process and to what extent are present relations aiding or detrimental to this process?

This is the question Tom Kingston asked me. As Superintendent of the Chelsea Public School District, Dr. Kingston invited me to come to Chelsea. He was interested in getting fresh answers based on local research. Not so much as a theoretical exercise, but empirically grounded in the hopes and expectations of leaders in Chelsea who want to create the best possible life chances for families and students living in this city.

I rephrased his question. It seemed apparent to me that Dr. Kingston's question contained several important aspects best treated separately in order to structure my research. First of all: *What is the present relationship between the community and the school department in Chelsea and how did this relationship develop over the years.* I will answer this question in the second chapter. Second: *How should this relationship develop in the near future?* I will answer this question in the third chapter. Third: *What should be the role of Boston University in Chelsea after the transition of power to full local control.* I will answer this question in the fourth chapter. Readers should be aware of the fact that I wanted to answer these questions also for my own interest, in order to better understand successes and failures of partnerships for youth development.

The method I adopted to answer these question was the *method of the stranger*. According to Simmel, to be a stranger is naturally a positive position in a community, being a full-fledged member both outside it and confronting it. In this sense, I have felt a stranger in Chelsea over these past three months: both connected, and mentally free¹.

Methodologically, the stranger perspective offers a specific attitude of objectivity. He "often receives the most surprising openness--confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person", because the stranger "is not radically committed to the unique

¹ I want to thank Mary Bourke, Barbara MacDonald, Sandra Porrazzo and Rickardo Figueroa for their expertise. They are the best cultural ambassadors a stranger in a city could hope for. Also, I thank PhD. student Misa Labarile, who translated interviews in Spanish, and discussed results with me, Conrad Bons and Judith de Ruijter for their comments on the first draft, and Kevin Carleton who edited parts of the text.

ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group”.

(<http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~Iridener/DSS/Simmel/STRANGER.HTML>) When the stranger is free from entanglement in-group interests, he can act as an objective listener, free from clannishness, not bound by local commitments that would prejudice his perception, understanding, and evaluation.

I have embraced this method. In my 80-days visit to Boston, I have listened to the people living and working in Chelsea in order to think and write about their (working) lives. They eagerly introduced me into the local conflicts, especially those surrounding the Agreement between Boston University and the Chelsea Public School District. Everybody wanted to have their say. In total, I interviewed 24 people, attended 10 presentations, and studied various local reports. Between May and July 2006, I have collected data from close to 50 local officials, professionals in community-based organizations, and members of the school committee, parents, and students. I have developed several checklists of questions, one for each group I interviewed: public officials, professionals working in community organizations, parents and students. I typed down what they said on the spot. I will use some of their quotes for this research, anonymously. Furthermore, in the company of one of the truancy officers, I have cruised the streets of Chelsea in order to better understand the daily life world of young people and families in this city. I read and reread several classical books on sociology and political science. Whether these sources together represent the community, I cannot say for sure. But the consistency in the data collected from different types of sources in my opinion does suggest this.

Looking back, I have come to see Dr. Kingston’s trust in the stranger as evidence of strong leadership. Inviting a stranger to Chelsea to study the fascinating and surely unique Agreement between the Boston University and the Chelsea Public School District and the upcoming transition of power can be seen as a philosophically informed and brave move by Dr. Kingston, for which I thank him.

Below, I will present my findings.

2. Historical context

The first question to answer in this research is: *What is the present relationship between the community and the school department in Chelsea and how did this relationship develop over the years.*

The Boston University-Chelsea Public School System Partnership (Agreement 1989) is a historically unique partnership worth studying. This Agreement has led Boston University (BU), a private institution, to manage the *public* school system of the city of Chelsea over the past 18 years. By the late '80s, the Chelsea public school district was in a bad state, with the problems typical of an urban and economically declining area. BU put its educational and managerial competences forth in order to redirect the downward trend. Initially, an Agreement was signed for a period of 10 years that should have ended in 1998. By the unanimous vote of the School Committee the Agreement was prolonged twice, and its next expiration date is June 2008.

The request

Long ago, the Chelsea schools turned out more doctors and lawyers than any other in the state, based on the 1.8 square miles area of the city. But by the seventies, this had changed dramatically. "We would have invited Attila the Hun to run us", said one interviewee. Instead, in 1988 Mr. Richard Voke asked Mr. John R. Silber, the *president of Boston University* (BU) for help. Silber promised to put forth the resources of the university to help Chelsea solve its problems.

Though a small urban city, Chelsea resembles a neighborhood. It has a strong urban identity, has brought forth several historical figures and leaders, and operates a strong social 'web' of community organizers going back over the years. Historically, there exists a good connection with Boston. People and professionals on each side of the Mystic River know each other well. Local residents in Chelsea always had the ability to produce public services of their own. Chelsea has always had a capacity for mutual assistance and self-government. But somewhere on the line, this vitality was lost. The problems with the school system had become so vast, that some people became convinced that redirecting the downward trend seemed to need an outsider. They embraced an outsider for help: BU. Why?

Social decline

By the seventies, the economic base of the city was declining, leading to apathy, poverty, and failure to provide adequate educational leadership. Some elected officials were found to be corrupt; member of the school committee were accused of patronage

and nepotism. Obviously, the capacity for self-help had become hampered. The local leaders were unable to achieve sufficient unity.

In 1988, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts saw the BU-deal as a hopeful experiment. It decided to make the Agreement between BU and the Chelsea Public School System possible (Charter 1989, 1994, 1999), effectively rendering all the educational powers in Chelsea to the Boston-University Management Team. The Agreement promised it would deliver a model for urban education in Chelsea. The problem was diagnosed as: schools are in a terrible shape, buildings are old and derelict, teachers are underperforming, local educational leadership is inadequate, we need to bring in outsiders who do it all and fast (McGurn 1988). The Agreement between the University and the school system contained 17 goals. These contained improving the curriculum, establish programs for the professional development of teachers, improve test scores for students, decrease drop out rate, increase job placements for graduates, decrease teacher absenteeism, etc. Every year in September a progress report was made on these goals to the Massachusetts Legislature (the one in 2005 was the *Fourteenth Progress Report*).

John Silber

In 1989, BU management *took over* the school system. On two conditions: lend us the authority to lead the Chelsea Public School District, and maintain the same level of funding. But the community was divided on the issue. John Silber, being an brilliant and committed educator, but reportedly with an intemperate personality at the time, was prepared to take on the management of the school system. Silber was a strong leader, who believed in an excellent Early Learning Center. He was against bilingual education at a time when this was still the law of the state. His personal opinions were greeted with suspicion by parts of the Spanish speaking community in Chelsea. They were an emerging immigrant community and did not trust people. The Governor of Massachusetts, the State Department of Education, and local legislators took steps to convince the community to support the Agreement.

Nobody in Chelsea disagreed about the fact the school system was in a dismal state. But people disagreed about the solution to this problem. Some teachers and community members were against BU's involvement. There was a public hearing and the vote turned out just in favor of BU's management of the system. For some, this was the start on the route to bring Chelsea school back up. For others, it was an affront to the community.

Antagonism

Many parents, community workers, teachers and unions were antagonistic towards the Agreement. Protestors joined in a lawsuit against the Agreement. Although the extensions of the contract with BU after ten and fifteen years were done by a unanimous vote in the school committee in favor of BU, and the law suit was lost, the opposition lingered for years. Initially, teachers were critical about the universities' interference with the curriculum. These objections disappeared after some years. Groups of parents were protesting strongly, for many years, against what they perceived to be undemocratic leadership in education. Eventually, they lost the lawsuit. Social workers protested for at least as many years that the local community was not taken seriously. The take over of the school system by BU was controversial. However, it seemed necessary, given the size of the exercise.

Neighborhood Politics

In his famous study *Neighborhood Politics*, Crenson (1983) analyses how in neighborhoods, where small groups of middle-class people live amidst low income groups, political fragmentation may develop over time, leading to political self-reliance among factions of local residents. “But the same fragmentation also reflects a failure to achieve political integration.” (p.206) Is this what happened in Chelsea around the beginning of the Partnership?

Chelsea was always a community of immigrants. By the eighties, the population of Chelsea was changing dramatically. Thousands of former immigrant families – Irish, Jewish, Polish, and Italian working class people - were leaving the city for better houses in better districts. Many poor Latino immigrants from South America and Puerto Rico (part of the United States of America) moved in. Some spoke little or no English. Spanish became the predominantly spoken language in the city. Chelsea had again become a gateway for poor immigrants.

Problems with implementation of the Agreement

During the implementation of the Agreement, two things happened. First of all, the Agreement was a fantastic opportunity for the city, but it started on the wrong foot. The leadership style in the partnership was oppositional and impatient. Some context variables were favorable for these drastic changes, and some were not. State representatives supported the Agreement. The governor and the department of education supported the Agreement. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts was flourishing at the time, and so was Boston. Chelsea however, was in decline. Problems had to be solved by good management, taking hard decisions. There was local corruption in Chelsea at the time, of which four mayors were found guilty in court. Corruption had to be stamped out. Local favoritism had to be fought. Quick actions had to be taken. BU rushed to the contract, while the teachers union was not yet involved. The school committee attorney had not seen the documents of the Agreement, when already pressure was put on school committee members to agree with the contract. Groups of Latino parents did not feel involved in the process and they thought their rights were being violated by the Agreement. Some people in the school committee and the university spoke openly against bilingual education, at a time when this was still the law of the Commonwealth. Latino parents felt discriminated against. They felt the educational philosophy of the Agreement was Eurocentric.

The second problem was that a clash took place between the established members of the School Committee on the one hand and members of old and new community organizations in Chelsea together with concerned citizens on the other. The old local elite that lingered in Chelsea mobilized the community in different ways. School Committee members were dedicated to good education. They felt that all students should learn English and that a better educational curriculum would advance the families in Chelsea on the social economic ladder. To do that, they wanted outside help from a professional organization in education, who could improve the curriculum and do a lot more. Many of the older residents in Chelsea, empty nesters whose children had already finished school, were not so interested in improving the school system. They were afraid it would raise their taxes.

Community organizers and the new elite, groups of Spanish speaking parents, on the other hand, thought that the school system should bridge the gap to the (new) Spanish communities and that the schools should be more open to Latino influences in the schools. They felt the Agreement did little for their children. “Parents were made to wait outside the school, looking through the little window at the children”, said one respondent. The fragmentation in local leadership failed to achieve political agreement on how best to improve the education for the students in Chelsea.

The educational political community in Chelsea has been relatively weak over the years. Elections for the school committee always turned out the same group of people. Community organizers were active, but the partners in the Agreement have largely ignored some of them. The school committee and the BU-management team for many years ignored the difficult educational issues, such as a high drop out rate and low attendance rate. Some organizations turned against the Agreement because of it, working hard on solutions of their own. Many of the citizens in Chelsea remained passive on educational issues. Newcomers in Chelsea have largely remained detached from the local educational polity. The working poor in Chelsea had other worries. New elites in Chelsea appear to have been unable to mobilize a broad enough section of the local population for concerted action on educational issues.

“Divided we stand, but united we fall”

An interesting fact that surfaced from this research is the date of foundation of several community based organizations in Chelsea. It shows in my opinion how *antagonism* operated in Chelsea. The *Centro Latino* was founded in 1988, in the same year as the Agreement. *The Chelsea Collaborative* was founded in 1988. *ROCA* was founded just before the start of the Agreement.

All these organizations started around the same time the Agreement between the school district and the university was signed. Is that a coincidence? These organizations concurred on one thing: the public school system belongs to the community and not to the university. For them, this meant that the Agreement should include not only the elected school committee, but also all of the parents of Chelsea, including the Latino parents.

Looking back over the years, a relatively high density of professional workers in the field of social work, community organizing, child development, immigration support, education, social work, etc., has developed in the city of Chelsea. They operate on a clear vision, achieve results and demonstrate a sense of partnership responsibility. Some local activists in Chelsea have been fierce opponents of the Agreement between the school system and the university. Several respondents state that the network of agencies in Chelsea is stronger and more extensive than the network in the surrounding communities around Boston. Chelsea has developed many professional initiatives over the years. Some are taken in cooperation with the school system by the competent management of BU and some are made in opposition with it.

It appears that combating the Agreement over many years has made the community-based organizations in Chelsea focused and strong social partners. The conflict about the Agreement has strengthened the local polity. They discuss local problems together. They take (legal) action when necessary. And when possible, they support each other. “Divided we stand, but united we fall” (Thomas Jefferson quoted in

Journal of Education 2004: 57). Organizations are helping families and students, each in their own way. The community organizers have tried hard to involve community members in education. They are slowly making progress as indicated by the following example. Only since two years (2005), has a Spanish speaking person become a member on the school committee, the Vice Chairman. Local activists had hoped for more. Several organizations successfully challenged the district voting system for the school committee, as being in violation with the Civil Rights Act. The district system has been changed to nine districts. Two districts are now predominantly Spanish speaking. However, no candidate stepped forward from these districts to get elected for the school committee. Instead, it is rumored, a member from the old elite in Chelsea, voting for him self elected a non-Latino member.

A divided educational polity

Crenson shows how important it is for organizational activism of high-status residents and community organizations to enhance the political integration of the neighborhood. If the activists are divided among several different organizations, this may hamper their efforts to cope with local problems. The detachment of lower-class residents from community organizations increases the difficulty of mobilizing the local population for concerted action.

Many families in Chelsea do not have many options for doing this. At the root of the problem in Chelsea are poverty and the conditions that accompany it. Poverty in Chelsea is accompanied by bad housing, not being able to pay the medical bill when your child gets sick, sometimes leaving the kids unsupervised, owning an unreliable used car, getting to work too late when the car breaks down, losing your job because of it, tensions in the family, divorce, moving to another place, starting all over in another low paid job, in another school, etc. Parents living in Chelsea often are working two or three jobs. Some of them lack the time to oversee if children do their homework. Some do not speak English, making it impossible for them to adequately help their children through school (Spellings 2005).

It is my opinion that parents have an important role in the education of their children. They should be active participants in the schools, in the school committee, in de school-site councils, in the parent-teacher organization. Not just volunteering in the school, but also making the decisions. It is important to have parents advocate for changes in the schools, because the problems of the schools are the problems of the community. Parents need to be involved in the educational polity as well as participate in the schools.

With BU, local educational leadership has been strong in the Chelsea. For many years however, there was also strong opposition. The opposition came from the Latino communities in Chelsea, from the community organizers, youth development organizations and social work organizations, the teacher Unions. As a stranger I would say: local vitality in the spirit of dualistic leadership was regained in Chelsea. Local partnerships for youth development and gang prevention are now in place and performing well.

The Agreement has organized resistance and cooperation. On the whole, I think, the Agreement for many years did not pay enough attention to outreach and community organizations. They appeared to be absorbed by the difficult task of leading a school

district in a poor community that had been too politically fragmented on the issue of education to fend for itself.

The role of recent district leadership

When BU came, the school system was considered to be underperforming and parochial. Now it is one of the better performing school systems in Massachusetts. The Partnership has made a difference in early childhood education. This is seen as a major accomplishment by all the sources I interviewed. The respondents agree that the intention of BU to improve the school system was admirable. Some things BU did really good. To name a few of the accomplishments: an excellent Silber Early Learning Center was developed, new school buildings were built, there is a free dental clinic for Chelsea students, 51 full scholarships to BU were distributed, teachers courses were given at no or little costs, music, orchestra en choral groups have become part of the curriculum, free summer day camps are organized by BU, etc. Other things were not so great. For instance, BU had an attitude of 'we know it all'. They did not work enough with the community. In the past, some people in the Partnership, almost to the extent of the partnership itself, were felt to be offensive to the community.

There have been several good Superintendents and several bad once, according to the respondents. Since Tom Kingston (Superintendent) and Mary Bourke (assistant Superintendent) have been installed as leaders, the level of community outreach in the partnership is improving a lot. They are seen to be more open to the community. They listen to the professional workers in the community and groups of parents. They are convinced of the benefits of community outreach. They understand the local problems well because of their long history in Chelsea. "The spirit of their leadership is awesome", said one interviewee. "They put a lot of energy in getting all the kids to school. They have made a remarkable change in Chelsea." All of the respondents I spoke to agreed on this. Most of the community organizations are happy to work with the school system now.

Until the past few years, the Management Team of the Partnership was not willing to talk about middle and high school issues, according to several respondents. The main problem in Chelsea is: the achievement gap. "The real issue of the public school system is: how to keep these students in school. And that is a difficult issue. It is hard to talk to kids who talk back to you. But they need educational options too", said one interviewee. "Otherwise they will just roam the streets, form gangs, recruit gang members from school and just increase problems in the community", said another. To keep all the kids in school, the system needs to work with the community. The present leaders of the school system recognize this more than before. And slowly, all CBO's wanted to work with the school system to attack these problems.

At the high school, a start was made to give classes in active parenting to parents of teenagers. The participation of Latino's in these classes is high. Also parents from other new immigrant groups participate in these classes. The program is now also starting at the middle school. The classes are set up in a way that fits the culture and the life world of the parents involved. When students go to high school, parents often back off, to give their kids some space. Different parenting styles are being taught to parents to cope with this transition. The classes are organized at 08:00 in the morning and they are taught in Spanish. 35 parents attend every week, mostly fathers, who

work all night at the workplace, and then start classes with a cup of coffee, to go home for sleep afterwards (Channing Bete Company 2003).

Achievements of recent leadership

In recent years, several initiatives have been taken to involve community resources in and around the school system. This addresses goal number 10 of the Partnership. In 2003, this chapter was still fairly short, mentioning the involvement of the Chelsea Police and Fire departments; Massachusetts General Hospital and community youth services agencies in the schools (p24). In 2005 it reported several outreach results: sessions to unite organizations in a common mission to prevent youth violence, improve school attendance, provide consistent family services, and coordinate interventions to improve the overall quality of life for families in the city (p29). Hence, the results are defined broader than the direct educational relevance of it. Gang prevention work is mentioned and especially important is the evolving working relationship with the Chelsea Latino Education Group (CLEG). And in goal 11 on establishing programs that link the home to the school system forums were organized at which parents, especially Hispanic parents, had opportunities to meet school officials and social service providers to discuss strategies for accomplishing common goals (p31). Under recent leadership, community outreach has made a big step forwards.

With the recent district leadership we see a transition to shared leadership in youth development and education. That has become an important development in Chelsea. Both the school system and community organization have recognized they are facing the same problem: how to increase parental involvement? Community outreach means recognizing that parents and schools are indispensable partners!

The transition

When the Home Rule petition expires on June 30th 2008, it will probably not be renewed. Kingston has been asked by local officials to consider staying on as Superintendent of the school district in order to have a smooth transfer of leadership. The length for staying on is indefinite, and the plans have to be tentative for the next 12 to 18 months because the University will have also to agree. There seems to be some anxiety among administrators and teachers, who are all on the pay roll of CPSD, that district leadership will bring back favoritism.

BU will almost certainly end the partnership with the Chelsea Public School District. Several respondents in my research are convinced that the goals set at the beginning - establishing a model of urban education - have not been reached. The task of closing the achievement gap, raising attendance rates, lowering drop out rates, is still looming large. They claim lack of community outreach has caused this.

The value of the Agreement between BU and the school will be determined how well the school district performs after BU leaves. In the eyes of many community-based organizations, the building of new local strategic partnerships for youth and family development is considered to be critical in this respect.

At this moment, a transition plan is in the making for the time when the Partnership will end. It has the working title: *Transition planning for conversion back to full local control*. The draft plan contains actions, products needed, agents and delivery dates.

Dr. Kingston asked Mr. Seigal of the School Committee to develop this plan. CBO's are still unaware this process is taking place. Is communication about this development of this plan sensible, in an early stage? Part of the transition plan that the school committee is now working on is to invite the community to engage in the transition plan. The transition plan is meant to be a flexible tool.

Crucial elements of the transition plan are:

1. Superintendent's Profile and Evaluation instrument. A job description, protocol and rubrics for evaluation of the superintendent's work will be made as an instrument for the School Committee. Tool from other cities are used. These are analyzed and put together in an evaluation paper. A ten-page draft has already been written. The School Committee is still working on it. This is important, because the School Committee has the power to hire and fire the superintendent.
2. Community Focus Groups: Visioning for the Schools. The School Committee will organize several discussion groups with Community-based organizations, parents, students, teachers and citizens. They will discuss ideas for further cooperation. It is recognized by the School Committee these agents should have a say about what the transition should be, in order to increase the level of education politics responsiveness.
3. District Attendance Policies and Procedures. School attendance in Chelsea is a problem. Recently, the school district received budget cuts due to inadequate yearly progress concerning school attendance. Last year a brainstorm was done. It was decided that kids would be given money incentives if they have a perfect attendance rate. The program appears not to be successful. Other options will have to be studied. The school Site Council is looking for other actions.

Looking at the whole of this preliminary transition plan one cannot but notice the preponderating emphasis on education. The plan needs further input of community-based organizations. Especially on solution for the problem of high school drop out school attendance. Local organization should together define a common mission in combating high school drop out and increasing school attendance levels.

3. New local strategic partnerships

The second question to answer in this research is: *How should relationships between the school system and community-based organization develop in the near future?* I will answer this question below

The Agreement with BU has brought Chelsea many advantages. However, for several years, the school district did not use the local resources to its maximum power. Recently, under the present leadership, big steps forward have been made. I have noticed an increasing interest in community outreach in the Chelsea public school system. Organizations are now forming local strategic partnerships for education and youth development. Parents and students are involved, community-based organizations, the school system, and the police department. In my opinion the moment should be seized to increase the collective efforts to reduce school drop out, raise school attendance rates and improve average student achievements in Chelsea. The achievement gap, together with low attendance rates and high drop out rates have been complex issues in Chelsea for many years and will probably remain so for many years to come. These complex issues need strong educational leadership of the kind we have seen over the past 18 years in Chelsea. Including community involvement!

There is an old saying that claims: it needs a village to raise a child. Helping students achieve, making them graduate from High School and go to college, needs the help of many different organizations and the help of all the parents in Chelsea. Good education needs all the partners it can get. We will consider some related concepts and models to find clues for local partnerships. The essence of these concepts is: interlocking problems require integrated solutions.

2.1 Transitions and trajectories, risk and protective factors

Youth can be described as a cohort between ‘infancy’ and ‘(young) adulthood’, a period in life with many ‘transitions’. One transition is from the family to the school, another is from the school to the workplace, from being a child in the family to starting a family, moving from the parent’s house to ones own house, etc. How these transitions, and the pedagogical careers connected with them, operate depends on the paths young people follow. We call these paths ‘trajectories’.

The trajectories young people follow are structured by society: social class, sex (gender), family, ethnicity, the neighborhood, the school, handicaps, police and justice system related contacts (Coles, 1995). Related concepts to trajectories are ‘harmful

paths' (Wong, 2003), and the concept of 'youth careers' (Coles, 1995). Transitions and trajectories are interconnected in many ways. We can use Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of 'life integrity' (Lebenszusammenhang) to describe these interconnections. Where the life integrity is distorted, one can use the concept of risk factors; where the life integrity is relatively in good order, one may speak about 'protective factors'.

Prior and Paris (2004) have analyzed research into risk and protective factors. 'Risk' is a critical concept in the analysis of 'post-modern' society and has become a complex and contentious topic in recent years, within criminology as well as in other disciplines (Kemshall, 2003). The concept of 'risk' can be used to refer to the presence of factors in a child's life that, within large population samples, have a statistical correlation with troublesome or damaging activities; in other words, the risk of becoming an offender is statistically more probable if the child experiences or is exposed to disadvantaged conditions. Conversely, other factors are identified as having a 'protective' effect in reducing the likelihood of a child becoming involved in troublesome or damaging activities.

2.2. Life integrity and partnership responsibility (social partnerships)

In order to intervene effectively into the lives of young people, connections have to be made between personal history, social experience, structural issues and the intervention strategy that is being applied. The Dutch sociologist Kees Schuyt (1995) uses the concept of 'chained responsibility' or 'partnership responsibility', which refers to the necessary interconnections of people, services, agencies and the like, which are responsible to create protective trajectories for children and adolescents.

When childhood takes place in problematic social circumstances, chained responsibilities or (professional) social partnerships should help children get through their difficult stages. Multiple risk factors cluster together and interact in the lives of some children, while important protective factors are conspicuously absent. Partnership responsibility is seen as a counteractive strategy to diminish the risk factors of disabling structures and damaging activities through interventions and to enlarge the protective factors through preventative actions.

Schools, social services, youth work and housing institutions have a responsibility to work together to help young people through these difficult transition periods. Schuyt identifies ten interconnections in the childhood period: (1) the family, (2) the relation between family and school, (3) the school, (4) after school, (5) between school and work – drop outs, (6) between school and work – work preparation, (7) starting to work, (8) in the workplace, (9) being unemployed, and (10) in the civil society (Schuyt 1995: 35-41). It seems that helping young people through these transitions calls for local social partnerships (Schuyt 1995: 60). See below:

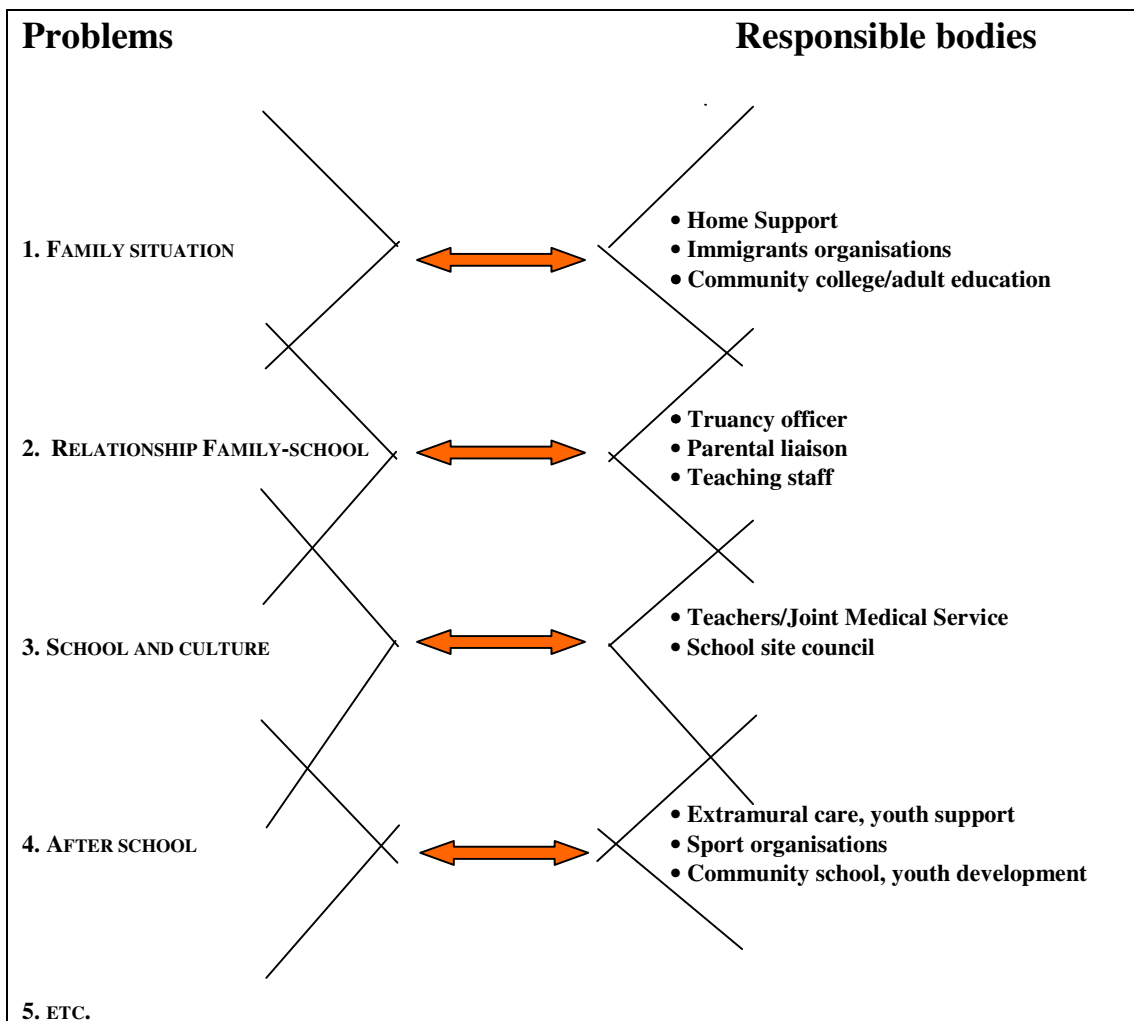


Figure 1: 'Partnership responsibility', derived from Schuyt (1995: 59).

A local strategic partnership, consisting of a multi-agency's approach is advised in order to help young people in difficult transition periods, through protective trajectories for social inclusion. In the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands there is the SISA approach (City Instrument for Concerted Action) that uses a computer system to detect multiple problem signals. The system systematically assigns case-managers to multiple problem cases in order to organize a multi-agencies approach. It is a cheap system that does not require a large-scale reallocation of means. Also in Birmingham, England, there is the Youth Offending Service, a strong local strategic partnership, consisting of multiple agencies, where multidisciplinary teams work from the same office to provide families with intensive help, requiring a large scale reorganization of work. These European examples show how joined efforts may help kids and families to prevent school drop out.

At the root of the problem in Chelsea are poverty and the conditions that accompany it: bad housing, being medically un(der)insured, working two jobs and having to leave the kids sometimes unsupervised, etc. Many of them lack the time to oversee if students do their homework, speak little or no English themselves, making it impossible for them to adequately help their children through school.

In disadvantaged school districts like Chelsea, getting results with a largely transitional student population is extraordinarily difficult. The Chelsea schools need local partners to reach adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). There is some serious criticism, on the rigid accountability culture that the NCLB and the MCAS mentioned above calls for (Journal of Education, 2004). The schools in Chelsea experience a high turnover when constant new streams of Spanish speaking settlers arrive from middle and southern America, from Bosnia and Somalia. Teachers and managers in schools have to invest relatively much in the academic achievements of students, without ever being able to show the hard work and professional investments it takes to reach results. Some students arrive without any knowledge of the English language². Teachers strive hard to improve the language skills. Some parents have never once been in a school in their life. It is hard to close the achievement gap, meaning the disparity between the school performance of white and Asian students on the one hand, and African-American and Latino students on the other (Hess & Patrelli 2006). But this goal should never be dropped. The “Washington consensus” (Journal of Education, 2004: 23) positing that poverty is no excuse for poor student achievement remains largely in tact, also in Chelsea. It takes a lot of effort by a wide range of dedicated professionals from different organizations to improve quality of life and quality of education in Chelsea.

I did find an emerging common vision and common mission in Chelsea. The starting point of all the dedicated people I spoke to in Chelsea was: all children can learn. In fact, children are the greatest learners of all times. Some children however, seem to loose the appetite for learning in school. And that is a problem for us all. The members of Chelsea organizations I spoke to all worked hard to improve the life chances of kids and families in Chelsea. The problems they address seem to be complex and persistent, needing every bodies help. Even on the scale of a small urban city like Chelsea and considering all the efforts everybody puts in to attacking the problems - teachers, parents, management of the school and the district, community based organization, Police department, City Hall - many feel they should make more progress.

If problems are interlocking, then so the solutions must be. Effective schooling is only part of the solution needed in Chelsea. Effective parenting is another part of the solution. Good after school programs are part of the solution. A better job is part of the solution. Urban safety is an important part of the solution just as gang prevention is. Good dropout prevention programs are part of the solution. One thing all organization can do: try to keep the kids in school for one or two years more. This will increase their lifetime earning capacities by more than a million dollars.

² My own kids did not speak English when we moved to Jamaica Plain. I saw from first hand experience how hard it is in the beginning on the children and the family, on the teachers and the other children in the class room. After one month, it started to improve for everyone. And after 82 days we sadly had to leave again. Looking back together it was a great experience for all of us.

4. Advise: Future role of BU - from leadership to advisory capacity

The third question to answer in this research is: *What should be the role of Boston University in Chelsea after the transition of power to full local control.* I will answer this third and final question below.

A recent increase in community outreach can be noticed in the Chelsea public school system. Community-based organizations have indeed answered this call. The school system is working together with local organizations and parents in Chelsea to increase the efforts to reduce school drop out and raise school attendance rates, in order to raise student achievements in Chelsea and close the achievement gap. Low attendance rates and high drop out rates have been complex issues in Chelsea for many years and will probably remain so for many years to come. My advice is to maintain the strong educational leadership Chelsea has seen over the past 18 years of the Agreement. On the basis of strong local leadership, Boston University can change its managerial role to an advisory role in the near future. That is, after the transition to full local control has been completed.

Youth support system

Students in Chelsea are helped best when each of the sectors in Chelsea - school system, child development agencies, recreational activities, health, police, community organizing - work intensively together, organizing a strong youth support system. In the past, organizations in Chelsea acted as if they were separate and unconnected pillars supporting the community. This seemed to hold true, both for BU and for some community based organizations. Recent leadership practices have started to change this. Institutions are becoming partners in the process of urban education. In fact, the city of Chelsea provides us with a successful example of how cooperation between institutions can grow over the years.

The real test of the value of the Partnership is: how well does the school system perform when BU leaves? In that, the building of local strategic partnerships is considered to be critical by all.

How can the university help after the transition? What are the ways in which the university in the future leverages broader partnerships? In my opinion, it can choose a more modest advisory role aimed at supporting new local strategic partnerships.

Working in local partnerships, towards life integrity in Chelsea, in the context of regionalization of action, remains a relatively new practice all round the western world. This practice still needs a lot of experimentation, knowledge development, and

evidence-based work. It is essentially a practice driven innovation in public leadership, often arriving from a bottom up approach. Although the organizations in Chelsea I spoke to operate on a clear vision, achieve results and demonstrate a sense of partnership responsibility, the Latimer Society, Iniciativa, and Choice Thru Education explicitly reported working on this in order to move on effectively, and Roca reports working on an innovate conceptual framework. They are in need of a lot of knowledge development, advice, and evidence-based work. The University can support these organizations. Also, the University can support the broader formation of local strategic partnership for youth development in Chelsea.

Boston University can assist local organizations in Chelsea with development of implementation strategies for innovative procedures and an integrated approach for local strategic partnerships. Reducing the school drop out rate can be an operational target in which the School of social work should be involved too.

BU itself can learn from this. The vocational preparation in many universities for urban educators, social workers, child developers, health institutions and the police is largely separated. By establishing multidisciplinary (research) programs in leadership, education and social work, BU can offer the students opportunities to look beyond the narrow boundaries of specialized areas of expertise. Teachers and trainers should work with multidisciplinary groups that (1) study the life integrity of young people, (2) develop with the help of urban professionals integrated methods, tailored for each field, and (3) apply the results within the curriculum again. The time span of these *knowledge-cycle-programs* is typically at least four years.

Important research questions are:

- How to prevent fuzzy responsibility in a multi-partner, multi-action local strategic partnership?
- How to connect multi-layered partnerships in education, child development, transition school-workplace, and gang-prevention?
- How to prevent partnerships from taking up too much time?

The multidisciplinary vocational preparation of urban educators, social workers, child developers, health institutions and the police is seen as a new market nice by important knowledge actors around the world. Universities such as MIT, Harvard, Stanford, Columbia Business School in New York, University of London, University of Rotterdam, are now developing multidisciplinary curricula in business and public management, history, education, and social work for managers that increasingly have to work in a joined-up world.

By offering students multidisciplinary research programs, BU can hope in a couple of years to be educating more well-rounded professionals, competent in combining knowledge of the broad social domain with knowledge in other fields. It is to be expected, moreover, that students who are capable of making connections between expertise areas in the domains of social work, housing, teaching, health, and police, might well have better job opportunities in the future. In many cities around the world, there is a great need for professional *generalists*; that can work with the concept of life integrity and the concept of regionalization.

In these courses, master's-level students:

- Are able to apply knowledge and insight and problem-solving capacities to new or unknown circumstances within a wider (or multidisciplinary) context, and are able to integrate knowledge and deal with complex subject matter;
- Are able to formulate judgments on the basis of incomplete or limited information, keeping in consideration the social and ethical responsibilities that are related to the application of one's own knowledge and opinions;
- Are able to convey conclusions, in addition to the knowledge, motives, and considerations that form the basis of those conclusions, in a clear and unambiguous manner to a public of both specialists and non-specialists; and
- Possess the abilities that enable them to enter an advanced training course that is mainly autonomous in character (Spierings & Notten 2006).

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Interviews with:

1. Kevin Carlton, Boston University, School of Education.
2. Jay Ash, City Manager of Chelsea
3. Juan Vega, Director Centro Latino
4. Molly Baldwin, Director ROCA
5. Bea Cravatta, Director Chelsea Community Schools
6. Gladys Vega, Chelsea Collaborative
7. Ed Marakovitz, Director Chelsea Collaborative
8. Melissa Colon, Director Iniciativa
9. Don Harney, Vice Chairman Chelsea Chamber of Commerce
10. Joshua Kraft, Director Jordan's Boys and Girls Club of Chelsea
11. Nancy Melendez Parental Liaison Officer Chelsea Public High School
12. Morrie Seigal, Member of the School Committee
13. Student
14. Elizabeth McBride, former member of the School Committee.
15. Michael S. Dukakis, Harvard University.
16. Leo Robinson (Council Member), together with Don Robinson, Directors of Latimer Society

18. Lt. David Batchelor, Chelsea Police Department Gang Prevention Unit; together with Dan Delaney and Scott Connelly.

21. Roberto Torrento (father of two kids in the Chelsea public schools), Zoila Calix (mother of 4 children in the Chelsea public schools), Santa Susana Alfaro (mother of 2 children in the Chelsea public schools), and Juan X.

Presentations by:

Dr. Tom Kingston (Superintendent Chelsea Public Schools)
Mary Bourke (Assistant Superintendent Chelsea Public Schools)
Gerry Lewis (Boston University Management Team Vice-Chairman)
Maria Meyer (Director of Outreach CPS)
Jordan Hampton (Nurse Practitioner, MGH health clinic at CHS)
Sue Clark (Choice and Upward Bound)
Mary-Grace Fusco (Director of English Language Learner Services)
Saida Abdi (MGH Hospital)
Josh Monahan (local student, graduate from Harvard University)
Karen Ludwig (Consultant ...)

Background information on the community by:

Rickardo Figueroa (Truancy Officer in Chelsea)

Local reports studied

See list of references above