

"We Will Teach What Democracy Really Means By Living Democratically Within Our Own Schools" Lessons From the Personal Experience of Teachers Who Taught in the Mississippi Freedom Schools

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Introduction

We begin this essay by posing a number of questions. Why does someone teach? What is the teaching act suppose to do for students? the teacher? the community? What effect does a particular curriculum have on students? How do different kinds of instructional behaviors coupled with a particular content affect students? What are students to be, do, feel, and know during and after instruction? Are students suppose to experience some kind of change during and after some particular instruction? What differences, if any, should there be in students as a result of instruction? Is the teaching act a set of facts from textbooks, lectures, and controlled structured instruction only to be remembered on district, state, and/or national examinations? Or should instruction improve or preserve a particular culture, develop citizenship, and/or improve employment?

This essay attempts to answer some of these questions by centering on a discussion about three volunteer/teachers as grounded in the everyday events and experiences of classroom life in the Mississippi Freedom School project during the summer of 1964. These teachers saw themselves as "agents of change" influencing the consciousness of African American students and the social and material conditions of their lives moving from the classrooms into the community and back again. "The education of that summer changed lives, revolutionized people. And it was meant to" (Howe, 1984, p. 51). Exploring these teacher experiences through the metaphor "agents of change" provides information about the nature of teaching and learning processes of empowering and changing the lives of students. The order of the essay will begin with a historical background including the freedom school proposal, how the curriculum and instruction were design in a curriculum conference, the recruitment and preparation of the teachers, and a brief description of the freedom school experience. Next, an in-depth description of the freedom school

experiences of three teachers will be examined. The essay will conclude with what possible pedagogical lessons might be learned from the three teachers that might inform contemporary practice.

Historical Background The Proposal for Freedom Schools

In late 1963, a major civil rights incursionary project into the state of Mississippi was being planned for the summer of 1964 by two civil rights groups, the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and The Council of Federated Organization (COFO). The initial purpose of the project was to flood Mississippi with approximately 1,000 volunteers, mostly white, in a major political action undertaking designed to promote African American equality and basic democratic rights primarily through a massive voter registration drive among the disenfranchised African Americans (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] papers, 1982, Reel 38; State Historical Society of Wisconsin [SHSW], R. Hunter Morrey papers). It was hoped that the influx of white volunteers "would attract national attention to the Southern struggle, force the federal government to act as a buffer between organizers in the black community and repressive Southern governments, and compel Lyndon Johnson running for president to commit himself on civil rights before the 1964 elections" (Perlstein, 1980, p. 301).

As part of the project, a six-week summer freedom school program was proposed. As an alternative to the existing, repressive public school system (especially for African American students) in Mississippi, the freedom schools were to provide students with a richer educational experience and, hopefully, would commit these students in becoming a force for social change (SNCC: Reel 67, 68; SHSW: R. Hunter Morrey papers). Those proposing the freedom school

program embraced a curriculum and instructional vision that was progressive and democratic rather than autocratic and authoritarian. Leaders in SNCC had implicit faith that progressive, democratic instructional methods involving active student participation centered in a civic issues curriculum emphasizing knowledge and experiences students brought to class would empower students (and teachers) to learn from each other, to become acquainted with different points of view, to stimulate, challenge, and expand ideas, and opinions, to explore possibilities of community and social improvement through collective decision making, and, hopefully, to effect those possibilities. Within the context of traditional patterns of education in Mississippi (and most other states), these classroom methods of the freedom school were considered revolutionary.

Charlie Cobb, a field secretary for SNCC and member of the summer planning committee, proposed the freedom school program and set the standards by which they would be organized and taught (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers; SNCC: Reel 68). "If we are concerned about breaking the power structure," wrote Cobb, "then we have to be concerned about building our own institutions to replace the old, unjust, decadent ones which make up the existing power structure. Education in Mississippi is an institution which must be reconstructed from the ground up," (SNCC: Reel 38, unpaginated)¹ He believed that young African American Mississippians had to break out of the slavery imposed on them by their schooling. "Learning here means only learning to stay in your place. Your place is to be satisfied—a 'good' nigger" (SNCC: Reel 67).

Cobb saw the task of freedom schools to release African American students from the passivity that Mississippi schools had fostered and, in turn, to provide them with needed skills and experiences which might encourage them to build leadership for a movement designed to change Mississippi (SNCC: Reel 68). Freedom schools were to "offer young black Mississippians an education that public schools would not supply; one that both provided intellectual stimulation and linked learning to participation in the movement to transform the South's segregated society" (Perlstein, 1990, p. 297). Cobb made it clear that the primary goal of the freedom schools was to empower students as catalysts in resolving the social ills of Mississippi society. "The overall theme of the school[s] would be the student as a force for social change in Mississippi" (SNCC: Reel 68).

Cobb had a deep-rooted faith in education as a democratic process in providing alternative solutions to transforming a repressive society. "[I]f we could show people that they could question the situation, . . . they could take some action about their situation, then they would find a correct action to take," (Cobb, 1981, p. 86). He believed that the freedom schools could make a difference in the lives

of their students and in the society of the state. "After three weeks or six weeks in the Freedom Schools at least some of the kids will have some vision of what can be done in their state," (Cobb, 1964, p. 35). Cobb perceived how this transformative education and student empowerment were to take place in the freedom school classrooms. Students were to be encouraged to ask questions about their experiences and personal situations. "The responsibility [is] to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions. More students need to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question," (SNCC: Reel 68). From these questions about personal situations Cobb believed would come solutions to problems embedded in the situations, which in turn, would bring about some action to implement the solutions in improving the situations. It would be a "freeing-of-the-mind kind of thing," Cobb told a New York audience during a fund raiser for the Summer Project, "how to think critically, to be able to analyze, to get past all the hazy little things that fog your vision," (Cobb, 1964, p. 35).

Cobb wanted teacher-volunteers to incorporate in the freedom school classrooms "some of the newer ideas, whatever they are, now circulating in educational circles" (SNCC: Reel 68). These were methods that would help students to examine, review, and if necessary, revise the social and political constructs of their society, envision alternative possibilities, and devise plans for change both in their own lives and in their community. There was to be no authoritarian teachers nor teaching methods. Instruction should permit active student participation encouraging them to reveal feelings, provide opportunities for expression, and develop a sense of group responsibility. Instruction should instill and nourish democratic principles of equality, justice, and choice. And instruction should promote community and social action.

National Curriculum Conference

To effect Cobb's ideas on freedom schools, COFO and the National Council of Churches sponsored a three-day curriculum conference in New York in March of 1964 (Fusco, 1964; SNCC: Reels 67; 68; 69). Fifty participants with a wide range of educational expertise were invited to attend the conference. The purpose of the conference was to design a comprehensive and detailed curriculum and propose various instructional methods for use in the summer freedom school program (See Note 1). Participants were divided into small groups with a specific assigned curriculum and instructional need. Each group was to "a. Decide what material should be covered b. Block out the material into a

daily schedule to fit each . . . Freedom School. [and] c. Indicate how the materials should be presented" (SNCC: Reel 64). The participants were given the charge that freedom school teaching had "to be very different from academic teaching" (SNCC: Reel 67) and had to reinforce "the relationship between school and life" (SNCC: Reel 20). As one volunteer stated:

Essentially, the Freedom Schools seek to do two things. First, we are trying to provide those things in the Freedom Schools that are not available in the public schools, or at least, supplement and improve on the offerings in the public schools. Secondly, in the Freedom School we are trying a new (for Mississippi at any rate, & possibly the rest of the country) approach to the process we call education. The Freedom Schools exist to encourage and aid free expression and thought on the part of students. [As] teachers . . . it is important for us to remember that we do not possess any knowledge that our students are incapable of acquiring through their own inquiry and effort. The Freedom Schools exist to set free the intellect. (SHSW: Frederick Heinze papers)

To help the volunteer teachers to meet these goals and to facilitate their to-be-teaching-experiences, the curriculum conference proposed and prepared a progressive civic and academic curricula and a progressive instructional program targeted to strengthen African American students academically and to prepare them for greater social and political activity. African American students in Mississippi had limited exposure to most academic subjects; many needed remedial help in basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills; and many had little interest in learning due to their negative experiences. Therefore, a curriculum of reading, creative writing, mathematics, science, English, foreign languages, and art was designed. However, the major thrust of the freedom schools was to be the implementation of the civic curriculum. Designed to relate directly to the students' experiences and life situations, the civic curriculum consisted of three components: (1) seven (fourteen were originally proposed) case studies of social issues, (2) the *Guide to Negro History*, and (3) the *Citizenship Curriculum* (Fusco, 1964; SHSW, Robert Starobin papers).

Case Studies. The case studies were structured specifically to help African American students learn to contend with and solve problems in their communities and state. Teachers were instructed not to be concerned with the number of facts students learned, but to focus on the students' ability to draw upon their own experiences, relate the case studies to current situations in Mississippi, and use the examples for suggestions to solve problems in their own area. Case writers each agreed to outline a week's study—approximately five one-hour lessons—and to provide a set

of concepts for each lesson, supply material relevant to each concept, indicate sources teachers could utilize for further information, and offer ideas for effective ways to present case content (SNCC, Reels 37, 67).

Guide to Negro History. The *Guide to Negro History* (SHSW: Pam Allen papers; SHSW: Joann Ooiman papers; SNCC: Reels 38; 67) was developed to enable African-American students to learn about their heritage, to construct a positive image of themselves as a people with heroes and positive role models (Fusco, 1964), and to realize they were taking part in a historical movement toward social, economic and political justice (Gillard, 1965). Consistent with the overall freedom school goal of making academic learning meaningful in a real life context, lessons were focused to help students understand the significance of learning history in relation to their own daily lives. Students could "grow and develop new insights as they (1) master relevant information, (2) relate this new knowledge to the information they already have, and (3) attempt to apply these insights to current problems" (SHSW: Joann Ooiman papers).

Citizenship Curriculum. To help students critically examine their life situations in terms of what they wanted to achieve and how they could work toward a more just and equitable existence, the freedom schools implemented the *Citizenship Curriculum* (SHSW, Christopher Hexter papers; Noel Day, Interview). Teachers explored with their students two sets of questions considered to be the foundation to understanding the content of the *Citizenship Curriculum*:

THE BASIC SET OF QUESTIONS:

1. Why are we (teachers and students) in freedom schools?
2. What is the Freedom Movement?
3. What alternatives does the Freedom Movement offer us?

THE SECONDARY SET OF QUESTIONS:

1. What does the majority culture have that we want?
2. What does the majority culture have that we don't want?
3. What do we have that we want to keep?

(SHSW, Christopher Hexter papers)

In addition, the conference recommended numerous progressive, democratic teaching techniques emphasizing self-discovery and self-expression and encouraging students to think critically, to question Mississippi's oppressive social order, and to participate in social change (SNCC, Reel 27; Lauter & Perlstein, 1991). Charles Cobb stressed that the teaching methods presenting the curricula should promote classroom activities and discussions as "an outgrowth of [student] experiences" (SNCC, Reel 27). Traditional

teaching in Mississippi had served as a form of oppression. Authoritarian in nature, it relied on rote learning where a teacher lectured and then tested solely on that lecture. Students were expected to be passive and subservient. Under this form of education, African American youth learned not to trust others (particularly whites), to be cynical, and to expect to be ill-prepared to function in society (SNCC, Reel 67). The possibility that students should someday serve as active agents for social change was unheard of—and it was undesired. This was the mentality of the black public education system and of the Mississippi society at large (Holt, 1966).

In contrast, freedom schools rejected these traditional teaching practices and relied upon progressive methods designed to promote "student participation in learning, a sense of the worth and equality among students, and the need to connect lessons to life . . ." (Perstein, 1990, p. 319). The "Introduction" to the citizenship curriculum stated it this way: "It is not our purpose to impose a particular set of conclusions. Our purpose is to encourage the asking of questions, and hope that society can be improved" (SHSW, Christopher Hexter papers). The asking of questions was to be the vehicle by which the conversion from passive to active was to be accomplished. On the simplest level, students needed to learn to question in the classroom. The curriculum designers hoped that through learning to question freely and thoughtfully in the class situation, students would "develop a new way of thinking and be awakened to their powers of analytic reasoning" (SNCC, Reel 27).

Although the volunteer-teachers were urged to use the designed curriculum and instruction, they were to be given the opportunity to modify or alter it if they perceived that existing situations or the experiences and abilities of the students warranted such change (SHSW, Jerry Demuth papers). And even though many of the volunteers were inexperienced teachers with inadequate content knowledge of African American history and civil rights issues, the designers believed that the teachers should have opportunities to make their own curricular and instructional choices (UWL, Otis Pease papers; SNCC, Reel 39).

Teacher Recruitment and Preparation

After the Curriculum Conference, SNCC and COFO began to recruit volunteer-teachers. Most of the recruitment and screening took place among college-age students from mostly Northern and West Coast universities (SNCC: Reel 39). Also, there was an active recruitment among professional teachers of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit.

"It is . . . clear that a number of people experienced in teaching the subjects and students that we will be dealing with, would be a valuable addition to the Freedom School staff[s]" (SNCC: Reel 39). Two hundred eighty volunteer teachers were eventually chosen to participate in the Mississippi freedom schools. Eighty-five percent of the teachers were white, sixty percent college students, forty percent professional teachers, fifty-six percent were female, median age of all the volunteers, 24.1, and all either college graduates or attending universities. At least 60 percent had at least some involvement in the Civil Rights movement either in their home states and/or in the South (Statistical information comes from Hinman-Smith, 1993). A report on the characteristics of the volunteer teachers stated, "The teachers are young—college students and youthful teachers—and relatively inexperienced, but they are enthusiastic, experimental, and politically sophisticated. Most importantly, there is a sense of purpose . . ." (SNCC: Reel 68).

Prior to a two one-week orientation meeting to be held at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, the freedom school applicants were sent an acceptance letter, a memorandum on how freedom schools were to operate, a six-page mimeographed handout entitled, "Notes On Teaching In Mississippi," and their freedom school assignment. The acceptance letter began, "We are happy to tell you that you have been accepted to work with us this summer on the Mississippi Freedom School" and encouraged each teacher to prepare themselves for the upcoming events of the summer (SNCC: Reel 39). The memorandum stated that the purpose of the freedom schools were "to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives, and ultimately, new directions for action" (SHSW: Sandra Hard papers). It also stated that "the students academic experiences should relate directly to their real life in Mississippi" and "be involved in the political life of their communities" (SHSW: Sandra Hard papers).

The "Notes On Teaching in Mississippi" gave more detailed instructions and emphasized how the Curriculum Conference wanted each of the freedom schools to be. Jane Stenbridge, who participated in organizing the curriculum conference, wrote:

This is the situation. You will be teaching young people who have lived in Mississippi all their lives. That means that they have been deprived of decent education, from the first grade through high school. It means that they have been denied free expression and free thought. Most of all—it means that they have been denied the right to question.

The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to help them begin to question. This is not an easy job. Neither is it impossible. Deep

inside, these young people possess the great creativity . . . the desire for knowledge. . . and the wild hopes of all young people. You have to reach deep and tap these resources. (SNCC, Reel 39)

The next two pages, *Problems Of Freedom School Teaching*, described how freedom schools were to be a low cost operation since funds were limited. Communities may or may not help. And teachers may have to recruit students before a freedom school would be able to start. Teachers were encouraged to bring any teaching resources and materials they believed they might need in order to teach effectively.

The last three and a half pages, *Remarks To The Freedom School Teacher About Method*, were written by Noel Day, also a participant in the Curriculum Conference. He encouraged teachers to use teaching methods that would create an active, participatory learning environment based on the experiences and the lives the students brought to class. Day suggested to the teachers that discussion should be the basic method of instruction in the freedom schools. Discussion was expected to promote affective and cognitive results among students because of the following strengths: "1. Encouraging expression; 2. Exposing feelings (bringing them into the open where they may be dealt with productively); 3. Permitting the participation of students on various levels; 4. Developing group loyalties and responsibility; [and] 5. Permitting the sharing of strengths and weaknesses of individual group members" (SNCC, Reel 39). Other progressive methods ought to include: drama, art, singing, films, guest speakers, role playing, creative writing, school newspapers, and social action projects. Discussion, however, was to be used as a follow-up technique for these other methods "to make certain that the material has been learned" (SNCC, Reel 39).

Some of the volunteer teachers also received additional instructions from their site coordinators. For example, from the coordinator of the Vicksburg freedom school came the following "requests":

All teachers please be at the place where your classes are scheduled, when they are scheduled. If this means missing dinner it means missing dinner. Please remain there during at least 3/4 of the time your class is to be in session if no one comes on time (unless, of course, you are rounding up your students.)

All teachers please spend some time (at least 1/2 hour per subject) on class preparation. This is necessary. Lack of preparation shows—and the students know it. Since there is never time in the evening and very little in the morning before classes, this means that teachers with more than one subject should not canvas (voter registration) weekday afternoons.

If this sounds like I think the Freedom School is some "big deal"—that's the way it's suppose to sound. It takes work and, yes, devotion. . . One more thing: *Thank you very much* for your [upcoming] work and efforts in the face of [possible] frustration and depression. (SNCC: Reel 68)

The two one-week training orientation meetings in late June 1964, on the campus of Western College for Women at Oxford, Ohio, were intended to provide further training and instruction (SHSW, Rev. Richard Gould papers; SHSW, Joann Ooiman papers; SHSW, Lise Vogel papers; Gillard, 1965; SNCC: Reel 69). The mood was serious. Robert Moses, an experienced SNCC field secretary, set the tone of the orientation workshops. The workshops would deal with real problems, situations, and issues. This was no summer vacation. The Summer Project meant the necessity of sending the young volunteers to possible death. The first-week orientation was for the non-teachers who were to canvas Mississippi to encourage voter registration among African American adults.

The freedom school volunteers attended the second-week session. They were involved in a series of workshops that included receiving intensive courses in Mississippi politics, race relationships, the existing educational structure of the Mississippi African American schools, practical safety procedures, and training in pedagogical techniques and the use of the core curricula (Lake, 1964; Rothschild, 1982). Both Moses, a participant in the curriculum conference, and Staughton Lynd, the Freedom School Director, urged the teachers to question and listen to their students, have the students study thoroughly problems of their community and the Southern power structure, and allow them to plan for action which could abolish segregation rather than talk and give information to them all the time (Mabee, 1964; SHSW: Lise Vogel papers). If the teachers would do this, their students would accomplish "something really significant" (SHSW: Lise Vogel papers). (See Note 2.)

The Freedom School Experience

On completing the orientation, the volunteers traveled to their respected locations throughout Mississippi to open their six to eight-week freedom schools. The organizers had initially planned for 20 schools with populations of approximately 1,000 students (SHSW, Robert Starobin papers); however the program met with unanticipated success and enthusiasm, resulting in 41 schools in 20 communities, with a total of 2,165 students (SNCC, Reel 38). Although high-school-aged students were originally targeted, the schools attracted a number of elementary and some adult students as well (Holt, 1966).

The culminating event for all freedom schools was a three-day statewide student convention held in August, 1964, in Meridian, Mississippi, planned and administered by student delegates, who formulated and adopted a detailed platform on issues ranging from job discrimination to civil liberties (SHSW, Robert Parks papers; SHSW, Howard Zinn papers; Grant, 1964; Lynd, 1965). Seventy-five African American students representing all of the freedom schools came together for three days to discuss common goals and concerns (SHSW, Jake Friesen papers). The student delegates brought with them political resolutions drawn up by students in each of the freedom schools. In a number of workshops and general assemblies they vigorously discussed and sorted out the various resolutions until a cohesive platform for a new Mississippi was developed and accepted by all delegates (Lynd, 1965; SNCC: Reels 39; 67; 68; SHSW: Jake Friesen papers).

This platform was probably the truest measure of the success of the freedom school program (SNCC Reel: 64).

Imagine [two] thousand or so high-school students, most of whom have been raised in poverty and have gone to poor schools, few of whose relatives have ever voted, who know policeman in general as people to avoid in time of trouble and white men as people who may have fathered their great grandparents and cheated their grandparent and parents. Next, give these young people a month in a freedom school, discussing, arguing, debating, learning . . . about Negroes who have struggled for better conditions for their people. Finally, transport seventy-five . . . of them from many parts of the state to one room in Meridian and step aside. . . . [F]reedom school teachers . . . gave them an initial nudge and they have taken off. (SHSW: Robert Parks papers)

The upshot of both the freedom schools and the Meridian convention was projected school boycotts and picket lines, participation in voter registration and other civil rights activities, creation of student unions and other freedom schools as parallel institutions to the public high schools, student activism within the public schools, and attempts to integrate various white schools and other public institutions (SNCC: Reel 64). Young African Americans began to fulfill Cobb's dream as active agents for social change. They began to change the structure of Mississippi society (SNCC: Reel 40).

Although it was hoped that freedom schools would continue beyond the summer project, only a few were able to be sustained. The original planners had not intended the schools to become permanent institutions, merely a vehicle for immediate change (Lauter & Perlstein, 1991). But many students and teachers found that the short six-to-eight week freedom school experience had a significant impact on their lives. "The freedom schools showed that there can be a situation where learning is not forced upon youth," wrote

Mary Gillard (1965), a Gulfport freedom school teacher.

This was a type of education which gave individuals a personal interest in social relationships, a personal interest which made learning something to be sought after. . . . The freedom schools met the challenge of changing the social order through the educative process. . . . This is not an additional burden that must be met through education, but a necessity if we are to have truth, justice, and equality in society." (p. 43)

The Teachers

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to explore the personal teaching experiences of three teachers in the context of the Mississippi Freedom School project and; (2) to extract pedagogical principles from these experiences, as these principles relate to teaching as social change in a democratic context. Data have been gathered from case examples of three freedom school volunteers teaching in three different freedom schools. The freedom school experiences of these three women will be examined from the perspective of their personal aims and goals for teaching in the freedom schools, and their curriculum and instruction experiences. From these experiences goals, curriculum, and instruction, a set of organizing principles will be distilled for the purpose of constructing a possible framework for teaching for social change.

A variety of primary sources were used to gather information for this study. Questionnaires were mailed to identified individuals who had participated as freedom school volunteers. From the returned questionnaires collected, three teachers were selected for this study. Two of the participants were also interviewed for more in-depth information and detail. News accounts, popular magazines, scholarly books, journals, and one master's thesis provided personal experiences of both the teachers and students. Archive collections were the primary resource for processes of curriculum development and instructional application: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee papers; Project South Collection, Stanford University; the Social Action papers from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; and the Manuscripts and University Archives Division, University of Washington.

Identification of the three teachers was limited by the extent to which their names and roles were identified through the sources utilized in this study. These teachers were chosen because of the availability of detailed information on curriculum use, instructional behaviors, and teachers' and students' responses and reflections on their experiences over the six to eight week period of participation. (Accounts of other freedom school teachers focus more on isolated

events, which, though they contribute much to overall understanding of the freedom school effort, do not lend themselves to comparison and analysis. For information on other teacher experiences, see Rothschild, 1981; Hinman-Smith, 1993). This study can not be generalized to all teachers who played an active role in the freedom schools. However, the conditions described by the teachers selected will provide some idea of the context which surrounded the work of many of the freedom school teachers.

The three teachers whose experiences will be examined are Pam Parker (Allen), M. Christine (Kristy) Powell, and Florence Howe. Parker was 20 years old from Solebury, Pennsylvania, and was a student at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. Prior to the Summer Project, she was an exchange student at Spellman College, Atlanta, Georgia, where she was recruited by the Freedom School Director, Staughton Lynd. Her assignment was in the Holly Springs freedom school. She had no teaching experience. Powell was 36 years old from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was an experienced public school teacher at the elementary level. Her assignment was both coordinator and teacher in the Ruleville freedom school. Florence Howe was 35 years old and an English professor from Goucher College in Towson, Maryland. Her assignment was in one of the Jackson freedom schools. Her teaching experience at the time had been with only adults.

Personal Aims and Goals

Pam Parker. Pam had spent a year at Spellman College as an exchange student when she was recruited to become a freedom school teacher. The decision to go was not an easy decision. She and her parents were anxious and admittedly afraid that something terrible could happen to her in Mississippi. But her Judeo-Christian values of service to those in need of equity, justice, and freedom and her belief in her ability that she could make a profound contribution to African American youth persuaded her she needed to go to Mississippi. She felt that teaching in a freedom school was so important "that these kids get a chance to share in [a] real education" that she was willing to risk her own life "to share with them" (SHSW: Pam Allen papers).

Prior to leaving for the Oxford orientation in late June, Pam gave a talk to the congregation of the Trinity Episcopal Church in her hometown of Solebury, Pennsylvania. In a passionate discourse on the injustices toward the black community, she outlined 10 reasons why she was going to spend her summer months in Mississippi teaching in a freedom school: to help alleviate injustice; to help her students develop self-esteem and dignity to help them see

themselves as human beings; to give her students love and support; to help develop their minds and their leadership potential; to tutor them where they are weak in their regular school subjects and in subjects where they wish additional knowledge and skill; to teach black history to show her students that blacks have contributed to their country in ways that the students can be proud; to teach what democracy really means by living democratically within the freedom schools; to create a learning atmosphere of mutual respect which in turn will encourage her students to ask questions and to share their own thoughts; and, to demonstrate to the students that having pride in being black is being proud in being human (SHSW: Pam Allen papers).

Upon arriving and beginning her teaching assignment in Holly Springs, Pam was very impressed with her students. She came to realize that her students were risking a lot to come to a freedom school. The white community at large had strongly discouraged the schools and intimidated many of the local black parents to discourage their children from attending the schools. The students wanted to be in the freedom schools and "they sometimes stood against parental and social pressure to come—as well as risked their lives" (Letter to the authors). In an interview, Pam was asked if there was any need for any type of classroom management or discipline. She responded,

Teaching issues like discipline are meaningless. The kids *risked* a lot to come. There may have been times when adults needed to structure exuberance or call a chaotic group to order, but it was to *focus* energy that was always in my experience, enthusiastic and exuberant. To put that in the category of discipline would be to distort the students' commitment and excitement. (Interview: Chude Pam Allen)

She also came to realize that they wanted to learn.

Every class is beautiful . . . They are a sharp group . . . they are undereducated and starved for knowledge. They know that they have been cheated and they want anything and everything that we can give them . . . They respond to everything that is said. They are excited about learning. They drain me of everything that I have to offer so that I go home at night completely exhausted but very happy in spirit because I know that I have given to people. (SHSW: Pam Allen papers)

This led to Pam having faith in their abilities to commit and be responsible to the movement and to their community. "I have a great deal of faith in these students. They are very mature and very concerned about other people. I really think that they will be able to carry on without us" (SHSW: Pam Allen papers). She felt a keen responsibility in teaching her students.

I feel very tired sometimes from the great responsibility I have in teaching all these classes. We must leave these students prepared to carry on without us, not just in terms of voter registration but in terms of sharing with their peers all that they have learned and teaching as much as possible to the younger kids . . . I feel inadequate to the task of teaching them but I keep saying to myself that as long as I continue to feel humble there is a chance that we might all learn a whole lot together. (SHSW: Pam Allen papers)

Kristy Powell. Kristy was both a teacher and the coordinator of the Ruleville Freedom School. She recognized the "potentially life endangering situation" the teachers could encounter while in Mississippi (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers). It was danger she and the other teachers were willing to encounter for the sake of teaching children to realize their potential as full human beings. She recalled "We had temporarily put aside our human fears and were accepting a responsibility which was ours and we were doing it together" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers).

In a final report about her experiences in Ruleville, she claimed the purpose of the freedom school was to be a center for "real education" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers). In contrast to the authoritarian environment of the regular black school which had started in July, Ruleville freedom school would meet in the afternoon and evenings providing a healthy social environment for the students. (It was not uncommon for black schools in the South to start in the middle of Summer as opposed to the beginning of September as for white schools. The reason was cotton had to be picked in late Fall and the black students were expected to help the adults in the picking. Therefore, they got a "field vacation" for two to four weeks.). The Ruleville freedom school was meant "to remedy the educational dearth and brain-washing of Negro youths through genuine progressive education" (SHSW: Dale Gronemeier papers). Students in the freedom school would

out of their study of such things as Negro History [would become] aware of themselves as human beings and as Negroes . . . They [would learn] to ask questions about why Negroes in Mississippi live they way they do. . . More important, it [would] be a chance to form meaningful answers to these questions, and . . . to begin really working to change the life of the Mississippi Negro. (SHSW: Jerry Tecklin papers)

The classes would be comprehensive and intense (One student exclaimed he had learned a lot of things, and "it was not fun!" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers). If the freedom school education was to have a lasting impact on African American students, they would need to apply what they had learned in school to create positive change in their community. True achievement in learning was considered to have occurred only

if students were involved in exploring ideas, applying reasoned options to real life problems, making choices, and promoting community involvement.

To accomplish these objectives, it was very important to Kristy both as a teacher and the school coordinator to bring the teachers together in to a "egalitarian" democratic community (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers). This teacher community had to be an example of how social action among peers with equal input and equal responsibility could take place and work within a repressive environment. She wanted the teachers to work closely with each other, the students, and the community both academically and socially, to solve problems and affect improvement. She was impressed with the Ruleville freedom school teachers. Out of the nine teachers, four were graduates and two, professional teachers. She found that being a graduate or a professional teacher made no difference in how good a freedom school teacher one was. The undergraduate college students did equally as well as the others. They were "creative, inventive, [and] full of enthusiasm" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers).

Florence Howe. Florence was an English literature instructor for five years at a small college, Goucher, in Towson, Maryland. She was by her own admission a traditional teacher. Yet, students seemed to like both her subject matter and the way she taught her classes (Howe, 1984). She had been working on a doctoral dissertation when she decided to volunteer to teach in the freedom schools. She believed that she was quite prepared as an instructor to teach black students. She was not prepared to have her instruction challenged. She was anxious to teach and was not too happy in attending what she first considered a boring orientation meetings in Oxford. Because of her experience, being older than most of the other participants, and being bored, she became sort of a busy body, know-it-all in attempting to tell others how they were to approach their instruction in their respected classrooms. Staughton Lynd, the Freedom School Director, encouraged Florence rather than undermine some of the instruction of the orientation organizers, she might like to familiarize herself with the freedom school curriculum and methodology. Not being offended, she took Lynd's advice and immersed herself in the civic curriculum and its proposed methods of instruction. In her own words, the freedom school pedagogy was a "revelation, for they specifically forbade 'teaching' as I until then understood it" (Howe, 1984, 155). It was meant to raise African American students' consciousnesses and knowledge about their culture that had a real identity, a language, a history, and that they could decide on their own values and future directions.

From that moment on Florence began to experience a complete change in her educational beliefs and practices.

Teaching the civic curriculum and English literature to eleven to fourteen year-olds in the Jackson freedom school became a "turning point" in her life. She explains:

In the summer of 1964 I went to Mississippi to teach in a Freedom School. I date this experience as the turning point in my life. In Mississippi I continued to teach mostly women students, but they were black and poor, not white and middle-class. In Mississippi I learned a few new things about teaching—only one of which I'll mention here. The subject of the summer was liberation: Freedom Summer it was called, and for many of us, teachers and students, it was just that. To liberate oneself—and no one else can do it for you—you need not only the belief in the value and possibility of freedom—without that nothing else is possible, but you need also an understanding of those social forces that have oppressed you. Without such knowledge powerful enough to include the means of change, freedom or consciousness is meaningless—head-stuff only. And in Mississippi, the aim of Freedom Summer and Freedom School was to change the consciousness of students and the social and material conditions of their lives. A phrase that has become trivialized through its misuse was not stale then: teachers and students were "agents of change" in Mississippi. We moved from the classroom into the streets and back again to our books. The education of that summer changed lives, revolutionized people. And it was meant to. (Howe, 1984, p. 51)

The impact of the freedom school experience came from her personal interactions with her students and her perception of what a freedom school teacher ought to be in practice. In her classroom she had opportunities to see the effect the freedom school curriculum and pedagogy had on the spirit and energy of her students. In this brief "glowing hour," a sense of community and an environment of learning was created to bring power to students in the form of participatory democracy which led to challenging the white power structure and to a "belief that significant social change was possible through hard work, organizing, education, rational discussion, the spread of truthful information," and a commitment to participation in nonviolent acts no matter the extremity of circumstances (Lauter & Howe, 1972, p. 132). "In short, there was no room for cynicism, defeatism, or . . . sense of doom . . ." (Howe, 1984, p. 250).

There was a fundamental belief that by participating in the freedom school Mississippi institutions could be changed and reconstructed. Florence believed her classrooms could provide a radical connection between school and the lives of her students. "My role as teacher was to create an environment in which students could decide to investigate . . . the necessities and realities of social change" (Howe, 1984, p. 156). The students were to be set in motion by recognizing the connections of school activities with community problems and the students' equal involvement in both

settings so that they might see learning and knowledge as potentially useful in changing the conditions of their lives and their community. Learning and knowledge had the power to raise student consciousness, contribute to self-determination in the community, and promote the confidence to act. "[T]he purpose of the freedom schools is to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives—ultimately new directions for action" (Lauter & Howe, 1970, p. 39).

Florence knew to bring about this desired social change the freedom school teacher had to practice non authoritarian classrooms, be a concerned questioner, evoke activity and expression, inject energy, academic knowledge, enthusiasm, and caring (Lauter and Howe, 1970).

Clearly, the freedom-school teacher [is] not to be an omnipotent, aristocratic dictator, a substitute for . . . the paternalistic state. [She is] not to stand before rows of students, simply pouring predigested, precensored information into their brains. . . . [rather she is] to learn to keep quiet, to learn how to *learn* with her students. . . . to be a student among students. [She does] not have all the answers . . . [but] depend[s] on [her] ability to listen to [her] students as much as or more than they listened to [her] . . . to respond with feeling and imagination as well as with intelligence and good humor to the moods and needs of the group. . . . to understand. . . . [and] really . . . hear what students [have] to say, and who would [herself] be led by their responses to think and act . . . (Lauter & Howe, p. 40)

"I learned something else as well," Florence continued, "that students might know something valuable that teachers did not; and that such knowledge shared in a classroom might spark a discussion, might provide one of those magical moments in which learning is 'revelation,' the kind of learning . . . that sticks to the marrow of minds. (Howe, 1984, p. 250)

Curriculum

Pam Parker. The school at Holly Springs offered a variety of different classes that could be chosen according to the interests and needs of the individual students; however, the core classes of citizenship and African-American history were required of everyone. Teachers worked with a goal of helping the students experience racial identity and pride (Questionnaire, Pam Allen; SHSW, Sandra Hard papers). Pam taught high-school-aged girls. She was assigned to teach the civic curriculum with emphasis on black history, and courses in religion and nonviolence. She also assisted in the drama class.

Her favorite curriculum was black history. The purposes of the class were three fold: teach a history that belonged to the students even though they did not know it existed, to help them to develop pride in being African American, and to realize that blacks can make a major contribution to society. She recorded an experience while teaching a lesson from the *Guide to Negro History* that reflected her own and her students' feelings and reactions to an historical event about which her students knew nothing:

Let me describe one of my first classes and one of my favorite classes. I gave a talk on Haiti and the slave revolt which took place there at the end of the 18th century. I told them how the slaves revolted and took over the island. I told them how the French government (during the French Revolution) abolished slavery all over the French Empire. And then I told them that the English decided to invade the island and take it over for a colony of their own. I watched faces fall over around me. They knew what was coming. They knew the story of their people well. They knew that a small island, run by former slaves, could not defeat England. They knew that the Negroes always lost to the Europeans. And then I told them that the people of Haiti succeeded in keeping the English out. I watched a smile spread slowly over a girl's face. And I felt the girls sit up and look at me intently. Then I told them that Napoleon came to power, reinstated slavery, and sent an expedition to reconquer Haiti. They looked at me and their faces began to fall. But they waited this time. They waited for me to tell them that France defeated the former slaves, hoping against hope that I would say that they didn't. But when I told them that the French generals tricked the Haitian leader Toussaint to come aboard their ship, captured him and sent him back to France to die, they knew that there was no hope. They waited for me to spell out the defeat. Former slaves, Negroes, could not defeat France who had the aid of England, Holland and Spain, especially without a leader. And when I told them that Haiti did succeed in keeping out the European powers and was recognized finally as an independent republic, they just looked at me and smiled. The room stirred with a gladness and a pride that this could have happened. And I felt so happy and so humble that I could have told them this little story and it could have meant so much. (SHSW, Pam Allen papers)

After the story, she asked her students to relate the historical experience to their own lives. What would it mean to stand up and say "no" in Holly Springs? A lively discussion on the consequences of the question and on how each of the students could be a leader in the community followed (See Note 3).

Pam's nonviolence class was intended to interest young people in committing themselves to the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Although the class had begun slowly, it picked up with a number of her students involving themselves in the COFO and SNCC activities. She assisted helping the drama class in designing a play about the killing

of Medger Evers. The idea was the students. Except for guidance in structuring the play, the students developed and wrote the play themselves. The play, "Seeds of Freedom" was so popular that it played in other freedom schools and surrounding communities, toured with the Free Southern Theater, and was performed later in December in New York City as a fund raiser for the movement in Mississippi. Two of the girls who performed in the play were kicked out their regular public school.

Kristy Powell. Prior to the opening of the freedom school at Ruleville, Kristy, as the co-ordinator of the school, had the teachers met and cooperatively decided how the overall curriculum would be. In addition to the required citizenship and black history curricula, each teacher would have the right to develop his or her own curriculum (SHSW, Staughton Lynd papers). When the curricula were assembled and school began, the initial class schedule was similar to that of the other freedom schools (SHSW, Jerry Tecklin papers); however the teachers soon realized that the classes were very academic and many students were not excited about most of them, so the staff decided to revise the curricula. The citizenship curriculum was to remain, but it and the best of the curricula had to become an active student forum for community changes (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers).

The schedule was divided into a three hour block. The first hour was a mass meeting of all of the students. The hour began with singing freedom songs followed by a prepared talk by one of the freedom school teachers. The topics ranged from civil rights topics, black history, community problems, book reviews, and folk singing by special guests such as Pete Seger. Time would be left for questions and further discussion involving the entire student body.

The second hour was for "Expression Groups." The students were allowed to choose from three classes, role playing, art, or creative writing, in which they were to express what they felt they had learned from the topics in the first hour. To represent their knowledge, those in the role playing class had to create short skits; those in art were encouraged to do free, abstract work with paint and charcoal; and, those in creative writing chose a medium—poetry, review, essay—to represent their thoughts and feelings. Usually, each class would begin with a discussion on the topic followed with how each student wanted to represent their knowledge. In teams of three, the teachers would then help the students to create their representations. Through out the week, these representations would be presented to the school, and sometimes to the community.

The third hour block was scheduled for electives. This included the core civic curriculum and remedial reading and writing classes emphasizing the civic curriculum. The classes were divided into age and ability groups. Kristy taught

thirteen and fourteen years olds in black history and geography. She also taught students who had a fifth or higher grade reading level. "This group was a delight to teach, and the readings always produced, if not discussion, at least very pertinent and often moving comments relating the thing read to the situation in Miss[issippi] today" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers).

In addition to the core curriculum, the Ruleville freedom school also prepared the students for three other activities. The first activity was to prepare students to attend the culminating state Freedom School activity, the Meridian Freedom School Convention. The purpose of the convention was to bring together student delegates from each freedom school to participate in drafting a political platform in which African American students through out the state could engage themselves in trying to transform Mississippi society. In preparing for the convention, small groups of students discussed, researched, and prepared motions on local conditions and political issues that they felt to be most important. The groups then merged to debate their positions and construct a representative platform, which was eventually presented at the Meridian convention.

The second activity developed from the students' concern that the African American teachers in their public schools were afraid to register to vote, and thus could not take the lead in demanding better, integrated schools (SHSW, Ruby Davis papers; SNCC: Reel 40). Students wanted to picket their public school hoping to encourage the public school teachers to realize that they too should become active change agents. Freedom school teachers helped the students practice picket strategies and role play interviews with their public school teachers on how to register to vote. Teachers and students wrote a pre-picket letter to the public school's principal and faculty presenting their demands, and produced leaflets for the students in the public school urging them to join the picket (SNCC: Reel 68). Although threatened with suspension, a number of public school students joined the freedom school students in what was to be a successful picket of the local high school.

The third event was both a community celebration of freedom and a culminating activity of what the students had learned in the freedom school experience. The event, "The Freedom Festival," featured a number of student presentations to the Ruleville African American community which included: (1) a puppet play in which the valiant knight Bob Moses (SNCC field secretary) fought the wicked witch Segregation; (2) a student play, *Uncle Tom's High School*, telling the story of the Ruleville student protest and picket; (3) choral readings of Eve Merriam's poems; (4) three freedom songs written by students; (5) two readings of students' poems on the Montgomery Bus Boycott; and (6) a finale in which everyone sang "We Shall Overcome."

Florence Howe. In the Jackson freedom school, Florence taught both the civic and the English curriculum. Her initial experience with the civic curriculum was somewhat limited. She considered herself to be "the least informed person" in her class (Howe, 1984, p. 250). Armed with a mimeographed copy of the curriculum she attempted to help her students interpret the content in terms of their personal lives "trying to make connections between [their] feelings and the objective conditions of . . . life (Lauter and Howe, 1970, p. 43).

It was aimed at meeting two basic needs of students: first, a need for identity and hence activity; second, a need for information. The "facts" of history . . . had been denied to them, and denied particularly in relation to their own lives as American blacks . . . Their need for identity and activity was organically one with the need for facts. It had to do with what happens when an individual begins to know himself as part of history, with a past and a potential future as well as a present. What happens when an individual begins to assess himself as a human being? [Therefore] . . . the citizenship curriculum was to assist the growth of self-respect, through self-awareness, both of which lead to self-help. (Lauter & Howe, pp. 40-41)

The use of the curriculum was "energy provoking," "problem solving," and "very demanding." As the class speculated, asked, and attempted to answer questions, the students defined "those aspects of their lives they wanted to keep and those they would change; in addition, they defined those aspects of the "majority culture" they would or would not want to adopt" (Howe, 1984, p. 156). The curriculum involved applying social science information to social problems and using cogent, intellectual processes in the resolution of these problems. Working from a base of the students' own experiences—the knowledge they had as blacks living in Jackson, Mississippi, the utilization of the curriculum began

with the experiences of your students . . . ; [next] you share experiences; then you leaven them with information, facts, data, what social science knows and does not know; and you proceed to analysis, the hard questions. Why were most black Mississippians without indoor plumbing? How could that be changed? (Howe, 1984, pp. 250-251)

Florence also explored new styles and approaches to teaching and learning the English curriculum (Howe, 1965). She wanted an English curriculum that was stimulating and relevant to the lives of her students. From the beginning she determined that the major ingredient of the curriculum would be the writing of poems. Using poetry as curriculum would provide students with opportunities to connect discussing and writing poems to the study of controversial subjects, to talk freely together about matters that concern them, to write about

feelings or thoughts about something they felt like expressing, and to do it in such a way that it communicates that something to others. Although she was concerned about the lack of English skills her students possessed, Florence believed that by actively participating in the reading, discussion, and writing of poetry these experiences would promote instinctively the acquisitions of those needed skills. "[A] poem's organic nature leads students naturally from its language and rhythms to feelings and ideas and back again to language and rhythms" (Howe, 1969, p. 62). She was sure that attempts at making poetry out of their own lives would contribute to her students' desires and abilities to read (Howe, 1972).

Yet, the most important part about the poetry curriculum was the connection of poetry and politics. Florence wrote that "in Freedom Schools all over Mississippi . . . students were becoming both social activists and poets" (Howe, 1965, p. 159). Poetry was becoming a forum for personal and communal expressions of feelings, experiences, thoughts and hopes. Students were making poetry theirs, transforming themselves in relation to their community claiming of it what they wanted, and rejecting the rest (See Note 4). Through the creative writing experiences, students were able to gain a sense of their own identities found in rich expression and thought (Howe, 1984).

Each night before the next day's class, Florence would cram as many poems on a single mimeographed page as she could. She did this because, one, there were no books of poems and paper was in short supply, and, second, it provided students with a variety of poems that they could easily read and discuss in the space of a classroom hour (Howe, 1972). The class read poems by Langston Hughes, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and e e cummings. Hughes had a special impact on her students:

They knew immediately that when Hughes, in a poem called "As I Grew Older," mentioned a "thick wall" and a "shadow" growing between him and his childhood "dream," he was talking about walls and shadows they knew everyday in Jackson: the barbed wire around the parks, for example, or the hate in white men's faces when they tried to go to a movie downtown. I didn't need to be a teacher showing the difference between literal meaning and what was "symbolized." (Howe, 1965, p. 157)

Students also helped determine the curriculum. Often after reading and discussing the meaning of a certain poem they would get into writing because it helped solve a problem they were having with the poem such as trying to determine what they thought the poem meant or writing a poem in contrast or in response to the author's intentions. Or they would simply construct a poem on something they felt like writing. Many of these poems would then become the curriculum for the day as students would read and

discuss their own poems. From these experiences her students were having with reading, discussing, and writing poetry, Florence believed they were having "direct evidence that their school experience had led them to create something that was lasting and profound" of a liberating personal nature (Howe, 1965, pp. 156-157). They could, through their own self-determination, transform their own lives and improve the conditions of their community.

Instruction

Pam Parker. From the beginning, Pam found it was quite a challenge teaching black students who had only known repressive and less-than-adequate schooling. They were at first very cautious and noncommittal. Students had learned from their childhood not to be openly emotional about their plight and since they were not educated enough to deal intellectually with their problem, they tended to accept rather than challenge their lot in life. Students had to deal with the realities of repression and were expected to rationalize their experiences and perpetuate those realities. To change their own lives, their community, and Mississippi society in general, methods were needed to help students construct from their own knowledge of their environment, the personalities and attitudes of the people who hated them, and then react to those attitudes and hatred. By doing this, students could get tremendous insights into the depth of suppressed emotions about black-white relationships. (SNCC: Reel 6).

Methods were needed to encourage critical, creative thought, something the local high schools did not promote. And, methods were needed to promote student confidence and self-respect. Reacting to these methodological needs, Pam wrote:

Because of the peculiar nature of a Freedom School, formal teaching methods must be modified. The most important aspect of the freedom school that makes modification necessary is the emphasis on creative thought. This is no outstanding aspect when you consider that this should be the objective of any school; however, when you consider this objective along with the fact that most freedom school students come from thought vacuums, it is evident that this objective is outstanding. (SNCC: Reel 6)

She then continued explaining how she and other teachers in Holly Springs used a certain discussion method to pull out the experiences of the students:

It is a difficult job to make this idealistic objective a reality. At the Holly Springs freedom school the first obstacle was the lack of confidence that each student had in himself [sic]. The first task was to build a feeling of self-respect. It is

impossible to explain the deep-rooted lack of confidence caused by years of lack of expression that most students have. The best way that we found to elicit some response is to discuss some topic in class, probably a nonracial topic, then ask students to write a short paragraph about the discussion. Students should be asked if they want to read this paragraph to the class. Paragraph reading must not be forced and if students don't volunteer to read, don't be upset. (SNCC: Reel 6)

Another problem that faced Pam initially with her students was how the students responded to Pam, not as a teacher, but as a white person. To help her students to view her as a person with whom the students could be equal and compatible, she asked the students to address her by her first name (SNCC, Reels 6, 65). Changing the ingrained practice of addressing all whites as *Mr.*, *Mrs.* or *Miss* was awkward and difficult at first. In order to break the momentum of the old pattern, she began to call each of her students *Mr.* or *Miss*. After a week, the entire class was on a first-name-only basis. To further capture the trust and enthusiasm of her students, Pam found the suggested freedom school instructional methods to "permit the expression of a wide range of feelings by the students, involve their total selves, stimulate creativity, provide the teacher with insights about the students, and at the same time get across the content material" (SHSW, Pam Allen papers). Her personal adaptation of the methods included:

Lectures: "I shared what I was learning. I am an excellent speaker, a storyteller actually. . . . I enjoyed the verbal sharing and the girls' enthusiastic responses kept me at it."

Stories: "My lectures on Negro history were really telling students to share experiences but we didn't tell myths or legends."

Discussion: "It was fun, very exciting and alive. We always had discussion after my presentation. I believe it was spontaneous and easy—no pulling teeth or trying to pull ideas out of the students."

Creative writing: "For self-expression and sharing."

Resource people: "We utilized the voter registration men. Someone spoke every morning before classes began."

Drama: "The kids developed their own play. [They] chose the topic of the Medgar Evers killing, divided up the parts and the characters role-played their parts."

School newspaper: "We mimeographed a newsletter made up of student writings"

Community action: "It's what the school was about—educating students for involvement in changing the social

conditions. Main work was registering people into the MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party]" (Questionnaire: Pam Allen).

She also found that when used incorrectly, the methods, no matter how progressive or effective in causing certain learning to take place, proved to do nothing but waste time if students did not have enough information to help the method to promote intended learning. She found that some teachers wanted to discuss everything and did not want to either provide or help students find needed information to carry on an intelligent, thought provoking discussion. Pam realized that students needed information to both inform their discussions and inform them on what they needed to know to change their circumstances. Teachers, because they themselves had the background knowledge, sometimes forgot that the Mississippi students did not. Without adequate knowledge, even the students began to tire of discussion because they could not see any concrete results. To remedy this situation, Pam found that her students, who were unexposed and under educated, were fascinated by facts and were grasping at every bit of knowledge. By providing information before, during, and afterwards, discussions were greatly improved (SNCC: Reel 6).

Kristy Powell. Kristy advocated methods that would involve students in constructing their own knowledge and making meaning out of what they learn. Methods should be designed and incorporated to help "students to be active in various ways to do their own *research* for information, and/or [to help] them give *expression* . . . in various ways to what they have learned . . . with the possibility of choice for the pupil" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers). She especially advocated the use of role play. She found role play as a method to be "far and away the most popular" with her students. She stated, "I attempted to translate everything I could into role-playing—even geography" (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers).

When she taught her African American history class of 13-14 year olds, she usually introduced each topic by converting the historical information in the form of telling a story. As she told the story, she would show corresponding pictures to illustrate the event. She would follow with a brief discussion or a question-and-answer session. Next she would have the students read something about the topic. This procedure usually required a day. She would find as many resources on the topic as she could and for the next two or three days, she allowed the students to interact freely with the topic through the resources. Following the example of "Expression Groups" concept, some of her students, as Kristy recounted, "did historical . . . creative writing; some drew pictures, or copied poems, or copied historical documents" (SHSW, Staughton Lynd papers). At the end of each unit,

she displayed all of the students' work on the back porch of the school building.

Kristy's remedial reading class exemplified the attempt to incorporate aspects of the civic curriculum in a class focused primarily on forming basic skills. Her goal was to help the students not only to read but to read critically, and in so doing to examine pertinent issues of their society. Content included readings on African American history from *Ebony Magazine* (a popular magazine); articles by Frederick Douglass; Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech; poems such as Margaret Burrough's "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?"; and copies of the freedom school newspaper, *Freedom Fighter*. Kristy focused both the reading content and the teaching methods of her class to allow students to participate in pertinent and relevant discussions comparing reading content to the conditions in Mississippi. The procedure she generally used was:

1. Introduce the piece to be read, arousing interest, supplying background, explaining new concepts. In the process of doing this introduce any words that you think are new or difficult, or perhaps merely basic to understanding the reading, and write them on the blackboard, as you use them.
2. Have the class read the passage silently section by section, posing a question to direct and motivate their reading before each section, and discussing the answers briefly at the end of each section read. How long each section to be read should be will [sic] depend on many things, notably the skill of the group. I found that a reading, 3/4 page of typed quarto long, consisting of 3 or 4 paragraphs, was enough to do in one hour—long lesson, and we generally read it silently paragraph by paragraph.
3. Read the whole passage through orally—usually around the class in turn.
4. Discuss meaning of passage as whole. (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers)

Florence Howe. Florence wrote, "[M]y role as teacher was to create an environment in which students could decide to investigate [a] problem . . . in which I was a resource but not an authority" (Howe, 1984, p. 156). In the Jackson freedom school, creating "an environment" meant doing discussion. As a teaching strategy, discussion, along with the curriculum, was disarming for both teacher and students. Discussion was

built on the assumption that the person who talks and who makes decisions about the direction of the conversation, or about what topic is to be investigated, learns; that talking is at least as important to learning as listening; and that, in a group, people can learn both to listen and to talk, whereas in a conventional classroom, the students learn to listen in order to memorize what the teacher has said. (Howe, 1984, p. 156)

Florence stated that discussion had three purposes:

to break the hierarchical pattern that binds the traditional classroom (and in the case of a white teacher and black students, the hierarchy of race as well); to encourage young blacks to understand that they have knowledge of value to themselves and to others; [and to involve the students] seeking out the knowledge and strengths people have, and building on them, rather than holding people up against a predetermined standard by which they must measure themselves (and find themselves wanting). (Howe, 1984, pp. 156-157)

To create an effective discussion environment, both the physical setting and the type of questions proposed were important (Howe, 1965). Traditional rows of students with a teacher standing in front were inappropriate. Not only would this interfere with free expression, it would stress the inequality between the teacher and students—the negative relationship that had characterized the children's earlier experiences in the black public schools. To break down the authoritarian tradition physically as well as emotionally, students and their teacher sat in a circle facing each other. "By sitting down in a circle," wrote Florence, "I deliberately changed my relationship to my students. They were not all looking at me anymore; they could now see each other as well" (Howe & Danish, 1971, p. 108). Sitting down, "I was effectively silenced. Apparently, I could lecture only when standing or walking." (Howe, 1984, p. 250). "Lectures gave way to group discussion, and I began to become a resource for the group." (Howe & Danish, 1971, p. 108).

After the chairs were arranged in a circle, Florence would experiment with what she would later term "open" questions (Howe & Danish, 1971). The questions would usually followed a three-step pattern (Howe, 1965): first, she would ask introductory questions: "How do you feel about . . . ?" or "How would you feel if . . . ?"; second, after the students had a chance to express their feelings, she would ask probing questions: "Why do you feel this way?" or "Why would anyone feel this way?"; and, third, as the discussion progressed, she would ask questions to draw more critical thinking from the students: "How do you feel about his idea?" or "How do you feel about her experience?". The purpose of these "opened" questions were to foster the idea that the teacher was interested in her students and their independent ideas and to encourage them to respond emotionally or intuitively and then to reflect upon those responses thoughtfully, even analytically, rather than in soliciting some particular answer from them, or tricking them into following the teacher's own line of thought in the Socratic manner, or second-guessing, or trying to please the teacher (Howe & Danish, 1971). Florence (Lauter & Howe, 1970) explained how connections were being made using "open" questions with the lived experiences of her students and why these connections were important for them:

Such questions were quite distinct from the usual school recitation. In the first place, they were "open"—that is, there were no single, prepackaged answers that teachers were to listen for or to require students to memorize. The idea was, indeed, that no one could have a single, ultimate answer to any or all of the questions, for the questions' purpose was to evoke not only response but also students' search for definition and identity. In the second place, the questions were based on what students already knew from their own lives—that is, they could begin to respond, they were already equipped. And third, essential to such questions and such response is the process of discussion itself. The hidden assumptions behind a reliance on discussion are, first, that talk—*saying the words*—is a necessary step for discovery of self and social identity. Further, the *public* discovery saying the words in a group—might lead to action, if not at once, then later. (p. 42)

An example of how Florence encouraged her students to express themselves and to urge them to get actively involved in their community took place during the third week of the freedom school. It was announced in the community that African American first graders would be able to register for the first time to attend a formerly all-white elementary school. Apprehension ran high in the African American community. To encourage parents to register their children, 36 local African American ministers announced that a prayer meeting would be held. To prepare her students to share in the experience, Howe initiated a discussion of the myth of black inferiority, but her efforts were greeted with silence. She asked if anyone knew any first graders who would be starting public school the following year. Since everyone did, she then asked if anyone knew a first grader who was going to attend the white elementary school. No one did and she asked why. Responses varied. Some said that the white school was too far away, or that the mother wanted her child to be with friends. No one spoke of the fear of trying to integrate a white school.

Wanting her students to be honest about their feelings, Howe asked, "What am I going to say to my friends back north when they ask me why Negro mothers haven't registered their children in white schools? That they like things the way they are?" (p. 186). Students then began to explore their real feelings and fears. Jobs might be lost, personal safety was threatened, and possible failure in white schools loomed high. Then discussion began to shift: The students began discussing reasons why first graders should integrate the white elementary school.

One student suggested that class members should go out into the neighborhood and talk to parents of first graders who were reluctant to send their children to the white school. Howe suggested that they practice by role playing the dialogue they might have with the hesitant parents. In the end, the "father" wasn't convinced, but the "mother" thought that she would try to enroll her child in the white school. Students then made plans to go out into the neighborhoods.

One of the freedom school teachers and a number of student volunteers spoke to over 70 families about attending the prayer meeting and transportation was provided; however, although 27 parents agreed to attend, only one mother actually came. Undaunted, the freedom school students began revisiting the 70 families the next day. Their efforts were rewarded and 11 out of the 43 eligible African American first grade children in Jackson registered to attend the previously all-white public elementary school.

Commentary And Conclusion

The purpose of freedom schools was to provide curriculum and instructional opportunities to prepare African American students to take their places in promoting change in their communities. The developers chose pedagogical content and approaches that were the antithesis of the traditional content and authoritarian methods prevalent in the public schools. The repressive teaching that contributed to African American children to becoming submissive and dominated students was to be replaced by a progressive curriculum and progressive teaching. The progressive curriculum and methods were designed to empower students to critically examine existing conditions, gain the knowledge and confidence to activate change, and prepare themselves to contribute creatively and positively in their communities. The curriculum and methodology advocated by the founders and actually implemented in many of the schools, as evidenced by these three teachers, stressed developing in the students the unquestioning belief in their own capabilities, appreciation of diversity, and acknowledgment of overall human dignity. These teachers and other volunteers injected energy, academic knowledge, enthusiasm, and caring.

What lessons can be learned from the freedom school experiences of these three teachers that might be able to inform contemporary practice in schools? By the time Pam, Kristy, and Florence began teaching in the freedom schools, one thing was clear: they were there to be an agent for change—to change students, communities, and the society. They all had an unabiding belief in the power of education to help make change. Pam and Kristy both talked about how "real education" would make a contribution to African American youth and be an alternative to authoritarian, traditional schooling. Florence, particularly after Oxford training session where she studied the civic curriculum, saw the purpose of freedom schools as liberation. It was at Oxford, that Florence had a "turning point" in her life (Howe, 1984, p. 51). "[I]t had taken Mississippi to make clear to me the need for a new connection: between learning and life" (Howe, 1984, p. 52). Teachers today are caught in an endless web of contradictions and conflicting demands. Teach just the

basics. No, teach problem solving. Teach so all students will be good employees. Teach more science and math, but integrate the curriculum. Teach skills, or maybe teach the curriculum whole. What should teachers do? Pam, Kristy, and Florence knew what they were to do: be agents for change, empower students.

In the freedom schools, the curriculum was given to the teachers: case studies, the *Guide to Negro History*, and the Citizenship Curriculum. This curriculum, however, was not mandated, nor tested with a standardized test at the end of the summer. Rather, each teacher brought their own talents, interests, and knowledge with her. Florence Howe, for example, was an English professor and brought her love of poetry to the freedom school experience. For Florence, poetry was a major ingredient of the curriculum. Through poetry, she provided students with the opportunities to discuss and write, to discover controversial subjects, and their own thoughts and feelings.

Kristy Powell, prior to opening the school in Ruleville, was determined to have the curriculum structured cooperatively by the staff. If the designed curriculum wasn't working to help them reach their goals, they revised it. It was in Ruleville that the teachers realized the focus on academics did not excite students, so they changed the curriculum to encourage an active student forum for community problems. Pam Parker, on the other hand, discovered that she was a good story teller, but after the story, she asked students to relate historical experiences to their own lives.

How Pam related history to the lives of the freedom school students suggests another powerful lesson for today. After telling the story of Haiti and how former slaves did succeed in keeping out the European powers and was recognized finally as an independent republic, asked the students, what would it mean to stand up and say "no" in Holly Springs? What would it mean today if students stood up and said "no" to oppression? That would certainly give a different twist to the "just say no" campaign. The freedom school teachers, as evidenced by these three women, knew that simple slogans, like "just say no", were not enough. And the students recognized it too. Pam found that students tired of discussions without information, because they could not see any concrete results. Florence realized the importance of getting the students accurate information because they had been denied the "facts" of history—the students needed knowledge to begin to see themselves as part of history, as people with a past, present, and future.

Another piece of the pie to make these goals and curriculum come alive was instruction that emphasized active learning and action. Lecture was out. As Florence said, the freedom school pedagogy "specifically forbade

'teaching' as I until then understood it" (Howe, 1984, p. 155). Discussion was the primary method of instruction advocated by the leaders, and as Howe pointed out, talk, saying the words, was "a necessary step for discovery of self and social identity" (Lauter & Howe, 1970, p. 42).

Other methods were used also, with the basic ingredient being they emphasized action. Students created newspapers, poems, plays. Newspapers were forums for students' writing and an alternative source of information for the community. Plays allowed the development of creativity, problem-solving, and expression, but they also told important stories. The student play, *Uncle Tom's High School*, told of the Ruleville student protest and picket. Kristy found role play to be "far and away the most popular" with her students. But this active learning was not just for activities sake. Role plays were more than just for fun. They were deadly serious. Howe's students used role play to practice talking with parents of first graders who were reluctant to integrate the white school. Then they went into the neighborhoods prepared.

These three teachers—Pam Parker, Kristy Powell, and Florence Howe—exemplified freedom school teachers. Their example suggests what can happen when teachers know why they are teaching and what they want to accomplish. Their example shows the power of teacher freedom in creating and modifying a curriculum to fit local needs and situations. Their example shows the power of teaching and learning in active modes, always with an eye toward action in the community. There is a historical example of an alternative to top-down, mandated curriculum, that allows no room for judgment on the part of the teacher, and insists upon passive, acquisition of knowledge sake without any room for action—that example is the Mississippi Freedom Schools.

Notes

1. Examples of how repressive the Mississippi curriculum was can be found in the following two excerpts in readers used in both the white and black schools (SHSW; Jerry Demuth). From a third and fourth grade reader:

God wanted the white people to live alone. And he wanted colored people to live alone. The white men built America for you. White people built America so they could make the rules. George Washington was a brave and honest white man. The white men cut away big forests. The white man has always been kind to the Negro. We do not believe that God wants us to live together. Negro people like to live by themselves. Negroes use their own bathrooms. They do not use white

people's bathrooms. The Negro has his own part of town to live in. This is called our Southern Way of Life. Do you know that some people want the Negroes to live with white people? These people want us to be unhappy. They say we must go to school together. They say we must swim together and use the bathroom together. God had made us different. And God knows best. Did you know that our country will grow weak if we mix the races? White men worked hard to build our country. We want to keep it strong and free.

And from a fifth and sixth grade reader:

The Southern white man has always helped the Negro whenever he could. Southerners were always their best friends. The South went to war to prevent the races from race-mixing. If God had wanted all men to be one color and to be alike, He would not have made the different races. One of the main lessons in the Old Testament of the Bible is that your race should be kept pure. God made different races and put them in different lands. He was satisfied with pure races so man should keep the races pure and be satisfied. BIRDS DO NOT MIX. CHICKENS DO NOT MIX. A friend had 100 white chickens and 100 reds. All the white chickens got to one side of the house, and all the red chickens got on the other side of the house. You probably feel the same way these chickens did whenever you are with people of a different race. God meant it to be that way.

2. Some of the volunteer teachers, while impressed with the overall workshops and the motivational speeches, were concerned that enough time was not spent studying the curriculum, discussing the ramifications of freedom school on students and teachers, and practicing teaching. For example, Kristy Powell (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers) made the following observations about the orientation meeting:

The main effect of Oxford (Was it the main design?) was to bring each of us to the point of seeing: "Do I really believe in this enough to go? Ought I go? Do I want to go?" This was as it should have been, I think. At the time I felt that such emphasis was placed on preparing for the dangers, even in our local project group, that we did scant justice to the job of preparing to teach, or of understanding the meaning of the Freedom School concept . . . I think we could have left Oxford with a much more positive understanding of what we were setting out to do, danger or no danger, than we did. I think the general sessions at Oxford were excellent and could hardly have been bettered. In the Freedom School sessions I think there were many useful things done—some of the sessions on reading, . . . the African songs, Negro History . . . but they could have been better . . . The curriculum was excellent, but . . . it was not used as well as it deserved. This was partly because it . . . wasn't really explored

at Oxford, and perhaps because many people never really read it properly. I think most schools accepted the notion of a core curriculum or Citizenship and Negro history. If the content of this core had been gone into much more fully at Oxford in lectures and small group discussions, and if there had been some practice teaching to demonstrate different methods of teaching it, I think the schools would have benefited and we would have left Oxford with a much more positive idea of the role of a Freedom School . . . (SHSW: Staughton Lynd; SNCC: Reel 68)

3. Years after the fact, Pam has reflected on this experience. Although realizing the importance of helping her students to begin to take pride in the black experience, she believes that "manipulatory history," history that tells only part of the story, is wrong. At the time, she was ignorant of the realities of modern Haiti, the terrible poverty and the brutal dictatorship. Yet, those who wrote the curriculum should have included those realities by giving the students the full picture, and, to help students to understand what had happened in Haiti's history, students should have had the opportunity to discuss what changes and how those changes took place from the time of the revolution to current events including the manipulations of the United States. It would only be fair to ask the students to deal with the meanings of poverty and dictatorship that was Haiti's in the Twentieth Century. Not all history tells the good story. Not only can history inform what can be, but it can inform what doesn't have to be. Finding out that one is going down the wrong road, doesn't mean one has to continue the journey. History informs us we can turn around and go back.

It should be noted, that some freedom school teachers did know about some of the one sided history that was being presented (SNCC: Reel 68). Members of the Jackson freedom school staff strengthen the *Guide to Negro History* by maintaining a library of important black history books and by designing some additional topics to be studied. The objectives, of course, were the same, "to explore the history of the Negro on the American scene in the hope of developing in the students an added appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses of American patterns of race relations. Special concern should be given to Negro contributions to the culture, to white reactions, and to political problems and possibilities for the future in light of a knowledge of the past" (SNCC: Reel 68).

4. For example, in the Harmony freedom school, students were reading poems that they had written, one about household chores, another, about the first time he had heard the word "freedom." Then, a thirteen year-old girl, Ida Ruth Griffin stood to read her poem in slow cadence:

I am Mississippi-fed,
I am Mississippi-bred,
Nothing but a poor, black boy [sic].

I am a Mississippi slave,
I shall be buried in a Mississippi grave
Nothing but a poor, dead boy.

She finished. There was a lingering silence. Len Holt who witnessed this event wrote:

The eager young faces grew sullen and flushed with anger as if somehow a scab had been ripped from an old sore or Ida Ruth's poetry had betrayed all that they were learning of denying the myths of Negro inferiority.

On the silence lingered until the floodgates of scorn poured forth from others in the class. In an angry chorus they responded with fierce refutations: "We're not black slaves!"

The teacher . . . felt the compelling urge to speak in an effort to save this brown, beautiful, and unknown young bard from more verbal attacks, but his tongue was stilled. All along the desire had been to encourage the students to think and to express those thoughts, and expressing opinions often include[d] speaking opinions other than what a teacher might think.

"She's right," spoke another student, a tall reedy girl with a sharp mind. "We certainly are. Can your poppa vote? Can mine? Can our folks eat anywhere they want to?"

Silence engulfed the class again momentarily, and then everyone began a cacophony of talking and thinking aloud, scattering ideas. (Holt, 1956, p. 109-111)

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¹ Many of the quotes from SNCC, SHSW, and UWL papers are unpaginated because these archival papers are collections of memoranda, letters, reports, photographs, mimeographs, dittos, correspondence, personal notes, etc. that do not contain page numbers.

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