"I Became Part of a Church of Freedom"
Teachers Who Made a Difference:
Teaching in the Mississippi Freedom Schools

George W. Chilcoat
Jerry A. Ligon

Introduction

In late 1963, a major civil rights incursionary project into the state of Mississippi was being planned for the following 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 /instruction 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. These progressive methods included discussion, art, singing, role playing, classroom newspapers, creative writing (with emphasis on poetry), social action projects, and drama. Within the context of traditional patterns of education in Mississippi (and most other states), these classroom methods of the freedom school were considered revolutionary.

This essay centers on the discussion of 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 in to the streets 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 the methodology of how the study was conducted. Next, 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. Then, an in-depth description of the freedom school experiences of three teachers will be examined. The essay will conclude what possible pedagogical lessons might be learned from the three teachers that might inform contemporary practice.

METHODOLOGY

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. Pedagogical behaviors including personal goals, how curriculum and instruction were used, and personal reflection on the freedom school experience were examined using cross-case analysis. For each of the behaviors, a set of organizing principles was distilled for the purpose of constructing a possible framework for teaching as social change.

A variety of primary sources were used to gather information for this study. During the fall of 1991 and the winter of 1992, questionnaires were mailed to identified individuals who had participated as freedom school volunteers. In winter 1993, two of the participants, Pam Parker (Chude Pam Parker Allen) and Florence Howe, were also interviewed for more in-depth information and detail (The third teacher, Kristy Powell, was not found at the time of this writing). Some interviewees who had

developed and taught the curricula and instructional programs supplied original copies of the printed materials. 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.

From the data collected, three teachers were selected for this study. 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 proved some idea of the context which surrounded the work of many of the freedom school teachers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Proposal for Freedom Schools

Charlie Cobb, a field secretary for SNCC and member of the summer planning committee, proposed the freedom school program and set the standards in 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 school 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 in his original proposal that the primary goal of the freedom schools was to empower students as catalysts in directly 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 truly 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 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 classroom around the state and ask their teachers a real question," (SNCC: Reel 68). From these questions about personal situations 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). What he meant by "some of the newer ideas ... circulating in educational circles" were methods that would help students to examine, review, and if necessary, revise the social and political constructs of the their society, envision alternative possibilities, and devise

plans for change both in their own personal 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 choose. 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. 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). 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).

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 had limited exposure to most academic subjects; many needed remedial help in basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills; and many had flagging 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...." (Perlstein, 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 were to be the vehicle by which the conversion from passive to active was to be accomplished; thus, questioning was the facilitating component of the core of belief. On the simplest level, students needed to learn to question in the classroom. Cobb affirmed, "More students need to stand up in the classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question" (SNCC, Reel 27). 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 students from Northern and West Coast universities and professional teachers belong to the United Teacher Federation Union, mostly in New York City, Detroit, and Chicago (SNCC: Reel 39). Two hundred eighty volunteers 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 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 applicants who were accepted as freedom school teachers were sent an acceptance letter, a memorandum on how freedom school 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 instructionally approach. First, Jane Stembridge, 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 described under the heading, Problems Of Freedom School Teaching, there would rarely be classrooms and blackboards (unless they could be scrounged). 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 believe 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, encouraging the teacher to use teaching methods that would create and active, participatory learning environment based on the experiences and the lives the students brought to class. He 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 groups 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).

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). 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).

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). This was the first time African American students from around the state gathered together to discuss common goals and concerns (SHSW, Jake Friesan papers).

Although it was hoped that freedom schools would continue beyond the summer project, only a few were able to sustain the activism enough to do so. 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 THREE 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 both Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota and Spellman College, Atlanta, Georgia. Her assignment was in the Holly Springs freedom school. She had no teaching experience. Powell was 36 years old from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her assignment was both coordinator and teacher in the Ruleville freedom school. She had elementary teaching experience. 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. 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, their curriculum and instruction experiences, and their personal reflections about those experiences.

Personal Aims and Goals

Pam Parker. Prior to leaving for her freedom school assignment, Pam gave a talk to the congregation of the Trinity Episcopal Church in her hometown of Soleburg, 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 justice; 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).

Kristy Powell. Kristy was both a teacher and the coordinator of the Ruleville Freedom School. She wrote in her weekly report, the purpose of the school was to be a center for real education, not just an academic institution (SHSW, Lynd papers). Academics had its place: to provide a sound foundation to prepare students to develop the research skills needed to solve problems. But if 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, teachers worked closely with the students, both academically and socially, to solve problems and effect improvement.

Florence Howe. Florence was assigned to teach the civic curriculum and English to 11-14 year olds in Jackson. She was absolutely overwhelmed with the concept of freedom school and how it was effected in the classroom: In the freedom school classroom, I had further opportunities to see the effect of such spirit and energy on young people ready for education. In short, there was no room for cynicism, defeatism, or whatever sense of doom often afflicts intellectuals. In this brief glowing hour, I became part of a church of freedom. I felt the power of people who, while they would give their lives to the struggle, understood that a different process was needed. It was no accident that at the center of that summer was the freedom school that included not only a new curriculum but a new pedagogy. (Howe, 1984, p.250)

The new curriculum and new pedagogy was driven by the purpose of the freedom schools...there was to be a radical connection between school and the lives of her students. There was not point to having white, authoritarian teachers (or novices) replace the black authoritarian Mississippians that students knew in their regular schools. Even using the word "school" was risky. That cycle had to be broken. The students themselves had to be set in motion so that they might see learning and knowledge as potentially useful to changing the conditions of their lives ... if only because knowledge was also the power of consciousness and the confidence to act. Or, as an "Overview" of the summer's plans projected it, "the 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." Those were no mean lessons to teach. (Lauter & Howe, 1970, p. 39)

Florence took the stance to be a student among students, a resource not an authority, a concerned

questioner and listener who did not always have the right answer. She was anxious to help her students control their own lives and contribute to self-determination in their community. "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).

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, and teachers worked with a goal of helping the students experience racial identity and pride (Questionnaire, Pam Allen; SHSW, Sandra Hard papers). Pam describes the Holly Spring's School schedule:

> Our schedule goes something like this:
> School begin 9 A.M.
> Singing until 9:15.
> Talk given by one of the voter registration people concerning events of the day before in Mississippi.
> 9:30 - 10:30 classes on the core curriculum which is Negro history and the Movement.
> 10:30 - 11:30 classes in special interest -- dancing, arts and crafts, science, sports, etc.
> School closes at noon and opens again at
> 2:00 French class, an arts and crafts class, a music class.
> 3:00 There are a play writing, debate and journalism classes for the teenagers.
> 4:00 There is a seminar in nonviolence.
> (SHSW: Pam Allen 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 was also to assist in the drama class. Her favorite curriculum was teaching Black history. 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)

Kristy Powell. Prior to the opening of the freedom school at Ruleville, the teachers met and decided that the overall curriculum should be structured cooperatively by the entire staff. 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).

One of the freedom schools' most striking activities 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 (See SHSW, Ruby Davis papers). Students wanted to picket their public school hoping to help the public school teachers realize that they too could become active change agents. Freedom school teachers helped the students practice picket strategies and role play interviews with their pubic school teachers on how to register to vote. Teachers an 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. 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.

Florence Howe. Florence stressed in her teaching of the civic curriculum constant application to existing conditions and events in the local community in terms of the students' personal experiences. "There was no pressure to cover content, for the content was the process of trying to make sense of the social and political world you were living in. . .trying to make connections between you feelings and the objective conditions of your life (Lauter and Howe, 1970, p. 43). Her experience with the curriculum was both a "revelation" (p. 155) and "energy provoking" (p. 256) as she attempted to help students interpret the designed content in terms of their personal lives, encouraging them to form their own conclusions: The curriculum was organized to raise black students' consciousness of themselves as part of a separate "minority culture" that had its own identity, strengths, and weaknesses, its language and history, and that could decide its values and directions for the future. Thus, students attempted to define 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. In contemporary terms, we should describe the curriculum as interdisciplinary, problem solving, and very demanding. When we tried a unit on black history, for example, we tried to figure out whether Marcus Garvey's strategy was applicable in the 1960's. When it was clear that young black Mississippians looked to Chicago or New York rather than to Africa, we talked about why black people were "rioting" in those Northern cities. Even as we speculated, asked, and attempted to answer questions, we worked from a base of human experience--the knowledge these students had of black lives in Jackson, Mississippi. (Howe, 1984, p. 156)

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 noncommunitive; for example, a 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).

Kristy Powell.

In her weekly report (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers) Kristy provided a description of her own experience attempting to integrate a progressive curriculum with traditional teaching methods. She taught two classes in African American history to 13-14-year-olds and remedial reading to those students at or above a 5th grade reading level. When teaching history, she introduced each topic by telling a story, presented the topic in some detail showing

pictures, and the students then read something on 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. Some students, as Kristy recounted, "did [some] historical [or] some 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 Douglas; 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 under which they lived.

The Ruleville Freedom School ended with a public presentation of what the students had learned and done in Kristy and the other teachers' classes. Calling the event "The Freedom Festival" student presentations 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. The freedom school teacher was not to be a professional manipulator, but a concerned questioner... to evoke activity and expression (Lauter and Howe, 1970). The discussion method was to be the major instructional mode of the Jackson Freedom School. As a method it 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). The method as demonstrated by Howe 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 promote the discussion relationship, the setting was 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. Florence described her initial reaction to this sitting in circles and how it affected her teaching:As a teacher in Mississippi. . .the first lesson I learned was that, seated in a circle prescribed by the freedom school pedagogy, I was effectively silenced. Apparently, I could lecture only when standing or walking. I learned something else as well: 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 that sticks to the marrow of minds. (Howe, 1984, p. 250)

Discussions would usually followed a three-step pattern, after Howe and students were seated comfortably in their discussion circle (Howe, 1965). She would first ask introductory questions: "How do you feel about . . . ?" or "How would you feel if . . . ?" 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?" Finally, as the discussion progressed, Howe would draw more critical thinking from the students: "How do you feel about his idea?" or "How do you feel about her experience?"

An example of how Howe 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.

Reflection

Pam Parker. The curriculum and the instruction coupled with Pam's enthusiasm and commitment to the freedom school goals to change these students from passive receptacles to active, committed agents of social change caused an exciting learning environment:The atmosphere in the class is unbelievable. It is what every teacher dreams about -- real, honest enthusiasm and desire to learn anything and everything. The girls come to class of their own free will. 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 inspirit because I know that I have given to people. (SHSW: Pam Allen papers)

Kristy Powell. The last assignment Kristy gave her students was to write what freedom school had meant to them. Part of the assignment included that she also write what freedom school meant to her as a teacher. She wrote:

> Our morning sessions of Freedom School have meant to me first of all fellowship and friendship. I have enjoyed being one woman among other women. I have enjoyed the laugher together, and the talk about things worth talking about. I have enjoyed making friends among people I have come to admire so much. I have admired people who are brave and determined in the face of hardships much greater than I have ever known. I have admired you because you can still laugh and love and meet life with energy and joy. You have shown me a kind of courage - yes a kind of gladness - I would wish to show in my own life.I have enjoyed Freedom School because I am a teacher, and I love to teach people who want to learn. In teaching you I have learned much about Negro history I never knew before. And I have been happy when you have come to understand the meaning of something we have studied in history together. And because I love to read, I have been happy when I felt you were enjoying reading too.I have learned a great deal from Freedom School because it is the first time in my life I have ever been part of a movement where together people were standing up to work for freedom and for a better world. It is good to have even a tiny part in a great work like this.I certainly won't forget you all. (SNCC Reel 68)

Florence Howe. The concept of freedom school and her personal involvement in her own classes had a tremendous impact on Florence's educational life. She went from teaching a traditional curriculum with a traditional pedagogy to teaching a progressive curriculum with a progressive pedagogy: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)

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 caused African American children to become submissive, dominated students was to be replaced by progressive teaching. Progressive 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 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. All of these are attitudes, beliefs and capabilities should be promoted by today's social studies instruction.

When accounts of the three freedom school teachers' experiences are examined, a set of principles can be extracted that embrace the freedom school goals, curriculum, and instruction. From these principles, a proposed model for instruction can be formed.

Goals

At least five general principles can be derived from a study of the aims and goals of the freedom schools:

1. Critical thinking skills are developed by examining existing conditions and experiences of individual communities; such critical thinking constitutes the beginning of positive change.

2. Academic learning is the foundation for democratic living when focused on useful knowledge; relevant social, economic and political thought; and practical skills and systems capable of effecting change.

3. Students learn to appreciate human diversity and to acknowledge the dignity of each individual, thereby working toward equality and justice for all humankind.

4. Student must become aware of his or her own self-identity; all students must become confident in expressing themselves and determined to take control of their own lives.

5. Students learn the necessary skills to ultimately improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, communities, states, and nation by participating actively together in meaningful tasks.

Curriculum

At least six general principles underlie the freedom schools' progressive curriculum:

1. Class content should relate directly to the situations and experiences of the students.

2. Content should be drawn from a variety of sources outside the standard textbooks.

3. The quality of content should be the same for all students, even though difficulty may need to be modified for some.

4. Teacher should be able to modify curriculum as necessary to adapt to the existing needs of each particular community and group of students.

5. The content should provide topics for in-depth study and insight development, as students master relevant information; relate new information to what they already know; and apply new insights to current problems.

6. The curriculum should promote knowledge, reasoning, and insights that focus on equality and social justice for all humankind.Instruction

At least six general principles are consistent with the freedom schools' conception of progressive instruction:

1. Instruction should permit student participation, encourage students to reveal feelings, provide opportunities for expression, and develop a sense of group responsibility.

2. Instructional techniques should help students to gain the skills they need to improve their existing conditions.

3. Instruction should instill and nourish democratic principles of equality, justice, and choice.

4. Instruction should promote community involvement.

5. Instruction should provide opportunities to develop and express democratic ideals through discussion, creative writing, art, drama, group projects, role play, music, and social/community action programs.6.

6. Instruction and curriculum should provide students and teachers with opportunities to work together as active agents for social change.

With imagination and commitment, teachers can implement these freedom school principles into their classrooms providing their students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will influence their potential to create social and democratic change. The ideal use of these principles would give schools and teachers the governing autonomy similar to the freedom school experience conception or the classroom as a laboratory and a participatory democracy where students and teachers can "wrestle with the challenges of the democratic experience" leading to "many experiments in the process of education in and for democracy" (Purpel, 1989, p. 49).

If social studies educators are truly concerned with helping students develop the critical and reflective skills necessary for full and meaningful participation in today's society, they must begin to question whether the present educational system has the capability of achieving this goal. Perhaps the fundamental paradigm upon which social studies education is currently based should be extensively revised. For six to eight weeks during the summer of 1964, freedom schools revised this paradigm in the intellectual wastelands of Mississippi with a project designed to promote student self-discovery and articulate a vision of social justice. Abandoning the traditional approach to education, these schools focused on the minds and abilities of the students; encouraged the students to think, to express, and to perform; and offered the students a chance to make a difference in their world:The students were taken seriously in the freedom schools. They were encouraged to talk, and their talking was listened to. They were assigned to write, and their writing was read with attention to idea and style as well as to grammar. They were encouraged to sing, to dance, to draw, to play, to laugh. They were encouraged to think. (Fusco, 1964, p. 18)

NOTES

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collections of Unpublished Documents State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives (SHSW):

Pam Allen Papers
Henry (Harry) Bowie Papers
Jerry DeMuth Papers
Jake Friesan Papers
Liz Fusco Papers
Rev. Richard Gould Papers
Sandra Hard Papers
Christopher Hexter Papers
Staughton Lynd Papers
R. Hunter Morrey Papers
JoAnn Ooiman Papers
Robert Parks Papers
Robert Starobin Papers
Jerry Tecklin Papers
Lise Vogel Paper
Howard Zinn Papers

University of Washington Libraries, Manuscript and University Archives Division (UWL):

Otis Pease Papers
Mary Aicken Rothschild Papers

Interviews and Questionnaires

Pam Allen
Noel Day
Florence Howe

MicroFilm

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. (1982). *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, Reels 1-72.* Stanford, North Carolina: Microfilming Corporation of America.

Books and Articles

Berliner, D.C. (1990). If the metaphor fits, why not wear it? The teacher as executive. *Theory Into Practice*, 29, 85-93.

Carter, K. (1990). Meaning and metaphor: Case knowledge in teaching. *Theory Into Practice*, 29, 109-115.

Collins, E.C., & J.L. Green. (1990). Metaphors: The construction of a perspective. *Theory Into Practice*, 29, 71-77.

Fusco, L. (1964). The Mississippi freedom schools: Deeper than politics. *Liberation*, 9, 17-19.

Grant, J. (1964). Freedom schools open a door to the world. *National Guardian,* (August 29), 5.

Holt, L. (1966). The summer that didn't end. London: Heinemann.

Howe, F. (1965). Mississippi's freedom schools: The politics of education. *Harvard Educational Review,* 35, 144-160.

Howe, F. (1984). Myth of co-education: Selected essays, 1964-1983. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Lake, A. (1964). "Last summer in Mississippi." *Redbook,* 124, 63-64, 112-117.

Lakoff, G. & M. Johnson. (1980). Metaphors we live by. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lauter, D. & Howe, F. (1970). The conspiracy of the young. New York: The World Publishing.

Lauter, D. & Perlstein, D. (1991). Mississippi freedom schools: Introduction. The Radical Teacher, 40, 2-5.

Lynd, S. (1965). The freedom schools: Concept and organization. *Freedom Ways,* 5, 302-309.

Marshall, H.H. (1990). Beyond the workplace metaphor: The classroom as a learning setting. *Theory In Practice,* 29, 94-101.

Marshall, H.H. (1990). Metaphor as an instructional tool in encouraging student teacher reflection. *Theory in Practice*, 29, 128-132.

Perlstein, D. (1990). Teaching freedom: SNCC and the creation of the Mississippi freedom schools. *History of Education Quarterly,* 30, 297-324.

Purpel, D.E. (1989). The moral and spiritual crisis in education: A curriculum for justice and compassion in education. New York: Bergin and Garvey.

Rothschild, M.A. (1981). A case of black and white: Northern volunteers and the southern freedom summers, 1964-1965. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Rothschild, M.A. (1982). The volunteers and the freedom schools: Education for social change in Mississippi. *History of Education Quarterly,* 23, 401-420.

Tobin, K. (1990). Changing metaphors and beliefs: A master switch for teaching? *Theory Into Practice*, 29, 122-127.

Zinn, H. (1964). Schools in context: The Mississippi idea. *The Nation,* 199 (November 23), 371-375.

Unpublished Studies

Gillard, M.L. (1965). The concept of the Mississippi freedom school and its implementation in Gulfport, Mississippi. Unpublished master thesis, Newark State College.