

A Report, Mainly on Ruleville Freedom School, Summer Project, 1964

by Kirsty Powell

(Provided courtesy of [Freedom School Curriculum Website](#))

Orientation, Oxford Beginning June 21.

The main effect of Oxford (Was it the main design?) was to bring each of us to the point of asking: "Do I really believe in this enough to go? Ought I to 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 still think this. 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 Laubach session, the African songs, Negro History (I believe though I didn't get to it)—but I think they could have been bettered. Next year I think it will be easier to use the history and experience of this summer to explore the Freedom School concept and I think it will be important to do this. It might even be interesting to discuss some profiles of 1964 Freedom Schools as case histories for criticism and evaluation.

The curriculum was excellent, but, if Ruleville is typical it was not used as well as it deserved. This was partly because it was rather late (it would have been good to get it before Oxford) and also 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 of 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.

On the score of method, I'd make a special (if old fashioned!) plea that volunteers (who are, after all, mostly pretty academic types) be introduced to (and if possible given a chance to try out) the project or activity method. Essentially I think this means helping pupils to be active in various ways to do their own research for information, and to give expression actively and in various ways to what they have learned—art, writing, talks, plays, interviews etc., etc.—with the possibility of choice for the pupil.

First Week in Ruleville.

We arrived on the Sunday—slight chill at our first view of police truck and dog—but for those of us working at the center, the fear went when we got on the job, and found Ruleville quiet. The center was at the back of an old house which contained two other occupied dwellings. It consisted of a yard, with trees for sitting under; porch, with bathroom at one end; a wide hallway which was to become an office; an incredible attic—beams reasonably sturdy, but

floor/ceiling of cardboard—where we later stored unwanted books; and two small rooms about 12 x 12 which were to be library and everything else.

The first job was to sort 7000 books and cull a library of about 4000, shelve it, and store the rest. We were lucky to have somewhere to store it! This was all we did thru' Thursday, apart from volunteers' meetings to plan school and center programmes. One night at the mass meeting we were asked when school would begin. We decided we'd never be "ready," so we said we'd open for registration Friday, and for a brief introductory session. Regular school was in session in the mornings, so we decided to have adults, with baby minding in the mornings, kids in the afternoons, and leave the evenings clear for individual tuition or special classes if called for.

Morning Program 8:30–11:00 (often 11:30)

Adults. The morning schedule remained the same for the whole summer. It was simple and effective.

1st Hour – Citizenship (Mon, Wed, Fri) Health, etc. (Tues, Thurs.)

2nd Hour – Writing (or, infrequently, Math.)

3rd Hour – Reading

Citizenship. The lecture followed by discussion was the approach used throughout the summer. All the freedom school teachers gave at least one session each, and voter registration and research people, and visitors were also used. This was good for both teachers and listeners. The topics chosen were in three different series.

1st 3 weeks:

1. Harriet Tubman
2. Booker T. Washington and Du Bois
3. and 4. Negro in Mississippi and the South
5. Negro in the North
6. The White Southerner
7. and 8. The Movement
9. Non-Violence

4th week:

1. The Freedom Rides
2. Power structure in Sunflower Country
3. A Journey Through India – and Gandhi.
4. Freedom Democratic Party

Last 3 weeks:

1. African Background
2. Slavery
3. Background to Civil War
4. Lincoln
5. Reconstruction
6. Birth of Jim Crow (Reading only)
7. Booker T. Washington and Du Bois (Reading only)

8. George Washington Carver
9. NAACP (Reading only)
10. Important 20th Cent. Negroes
11. Montgomery, Birmingham, and M.L. King (Reading only)
12. Civil Rights Bill and the National Elections.

This Citizenship program worked well. Our adherence to the lecture method all the way was somewhat unimaginative but it's a bit difficult to think how else it might have been done. I'm not sure how successful "activity methods" would be with adults—might be worth trying. Discussion improved as the summer wore on. In fact, I think the sessions might have been improved if the lecture time had been greatly reduced, and then previously planned "questions for discussion" had then been thrashed out.

Health. I don't know the schedule for this. It was done 2 days a week for 8 weeks by one teacher, and I think it might have been better shared out a bit more. I think the course might have been improved by adding some basic physiology—with plenty of pictures and diagrams—and by using more demonstrations for the teaching of first aid. There was certainly no doubt about the interest of the women in the subject. There were a couple of sessions on food, and a recipe sharing session which proved most successful and ended in the production of a collection of Freedom School recipes. One topic that was not discussed that might usefully have been, was buying and housekeeping—sort of thing you get in one of those paperback shoppers' guides. Another subject that was asked for that we never supplied was Sewing.

Writing. As with Citizenship and Health all the adults remained in one class for writing. Usually, this was about 12 to 15 students, numbers fluctuated somewhat between six and 30. The method used was to have three to six teachers on hand circulating while the writing was being done, to help and to answer questions and to correct. The topic usually arose out of the preceding citizenship session. Very little was done to structure it, the idea being simply to encourage them to put thoughts on paper as freely as possible. I think this unstructured approach was good and perhaps liberating in a way. Certainly it produced some very interesting, albeit weirdly punctuated and spelled genuine writing, most revealing of thoughts, feelings and experience.

Later in the summer, we did attempt to teach certain structures: form filling, the sentence and with it the period and the capital letter; personal letter; business letter; report of a meeting. I think we were wise to leave this till the end of the summer. Though there is a great eagerness to learn the proper forms, I think that to have begun this way might have been rather inhibiting.

A few of the people who came were near illiterates and were in need of straight out handwriting practice. Even these, I think, benefited from the fairly free approach, provided they continued to come. I think we should probably have had a special class for them, and perhaps we'd have attracted more and held them.

At least the team teaching approach guaranteed fairly individual teaching of each person.

Reading. Practically all the adults were given an individual textbook test (sometimes called "informal reading inventory") using a set of basal school readers. This test is familiar to all teachers of reading. The purpose of the test was to discover the instructional reading level of

each student; i.e., the level at which over 100 running words, he makes 2%–5% errors in word recognition. On the basis of this testing we divided the students into 3 reading groups.

1. All below 3rd Grade went into a literacy class. These worked on the Gattengo “Words in Color” system and were taught by Linda Davis. I don’t know what Linda’s final judgment on the success of the course was. One of the advantages of the method is that it is useful in improving writing as well as reading. One woman, in particular, benefited from this, and made quite remarkable improvement not only in handwriting, but in composition. The success of the method depends on faithful attendance and a pretty high degree of concentration on the part of the student, and, with the exception of the one woman mentioned, the less literate students attended least faithfully. My own feeling was that the method postponed actual reading for such a long time that it tended to be a bit discouraging. But I am really very ignorant of the method and predisposed to be critical of highly phonetic approaches to the teaching of reading, so that it would be important to get Linda’s own appraisal of the success both of the method and of this particular experience.

2. 3rd and 4th Grade were taught by Fred Miller, who used an easy reading newspaper (not Junior Scholastic, but something similar) which people seemed to enjoy reading. Only trouble was that the paper was rather expensive.

3. 5th Grade and above were my group and were, in fact, the largest group. We read materials on Negro history, most of them written by us especially for the purpose, because most available materials were too difficult even for this group. We began with the Ebony Emancipation issue, in which we found plenty of good material written in impossibly difficult and high flown language. We began with the “Ten Dramatic Moments” which when rewritten, proved excellent. We read also parts of the Sarah Patton Boyle and Frederick Douglass articles, the M.L.K. “I Have a Dream” speech, several issues of the local “Freedom Fighter,” the mimeod newspaper produced by the Center. In the last few weeks, we read materials written by all the teachers, following the last Citizenship syllabus (see page 2).

This group was really 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. today.

On two occasions we read poems: Margaret Burroughs “What Shall I tell My Children who are Black?” which produced really excellent participation, and Eve Merriam’s “Tomorrow’s Footsteps” and Naomi Madgett’s “Midway” which served to sum up and reinforce the thoughts of the summer in a very effective way. If a teacher likes poetry, and has a few simple clues about how to present it, I think it is often very much appreciated.

My own method for teaching reading—or rather, for reading something with a group who has some skill in reading—usually followed the standard procedure enshrined in most American basal reading systems. I find the procedure extremely helpful, so I set it out.

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 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.

Baby Minding. At the first announcement of Freedom School at the mass meeting, we invited mothers to bring their children, and promised to have nursery care for them. There were times when we repented of this invitation, but, on balance, I think it was very good that we were able to provide this service, and that the beginnings of a kindergarten were, in fact, established over the summer. Looking after anything up to 15 kids, ages ranging between 15 months and 5 years was a far more formidable task than any of us realized. The people who bore the brunt of the work and worry were the 4 community center workers, though some of the freedom school teachers did help some of the time also.

Aside from the abysmal lack of equipment with which we began, I think that what made the task hard was that all of us, those involved, and those not involved, tended to underrate its importance. It was important not just because it made the attendance of mothers possible, but for its own sake, and because it paved the way for the permanent kindergarten that now exists. The “curriculum” included the usual games, walks, stories, songs etc.—but these tended to require too much discipline and concentration. Things were much better when we acquired some simple equipment—blocks, tinker toys, wagon, toy phone—which made self directed free play possible. Especially considering the age range, this kind of equipment was absolutely essential. A mattress also proved essential, as there were always a few babies who spent the morning squealing, or gurgling, or sleeping on it.

I think if this is to be part of the program next year, it should be spoken about at Orientation, shown to be important, and, if kids are interested, they should be encouraged to prepare themselves for it.

Afternoon Program: Kids

The Ruleville Central High School was in session 7:30 AM to 1:30, so Freedom School met from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

There were 6 teachers, so we divided into six different classes according to age group 10 to 12 year olds; 13 and 14 year olds; 15 and 16 yr. old boys; 15 and 16 year old girls; 17 year olds; 18 years and over.

We have no accurate record of numbers and attendance, but I think the total number was probably about 120, and our daily attendance between 50 and 80.

At the end of the 3rd week, we lost 3 teachers . . . as they went to Indianola to set up a Freedom School there. The three different schedules which we worked to during the summer reflect the staff changes.

Schedule I

1st Hour: in Age Groups for Citizenship, Reading, Writing.

2nd Hour: Electives—most met 2 days a week, some 1 day only:

Typing	Reading	Art
French	African Culture	Biology
Music	Health	

The electives were taught not only by Freedom School teachers but by Community Center people also.

3rd Hour: Principally Recreation

Also some electives

Also canvassing—when needed.

One feature of this schedule was that we never met as a whole school together in a general session. I think this was a weakness. We did have one general session in the last week, when we sang a few freedom songs and then heard a talk about M.F.D.P., and then broke into age groups to discuss it. The kids liked this, and we had decided to do it once a week when we had to abandon Schedule I and devise a plan that would work with 3 teachers only.

Schedule I worked well, on the whole. Good relationships were built up between teacher and kids in classes that ranged in size from 6 to 20. One problem proved to be the numbers of hangers on and dropouts who wanted to hang around the center but were unwilling to join a class. There was some debate as to whether they should be told to go or allowed to hang around. I think in the end the former opinion won out, though it was never very rigidly enforced. My own approach is that they should have been allowed to come and sit around, provided they were not a nuisance. I think that some arts of persuasion should have been used to enveigle them into classes, but I feel that there's always the chance that someone will come further in if he's given a welcome, allowed to hang around, and not badgered. I think a community center should be as free and permissive a place as possible. On the whole the younger kids came to classes more faithfully than the older ones, though some teachers managed to build up a very good relationship with their older kids.

Schedule 2 was designed to meet the conditions of the fourth week when there were only 3 Freedom School teachers (though 3 more expected the next week) and when we wanted to use community center personnel as much as possible. We decided also to draw on voter registration and research volunteers.

1st Hour: Mass Meeting or General Session, to begin with Freedom Songs , general announcements, contributions form the kids etc, followed by a talk by a special speaker, as follows: —

1. The Freedom Rides—Rabbi Levine
2. Sunflower County—in context of Federal, State, County, and Town systems of Governments; given by Jerry Techlin, Research.
3. The Party System—George Winter and Len Edwards.
4. Education in the U.S. —Jerry Tecklin
5. A Journey to India—Gandhi and Non-violence—Kirsty Powel
6. Book Review Session—in which a number of teachers and community center people took part. Books of various kinds were introduced—beginning reading (Seuss etc), Fairy Tales, Alice in W. , Biography, Travel and Adventure, Novel (Huck Finn). After the session the library was open for checking out books. A most successful kind of session, I think.

2nd Hour: Expression Groups—Art, Role Playing, Writing

The whole school broke up into 3 groups, initially on the basis of preference, but we tried to insist that each child have one day in each group, and he was then free to go where he like. The resulting groups had a wide age range, but on the whole this did not prove as difficult as might have been expected—it was even, in some ways, rather interesting. The groups were large and in all of them we used team teaching. The aim was to find ways of expressing through writing, art, or role playing something of what had been spoken of in the speech. However, it so happened that the week we began working to Schedule 2 was also the week when the kids began working on a proposed picket of the Central High school for the purpose of urging teachers to vote. The result was that the role playing became geared almost entirely to role playing the picket, and some of the art work became directed to sign making.

Role Playing—this proved far and away the most popular, and there were sometimes as many as 30 or 40 in the group. In Role-playing the picket, great enthusiasm was developed, not only for the picket, but for role playing as such. As a result, in Schedule 3 a good drama group emerged, and role playing was used a good deal in the age groups, as part of ordinary class work.

Art—This group began with posters. It began to be exciting, however, when they were encouraged to do free, abstract works with paint, and then with charcoal and flat, not the tip of the pencil. Sometimes these were intended as emotional expressions.

Writing—The writing group did, generally, take the topic of the speech as its inspiration, and it often proved necessary to explore the ideas presented to it pretty thoroughly in discussion before writing was done, and this gave opportunity for useful review—but cut down on writing time. I think probably the freer approach that we used with the adults would have produced more creative results.

3rd Hour: Electives (same) and Recreation, and Canvassing

This schedule 2 had a great deal to commend it. When the speaker was dramatic like Rabbi Levine the meeting of the whole school was good, and the expression groups were really quite exciting and creative. I think they gave the kids a sense of freedom which engendered a good deal of enthusiasm. It was good, too, to be able to involve the community center and voter registration people in both the talks and the team teaching—in fact they were essential. In fact it seemed such a good scheme that there was some discussion about whether we should continue with it after the new teachers arrived. However in the end we decided that the advantages of intimate association with an age group were of even more value than the general excitement of the expression groups, so Schedule 3 ended up something of a compromise between the two previous schemes.

Schedule 3

1st hour—General Session with freedom songs, etc., and a talk on Negro history—topics same as for last 3 weeks of adult program. The 6 freedom school teachers took turns in giving the talks.

2nd hour—age groups. These were somewhat reformed

The 10-12 year group had become so big that it split into 2 classes

The 13-14 group remained the same, and the rest of the senior kids became one class, with 2 (sometimes 3) teachers working as a team with them.

3rd hour—Electives, recreation, canvassing

The Value of the general session came to be debated among the teachers. Very early in the piece it was decided that the 10 to 12 group should meet in their own class, because it was impossible to talk to them and to the 18 year olds at the same time. However, even for the older students it seemed too passive a method, with too little interchange between speaker and audience. As a result, in the second last week we decided to have a general session only once a week, and to have the first two hours in age groups. This places a great responsibility on the individual teacher—but if he accepts that, it makes possible a much more active learning situation.

Age Groups. The switch in teachers mid-stream meant the 10-12's and the 13 and 14's were the only one who continued as separate class groups with the one teacher all the way. This was a great advantage, and I think, it is the main reason why we didn't do as good a job with the older students as we might have. I don't have reports on all the classes, but it might be useful to report on the two that I have reports on: Lucia Guest's and my own.

10-12's This class showed great enthusiasm. By the beginning of Schedule 3 it had grown so much that we split it. It met on the steps of the Sanctified Church, and the high school teachers who lived in the houses opposite had a grandstand view of what went on. Lucia has never taught before, but she strikes me as a very good example of a naturally good teacher—creative, inventive, full of enthusiasm. I quote from a letter in which she gives an account of what she did with her class.

Looking back and trying to say what I did with my classes, I realize how much time I misused or wasted. If I had it to do over again, I think I would shoot for more concrete efforts, perhaps more writing, more art work. As far as what I did do: I guess a great concentration on world geography. I.E. what are the continents, where are they, what are some of the key countries in each continent, and how do people live there? We did the world maps and the map of Australia (big maps which each kid colored and labeled). I spend time on Australia—pop., largest cities, states, etc.

We did maps of Africa, and all the readings on Africa which we prepared. I also spent some time on Egypt, using National Geographics. As far as Negro History—this is where I fell down, I'm afraid. We went from Africa to U.S. slave trade, to Slavery in U.S. and skipped to Civil War, and didn't get further. As for the Movement: we went through the M.L. King comic book, and learned about "Snick" and what SNCC stands for. As for Government and politics (American): I attempted to teach some idea of the relationship between, and what are the 4 governments—municipal, county, state, Federal, also the importance of the ballot and where it fits into the scheme of things. As far as how I taught this:

1. I learned the great value of the blackboard, and of pictures.
2. Role playing—towards the last, I attempted to translate everything I could into role-playing—even geography.

13-14's—my class. I took Negro History as a core, following roughly the adult course (p.2), but leaving out the more sociological topics (like the Negro in the North etc.) My method was to introduce a topic, like Harriet Tubman, for instance, by telling the story, talking about it, looking at pictures, reading about it. This generally took one day. Then for the next two or three days, the kids followed up on this topic in their own way. I brought all the books, magazines, mimeoed material, pictures, etc. I could find to class, and got kids to choose what they wanted to do, and use the resource materials to help them. Some did historical, some creative writing, some drew pictures, or copied poems, or copied historical documents like runaway slave notices, etc. At the end of the summer, we displayed the work on all the units, arranged chronologically, to present a kind of perspective on Negro history.

Electives. These were popular, but difficult to organize. Things went better when we submitted to the inevitable and started banging a gong to induce people to change over on time. I think we were perhaps too ambitious in the number of electives we tried to run, and some kids never settled into one long enough to get somewhere. However, I think the idea of electives has a lot to commend itself.

Typing—perhaps the most popular—had to exclude the younger members for lack of room. Mustered 6 typewriters, and had two classes of 6 each afternoon.

Health—a small but faithful group continued the whole summer. Included First Aid Physiology, and even some dissection—frog!

French—Great interest in learning a foreign language—all simple conversation—unfortunately we lost the teacher who was doing this.

Music and African culture—both began and fizzled out, either because we lost the teacher at the end of the first 3 weeks, or because the teacher was drafted to another elective.

Art—really got under way after the impetus given under the 2nd schedule. Much enthusiasm—great ignorance of simplest techniques—need encouragement to be bold and free in their work

Dancing—very popular—did modern dancing, singing games, and occasionally the kids taught us the monkey etc. Only girls, except once or twice for singing games and folk dances.

Role Playing—became an elective in the last three weeks—emerged from the 2nd Schedule. Devoted itself to preparing an unscripted play about the High School protest—caste of about 20, one hour long. Presented it at the Freedom Festival, last day of school, and it was a great success.

Reading—we tried hard to offer reading of various kinds as an elective, but on the whole we did not establish sufficient continuity to make a great success of it. The moral is, I think, that reading should not be an elective. Something was done however. Again we tried to test and group the kids, but the great variations in ability and the paucity of teachers made it hard to get kids reading in a group at their own level. In the end we established three groups that had a fairly continuous existence in the last three weeks:

1. Seriously retarded readers. This group numbered 4 at its maximum. It used a new series of beginning readers based on Karl Fries Linguistic approach and written by Mrs. Rosemary Wilson for a new experimental reading program being conducted by the Board of Education in Philadelphia, PA. The set of readers remains in Ruleville and I think they're excellent (but reading is a field full of partisanship!). I think this group made progress (age range 12 to 20) but they scarcely got beyond the "alphabet book". Teaching beginning reading must have provision for a long term project to be useful.
2. 3rd Grade. This group read the Seuss books with great pleasure.
3. 3rd Grade and up. This group read the 4th grade basic reader together—but it was too difficult for some, too easy for others.

Once or twice I tried individual reading—and I think this would have been the answer if I had succeeded in getting it organized. Each child would then spend most of the lesson reading a book at his own level silently, coming to the teacher for 5 to 10 minutes of individual oral reading, questioning about comprehension, and word study.

The other classes, 15's and up. The senior classes had great discontinuity of teachers. They concentrated exclusively on citizenship and history, using mainly discussion, with some (I suspect too little in most cases) reading and writing. I think senior students can also learn from more active methods.

Highlights of the School Program

1. Caravan of Music. We had about 6 visits from folk singers and these were all a great delight. Among those specially remembered will be the drummer who let everyone have a go at the

drums one by one after the show, and Jackie Washington with his children's songs and Barbara Dane, who taught us "It isn't nice". It would have been good if there had been more attempt to teach songs.

2. The Visit of 13 of the Women from National Women's Organisations gave us all a boost. A great crowd turned up and we put on quite a program. They sat in on "baby minding" and on a reading lesson. Then Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. MacDonald, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Tucker told the story of the Movement in Ruleville, after which followed some very good discussion. Then they met volunteers and heard Jerry Tecklin talk about voter registration, research, and the law—then more discussion. In the afternoon, the kids took charge: told the story of the protest at school, and then did a role play performance of the picket.

3. Meridian Freedom School Convention. Three kids went from Ruleville armed with a program for Senator, Congressman etc worked out with other young people over a whole afternoon and a morning of strenuous discussion. They voted for Mr. MacDonald for Mayor of Ruleville and Martin Luther King superintendent of Education. (See [Platform of the Mississippi Freedom School Convention](#).)

Ruleville made a good contribution to the Convention. The story of the school protest and the motion of Bobbie Cannon inspired plans for the state wide boycott. Ora Doss and Eddie Johnson both made enthusiastic reports back to the Freedom School. Both were impressed by how hard work it was. As Eddie said in his report, "It wasn't fun!"

Actually I think that next year the program might include a bit more fun—a dance early in the program, and perhaps other recreation planned to help kids meet each other, or perhaps more highly organized communal meals to provide opportunity for kids to meet people from other places, or perhaps some discussion groups or study circles devoted not just to drafting motions, but to the task of studying and discussing something written specially for the purpose

4. In White America. This was a great success. It was done on the back porch, and the 200 or so people sat on benches in the sun or stood. Despite Gil Moses' misgivings about an out-of doors daylight performance, I thought the setting was excellent. The audience almost became a part of the play. Small boys climbed on the porch to go to the bathroom in the middle of a scene, dogs and hens paraded in front of the stage and there was an intimacy and informality about the performance that underlined for me the impression that the play was woven out of the very stuff of these people's lives.

5. Freedom Festival. The last day of school was given over to a Freedom Festival. In the morning the adults came for a tea party which somehow proved a bit stuffy and "middle class". Conversation didn't flow as freely as usual though I think people enjoyed it. In the library we had a display of kids' writing and art work and maps. In the afternoon we had a programme presented mainly by the kids, but two adults also took part: some plays written by the kids, a puppet show about the valiant knight Bob Moses and the wicked witch, Segregation, some poems of Eve Merriam recited in chorus, three freedom songs written by the kids, and an excellent, long, rehearsed, unscripted play telling the whole story of the school protest. Finally, Mr. Macdonald presented each kid with a dictionary.

The School Protest

This story deserves setting out in detail some time, but here I'll just give the main facts. The idea arose among the tiny group of kids active in the Ruleville Student Action Group which was stimulated into action when the volunteers came down. They began talking to the teachers about voting, and role played interviews with them in the meetings. Then, one meeting, after all the volunteers had gone they decided to announce a date to picket the school (August 5th) and to prepare for it they began having daily campus meetings at noon, and practiced role playing the picket during freedom school. They produced a leaflet setting out these plans, urging kids to come and join them, and urging the teachers to go down and register. That was the first phase.

Then, discussion with Charles MacLaurin and others threw doubt on the wisdom of having a picket, especially one whose date had already been announced. It was decided, as a kind of face saving device, to write a letter to the Principal and faculty, setting out a list of demands, and saying that if the demands were not met in reasonable time, they would take direct action. Besides asking teachers to go and register, the demands included such things as asking for an account of money earned cotton picking, for a student government and clubs, and for teachers to take the lead in demanding better, and integrated education. The letter was handed personally to each member of faculty on Monday morning. In addition, in Chapel two kids took advantage of a regular space in the program for student announcements, to make freedom speeches. Eddie Johnson expounded the letter, and Bobbie Cannon told teachers that there was "a new day" coming and they should be leading their people into it. The result was electric. The kids applauded and the faculty preserved a stony silence. That was the end of the second phase.

By the end of the morning, a notice had been handed to every student purporting to come from the Superintendent saying that any student who took part in any demonstration would be suspended. When MC. Perry tore up this notice saying he didn't "want any of that trash", he was immediately hauled off to the Principal and suspended. He tried to return to school next day; the Principal called the cops, and he was marched from the school at gunpoint. The Mayor then warned him that if he wished to return to school he would have to sign a statement that he would never again take part in civil rights activity. He went home to the plantation, and after a day, decided he would sign the statement. On the bus he learned that the kids of his class had staged a walkout the day before in protest against his suspension. School was pretty tense. The result was that the minute he got on campus the cops were again called. This time he was brought for trial, sentenced to 30 days and \$100 for disturbance of the peace, and it was 10 days before we bailed him out on appeal on \$500 bond. During this period things were happening at school, though I'm not very clear on the details. The kids generally agreed that they had missed the right moment for a demonstration by the whole school when they did not stage a wholesale walkout the day M.C. Perry was expelled. The kids had a meeting to discuss the letter and its demands; Mrs. Hamer had a meeting with the faculty; and the lawyer, David Godstick and I think Len Edwards met with the Principal. The kids brought their story to the meridian Freedom School Convention, and there plans were made for a statewide boycott. This was the end of the 3rd phase.

The Library

About 30 volunteers spent the first 4 days of the summer project doing nothing but sort the 7000 books piled in the Center, culling about 4000, and shelving them. We started lending books immediately using a check-out book. A group of kids volunteered to act as librarians, and worked on the issuing of books, and later on numbering and ordering them on the shelves. Eventually, we decided to use our very simple form of Dewey, using only the numbers for the main classes and a few other numbers within each class to apply to sections where we had many books. The system suited our purpose, and I think it worked pretty well. We had one shelf of "Book By and About Negroes" but otherwise there were no special displays—though I think they would be a good idea. The kids and I began work on a catalogue but we grew faint hearted, and decided it was better to concentrate on getting a good shelf plan first. We had a couple of book review sessions both for kids and for adults, and these were most successful and provoked a lot of borrowing of books. After the work day, when tables and benches were made for the library, we started to keep one room quiet for reading and studying. Before the regular school closed for picking, some kids had already got into the habit of using the library to do homework, as well as to write letters and read.

During September, we tried hard to get the library to the point where the kids could run it themselves, and a chief librarian and group of assistants were doing a pretty good job, and were represented in the board.

As to the quality of the books, they included everything from Nancy Drew to Thomas Mann. Perhaps the Thomas Mann would be better in a college library, but I cling to the thought that Richard Wright might come out of Ruleville. And anyway, as long as the High School has no library to speak of, the Center Library must serve as a High School Library. The Literature and History sections of the library were quite good but it was pretty weak on Science and the Social Sciences.

Teachers

I think we were extraordinarily lucky in the high quality of teachers, and their genuineness. We began with 6 people, with Liz Fusco as co-ordinator. When Liz and 2 others went to Indianola, we got 3 new people. Out of all nine of these, 4 were graduates, and 2 professional teachers. I think it was fairly obvious though, that neither being a graduate, nor being a professional teacher had much to do with being a good Freedom School teacher. When we lost our co-ordinator, it was suggested that we agree among ourselves as to who should take her place, and this was how I took over. I think this was a good way to do it, and it seemed to work out happily.

Like most Freedom School staffs we had our problems of personal relations, but on the whole I think we worked well as a team, and this is one reason why the summer was a joyful experience for us, all other things notwithstanding. I think the most important relationship for the school is that between the co-ordinator and the rest of the teachers. In some ways it is a pity that orientation is not long enough for a co-ordinator to be the choice of the group. But in any case, I think that the more the co-ordinator can act as "mere co-ordinator" and not as head the better. I think the spirit of staff meetings should be thoroughly egalitarian, and everyone should be aware that he or she has equal responsibility. I think staff meetings are important and should

be quite frequent—at least once a week. I think it's important that schedule and curriculum be planned co-operatively by the whole staff, though I also think it's important that each individual teacher have freedom to develop his own curriculum for his class. I don't think these two things are necessarily contradictory.

Another problem which I think we shared with many schools was some difficulty in working out a good relationship with the community center staff. I think in the end we succeeded, partly because at the personal level we got along well and enjoyed each other—which was just lucky—partly because the Freedom School needed the community center people in order to function. Difficulties were, however, inherent in a situation in which Freedom School and Community Center functions overlapped and in which Community Center functions were much less clearly defined than were Freedom School functions. One difficulty, for instance was whether Freedom School or Community Center co-ordinator should lead joint staff meetings. In the end, we agreed that where the adult morning classes or the kids afternoon classes were concerned it should be rated Freedom School business, but all other business was Community Center business. This seemed to work out O.K. Most of the time the two staffs met separately, and the Freedom School simply used all the community center personnel as teachers.

I gather that in some projects there was a good deal of tension between voter registration and freedom school volunteers. On the whole I think we escaped this. I don't know why: perhaps partly because some of the Freedom School and Community Center people were as militant as any, and when arrests were made in Drew all three groups were involved. I do remember one argument when plans for the school protest were developing when someone in voter registration suggested that all the school program should now be geared to the picket, and I protested that if freedom schools were to retain their integrity they had to be centers of real education, not just of propaganda. In actual fact, I don't think this was disputed. Not only that, there was a lot of sharing of work at every level. Voter registration people gave talks in freedom school and freedom school people helped canvas and make out file cards, and everyone helped in the Community Center's work day, or in food and clothing distribution.

Community Center

Looking on, it seemed to me that in many ways the community center people had a hard time because it was not clear at the outset what their job was. They took on the responsibility for baby minding in the mornings. They organized a program for the under 10 year olds 2 afternoons a week. They accepted responsibility for the physical state of the center. They helped organize food and clothing distribution. They conducted a health survey. They planned and carried out a most successful Work Day when volunteers and local people made tables and benches, laid linoleum, and painted. All of these things were important but I think that sometimes Community Center people felt they were doing the jobs that were left over after others had done the "main jobs." Not only that, I think some community center talent was not perhaps used to its fullest extent, simply because at the beginning it was not clear enough what there was to be done.

Handing Over

When Linda Davis came back from the meeting in Jackson with the news that she was to stay at the center through the winter, she discussed with the few remaining volunteers a plan for

having a Board of the Community Center elected by the Mass meeting. This was in line with the feeling often expressed during the summer that somehow the Center had to become the community's. The election of the Board was quite a milestone. In the last month I was down after the summer project proper was over there were many signs that the community was really claiming its own center. A team of kids helped man the radio. Another team of kids became librarians. A dozen or so 4 and 5 year olds began to come regularly to the kindergarten which Linda organized. Adults came 2 nights a week to reading classes. And the young people started to organize their own program with recreation and study and discussion concentrated in an organized way, mainly on Sunday afternoon. Perhaps more important, people, young and old began to drop in to the community center for various reasons: to borrow a book, to read or write in the library, to play Checkers or Monopoly, to talk, or dance, or listen to the radio, to meet before going to the courthouse to attempt to register, or before going to a county wide meeting on Sunday afternoon in Indianola, to talk over a problem, or to report some news, or to play basketball or football or croquet. If any confirmation were wanted of the need for community centers, this was it surely. In just 3 months this Ruleville Community Center had become a real center of community life in the Negro community. No one looked forward to the winter. But, as a local person said to me—not a regular attender at the center— “We all know where we'll be running if there's trouble.”