

To: Martha, Sally, Arlene

Report From Batesville  
Conference on Freedom Schools

From: Jo Ann

October 2, 1964

Liz Fusco's main purpose in calling the conference seems to have been to have the curriculum revised so that it would be a product of actual experience in Freedom Schools and not of guesswork (as the original teaching materials necessarily were). The coordinators' main purpose in attending the conference seems to have been (judging from a sense of common disappointment at the end) to obtain a clear view of what is expected of us this winter, along with, perhaps, some concrete materials and techniques for achieving it. The conference fulfilled neither purpose (although future results may come out of the beginnings we <sup>made</sup> on the curriculum). But it did provide a very valuable chance for us to exchange ideas, techniques, experiences and to talk at length about hopes, confusions and frustrations, individual and collective. It also gave us a chance to learn Liz's information on such things as the boycott and her personal attitudes toward the schools and teachers.

### TENTATIVE CURRICULUM CHANGES

The conference group was divided into several committees, each responsible for a given section of the curriculum, each to report back to the whole group on its decision re its particular section. Involved in the decision would be whether or not to turn some or all of ~~the materials~~ the materials into text book-type stuff to be put in the hands of the students. All but one of the committee reports indicated great dissatisfaction with the original materials. None of them recommended the creation of textbook materials. They generally indicated, too, rigorous individualism among the teachers. Some of the more significant recommendations made: 1) completely redo "The Movement". As it stands it is too propagandistic calling for answers already implied in the questions themselves, instead of calling for what are honestly the students' questions. The new materials should be set in an historical context, should contain the viewpoints of more organizations than just SNCC, should not shy away from such touchy topics as the strife among the several civil rights groups, and should be supplemented with a bibliography. 2) Incorporate into "THE Power Structure" a program of student field research. 3) Totally revamp "Material Things Vs Soul Things", introducing such studies as comparative religion. I came away confused as to whether or not such recommendations will be further acted upon.

### SUGGESTED TEACHING TECHNIQUES

As we talked about how we'd gotten along this summer we found ourselves pooling ideas and resources. Techniques which were reported to have worked very well and which I don't think were tried in any of the Canton area schools: 1) grab-bag dramatics -- each child (or group of children) draws from a bag an idea or scene to act out in 5 or 10 minutes.

2) intuitive art classes with either A) dropping a paint blob on a paper, folding paper in half, opening it, filling out the butterfly shape. From this the child will be inclined to experiment with other shapes & will soon not depend upon the accidental design to start him out, or B) talking about colors,

and how out of the 3 basics come all other colors. Then have the kids experiment with making colors. Both of these tactics avoid the stricturing concerns of "what shall I draw." In connection with art work, we discussed the problem of how to maintain a balance between waking the kids up to the fact that they can draw good stuff and keeping them from being stifled by our (white) approbation. Often if you tell a kid you like a certain painting, he'll paint you 10 more exactly like it. One way to do this is to have some of the art work shown at precinct meetings etc., drawing parental interest and encouragement, having approbation stem from the community.

3) To start ~~KIDSDRAW~~ kids writing: read 3/4 of a story and ask them to provide an ending. Pen pals have proven good incentive, too. I have 2 letters from Sweden, one from a 14 year old girl, one from a 16 year old boy. We should decide what to do with them, also if we want to start up some sort of correspondence between Canton kids and the north. A common problem with student writing is their use of movement slogans which is appallingly reminiscent of the constant (unthinking) use of biblical "slogans" by their parents. This is perhaps a bad commentary on the movement and its tendency to brain wash. 4) Hemingway has worked very well in reading sessions, especially TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT. Twain's HUCK FINN has worked well, too.

### STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

#### School Boycott

Liz reported growing unrest among Mississippi students, accompanied by sporadic and ill-planned demonstrations etc. which have resulted in several expulsions. She emphasized that we should discourage our kids from this and encourage them to develop the discipline needed by all revolutionists, discipline which deters impulsive action and results in good timing and ultimate effectiveness.

The procedure for the boycott runs as follows: 1) a core group of students draws up a petition of grievances. Number 1 on the petition is segregation. They quietly circulate this, obtaining as many student signatures as possible. 2) They attempt to get their parents involved and to get a parental petition drawn up, too. 3) These are presented to the principal and the school board. 4) The kids and parents make clear their desire to talk and negotiate. 5) If all else fails they demonstrate by joining the state wide FREEDOM STUDY DAY to be held about mid-November. As things stand now the exact date will be kept secret until 3 days before. The mid-November date may be extended because of the difficulty in organizing Delta kids, most of whom won't be in school until mid-October.

The aims of the boycott are principally to obtain full integration and to upgrade education in all Mississippi schools.

In the event of the suspension of student participants: we should work with the "suspendees" to prepare them as Freedom School teachers. They should understand in advance the probability of their suspension and our expectation that they should work in the

freedom education program until they get back into school (either by being readmitted or perhaps going north).

High School, College and Scholarships

With the help of The National Scholarship Fund for Negro Students a travelling college counselling service will be coming to Miss. I will work from the PSAT SCORES of the tests our kids will take October 31. These tests are for high school juniors, seniors and for people out of school and interested in college. (Some kids have already taken the test earlier in the summer and need not take it again.)

Scholarships for study in northern high schools are also materializing now. San Diego, Calif. and Scarsdale, N.Y. are pioneering with these. It was suggested that we might want to ask our home communities to join them.

Adult Literacy

The experimental, experimenting team which worked in this area in Selma, Ala. this summer are ready to move into Mississippi. So far they have concluded that 1) the Laubach and comparable methods are unsuitable for our purposes because they do not let us use the verbal strengths which the adults already ~~possess~~ possess and because they too much reflect dull, white, northern, middle-class interests and speech patterns. 2) The "Experience-Story method" is better suited to our situation. It consists of beginning a discussion about the adults' interests, pulling 5 or 6 sentences out of what he says and teaching them the words of those sentences, his own words. Thus we start with a vocabulary memorized by sight (the illiterate has usually developed a strong memory because he's had to rely on remembering as a survival technique). Gradually we work into structural analysis of words (prefixes, suffixes etc) and then into phonics and eventually into the use of a dictionary. Very often writing can accompany learning to read. Part of the memory process can consist of how to shape the words with a pencil. Often the use of magic markers, or thick-lead pencils helps initial writing attempts very much.

I have some materials from the Selma team. Others should be coming in the mail. I strongly suggest we push doorbells, find us 506 people who want to learn to read and write, write Jackson that we'd like the team to visit us for a week or 2 and have a literacy-class going by the time they arrive to help us.

Travelling Sculptor

We have one in the state. He paid his initial visit to Meridian. Apparently he wants mostly to be an artist in residence, demonstrating what a real live artist looks like and does. But also he'll help any aspiring sculptor. We can write Liz if we want a visit from him.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE COORDINATOR

For purposes of getting money and materials and of publicizing anything we do around here that might be half-way worthwhile, it would

be well to submit regular reports to Liz. On the brief report sheet she sent around while we were there I requested 2 more teachers, several periodicals, subscriptions and \$15. She complied immediately with the 3rd request. A repetition of the others should probably be forthcoming fairly soon.

in Jackson

She is fighting for all of us, the same battle being fought in most local projects: that of making the educational programs something more than an object of, at worst, disdain, at best, neglect by the Project Directors. One way to contribute to "our side" is to get our kids producing good stuff -- paintings, essays, poems, stories; also to keep the quality of our teaching as rich as possible. The results our kids and adults hand back will reflect either such quality or real justification for project directors' disdain.

On the other hand, some of us may find ourselves fighting mild disdain from Liz herself who indicated a real fear that many of the teachers (or at least of the people at the coordinators gathering) are not sufficiently sensitive to the special problems of Mississippi Negroes and are therefore incompetent to deal with the people and inclined to do some kind of terrible damage (what kind was never defined). She also indicated some scorn for the fact that, coming from college backgrounds, we are inclined to become "academic" (a dirty word). I personally see very real dangers in these attitudes of hers and feel some obligation to attempt a subtle changing of them. If we begin to agonize as much as she seems to desire over racial differences between us and our students we will become paralyzed and will lose one of the most important teaching tools we have -- our own sense of our own dignity and worth and of the worth of our own beliefs and values, even though they do differ from those of our students. If we concentrate as much as she desires upon destroying any potential "academic" atmosphere the materials we teach will be constantly superficial and will absolutely kill our schools within a few more months because already by the end of the summer our students' ~~was~~ interest was waning from an overdose of movement propaganda, ~~and~~ too dramatic and almost phony teaching of Negro history (based on the too dramatic and almost phony Hughes picture book), and ~~and~~ too repetitive gripe sessions about the Negro plight. We need neither agonize over nor ignore the racial ~~differences~~ and cultural differences, but rather should live with and acknowledge them as honestly and kindly as possible. We need neither disown nor haughtily proclaim our academic origins. All we have to do is teach with as much thought, substance and imagination as possible.