Theatre as Participatory Democracy:
Classroom Drama in The Mississippi Freedom Schools - Lessons For Contemporary Classrooms

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Introduction

During the summer of 1964, in the state of Mississippi, two hundred volunteer teachers, most of them from the Northern states, taught 2000 African American students in forty one different schools. The event was to become known as the Mississippi Summer Freedom Project, and the schools were known as freedom schools. Both the Summer Project and the freedom schools were designed and sponsored by two civil rights organizations, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Conceived in November, 1963, the Summer Project was originally intended to bring to Mississippi over 1,000 chiefly white volunteers to conduct a massive voter registration drive among disenfranchised African American adults and to build an alternative political party to challenge the conservative, all-white Democratic Party (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] papers, 1982, Reel 38; State Historical Society of Wisconsin [SHSW], R. Hunter Morrey papers). Organizers hoped that the influx of white volunteers would attract national attention to the Summer Project, force the federal government to act as a buffer between organizers in the black community and repressive local white governments, and compel Lyndon Johnson, who was running for president, to commit himself on civil rights before the 1964 elections (Perlstein, 1980).

As part of the project, a six-week summer freedom school program was proposed. As an alternative to the existing, Mississippi public school system, which was repressive, especially for African American students, the freedom schools were to provide students with a richer educational experience and, hopefully, to commit them to become 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 that 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 in most other states), these classroom methods of the freedom school were considered revolutionary.

This essay will discuss the role of drama as a method within the context of the freedom school. First, the aims of the freedom school project as envisioned by SNCC will be presented. These aims were the guiding force for the crafting of the curriculum and instruction used in the freedom schools. Next, drama as a teaching tool will be discussed, as it developed during the two-day freedom school curriculum conference prior to the Summer Project. Then, examples of how drama was implemented in the freedom schools will be examined. And finally, this essay will close with some comments on how drama based on the freedom school experience might inform contemporary social studies practice. The implication of this essay is that there are lessons to be learned from curriculum history, if contemporary educators wish to make use of it. Historical inquiry can be critical component informing contemporary educational practice (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Examining the critical, progressive classroom practice of the freedom school movement may prove useful to current instruction.

The Aims of 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 by which the schools 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; See Note 1). Cobb 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 as releasing African American students from the passivity that Mississippi schools had fostered and, in turn, providing 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 to become 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 for providing the alternative solutions necessary to transform a repressive society. "If 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. Thus freedom schools were to "to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions. More students need to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question" (SNCC: Reel 68). From these questions about personal situations 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. It would teach young African Americans "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 their society, envision alternative possibilities, and devise plans for change both in their own personal lives and in their community. There were to be no authoritarian teachers or teaching methods. Instruction should permit active student participation encouraging students to reveal feelings, provide opportunities for expression, and develop a sense of group responsibility. Instruction should instill and nourish democratic principles of equality, justice, and choice. And instruction should promote community and social action.

The Freedom School Curriculum Conference

To effect Cobb's ideas on freedom schools, COFO and the National Council of Churches sponsored a two-day curriculum conference in New York in March of 1964 (Fusco, 1964; SNCC: Reels 67, 68, 69). Fifty participants representing a wide range of educational expertise were invited to attend. The purpose of the conference was to design a comprehensive and detailed curriculum and to 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 split into small groups with a specific assigned curriculum and instructional need. Drama was on the agenda to be discussed as a possible method of instruction (SNCC: Reel 38; SHSW: Howard Zinn papers). 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).

Two of the conference participants, John O'Neal and Myles Horton, had brought with them a strong commitment to drama as an educational tool. O'Neal was a SNCC field secretary, a co-organizer of the curriculum conference, and the co-founder of a recent, established touring Mississippi community theater, the Free Southern Theater (SNCC: Reel 67). O'Neal claimed that the art for the black community, as well as most other forms of communication and media, was restrictive by the white system in order to confine black awareness to the black community, to allow the black community to learn only what the white political interests wanted them to know or guess, and to control and limit black expression within the confines of its

community (SNCC: Reel 67). Similar limitations were imposed by the segregated Mississippi public schools, a white administration that restricted rather than nourished the learning processes of black students by controlling the content of textbooks; forbidding the discussion of controversial topics, especially any problematic topic dealing with the black experience; and denying teachers the freedom to choose and design their own curriculum (Derby, Moses, & O'Neil, 1965). The result of this subjugated system was to emasculate blacks by ignoring the significance of black personal experiences and to prevent blacks from developing an emancipated vision which would allow them to see themselves as acceptable, worthwhile, and important participants "in the total human experience." Such limitations and denials prompted "the feeling of being irrelevant to any event in life" and negated the "personal importance of the Negro individual by calling him [sic] inferior, second rate and less than a human being" (SNCC: Reel 67).

Therefore, to challenge, in part, the very essence of this repressive segregated system, O'Neal believed drama that was improvised, written, and performed by black students about problematic black experiences and situations showed promise for promoting learning and for stimulating critical thought. O'Neal realized that although drama was by no means an absolute solution to the tremendous problems faced by blacks suffering under an oppressive system, dramatic projects and activities might add a valuable dimension to both the current civil rights movement and the freedom school program. Such activities would provide an outlet for the potential creative talents of black youth in terms of reflective and critical thought, culminating in a forum for expression of the black social and economic experience in Mississippi. With this arena for active participation and involvement in improving the local black communities, both blacks and whites could be educated in preparation to change these repressive systems and to "emphasize the universality of the problems of the Negro people" as they relate to other human problems. "Above all," drama would be an opportunity to "release laughter" (SNCC: Reel 67).

Myles Horton had been a co-founder in 1932 of Highlander Folk School, a labor-activist school in Tennessee. Many members of SNCC's staff had participated in Highlander workshops, based on Highlander's model of participatory education which stressed that solutions to a group's problems had to grow out of group members' own experiences. Highlander's goal was not for teachers to give 'correct' answers, but rather to ask questions that would cause the group to analyze the problem collectively, generalize from their experiences, discover solutions to their problem, and develop some action plan to implement the solution (Tjerandsen, 1980).

Drama was one of the activities Highlander used in the participatory education curriculum (SHSW: Highlander papers; Petty, 1979). Its most important purpose as an educational tool was to create an open environment in which a group of participants could become a mini-community to deal with real problems they faced daily, seeking real solutions to achieve a better life. Developing group plays required problem solving processes and skills. Highlander advocated that by being involved in a problem solving dramatic experience the participants would learn to use processes of problem solving effectively, solve a meaningful problem, and in their lives, be able to translate the drama experience to future life situations. While engaged in the drama process, the participants were required to investigate a social issue, analyze problematic situations about the issue, incorporate the situations into characters and dialogues, create a number of solutions, formulate a final scene which would reflect what the participants decided was the most appropriate solution to the problem, and then present the play to an audience. During the drama process and after each performance of the play, debriefing discussions were used to help participants understand the content and the process of solving the given problem.

At the end of the two-day curriculum conference, the participants had created three progressive curricula targeted to strengthen African American students academically and to prepare them for greater social and political activity (SNCC: Reel 64). The remedial "academic curriculum" was to be used for those students who had specific learning problems. The "humanities curriculum," emphasizing English, foreign languages, mathematics, and science, was designed to help students develop their talents and their potential as human beings, to enable them to break out of a segregated Mississippi public school system that by restricting learning was essentially preventing blacks from functioning in society. However, the major thrust of the freedom schools was the "civic curriculum," designed to enable students to study real life issues that affected them and their community, to develop new ways of thinking and analytic reasoning, and to work together as active agents for social change.

In addition, the conference recommended numerous progressive, democratic instructional methods emphasizing self-discovery and self-expression, encouraging students to think critically, to question Mississippi's oppressive social order, and to participate in social change (SNCC: Reel 27). Drama was recommended as one of the teaching methods. In a six-page teaching guide, "Notes On Teaching In Mississippi," given to the freedom school volunteers, drama and the other suggested methods were recommended for their strengths in the following areas:

1. Encouraging expression,

2. Exposing feelings (bringing them into the open where they may be dealt with productively),
3. Permitting the participation of students on various levels,
4. Developing group loyalties and responsibility, [and]
5. Permitting the sharing of strengths and weaknesses of individual group members.

(SNCC: Reel 27)

Drama was also specifically encouraged because "this method can 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" (SNCC: Reel 27). Under the heading of "USING DRAMA," instructions were given on how drama might be implemented in the class room:

> Probably the best way of using the dramatic method is the extemporaneous approach. In this approach, learning lines in a formal way is avoided. A story is told, or a "Let us suppose that . . ." or a "Pretend that . . ." situation is structured, and then parts assigned. The actors [students] are encouraged to use their own language to interpret the story or situation and some participants are assigned to act the part of non-human objects as well (e.g., trees, a table, a mirror, the wind, the sun, etc.). Each actor is asked to demonstrate how he thinks the character he is portraying looks, what expression, what kind of voice, how he walks, what body posture, etc. As soon as each actor has determined the characteristics of his part, the story outlined is reviewed again, then dramatized.
>
> (SNCC: Reel 27)

Examples of Drama Use in the Freedom Schools

This section will examine how five freedom schools used drama in their classrooms. The reason that these five schools were chosen for this essay is because they are the only ones for which the historical records provide copies of the play scripts and descriptions of the plays. According to curriculum reports, most of the forty-one freedom schools used drama in the classroom, but there are no detailed accounts of most of those experiences. For example, Jo Ann Ooiman (SHSW: Jo Ann Ooiman Robinson papers) attended the opening of the Ashbury Freedom School's play entitled "Raising Cane in the Sun" and thought it was well done. The Greenville freedom school presented to a mass civil rights meeting a student-written play about the death of Herbert Lee, a Mississippi civil rights leader and organizer (SNCC: Reel 68). The students at the Clarksdale freedom school dramatized Richard Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie*. The Ruleville freedom school held a Freedom Festival on the last day of school (SHSW: Staughton Lynd papers; SHSW: Jerry Tecklin papers). The program for the festival included the following presentations that the students had designed in their freedom school classes: (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 in the presentations and the audience sang "We Shall Overcome."

Lise Vogel (SHSW: Lise Vogel papers), a freedom school teacher in one of the Jackson freedom schools, indicated in her teaching plans that she had her students dramatize stories and poems they had written themselves as well as materials written by others. Her students chose and invented their own characters, and through simple theater games and pantomime they constructed the plot of each skit. After the students designed their own costumes, Vogel would hold two dress rehearsals in class and finally have the students present their skits to the entire freedom school.

Because drama was popular with the students, it was a valuable medium for reaching the students and helping them learn. One student who had participated in the Ruleville freedom school recalled that at the beginning of the freedom school students said very little. "It wasn't that the students did not know anything, rather they had no experience in expression. They had learned from their experiences, especially with whites and with their teachers, to fear saying anything. If they did [say anything] they would get punished or be hit. So instead of saying anything, they would play 'dumb nigger' so they wouldn't get into any trouble. In freedom schools, by implementing and using role plays and having students engage in drama skits, students began to talk and think about their problems and situations they were in. They developed confidence not to be afraid to say or do anything. Creating and doing plays brought out expression about their experiences, developed creativity, had a lot of fun, and helped students to discuss and propose solutions to the problems they were facing in their communities. At least where I went to freedom school, drama was the best learning tool we used." (Interview, 1995). A professional teacher in the Hattiesburg freedom school explained that emphasis on learning experiences that created a participatory educational environment rather than traditional teaching was important due to the nature and prior experiences of the students.

> It has been rough. Much of what we know about teaching must be unlearned or relearned here. The standard academic approach has not work at all well, even when material has be simplified . . . . The kids

we are dealing with are not trained to listen and absorb information presented in an organized, "logical" manner . . . . The students do not seem to be able to follow a point-by-point presentation at all, whether simple or complex. They learn by talking, by conversation, by rambling around and beating the nearby bushes [community involvement], and **they learn by acting things out** [authors' emphasis].

(Sutherland, 1965, p. 98)

Holly Springs Freedom School. Of the many student dramas performed throughout the freedom schools, the most memorable was "The Seeds of Freedom," (SNCC: Reels 6; 37; 68; SHSW: Eugene Hunn papers; SHSW: Pam Allen papers; Lukas, 1968). It played in a number of other freedom schools, toured with the Free Southern Theater, and was performed in New York City (SHSW: Aviva Futorian papers). This is the only Freedom School play on which detailed information exists on the process by which it was designed and composed.

The play began as a suggested activity in the Holly Springs freedom school's creative writing workshop (SNCC: Reel 6). Students decided they wanted to portray the life and death of Medger Evers, a Mississippi civil rights leader. None of the students had any experience in play writing. Deborah Flynn, a New York public school teacher, suggested they improvise the story (as suggested in the "Notes On Teaching In Mississippi). "The dialogue, . . . except for the quotes," explained Flynn, " is indicated or simply outlined as a series of suggested ideas to carry forward the action of the play. Dialogue in this type of play should never be considered as words to be studied by heart and repeated by rote. This play form is particularly well-suited to present ideas of action" (SHSW: Pam Allen papers).

The students began to research Evers' life and death, with Flynn filling in additional historical facts to complete the story. For the next two weeks they acted out the story through improvisation and discussion until the scenes were scripted. The title of the play developed from a class discussion about Evers. A female student said, "I don't think of him as really dead. I feel that from his grave is growing a huge tree which is spreading seeds of freedom all over" (Lukas, 1968, p. 84). "Seeds of Freedom" was the title the students chose.

The 50-minute play opened on July 26 to an audience of two hundred, The performance begins with the actor-students sitting in the audience, coming on stage at designated times to tell in their own words their part of the story. The narrator begins:

> And this is a play about Freedom . . . about us! Yes, us because every step we take along the Freedom Road, every time we act, every time we do something to move forward along the Freedom Road we plant a seed. And seeds are blowing in the wind today.
>
> (SHSW: Pam Allen papers)

The first scene then takes the audience to the home of the Evers family in Jackson, Mississippi. The Evers are waiting for Medger to come home. Meanwhile, Mrs. Evers explains to her two children their father's involvement in civil rights work. Then a threatening phone call is received. Next Evers car is heard pulling into the family driveway. Then a shot rings out. Medger Evers is dead.

The second scene finds the family returning home from Evers' funeral, his son very bitter. The boy's mother takes the time to teach him an important principle. (The line was written by Ira Moore, the student who played Mrs. Evers.):

> Oh Darrell, don't talk this way. I too hated all whites the first day Daddy was murdered. But I don't hate anymore. We must not hate even our worst enemy. We may hate only what they do. It was Daddy himself who taught us this. He wouldn't want you to hate or kill. Daddy is not dead in the inside of us. But if you hate, you will kill him.
>
> (SHSW: Pam Allen papers)

The next two scenes portray the travesty of the white Mississippi court system allowing Evers' accused murderer, Byron de la Beckwith, to go free. In the last scene, the narrator returns:

> Here today we have talked of two men: one alive but forever dead. The other, Medgar Evers, dead. But having died for a cause, a noble cause, he will live forever. Don't you believe me? Then come see, come watch the hundreds, the thousands who are carrying on the work, who are joining the movement.
>
> (Lukas, 1968, p. 85)

After that narration, each freedom school student, one by one, goes to the stage and tells the audience why he or she joined the civil rights movement:

> I believe it is time for the Negro to progress, to assume all the rights and the duties of free men. Attending Freedom School gives us the chance to learn to make that progress.
>
> As Freedom School students, we are helping in voter registration because we feel that the fight for freedom in Mississippi must be fought not only by the adults, but by the teenager.

> We go to Freedom School because we feel this is the era of changing conditions, and we want to participate meaningfully in that change.
>
> (Lukas, 1968, p. 85-86)

At the end of these testimonies, the entire cast on the stage with the audience ends the play by singing:

> We're voting now
> We're voting now
> We're voting now for liberty.
> Our years of slavery now are ending.
> We'll walk and talk till we are free.
>
> (Lukas, 1968, p. 86)

McComb Freedom School. The play designed by the McComb freedom school was entitled "McComb, U.S.A." (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers). The play was a historical, chronological story of the violent acts towards blacks and civil rights workers that took place in McComb in the summer of 1964. History had shown that McComb, Pike County, was the most violent town in Mississippi toward civil rights workers and the blacks who supported them and the movement (Dittmer, 1994). Many black adults wanted nothing to do with the movement because they feared for their jobs and for their lives.

Because of the white violence and the lack of black adult support, the freedom school organizers had not decided until the last moment to place a school in McComb (Rothschild, 1981; Hinman-Smith, 1993). The reason they finally established the school was SNCC's faith in young African Americans as catalysts for community change (SNCC: Reel 38). "I think the Freedom School is inspiring the people to lend a hand in the fight," reported McComb Freedom School Coordinator, Ralph Featherstone.

> The older people are looking to the young people, and their courage is rubbing off. The school makes the kids feel they haven't been forgotten. It makes them feel that at last something is coming down to help them.
>
> (SNCC: Student Voice, 1964, p. 2)

To welcome the volunteer teachers and their students to McComb, the building which was to house the freedom school was bombed the day before school opened. Undaunted, the volunteers opened the school 'open-air style'(SNCC: Reel 28).

There is no record of who wrote the play, when it was performed, and to whom it was performed. The play is long, and the structure is complex, indicating that probably a freedom school teacher or teachers did much of the work in designing this play. However, a number of references to the students' own experiences and student admonitions to the audience to support the civil rights movement in McComb are evidence that the students were involved in designing as well as performing the piece (See Note 2). The only evidence that the play was performed is a typed note at the bottom of the first page of a script belonging to one of McComb's freedom school teachers that it had been performed (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers). Also on the script next to the name of each character was written in script the name of the individual who apparently was assigned to play the role. Comparing those names with names from other freedom school assignments and activities, shows that these names were freedom school students (SNCC: Reel 38). From the content of the play it is evident that this play was written for and possibly performed to the black community to encourage active involvement in the civil rights movement in McComb.

"McComb, U.S.A." was a propaganda play intended to recruit blacks to involve themselves in the civil rights movement. It portrayed the town's violence towards blacks and civil rights workers. Twenty-seven violent acts were portrayed in the play. The violence included killings, beatings, bombings, and burning crosses in yards in addition to verbal abuse, public hatred, Jim Crow laws, mass arrests, and rape. The language at times was raw and vulgar, and some scenes were very descriptive. Violence was committed by businessmen, legislators, policemen, a community preacher, the "Sheriff", and a number of community white citizens. The victims of the violence were of two types. The first were civil rights workers and blacks who supported the movement. They were the victims of the most violent acts. The second group were "Uncle Tom" blacks who were either content with the status quo or too scared to organize to stop the violence and the injustices. They were not necessarily victims of violent acts, but victims of knowing their place in the community. The protagonists in the play were the female COFO worker, the freedom school teacher, freedom school students, several black citizens, and the "Voice."

The structure of the play followed the theatrical form of the Living Newspaper. The Living Newspaper, a dramatic structure developed in the 1930s, treated topical, significant issues as problems requiring solutions. The common person, either individual or group, was the protagonist, and the plot developed from the common person's determination to solve a problem imposed by her/his economic, political, and/or social environment (Chilcoat, 1988). Nearly all Living Newspapers followed a similar pattern: multiple short scenes, real and generic characters, compressed dialogue based on actual discourse, minimal reliance upon settings and props, a running commentary to tie the scenes together. These dramas represented strong liberal and didactic attitudes and portrayed

specific recommendations for action. The play would begin with some sensational event which would force the audience and the protagonist to recognize a problem and seek for a solution. Through an excursion of recent historical events, the causes of the problem would be exposed and analyzed. Once the causes were established, solutions would be suggested. The play would end with the protagonist advocating one solution.

"McComb, U.S.A." applied the Living Newspaper format to the problems being experienced in McComb, Mississippi. The events in the play were taken

> from actual happenings of the summer; the dialog [was] taken from the actual words spoken at the time. If any license [had] been exercised in compiling this production it [had] only made slight changes to the strict chronology of events.
>
> (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The production consisted of twenty-three short scenes, with the singing of civil rights songs between scenes. There were thirty-seven real and generic characters, and the "Voice" provided running commentary. The problems centered around a combination of white violence and black apathy. The solution was to listen to the recommendations of the COFO workers and to imitate the examples of adult blacks and freedom school students who put their lives on the line for justice. These recommendations and examples would lead to black community activism.

The play begins with the playing of "Dixie" and the white "Announcer" declaring:

> In Mississippi each morning dawns softly and tenderly like a blessing. The people of this historic state rise with the sun to tend their crops of cotton and corn. From time immemorial it has been thus. The thankful hearts of the people of Mississippi as they arise to go about their appointed tasks are as much a part of the great Southern Heritage as the glorious flag we call the stars and bars.
>
> (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The "Voice" suddenly interrupts, stating that in 1961, in broad daylight, on a public street, Herbert Lee, a black supporter of civil rights was murdered. The next two scenes describe the fate of Lewis Allen, a black man who saw the shooting, who was scared for his life but willing to testify in court. Allen was murdered, the Sheriff claimed the shooting was domestic, not racially motivated, and a white man claimed Allen would not have been shot except for those "Goddamned Communists, Jew nigger-loving civil righters."

The next scenes involve a businessman claiming that the reason for Mississippi being the worst state in the Union in respect to personal wages is because "[w]e have millstones around our necks, and by millstones, I mean of course Negroes"; two white men beating a black man for information on who is housing civil right workers; a legislator passing a bill to curtail civil rights activities; and a community white female liberal saying she feels bad for "nice Negroes" and deciding to take a stand while her black maid scrubs her floors. "'Give us, we're going to say, 'any old clothes you don't want. Negroes will be glad of them."

The eighth scene has Black "Tom" answering questions from a female COFO worker about taking a stand against McComb injustice. "Tom" is happy and does not want to have anything to do with the "Freedom Rider" worker, "Keep away!," and runs off. The next two scenes have a policeman abusing his authority by insulting a group of black teenagers telling them that no matter what the "agitators" call them "you're just plain old fashioned niggers and always will be," and a white preacher at the pulpit claiming that no matter what these "strangers in our mist" are saying, blacks according to the story of Noah in Genesis were meant to be slaves.

The "Voice " describes shootings and bombings (with sound effects), the Sheriff claims the civil-rights workers are doing it, and "Tom" says the Sheriff is always right. Then comes the bombing of the freedom school. A freedom school student offers a solution as he reads to those who resent or are afraid of change a poem he has written:

> I came not for fortune or for fame,
> I seek not to add glory to an unknown name;
> I did not come under the shadow of night,
> I came by day to fight for what's right.
> I shan't let fear, my monstrous foe,
> Conquer my soul with threat and woe.
> Here I have come and here I shall stay,
> And no amount of fear my determination can sway.
> I asked for your churches, and you turned me down,
> But I'll do my work if I have to do it on the ground.
>
> (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The next scenes describe a cross burning, a rape of a black woman, and an old black women feeling ashamed of the shooting of three civil rights workers registering to vote at the courthouse. In the following scene an old white man is upset that blacks can eat in a white restaurant, "Niggers are taken our freedom away!" A black women enters the restaurant shouting, "Well, all I know is that I' ve waited all my life, fifty-six years,

just to be able to come in here when I felt like it and sit down and order a banana split. Lord! I' ve *tasted* freedom now!" After this, the middle class white community wonders, "Will Mr. Goldwater be able to save us?"

There are more explosions, a white friend to COFO workers is forced to leave town under treat, and the "Tom" preacher claims in church that the Lord will provide, just pray. The female COFO worker challenges him and his congregation, "How can we overcome our fear of the white folks when we' re frightened of each other." The preacher yells, "Get out!" The worker then turns to the audience and exclaims:

> I m sick of hearing you people tell me that you' re too old, too ill, too happy or too scared to vote. How else are you going to change this rotten state of affairs? How else are you going to get rid of a Sheriff who is either an incompetent or a criminal? If you' re not willing to do something about it, you have no right to complain. How many of you have enough guts to stand up straight and say, "We are sick and tired of being sick and tired. (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The next scene shows a black supermarket blown up with two "cops" beating a black man - - "What you niggers do this time?" - - followed by the bombing of Aylene Quin's (a friend of COFO) home, nearly killing her two children. At a mass protest meeting sponsored by COFO, a freedom school teacher stands and speaks, "I'm going to speak loud and clear so you can all hear me. I especially want those cops standing at the back there with their guns and Billy-clubs to hear . . . We have been beaten in the streets. We have been bombed. We have been burned. Now we are beginning to . . . [reach] a point where [we] will hit back." The teacher and the rest of the "disreputable bunch" are arrested and thrown in jail. Freedom school students are taken out of school and are arrested. A freedom school student reads her essay entitled "The Feelings":

> What were the feelings of the Negroes gathered under a large tree at the scene of the bombed church? The words that were spoken came not from the mouth but from the heart. The tears that were cried came not from the eyes but from the heart. And the feelings came not from the outside but the inside. Some were the feelings of hate. Some were the feeling of grief. Some stood by swearing softly while others were just plain numb. Such were the feelings of the black people who stood by almost hopeless.
>
> (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The next to the last scene has eleven white men arrested in connection with all of the bombings. The circuit judge is lenient, "You were . . . unduly provoked by the presence in our community of foreign agitators, and by the fact that these agitators are living immoral and unhygenic lives . . . . Don't do it again." "It isn't fair, exclaims four blacks who were beaten or had loved ones killed for participating in civil rights activities. The "Voice" comes on stage:

> I, the Negro of McComb. I have been starved. I have been humiliated. I have been driven away. My body has been used by the white man and then thrown into rivers and swamps. I've been left hanging on trees. They have taken my blood. They have taken my pride. They have taken my history. They have robbed me of my color. Why is it that when they hear me sing they are afraid.
>
> (SHSW: Henry Bowie papers)

The "Voice" leads the audience in singing "We Shall Overcome" and ends the play, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the audience. Men and Women of the world. Black and white people. We have now reached the beginning."

Mileston Freedom School. The students of the Mileston freedom school wrote, produced, and performed the play "The American Negro" (SNCC: Reel 65). The students believed that creating and performing the play was a worthwhile experience that involved them in promoting the civil rights movement and in positively influencing their community. The objectives of the play were two-fold. First, it was the culminating activity of the Mileston freedom school experience, providing the students the opportunity to show their community what they had learned and what they wanted the community to learn from their freedom school experiences. Second, the play produced with the political objective of persuading members of the black community to remain or become active in the struggle for freedom. Records indicate that the play was well received by the community and that it appeared to motive some to activism (SNCC: Reel 65).

The Mileston play, "The American Negro", depicted the experiences and conditions of African-Americans in a very loose historical context. There were only seven short scenes in the play. The structure of most of the scenes began with a narrator standing on the stage and reciting a thematic poem that introduced the scene, told a story, and tied all the scenes together in one congruent story line. After the narrator finished reciting the poem a short thematic skit followed. Twenty characters made up the personnel of the play.

The first scene begins with Narrator #1 coming on stage and reciting the introductory poem setting the stage for the events that follow:

I am the American Negro.
I am the mind of a race of millions
Who have suffered three hundred years
Of mental and physical slavery.
My mind is sore and it aches
Since I have known the sins
Of two races, and carried the hate of one.
I have stretched out my hand in brotherhood
And had it burned. My soul has sought
Reconciliation, but has only found a
Well of hate. I have asked only that I
Be recognized as a man, and in return
I have been beaten like a dog.
My mind is weary with thoughts of the past
Of what I was and what I am now.

(SNCC: Reel 65)

The second scene begins with Narrator #2 reciting, "I am the Negro before slavery. My home is in Timbuktu...my people are free." Then the curtain opens to a scene of Native African blacks - - free, happy, and proud to be a "dark and beautiful race." The next scene changes to a slave galley with Narrator #3 stating, "I am the Negro on my way to America, Land of the Brave and the Free...I have been dragged from my home. And torn from my husband and child." Six slaves then ask why this has happened to them, who is going to deliver them from this evil, what will become of them, and whether they will ever find peace again. The fourth scene begins with Narrator #4 claiming, "I am the Negro in slavery. I am a slave to the white Cotton King. My name is Nat Turner, and I will be hung, For trying to lead my people out of their bonds. My people live in the field...under the white Master's whip." The curtain opens on a mother and child chopping cotton, the child crying to her mother, "I don't wanna leave you. I don't wanna go. Don't let "em take me, mamma." Suddenly, a white man enters cracking his whip, "Git on you lazy ole nigger woman. You ain't gonna have your baby boy much longer."

Scenes five and six portray the Civil War, the segregated South, the end of World War I, and again the South. Narrator #5 states, "The civil war came, and we thought Our deliverance was at hand. We joined . . . and fought . . . After the war it seemed as though we were free, We could vote, hold office, and walk the streets . . . . But we were deceived. Our old masters brought down a new slavery upon us... segregation . . . inequality . . . terror." Narrator #6 moans, "We have just helped fight in World War One, A war that was supposed to make the world Safe for Democracy. Mississippi must not Be part of that world . . She became a terrorist state . . . our young men were hung . . . the white man's terror grew. Again we hung our heads and cried, and did nothing." The Narrator becomes quiet then looks defiantly at the audience and says:

But there comes a time when we must stop running.
A time when we must turn around and face the man
Who kills our sons in the night, who
Burns our homes by day, and ruins our lives as we
Would live them year in and year out.
There comes a time when we must stop
Looking at ourselves as dogs and realize
That we too are human beings and have dignity
Of our own to preserve.

(SNCC: Reel 65)

The next scene opens as two African American men then are talking at a table. One is agitated because his son was killed by the Klan. "They ain't gonna get away wit dat if I can help it." The second man tells the first to be quiet or both of them will get into trouble. "No," exclaims the first, "I'm sick an' tired an' I'm sick an' tired of being sick an' tired....I ain't afraid no more." Three Klansmen enter, putting a rope around the neck of the first man, "You've been talkin' mighty big, Jessie boy. Now why you wanna go an' upset all your friends wit all dat talk. We're goin' to hang you now, Jessie boy, jest to shut your mouth." The spotlight comes on, showing a silhouetted hanging body as the curtain closes.

In the last scene, Narrator #1 steps on the stage and pleads to the audience:

I am the American Negro.
You have seen my past; you have known my past.
And you have seen the trouble I've seen.
Today we have seen many men die
Because they stood for their rights.
Today we have seen three men disappear
For joining in our fight.
Tomorrow many more will die.
And many more will suffer,
But we've begun and we are not turning back
And someday, somehow we shall overcome!

(SNCC: Reel 65)

Finishing his speech, he invites the community gathering to join in with the cast and sing "We Shall Overcome."

Indianola Freedom School. The Indianola Freedom School play, "The Strong Feeling of a Man and Women," was an assignment of a very popular writing curriculum designed by the local freedom school teachers (SHSW: Christopher Hexter papers; Christopher Hexter Interview). Although it was written by one student, rather than representing a collective effort, the performance of the play involved an entire class of students. There were three short scenes, two locations, and six main

characters: the protagonists - - mother, father, and son - - and the antagonists - - the Boss Man, the Chief of Police, and the restaurant owner. The story line was also simple, mostly dialogue and very little action.

The objective of the play was to show that blacks must become involved in their community and state to make change, no matter how bad the obstacles. One of the obstacles was the Boss Man. Many of the blacks in Indianola worked on cotton "plantations" and lived on property owned by the Boss Man. The blacks knew how he would react if they made any attempt to registrar to vote or to participate in any type of civil rights activity, including allowing their children to go to freedom school. For example, Fannie Lou Hammer who lived in the next town, Ruleville, had gone to the courthouse to take the registration test in order to vote. That night the owner of the plantation she and her husband had worked on and the property they had sharecropped for eighteen years ordered her to withdraw her application to vote. She refused. The owner not only beat her but threw her off his plantation and out of her house (Dittmer, 1994; Mills, 1993). The police did nothing. This experience had scared many blacks into not registering or involving themselves with the SNCC/COFO workers. "The Strong Feeling of a Man and Woman" portrays this fear and shows how the son (the black youth) is prepared to overcome this fear despite the consequences.

The first scene opens with a family of three - - a father, mother, and son - - discussing whether the son should go with some friends to integrate a local white restaurant. Father and mother plead with the son not to go because it will be dangerous and they know he will get hurt. Father also argues that their employer, simply known as the Boss Man, will not like any of his blacks involved in any integration activities. If he finds out, mother and dad will lose their jobs and home. The parents feel they should just wait and things will get better. The son responds, "If we are going to wait now, we will never get anything done here in Mississippi. That's all we have been doing is waiting for it to happen here and now we don't want to do anything about it . . . . I don't want to wait." The father continues to plead that the son listen to reason. "I don't care what the Boss don't like," the son says, "because if we wait until he likes our color we will never get anyplace . . . . We . . . have to co-operate together "everybody." When I say everybody, I mean the people in and all around Mississippi . . . . So, I'm going, and stop worrying". The son leaves.

There is a knock at the door and the Boss Man enters. He threatens the father and mother, "I came over here to tell you don't have anything to do with any of that civil rights thing, because if you do, I'm going to throw you off my plantation."

"Yes sir," winces the father. The Boss Man leaves.

The second scene has the son and friends entering the "White Only" restaurant. The owner wants to know why they are in his restaurant. The son responds, "We come here to get something to eat."

"We don't serve black folks."

"As you know the Civil Rights Bill [has] been signed and this isn't just a white place any more."

"I don't give a darn about no rights, get the hell out of here before I call the police."

"We are not leaving until we are served!"

The owner leaves to phone the police. A group of whites eating in the restaurant get up from their tables, surround the blacks and begin beating them up. The son is killed. The Chief of Police comes, asks a few questions, and leaves to tell the son's parents that he is dead.

The third scene is very short. There is a knock at the father and mother's house. The Chief of Police enters and tells them that their son is dead. The mother faints, and the sorrow-stricken father says, "Thank you Chief, I got to see about my wife now." The play ends when an announcer turns to the audience and asks, "What is going to happen next?"

Gulfport Freedom School. The Gulfport freedom school created a short play entitled "Memories of Freedom School" (SNCC: Reel 39). The plot of the play recorded the more memorable activities in the Gulfport freedom school. The play was written by the freedom school students. There were five scenes with five main characters. The structure of the play resembled the 1930s workers' theatre form, the mass chant. This dramatic form used individual and group vocals as choruses, along with physical movement, and rhythmic gestures to enact a one-act play. Through various combinations of pattern, rhythm, and pitch the performance evoked meaning and emotion. Variety was produced as different combinations of people would chant - - individuals, combinations of individuals, or the entire group. Dynamic effects were produced through contrasts: male/female, antagonists/protagonists, teacher/students, slow/fast, and loud/soft. The content of such plays was based on the workers' lives and experiences.

The first scene of the Gulfport Freedom School play involves Narrator #1 giving a history of COFO coming to Mississippi in the summer of 1964 and giving a detailed account of the Gulfport freedom school classroom. The scene ends with "You

ask what we did in freedom school. Well, now you can see as we begin "Memories of Freedom School." The second scene opens with Florence, the freedom school teacher, engaging the class (the chorus) in the school's favorite activity - singing:

> Florence: Would you all like to sing some songs?
> All: Yes.
> Florence: What would you like to sing?
> All: "Oh Freedom". (Begin singing.)
> Florence: Are you sure you do not want to be slaves?
> All: Yes, of course.
> Florence: Then why don't you sing this song like it has some meaning to you. Try it again.
> All: Sing.
> Florence: How about "Which Side Are You On?"
> All: Sing.
> Florence: Which side are you on?
> All: The freedom side!
>
> (SNCC: Reel 39)

Scene three is basically a repeat of scene two but with a different teacher, Roberta. The class sings "We Shall Overcome" and Roberta wants to know why the entire class is holding cross over hands. The class responds, "A chain."

"What happens when the chain is broken?" asks the teacher.

"Falls to pieces and breaks down," chants the class. This scene represented the symbolic chain that unites the civil rights movement and any one person that leaves or does not join in the struggle for freedom weakens the chain.

In Scene four Narrator #2 describes Florence's language classes and Roberta's spelling class as the performers mime these classes. The fourth scene has Roberta telling her class how four black people went to integrate the white only library. One of them was beaten up and had to go to the hospital. The police did nothing about it. Roberta then suggests to the class, "Let's write to him," and the class responds, "Sure, we like to."

Narrator #2 fades as he continues the monologue, "Other times, there are parties at freedom school, such as . . ." Narrator #1 ends the short play by stating to the audience, "The Summer of 1964 certainly was full."

Application of Freedom School Drama for Contemporary Practice

Freedom schools became a front of real activity during the Mississippi Project. Students began to have a sense of themselves as people who could be taken seriously. They became articulate about what was wrong and what changes should be made. Connections between curriculum and personal experience were drawn as students studied the realities of conditions in Mississippi and the effects of those realities on their lives. Students discovered that they were real human beings and that they could alter realities by taking action against the injustices which kept them "unhappy and impotent."

The organizers of the freedom schools wanted a certain type of community of students: active, participating student-citizens who would make positive changes in the Mississippi social fabric, as opposed to passive 'good little niggers.' Obviously, the authoritarian curriculum and teaching of the Mississippi school system was not the answer to civics education. Thus the civics curriculum was developed around a drama/discussion-based public forum dealing with real problems found within the context of students' experiences and Mississippi society. Therefore, freedom schools were conceived as a community of publics -- classes of students who shared a range of common values and commitments. As a citizenry long cut off from decisions affecting its well being and self-image, these students developed civic competencies through dialogue and collective interaction, including competence to participate in controlling their own daily lives and their society.

Freedom schools provided students with classroom laboratories where they encountered, rehearsed, cultivated, and applied the skills and practices of participating citizens, using democratic principles in public drama that at times led to community improvement through direct action. The public drama was not passive, nor was it limited to opinions and posturing. Rather the dramas explored the meaning of self-determination and activism, as students examined their experience within the context of real problems and conditions that faced African American students in their own society: a repressive society that seemed to hold no democratic possibilities for these minority students. Freedom schools gave them the opportunities to realize that they had a voice, and that through that voice, particularly a collective voice, real changes could be made.

In practice, organizers and freedom school teachers found that students developed the skills and confidence to become participating citizens when the teachers bought the freedom school aims into the classroom. Drama as aim, curriculum, and methodology created a powerful teaching experience in civic education that helped African American students to teach themselves an eventually develop into a positive community force in the State of Mississippi. The expressed intentions of the participants of the Curriculum Conference in March 1964 regarding drama in the classroom were to provide a context whereby students could (1) become actively involved in the

classroom and in their own learning; (2) suggest then discuss the issues they thought were important; (3) have opportunities to express their own feelings and beliefs about the issue in question; (4) develop the abilities to collectively solve problems; and (5) transfer their learning experiences into their real lives and into their community as activists. Freedom school organizers and teachers were not merely interested in having students produce plays and learn the elements of a theater form. Drama in the freedom school context was the educational, rather than theatrical, application of dramatic processes. The meaning of the drama experience would only be determined in the significance of the students' interactions within dramatic situations dealing with real human problems. While it was true that drama would be by no means a major solution to the problems faced by the students in their oppressive society, drama as an educational tool could provide them with a forum in which they could study their own experiences; see the social, political, and economic effects of segregation; and propose possible ways in which to ease or overcome those effects. After participating in a freedom school play, one student stated,

> In fact, I'd say that was the first time I really became personally, deeply, emotionally involved in the movement. Up to then, it was sort of a job, something that had to be done and so we did it. But this was different.
>
> (Lukas, 1968, p. 86)

Based on the Freedom School experience with drama, four conditions seem necessary for fruitful educational drama to take place. First, there needs to be a climate of mutual respect and trust between students and teachers. Second, drama needs to connect to and build upon the lived experiences of students. Third, drama is open, answers are not predetermined. And finally, dramas are conducted with an eye toward social action. Under these conditions, the following can be learned from the freedom school experiences to inform contemporary social studies practice in the schools:

1. Meaningful drama can be written, created, produced and performed by elementary and secondary students. The more control or input students have with the ideas of the drama, the more engagement they feel and the deeper their level of involvement may become. Through discussing, writing, reflecting, and performing these plays, students not only express themselves, but also began to construct, order, and make sense of their experiences.

2. Drama promotes critical thinking skills such as defining a problem, locating and collecting data, organizing and designing tasks, drawing inferences, creating and building interpretations, revising and editing, and applying data and interpretations. The sequence of events in creating and performing a group play provides students with the opportunity to understand the basics of problem-solving. The sequence of events seems to include: begin with a problem or problems to be solved; become aware there is a problem and it needs to be solved; analyze the experience; gather and interpret information; consider a number of viewpoints; compare a variety of possible solutions; formulate and test possibilities; make sense of the problem and its solution by organizing the information into play form; and execute the play in such a way that it amounts to solving the problem.

3. Drama promotes academic learning. Content for drama should relate directly to the situations and experiences of the students. It should be drawn from a variety of sources outside and including the standard textbooks and teachers' lectures. It should promote knowledge, reasoning, and insights as students master relevant information; relate new information to what students already know; and apply new insights to current problems.

4. Drama builds a critical awareness of the social world, as students develop the ability to take on a different role and by so doing seek to gain different viewpoints of some of the problems faced by people and society. Students learn to appreciate human diversity and to acknowledge the dignity of each individual. Drama helps students to engage empathetically in experiences of other people, helping them understand the human condition, become sensitive, aware and tolerant of others, and realize the complexity of human relations.

5. Drama is doing. Both the process and the product are active rather than passive. Drama requires active participation and encourages active learning Students become involved directly in the teaching-learning process. Participation in drama engages students in exploitative, experimental, expressive, and communicative modes of action. The assumption is made that students absorb a lesson more readily if they learn it through experience than if someone else spells it out.

6. Drama provides enjoyment for students, which reduces boredom, evokes curiosity, attracts learner attention, and increases student motivation. It also captures and anchors students' interest in an area of content to be studied. Students have ownership of both the process and product of the drama activity because they originated and designed the drama. Without attention, motivation, and ownership, subsequent learnings are weakened or negated.

7. Drama can contribute to serious examination and discourse about contemporary political, social, and economic issues within the community of the school and within society at large.

Drama is a particularly effective way of examining issues and assisting students to formulate responses to those issues in a safe, controlled environment. Students can be engaged with the kinds of social contexts that generate the issues that personally concern them, seeking concrete and immediate means of perceiving and handling these social contexts as participants involved in the real action and real struggles that generate the issue. Drama also provides a means of presenting certain crucial issues and significant problems for joint consideration and action by teaches, students, and interested members of the community. In fact, the community should itself be seen as a major resource to inform and deepen discussions conducted in the classroom. Drama should grow out of life situations, problems, episodes, and incidents derived from the direct concerns and experiences of students. Participation in such drama develops a sense of social responsibility, provides a context whereby students may participate in social practice as they experience and contemplate issues of human concern. Ultimately personal understanding and social knowledge are increased as students attain social awareness that makes vital connections between the classroom and the realities of the community and society.

8. Drama creates a mini-community in which students participate in an atmosphere of give-and-take in discussing and solving problems; they make collective decisions in matters that affect the community. The distinguishing factor of drama is collaborative learning. Drama emphasizes a team approach, along with learning experiences that create a dynamic, participatory, collective consciousness-raising educational environment. Students pool their energies and ideas, drawing on the actual experiences and knowledge of each group member, which develops collaborative participation, cooperation, and responsibility; they learn to see and respect others points of view. The resulting communal strength involves learning to work together, sharing ideas, seeking and building consensus, making and honoring collective decisions, and becoming sensitive to and accommodating of individual differences.

9. Drama provides students with a context in which they are able to talk in a public forum with the confidence and competence to articulate their thoughts and feelings fluently. Thus students participate in an active and determined exploration of ideas, not in a subordinate teacher-students situation, but in a free and accepting atmosphere where they feel secure enough to express ideas and emotions freely. The motivation for them to engage in productive and meaningful dialogue is inherently powerful. Talk gives students some control over the way they perceive and make sense of their world. Students are able to put their knowledge into words when they begin to reflect on that knowledge, to act on it, and to change it. They question, plan, speculate, describe, disagree, express commitment, negotiate, and interpret with student talk. Helping students to develop individual and collective voice empowers students to act and to speak; to find their own meanings, conclusions and perspectives; and to realize that they make a difference in design, contribution, decision-making, and problem solving that affects others as they influence the outcome of the topic being studied.

10. Drama provides a critical framework in which students can examine these beliefs and values without fear of negative criticism. Drama provides students with the opportunity to discover and evaluate their own existing values, attitudes and beliefs in relation to other people, their community, society, at large, and even to themselves. They have the freedom to explore, experiment, and test out their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. From such experiences students can decide which values they wish to hold and which values need to be modified, changed, or possible rejected.

11. Drama is an effective tool for evaluating the results of instruction. The outcome of a presentation demonstrates how the students use, organize and integrate their information and skills acquired through the drama process. The finished drama makes learnings observable and reveals the degree to which students have internalized knowledge. However, the focus is not usually on the quality of the performances, rather on the understanding the students gain from the overall experience. A prime objective of the drama experience when it is applied as a learning medium is for the students to leave the drama knowing more about the particular event or issue than they did when the lesson began. As a learning tool, drama enhances and maintains content comprehension and retention not only as students observe the results of drama but also as they think through, design, and act out appropriate playable settings with given circumstances, action, and characters. Evaluation also includes the aftermath of the drama experience. Assessment should include activities that evaluate and reflect upon the learning and insight gained about the issues that have been dramatically portrayed. Assessment should also identify alternative courses of action in order to solve and reexamine the issues, draw inferences and conclusions from the total experience, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the experience, and make decisions for further possible inquiry.

12. The teacher's responsibilities during the drama activities are varied. The teacher is to act as a resource to encourage student research and to facilitate action and critical reflection; the learners should attempt to promote the development of students reflective skills in order for the learning experience to be explicit. The teacher should avoid doctrinaire positions and harsh judgments, but instead should create a liberating

classroom atmosphere, where process takes priority over specific results and where students make many choices for themselves. The teacher should also provide a framework and context that facilitates examining, voicing, exploring, and reflecting on their own values as these values relate to the given social topics and issues.

Conclusion

Civic curriculum surely needs attention. Students need to become familiar with and to practice carefully and deliberately the habits necessary to participating citizens in a democratic society. These habits include public discourse on real life problems, including discussion, community service, and social action. Drama as a curriculum and as a method should receive more time, energy and resources in order to educate students in all grade levels in the practical arts of discussing public problems in the context of real life.

Finally, any educational system is a reflection of the values of the society itself. The Mississippi educational system in 1964 reflected its society. And although much in our contemporary society has progressed, much has stayed the same, and some has even regressed. The history of the freedom schools illustrates the impossibility of disassociating teaching from the wider social order and, therefore, reconfirms the need for both teachers and their students to be engaged in a curriculum for developing democratic citizens to improve the inequities in society. In conclusion, one freedom school teacher (Lauter & Perlstein, 1991) writes:

> Today, as inequality grows . . . many students and teachers find the notion that society can be fundamentally restructured far less plausible than it was in 1964. Thus the dilemma of how to catalyze demands of radical change and simultaneously to liberate voices shaped by oppression is, if anything, more pressing than it was a generation ago. In their synthesis of learning and political action that transformed the experience of oppression into a basis for liberation, the freedom schools do not supply simple answers to teachers looking for a pedagogy engaged in today's struggles. Rather they ask our most provocative questions. (p. 5)

Drama can be a useful teaching tool. Teachers must reexamine their current assumptions about drama, in order to forge a new kind of professional discourse and reorient their classroom practice. Drama is unique in that it involves the whole student in the learning process. When most effective, this student engagement provides a potent means of using content, exploring ideas and situations, clarifying values, acquiring knowledge and constructing personal responses to a variety of concepts. Drama enables students to experience problems, situations, and challenges in a safe environment, or, if desired, as in the example of the freedom schools, students may participate in community attempts to resolve the problems, situations and challenges.

After six weeks of freedom school, student participation drama proved to be significant and meaningful. Freedom school plays depicted real life problems that the students lived every day. Hostile, violent, even deadly conditions were part of their daily lives. Going to a store, to a movie, to school, to a restaurant, or just walking on the street might bring a beating or even death. These plays reflected pain, fear, distrust, and disbelief. Why do any of these things happen to us? Why do we deserve this kind of life and this kind of history? These were plays of hope that students' lives could improve and that the dignity of being black might be restored. They were plays of courage, strength, nonviolence, protest, and commitment to a cause to combat a hostile environment. They were plays of participatory democracy in which students collaborated in mini-communities dealing with real issues, expressing viewpoints, finding solutions, and making collective decisions which could effect change in their communities. And these were plays of political action that encouraged both the students and the black communities to become politically active and through collective power to tear down the oppressive white political and social structure and restore democracy and freedom. Using drama in the freedom schools provides a clear example and pertinent lessons for today's classrooms.

NOTES

Note 1. Many of the quotations that come from the SNCC, the SHSW, and UW papers are unpaged because these archival papers are collections of memos, letters, reports, photos, mimeos, dittos, correspondence, personal notes, etc. that do not contain page numbers.

Note 2. In reference to secondary students designing a play using a similar structure to that found in the McComb play, Chilcoat (1988) found that after students were introduced to the drama structure, they were able to create their own play independent of adults.

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