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COMMUNITY CENTER AND
FREEDOM SCHOOL PROGRAMS

I attended the second training session in Oxford, Ohio. On Monday, the first day of orientation, it was announced that the three men were missing. This had a very sobering effect on all of the volunteers -- it brought reality into focus and kept it there. As we were preparing to leave at the end of a serious week of training, it seemed as though we were going into a foreign country, a police state.

All of the programs in the Miss. Summer Project were aimed at changing the existing structure of hatred and ignorance. One direct way of doing this is through voting, thus there was the voter registration program. Another way of accomplishing this is through education and economic aid, thus the freedom school, community center and federal projects programs.

Since we would only be able to get one building, the community center people merged with the freedom school people. Our freedom school started at 9:00 every morning with freedom songs and news from the other projects in the state. The only object of the freedom school was not for us to teach our students -- we were all there to learn. We had many informal discussions with the students. The staff attempted to give concentrated instruction in some very basic areas such as english, math and Negro history and also attempted to expose the students to new subjects in which they were interested. I worked with a group of younger girls on modern and jazz dancing and with a bunch of older girls (and a few fellows) on the same plus some role-playing. Some of the girls were extremely interested in dancing but most had never had it in school. At first, I was amazed to see how these young people opened up in role-playing; but then I realized that they were merely reenacting situations which they had gone through.

I taught biology to a group of fellows who were interested in majoring in this field. Another important part of the freedom school program which I was involved in was working with individual adults on filling out the voter registration forms.

Although the most significant achievement of the freedom school program was not academic improvement (a great amount of this being impossible in just one summer), there was a measured amount of improvement. The literacy program with adults was quite successful. Through individual tutoring, some young people were able to improve a good deal -- one youngster who was beginning first grade, skipped to second within a couple of weeks.

I would say that one of the more significant achievements of the freedom school program was the interest in education that it generated. The students were encouraged to go on with school and to pursue their interests. The summer program gave them a chance to discover these interests. For instance, several potential actors and actresses discovered their talents through a play that was written and performed by the students.

Perhaps the most significant thing that the freedom school did for these young people was to let them know about the existing civil rights struggle and to get them involved in that struggle. Many of them had before never imagined that they could do anything to change the sick system that exists. Now these young people are a bunch of enthusiastic and diligent workers -- they have changed and they are going to change the structure which for so long has oppressed them.

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