

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Freedom Schools, Mississippi, 1964 - "Why can't we set up our own schools? What students really need to learn is how to be organized to work on the society to change it." – Bob Moses.

Vision: Freedom Schools were part of Freedom Summer, organized by SNCC in Mississippi in 1964 to "force a showdown between the local and federal government" in order to further the demands of the Black freedom movement. The Freedom Schools started as six-week summer classes for high school students, but quickly moved into an all ages state-wide project with 3000 students that turned year-round. The call for these schools was found in the tremendous racism, oppression, and power of white supremacy in Mississippi. The first 'Non-Violent High' was set up in McComb, MI because 100+ students had been expelled from the local school for organizing. Teachers in many MI districts who attempted, for example, to teach the period of Reconstruction in history classes could be fired. The Freedom Schools were seen as an essential part of the struggle for political and social rights, essential to larger scale transformations. The schools were envisioned as necessary for people to develop not just the consciousness to fight for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (an alternative to the racist Democratic Party), but for people to fight for liberation. The initial proposal for the Freedom Schools project by Charlie Cobb was "to get (Black people) to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions ... to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question ... to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives — ultimately new directions for action." Students who attended these schools often returned to their segregated oppressive school environments and led strikes and protests to transform those institutions, in addition to joining the movement. Freedom Schools were seen as essential to helping people "anxious to learn how to be Free" and to build capacity and participation in the movement.

Pedagogy: Freedom schools used a question-posing pedagogy. Students were asked questions and to engage their lived experiences in order to provoke discussion and study; teachers were encouraged to share their own experiences as they taught classes that ranged from traditional school subjects- like history and math with a twist, eg. teaching the history and reality of the 'the Mississippi Power Structure' and math using Mississippi racial housing data, to classes like 'Black-white relations', 'Material Things; Soul Things,' and protest strategies and tactics.

Structure: Freedom Schools has common curriculum across the state and were a school system serving communities outside the formal system and profoundly critical of it. Those who gave the schools space were threatened; the schools themselves were attacked and even bombed by whites and the KKK. The very existence of this alternatives schooling structure was a direct confrontation with entrenched white supremacy and white power.

Oakland Community School Oakland, CA.

The OCS was a program of the Black Panther Party. It was begun as a way to embody point 5 of the 10 point program – to build a decent education for our Black people. The school served food for the body and soul: 3 meals a day were served, as well as daily meditations and Black history and critical thinking. Students from ages 4-12 were grouped by ability levels and encouraged to use their voice in many creative ways. There were no letter grades. Students engaged in critical projects to serve the surrounding community. Teachers and parents collaborated to support all aspects of running the school.

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The Landless Workers Movement, Brazil

The MST conducts large-scale land takeovers, placing agricultural land in the hands of those work it. A major piece of their struggle is to **occupy** the educational system, with the goal of fundamentally altering it in order to build the capacity and consciousness of folks who can build a different society and economy. The MST took over or built from the ground up 100s of schools, compelled the national state to adopt their rural education initiative as its policy; and even took over pieces of university education. The educational process is a critical piece of the fight for economic and social transformation.

WHAT ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO OR MODEL OF EDUCATION CAN YOU IMAGINE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?