**The Freedom School Program**

**Challenge**

There was tremendous social unrest in the southern part of the United States in the 1960s. Several Civil Rights activists were murdered, and several Black people were shot while registering to vote or when voting. After the supreme court decision in Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education, the process of school desegregation was slow. Conditions for many Black children in the south were deplorable. School facilities were often in disrepair, learning materials were in short supply, teachers were underpaid in comparison to their White colleagues. Additionally, in Mississippi there was not a mandatory education law and plantation owners exploited poor white and black children for cheap labor. This interrupted their education.

**Intervention**

The Freedom School Program began in the summer of 1964 in Mississippi. The program was sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a statewide organization of local groups aided by field secretaries of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), CORE, NAACP, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The group identified sites for schools wherever space was available in churches, private homes, backyards. In the summer of 1964, 250 Black and White summer volunteers from 40 states arrived in Mississippi to teach in the Freedom School Summer program in locations identified across the state. The school curriculum focused on individual student’s academic needs and on understanding Black history and culture, social, economic, and political conditions for the Black population in Mississippi, and approaches for improving conditions. The goals of this effort included to politicize the right to education, voter registration, and confrontation between local governments and the federal government to facilitate social change.

**Impact**

The summer project contributed to ending the seven-week filibuster in congress and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Voter registration significantly increased. The school curriculum began to change to include Black history and literature. A few Black students were admitted to previously all white universities.

**Follow-up**

The underperformance of Black students as a group, overrepresentation in special education, and the disproportionate use of harsh discipline against Black students indicate that more work is necessary. Harsh discipline includes suspension, expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and school related arrests. Many issues involving harsh discipline result from relationships between teachers and students and among students. Creating a comfortable and supportive classroom environment that promotes the academic, social, and emotional development of all students is an important aspect of teaching. Academic underperformance is most often related to curriculum framing and pedagogical practices that are inadequate for meaningful and productive learning.