# *THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW*: CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

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## ABSTRACT

*We explore how K-8 student scholars experience culturally relevant texts provided during Freedom Schools summer camps, discuss ways Freedom Schools can be a vehicle for youth to become advocates for social change, and consider opportunities created by Freedom Schools for community engagement and partnerships. Mixed methods were used to investigate the experiences of 38 scholars at two different Freedom Schools sites (one rural and one mid-sized urban) in the southeastern U.S. The majority of scholars identified as African American and lived in low-income households. Primary data sources included scholar surveys and reading assessments, camp observations, and interviews with scholars, as well as our own personal reflections as the Research Director (Alysia Roehrig) and Co-Executive Directors (Kristal M. Clemons and Keely Norris) for the*

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*sites. We triangulated descriptive statistics from surveys with qualitative data, primarily from interviews, which we analyzed using open coding and axial coding to develop themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The majority of scholars, who participated in the 2016 North Florida Freedom Schools, reported being able to identify with specific characters and situations in the books included in the culturally relevant reading summer program, and they expressed positive thoughts and feelings about the books. Most scholars (74%) maintained or gained in instructional reading levels and did not experience summer learning loss. Children's confidence that they could act prosocially also increased significantly during the summer camps, which children characterized as different from regular school. Freedom Schools can offer a valuable forum for diverse community members to learn about one another, focus on their strengths, and become agents for social change. We provide suggestions for how other communities can implement the Freedom Schools model.*

**Keywords:** Culturally relevant reading instruction; reading attitudes; social action; community engagement; Freedom Schools

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded a divided nation we are stronger when we work together to improve our conditions. He called this the "fierce urgency of now" at the historic March on Washington. For every child in America whose access to a quality education is in jeopardy, there is an urgency of now. Freedom Schools provide a unique educational opportunity to celebrate the rich history of the Civil Rights Movement and the passions of children traditionally considered at risk for school failure in our communities. An anti-deficit framework allowed us to structure our investigation of Freedom Schools in what Harper (2010) calls an "instead of fashion" (p. 68). Instead of seeking to understand, for example, why some high-poverty African American students are placed at greater risk for dropping out of school than white students, we wanted to study the successes high-poverty black students have as readers and social activists.

## WHY FREEDOM SCHOOLS NOW?

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools movement developed out of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, which served

thousands of young children and adults in over 40 Freedom Schools created to help combat voter suppression and encourage youth to engage in the civil rights movement (Clemons, 2014). "With little money and few supplies, the Freedom Schools set out to empower African Americans in Mississippi to become active citizens and change agents in their respective communities" (Clemons, p. 141), using a "curriculum focused on the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement, reading, writing, arithmetic, and African American history" (Clemons, Price, & Clemons, 2017, p. 856). The idea was "to supplement what children were not getting in their traditional public schools and mobilize voter registration" (Clemons et al., 2017, p. 857).

We still have a need for liberatory education, even 50 years after the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools. A cradle-to-prison pipeline has developed for children of color who live in economically disenfranchised communities (Clemons et al., 2017). CDF pointed out how deteriorating schools along with the juvenile justice system and prison industrial complex have resulted in the disproportionate incarceration of people of color (The State of America's Children, 2008). In part, to help develop young activists who could make social change through grassroots and community organizing methods, the Freedom Schools movement was reborn by CDF in 1992. Marian Wright Edelman and the CDF's Black Community Crusade for Children also sought to use Freedom Schools to enhance intergenerational collaboration between Civil Rights Era activists and the younger generations (Clemons et al., 2017).

Contemporary CDF Freedom Schools are typically six-week summer enrichment programs offered free of cost to families of school-aged children. At Freedom Schools, students are called "scholars" to inspire them to focus on their educational and civic endeavors. The ratio between scholars and servant leaders must be no more than ten students to one teacher. The staff is usually composed of diverse local stakeholders, including college students who serve as teachers or Servant Leader Interns (SLIs) (Clemons et al., 2017). The purposeful selection of college interns works as a precollegiate program effort to support students in preparing for college. The CDF believes in modeling and wants the college interns to help scholars begin to think about various college majors and career opportunities. The staff also are required to participate in a weeklong national training at Alex Haley's Farm in Clinton, Tennessee and the University of Tennessee Knoxville in Knoxville, Tennessee, where they learn how to implement the Integrated Reading Curriculum properly. In addition, at national training, SLIs:

> meet other SLIs from across the nation and recognize that they are indeed part of a movement where every student who is participating will be reading the same book, singing the

> same songs and participating in the same social action in their respective city. (Clemons et al., 2017, p. 857)

A typical day at CDF Freedom Schools starts at eight o'clock in the morning with campus arrival. Scholars are welcomed by cheering SLIs as parents and guardians usher their children into the building. The scholars enjoy a nutritious breakfast with their classmates and Servant Leader Interns. They typically talk about the fun day ahead and get ready for the morning activities. Following breakfast, scholars engage in *Harambee!*, which is a Kiswhahili word that means "let's pull together." Harambee is rooted in an Afrocentric pedagogical tradition that invokes musical improvisation and call and response. It can be described as a morning pep rally aimed at positively motivating the scholars for the learning ahead. Harambee includes a guest/community reading, motivational song, cheers and chants, recognitions, moment of silence, meditation, and announcements. It is sharing time where children and staff come together to celebrate themselves and each other. The inclusion of a guest/community reader works to help students meet a variety of adult community stakeholders who are invested in their future. Immediately following Harambee, scholars transition to their classroom for the Integrated Reading Curriculum.

CDF developed the culturally relevant, Integrated Reading Curriculum or IRC, which is now implemented by SLIs during mornings at almost 200 Freedom Schools summer camps across the U.S. annually. It is based on books written by African American, Latino/a, and Caribbean authors on subjects addressing social action via weekly thematic units focused on making a difference in self (week 1), family (week 2), community (week 3), country (week 4), world (week 5), and with hope, education, and action (week 6). At CDF Freedom Schools, scholars are separated not by individual grades but into four levels. Level I includes grades K–2, Level II includes grades 3–5, Level III includes grades 6–8, and Level IV includes grades 9–12. At the end of camp, student scholars, receive a set of these books for their personal libraries. Books read in the Summer 2016 curriculum included *Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?* by Sandy Lynne Holman (Level II, self), *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles (Level I, country), *Confessions of a Former Bully* by Trudy Ludwig (Level 3, with hope, education, and action), among others (see Appendix for complete list).

Scholars of culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lee, 1995) have demonstrated the importance of appealing to students' worldviews, values, cultural orientations, and experiences in order to affect greater educational outcomes (Clemons et al., 2017). Nevertheless,

Ladson-Billings (2014) encountered teachers who communicated strong beliefs in their students' academic efficacy, though "they rarely pushed students to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have a direct impact on their lives and communities" (p. 78). In her many observations of teachers she perceived, "there was no discussion on issues such as school choice, school closing, rising incarceration rates, gun laws, or even everyday school climate questions like whether students should wear uniforms (which typically sparks spirited debate)" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 78).

Unlike the heavy focus on testing in many contemporary public schools, the emphasis in Freedom Schools is on children experiencing success and on providing opportunities to make literacy meaningful and relevant to their lives, by relating to the books and putting ideas into action. This approach follows Ladson-Billings' (1995) work on effective teaching for African American students. With culturally relevant teaching: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Student scholars at Freedom Schools also take part in a variety of afternoon activities facilitated by parents, volunteers, university faculty and students, and other community organizations.

The mission of our nonprofit North Florida Freedom Schools (NFFS), aligned with that of CDF, "is to ensure every child has a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities" (CDF, 2017, "Our Mission"). NFFS strives to reach low-income, primarily African American students, during free 6-week summer day camps that are intended to support the empowerment of local children to make a difference in their world through a social action project, while also celebrating and reinforcing positive attitudes and efficacy for reading.

## METHODS

Mixed methods were used to investigate the experiences of scholars at two different Freedom Schools sites (one rural and one mid-sized urban) in the North Florida region, in and around Tallahassee, Florida. Tallahassee is a mid-sized, capitol city with two state universities, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU, an HBCU, i.e., one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and Florida State University (FSU, a Primarily

White Institution or PWI), which partnered to help organize our local Freedom Schools. The urban center of Tallahassee, with FAMU to the south and FSU just to the north, strikingly mirrors the racial segregation in the community, which was identified in 2015 as the most economically segregated city in the nation (Florida & Mellander, 2015). Of the 100 total K-8 scholars (of whom 95% identified as African American and 98% were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch) enrolled at the camps, we conducted interviews with or had at least two time points of reading or survey data from 38 scholars (who had parental consent to participate in research). While males and females were evenly represented at the camps, females are slightly overrepresented (approximately 60%) in the data presented here.

Primary data sources included scholar surveys and reading assessments, camp observations, and interviews with scholars and facilitators, as well as our own personal reflections as the Research Director (Alysia Roehrig) and Co-Executive Directors (Kristal M. Clemons and Keely Norris) for the sites. Descriptive statistics from surveys were triangulated with qualitative results, primarily from interviews, which we analyzed using open coding and axial coding to develop themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We administered two surveys to scholars during the first and last weeks of camp. The 20-item Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990) assesses changes in attitudes about recreational and academic reading (e.g., "How do you feel about spending free time reading?" [recreational], "How do you feel about learning from a book?" [academic]) rated on a 4 point scale (1 = "Don't like it!" to 4 = "Love it!"). We developed another 12-item survey to assess efficacy for prosocial behaviors aligned with the IRC themes (e.g., "I can be a good friend," "I can be respectful of others," "I can make a difference in other people's lives") using a 100% certainty scale. The surveys have acceptable levels of internal consistency ( s = .75 – .85). Reading level data came from pre- and posttest administrations of the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI; Johns, 2012), an informal reading inventory assessing instructional reading levels.

## FINDINGS

Based on data from the 2016 North Florida Freedom Schools summer camps, we first explore K–8 children's experiences with a culturally relevant reading curriculum and their experiences with the various culturally relevant texts from CDF's IRC. Next, we discuss Freedom Schools as a critical thinking and social activism vehicle for youth to become advocates for social change.

Finally, we consider the opportunities created by having CDF Freedom Schools in communities to integrate the experiences and insights of parents, teachers, College of Education faculty and students, and volunteers from community organizations.

## *"Reading Books Is Really Cool!": Connecting with Culturally Relevant Texts*

One of the goals in Freedom Schools is to position reading as empowering, relevant, accessible, and even fun for scholars. A core belief that guides CDF Freedom Schools is that "literacy is essential to personal empowerment and civic responsibility" (CDF, 2017, "Core Beliefs"). Most scholars enthusiastically (with the exception of a handful of middle school/level III scholars) participated in the energizing cheers and chants during morning Harambee, to get them geared up for Integrated Reading Curriculum. The majority of cheers and chants celebrate reading and books, with lines such as, "See a book, grab a book, read a book, hey!" and "There's no school like Freedom School! Reading books is really cool!" This led us to ask, how do young scholars actually connect (or not) with the books provided during Freedom Schools IRC? In the following sections, we describe the ways scholars found IRC books relevant, enjoyable and understandable, as well as how SLIs may help sustain positive attitudes about reading.

### *High-Achieving Readers*

Though low-income, ethnic and racial minorities are often characterized in the literature as "at risk" for school failure, the large majority of scholars in our camps (84%; 32 of 38 scholars with pre-BRI data and consent to participate in research) were reading at (16%) or above (68%) grade level during the first week of camp. During the last week of camp, 83% (29 of 35) of scholars were reading at (11.5%) or above (71.5%) grade level. Of the scholars participating in research, 74% (25 of 34) maintained or gained at least one grade level in reading on the BRI by the end of Freedom Schools. These results suggest our Freedom Schools met one of CDF's goals, which is to prevent summer learning loss. Even more importantly, we believe, the following interview and survey results reveal that the reading opportunities allowed many scholars to flourish.

*Positive Attitudes About Reading and Books*

The scholars, who had consent to participate in research and completed at least one survey, also began Freedom Schools with relatively positive attitudes about both recreational ($M_{pre} = 2.75$, $SD = .649$, $n = 43$) and academic ($M_{pre} = 2.67$, $SD = .681$, $n = 43$) reading. (Note, 3 indicates "I like it" and 2 indicates a "ho hum" attitude about reading activities like "How do you feel about spending free time reading?" [recreational] and "How do you feel about learning from a book?" [academic]). Scholars ended the camp with descriptively more positive attitudes about both recreational ($M_{post} = 2.81$, $SD = .588$, $n = 52$) and academic ($M_{post} = 2.81$, $SD = .660$, $n = 52$) reading, though the average gains for the 36 scholars with no missing data were not significant.

When interviewed, the majority of scholars also expressed positive thoughts and feelings about the books read and some relayed they enjoyed reading even more after participating in Freedom Schools. One Level II scholar said he liked reading more "because they made it fun and we all take turns reading." However, most had an existing passion for reading. For example, a Level I scholar said she liked to read, "Because it's my favorite… it's my favorite thing because… when I read I just see, I use my imagination, and pretend, like I was in it." Along those lines, a Level II scholar said, "Because it can, it can enhance my mind!" On the other hand, scholars, who indicated they did not enjoy reading in general and had low confidence in their reading ability ($n = 4$) reported negative thoughts and feelings about IRC books, explaining that the books were sometimes too hard or too long. A few other scholars reported mixed feelings. For example, though a Level II and a Level III scholar both said they liked reading, they added that they really did not like reading aloud, which is a common practice in IRC. The Level III scholar said, "I enjoy it but not reading out loud. I hate that. I read a whole lot more better, like, in my mind and stuff. Like whenever I mess up in front of everybody. I don't like that."

Many interviewed scholars (18 of 31) also reported being able to identify with specific characters and situations in the IRC books. The way students related took a variety of forms, which ranged from identifying with a character's health problems or rough childhood to excitement to create their own menu because they love cooking and want to be a chef. One of the Level II scholars said he could relate to *Tamika and the Wisdom Rings* because "somebody in my family [also] got shot and died" and to *The Harvest Hope* because "me and my uncle…garden too and we get paid." Another Level II scholar reported relating to Tamika, "Because she, she is brave and like she likes to help people out and stuff like that… I like to help people out sometimes." A Level III scholar explained clearly how the books supported perspective

taking as well as perseverance, particularly with regards to a favorite book, *We Beat the Street*: "I can kind of relate to it because like, stuff, like people go through, they still end up successful, but like I had, I didn't go through what they went through, but still I think we all go through something difficult to like get to success." Even the youngest scholars reported making important meaning from texts, like *Freedom Summer*: "I just, now I know that it wasn't fair to black people that they had to go to the back door." Thus, we found the diverse IRC texts to serve effectively as both mirrors and windows (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014):

> The concept of a book acting as a mirror implies that readers see something of themselves in the text. Such a book reflects back to readers portions of their identities, cultures, or experiences. When readers are able to find themselves in a text, they are therefore validated; their experiences are not so unique or strange as to never be spoken or experienced by others. This inclusion, in turn, connects readers even more strongly to the larger world of books. The reality for many readers, however, is that they do not see reflections of themselves in children's literature… To view worlds that are not their own, books must also act as windows, allowing for a vicarious experience to supersede the limits of the readers' own lives and identities and spend time observing those of others…readers need books that show them their place in our multicultural world and teach them about the connections between all humans. (p. 29)

*Role of SLIs*

How do such human connections link to reading achievement for our scholars? All scholars described positive feelings or thoughts about their SLIs, regardless of whether their SLI was the same race/ethnicity as themselves. (Approximately half of our SLIs were African American like the majority of scholars, and the other SLIs were Hispanic or white.) Moreover, we found that scholars who demonstrated reading level gains cited the time SLIs spent laughing with them, reading to them, and giving them patient, individual attention as strong factors of Freedom Schools. For example, one Level III scholar said of his SLI, "He's nice and funny. And we're like gonna do the play and he makes us laugh and stuff … He lets [us] take turns reading, he lets us pick the activities we wanna do."

## *"Something Inside So Strong": Knowing You Can Make a Difference*

In addition to a focus on empowerment through reading, Freedom Schools provide a critical thinking and social activism vehicle for student scholars to become advocates for social change. Each morning at Freedom Schools,

Harambee includes singing the motivational song, "Something Inside So Strong," which was written by Labi Siffre after he saw video of black youth being shot by a white soldier in South Africa (Mathur, 1989). The purpose of singing the song is to make explicit scholars' intrinsic value even though others may treat them poorly. A foundation to encourage scholars to follow their passions and become community advocates can be found in the IRC's six week-long units, beginning with making a difference in (1) oneself, (2) one's family, (3) one's community, (4) the country, (5) the world, and (6) ending with "Hope, Education and Action." These themes align with daily IRC activities meant to support scholars in finding and using their voices. As one Level II scholar explained, he liked "writing activities, drawing activities, and um talking about activities [because] you can talk and communicate to others," which he said helped his learning. The curriculum also acted as a forum for scholars to find ways to serve others and build their community.

*Inspired to Serve*

The themes of the IRC align with the larger social action project, which CDF identified as voter education for 2016, a presidential election year. Participants at every Freedom Schools camp collaborate on the identified social action project and participate in the National Day of Social Action to bring their community's attention to important social issues. Scholars were clearly inspired by the social action focus of Freedom Schools. At one of our sites, the scholars discussed with SLIs how they could address the hunger needs of their peers. We offered free breakfast, lunch, and snacks via the Federal Summer Feeding Program and donations, and it was clear to us that many children greatly valued the opportunity to eat at Freedom Schools. Indeed, scholars often mentioned food as a favorite aspect of Freedom Schools. The Scholars at our urban location brainstormed ways they could create discrete food backpacks for children to take home on weekends. They did not have enough time to garner the support needed to implement the service before the end of the camp, but the children's compassion and drive to make a difference for others was inspiring.

*Building Community*

The "making a difference" themes in IRC effectively address many prosocial behaviors such as friendship, advocating for others, and respecting others and their differences. The majority of interviewed scholars (22 of 31) described getting along well with some or most classmates, and the culture

of Freedom Schools seemed to shape the quality of their relationships. For example, one Level III scholar said of his peers, "In the very beginning it was kind of rough… [Now] it's pretty much good. We're all getting along and, um, they know now that we all know each other's strengths now, I guess." Similarly, a Level III scholar said of her peers, "They don't really judge people." This interview finding triangulated with the significant gain found in scholars' confidence that they could act prosocially, $t(33) = 2.474$, $p = .019$. On average, during the first week of camp, scholars reported that they were 79% ($SD = 13.539$) confident that they could act prosocially. During the last week of camp, they reported, on average, being 84% confident ($SD = 15.070$). Three of the younger (Levels I and II) boys with large gains on the Prosocial Efficacy Survey described liking their Freedom Schools peers for the following reasons:

- "They're caring, they help me when I have problems… And they just help me whenever I need help."
- "Because, hmm, we work together."
- "Because they're like nice kids and we get to play and we're nice to each other and act like family."

These findings are clearly aligned with the core beliefs of CDF Freedom Schools regarding culture and community: "Culture and community conditions influence child learning," and "Appreciation and knowledge of one's culture engenders self-worth and the ability to live in community with others" (CDF, 2017, "Core Beliefs").

### *"Let Me Put Some Freedom In It": Reimagining How We Do School*

"Let me put some freedom in it" is a quote from an inspirational Harambee chant that highlights how Freedom Schools differ from traditional schools (Clemons et al., 2017). Not only are civil rights emphasized in the curriculum, but the camps are organized to support and celebrate scholars' successes. The goal is to provide scholars with more equitable opportunities that can help change the status quo.

#### *Serving the Whole Child*

We approached the organization of our Freedom Schools sites from the perspective of community schools, which offer wrap around services to children

and their families. We provided group counseling services via college-aged School of Social Work interns. Local companies, church members, and university students and faculty organized other activities (e.g., fitness, healthy habits, number talks, writing and art workshops, STEM club, music production, dance). Scholars also were offered clothes if they came in unwashed ones, and staff picked them up in a church van if they couldn't walk or their parents couldn't bring them.

To participate in Freedom Schools, families did not have to bear the burden of tuition, lunch, or fees for supplies, but they did have to commit sending one adult family member to the bi-weekly parent meetings held in the evenings during camp. This is because one of the core beliefs guiding CDF Freedom Schools is that "parents are crucial partners in children's learning and need supports to become better parents" (CDF, 2017, "Core Beliefs"). Parent meetings provided a venue for parents to learn about their scholars' Freedom Schools experiences and a forum to discuss community concerns as well as access to workshops on healthy habits. The health habits workshops created a dialogue among parents about ensuring access to healthy, affordable foods, increasing physical activities, and empowering parents and caregivers to make good choices for their families. The workshops also covered the importance of mental health counseling. Mental health counseling professionals from a local agency were on hand if any family needed intervention strategies or support as it related to stress management, grief, or disabilities.

*The Freedom School Way*

Beyond the community schools orientation, Freedom Schools are characterized by the way they create close knit, caring communities in their camps. This is the "Freedom School way," which is characterized by mutual respect and caring, choice, and self-discipline. We often overheard SLIs talking about and reminding their scholars of the Freedom Schools way when they did not follow the classroom management agreements each class of 10 scholars developed together. And SLIs worked closely with one another and their site coordinator too, forming supportive professional learning communities (PLCs; DuFour, 2004). During their daily afternoon debriefs, SLIs discussed successes and challenges of the day, with a focus on identifying ways to better support one another and their scholars. These findings are aligned with the core CDF Freedom Schools beliefs that

- "effective teaching requires planning, creativity, and implementation, with reflection and processing, [and]

- classroom discipline and management are integral parts of instructional practice" (CDF, 2017, "Core Beliefs").

Freedom Schools offer a different way of doing school than many students experience in traditional schools the rest of the year. In interviews, scholars often expressed what they liked about Freedom Schools in terms of how participating in Freedom Schools differs from regular school. For example, one Level III scholar said what she liked about her SLIs was "that they love teaching us. Because I never got the attention that these teachers give me here… They got the same personality that I got. Like fun and determined to do anything." Another Level III scholar said of his SLI, "He was fun I guess… Wasn't like normal teachers… And he doesn't really force us to do anything." The scholars also found the activities and books at Freedom Schools to be different from previous experiences as well. One Level II scholar characterized the books as "interesting and different than the usual ones I read."

## CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that Freedom Schools can offer a valuable forum for diverse community members to learn about one another, focus on their strengths, and become advocates for social change. We conclude by providing, for others who would like to implement Freedom Schools in their communities, some practical suggestions based on what we have learned from our experience and research with Freedom Schools.

In summer 2016, we helped to organize the very first Freedom Schools camp in Tallahassee, which served 50 scholars. We also organized a camp serving 50 scholars in Quincy, Florida. As we write this chapter, we are helping to organize two camps that will serve 130 scholars from the low-income, south side of Tallahassee in summer 2017, as well as another 35 in rural, Gretna, Florida. Recruiting the scholars to enroll has been the easy part, as families welcomed an affordable, high-quality summer experience for their children, and Freedom Schools cost only a $25 registration fee. There were many on our waiting list that we could not accommodate. To make NFFS's inaugural camps in 2016 a reality, we first had to raise over $40,000, as well as recruit scores of interns and volunteers. How did we accomplish this? We did not do it alone, but with the strong support and engagement of people throughout the community. Students, alumni, and faculty from both FAMU and FSU as well as residents and community organizations from both sides

of town seemed eager to contribute to something that would address the historic divides in our region of the South.

Racial tensions have been running high across the U.S. over the last couple of years, so your community might be as supportive as ours was to find a productive way to address the divides by founding new Freedom Schools. Alternatively, you may have Freedom Schools in your community already, as there were almost 200 sites across the U.S. in 2016. The majority of CDF's Freedom Schools partnerships are with public schools, churches, and/or other community organization. However, only a handful of Freedom Schools are part of active collaborations with university partners. We represent a collaboration between both university and community partners, and we work closely with multiple businesses, churches, as well as public schools. These multiple perspectives have informed the following implementation suggestions:

**1. Partner with at Least One Local College or University**

FAMU and FSU faculty, alumni, and students collaborated to establish and run the NFFS camps. We also joined forces with many other local partners mentioned above, but the advantage of partnering with a university is that it provides a large, eager, and diverse pool of potential collaborators. One of the main sources of SLI applicants are current undergraduates or recent graduates, particularly education majors. We have also found the universities' reach, through social media, to faculty, staff, and alumni and current students to be invaluable for recruiting SLIs and volunteers, not to mention for raising money for the curriculum, books, supplies, and SLI training. Moreover, social media campaigns by the universities about our efforts have been picked up by local news outlets, which further expands our source of volunteers and donors.

In addition, the faculty at both universities provided support for afternoon programming, grant writing, research, and program evaluation. Faculty organized afternoon programming staffed by undergraduate and graduate student volunteers, many of whom receive supervised internship credits for their efforts, making them a reliable source of free labor. Research grants helped pay for programming costs and incentives for children and parents. Faculty also organized data collection for program evaluation and other research initiatives carried out by undergraduates and graduate students, who often received individual study credits for assisting with research. Thus, Freedom Schools provided not only K–8 scholars but also college students with a rich venue for learning.

**2. Brag about Freedom Schools to Whomever Will Listen**

A valuable long-term impact that findings from program evaluation and research can have is on the credibility of the Freedom Schools, which should help to attract more donors and serve more children. As previously mentioned, we also have had great success with raising needed funds to implement Freedom Schools by sharing about the program and its effectiveness though social media, news outlets, and churches. Another way to brag about your Freedom Schools is to invite folks to visit! Every morning, Harambee includes a read-aloud guest. Not only is it important to expose the scholars to diverse guests from all walks of life, but to share with the wider community the enthusiasm of young scholars passionate about reading and social action. So invite potential volunteers and donors to participate in Harambee, read aloud, and tell the scholars about their careers and passion for reading. Don't forget to take and post lots of videos to social media or to invite the community to attend the finale on the last day of camp that showcases all the scholars' accomplishments.

**3. Find Diverse Partners from Throughout the Community**

Closely related to our first two tips, we have found that having diverse partners from throughout the community is key to establishing a sustainable Freedom Schools initiative. One invaluable partner who found us through the media is AmeriCorps VISTA; they provide matching grants that best SLIs' stipends as well as provide a tuition waiver or student loan forgiveness. This means less money for us to raise and a more attractive package to recruit talented college-aged applicants for SLI positions. Moreover, having multiple churches and local businesses providing money, time, supplies, and talent equals more stability. In fact, we had too much interest and had trouble fitting in all the activities people offered to provide to scholars in the afternoons! With many options comes the benefit of having resources available in coming years, even as the ability of individual organizations to provide support may fluctuate from year to year.

**4. Believe in and Love the Scholars**

Last but not least, the core beliefs that guide CDF Freedom Schools include the following principles, which are supported by the research on the positive effects of high expectations and caring (cf. Roehrig, Turner, Arrastia, Christesen, McElhaney, & Jakiel, 2012): "All children are capable of learning and achieving at high standards," and "Learning communities that offer a sense of safety, love, caring, and personal power are needed for transformative

education" (CDF, 2017, "Core Beliefs"). The CDF Freedom Schools provide a model of schooling that offers support and praise upon the first encounter with the students. It is a model of schooling that does not wait for the scholars to demonstrate mastery of any content before they are praised; rather it praises students first, establishing a foundation of positive self-efficacy where students know they are loved. The CDF Freedom Schools see intelligence as the unique balance between knowledge of self, family, community, country and world alongside a commitment to social action. Thus, we emphasize self-care with our staff, who can wear themselves out during the intensive summer. And, above all, we encourage our staff and other key stakeholders to constantly remind the scholars they are smart and loved.

## IMPLICATIONS

The growing Freedom Schools movement represents one promising method for focusing on and harnessing the strengths of communities to help encourage children, who are often considered "at-risk," to follow their passions and become advocates for themselves and their communities. We have found that incorporating powerful tools such as culturally relevant pedagogy – in contexts that do not just recreate the existing societal hierarchies that lead to inequality – to be effective and rewarding. Thus, we strongly encourage professional educators and community members to find ways to work together to level the playing field for the next generation of scholars who want to make a difference.

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# APPENDIX: IRC TEXTS BY WEEKLY "I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE" THEME AND LEVEL IN 2016V

| Weekly Theme | Level | Book Title | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| Week One: Self | I (grades K–2) | *Mr. George Baker* | Amy Hest |
| | | *Just Because I Am: A Child's Book of Affirmations* | Lauren Murphy Payne |
| | | *Wilma Rudolph* | Victoria Sperrow |
| | | *Miss Little's Gift* | Douglas Wood |
| | | *Dave the Potter* | Labon Carrick Hill |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?* | Sandy Lynne Holman |
| | | *Miss Little's Gift* | Douglas Wood |
| | | *Light in the Darkness: A Story of How Slaves Learned in Secret* | Lesa Cline-Ransome |
| | | *Good Enough to Eat* | Lizzy Rockwell |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *Out of My Mind* | Sharon M. Draper |
| Week Two: Family | I (grades K–2) | *¡Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A.* | Diana Cohn |
| | | | Susan Kuklin |
| | | *How My Family Lives in America* | Maribeth Boelts |
| | | *Those Shoes* | Kathleen D. Lindsey |
| | | *Sweet Potato Pie* | Linda Jacobs Altman |
| | | *Amelia's Road* | |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Always My Grandpa: A Story for Children About Alzheimer's Disease* | Linda Scacco |
| | | | Karie Smith Milway |
| | | *The Good Garden* | Karen Lynn Williams |
| | | *Circles of Hope* | Jeanie Franz Ransom |
| | | *What Really Happened to Humpty?* | |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *The Road to Paris* | Nikki Grimes |
| Week Three: Community | I (grades K–2) | *The Storyteller's Candle* | Lucia Gonzalez |
| | | *Miss Tizzy* | Libba Moore Gray |
| | | *Have You Filled A Bucket Today?* | Carol McLoud |
| | | *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship & Freedom* | Tim Tingle |
| | | | Eve Bunting |
| | | *Smokey Night* | |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Tamika and the Wisdom Rings* | Camille Yarbrough |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *We Beat the Street.' How a Friendship Pact Led to Success* | Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, & Rameck Hunt with Sharon M. Draper |

| Weekly Theme | Level | Book Title | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| Week Four: Country | I (grades K–2) | *Freedom Summer* | Deborah Wiles |
| | | *Biblioburro: A True Story of Colombia* | Jeanette Winter |
| | | *Elizabeth Leads the Way: Elizabeth Cody Stanton and the Right to Vote* | George Littlechild |
| | | *Granddaddy's Turn: A Journey to the Ballot Box* | Michael S. Bandy & Eric Stein |
| | | *A Picture Book of Thurgood Marshall* | David Adler |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* | Carole Boston Weatherford |
| | | *Tucky Jo and Little Heart* | Patricia Polacco |
| | | *Lillian's Right to Vote* | Jonah Winter |
| | | *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship & Freedom* | Tim Tingle |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *The Watson Go to Birmingham, 1963* | Christopher Paul Curtis |
| Week Five: World | I (grades K–2) | *The Day Gogo Went to Vote* | Elinor Batezat Sisula |
| | | *Mama Miti* | |
| | | *Donna JoNapoli* | Emily Pearson |
| | | *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* | Mem Fox |
| | | *Whoever You Are* | Lynne Barasch |
| | | *Knockin' On Wood: Starring Peg Leg Bates* | |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Kid Caramel, Private Investigator: The Case of the Missing Ankh* | Dwayne J. Ferguson<br>Lesa Cline-Ransome |
| | | *Young Pele: Soccer's First Star* | Paula Yoo |
| | | *Twenty-two Cents: Muhammad Yunus and the Village Bank* | |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *You Don't Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys* | Sharon G. Flake |
| Week Six: With Hope, Education, and Action | I (grades K–2) | *A Picture Book of Cesar Chavez* | David Adler |
| | | *Freedom's School* | Lesa Cline-Ransom |
| | | *Keep Your Ear on the Ball* | Genevieve Petrillo |
| | | *One Hen: How One Loan Made a Difference* | Kacie Smith Milway |
| | II (grades 3–5) | *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* | Kathleen Krull<br>Suzanne Slade |
| | | *Climbing Lincoln's Steps: The African American Journey* | Jeanette Winter<br>Vaunda Micheaux Nelson |
| | | *Malala, a Brave Girl from Pakistan/ Iqbal, a Brave Boy from Pakistan: Two Stories of Bravery* | |
| | | *The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore* | |
| | III (grades 6–8) | *Confessions of a Former Bully* | Trudy Ludwig |