

Youth Activism and Resiliency: Is there a correlation for urban youth?

Final Report prepared for the Chicago Freedom School

MICROSOFT

2009

Authored by: Cassandra McKay, PhD, LCSW

Youth Activism and Resiliency: Is there a correlation for urban youth?

Final Report prepared for the Chicago Freedom School

Project Summary

This project was a strengths based inquiry of urban youth and the communities that coalesce around youth activism. The Chicago Freedom School (CFS) is an educational organization that promotes youth activism and regards education as a transformative catalyst to bring about social change. For this project, CFS acted as a resilient community in which youth interacted. A resilient community is defined as a collective of adult allies who display: 1) care and concern for youth; 2) have high expectations of youth and provide support to meet those expectations; and 3) encourage youth to meaningfully participate in their community.

The research questions that guided this inquiry:

- Is there a correlation between activities of youth activism and resiliency traits (autonomy, social competence, problem solving skills, and having a sense of hope and personal purpose)?
- What is the impact of interacting factors of a resilient community on youth becoming activists?

Conceptually, as the resilient community displays care and concern for youth; support for meeting high expectations; and provides opportunity for meaningful participation of youth (Krovetz, 1999), there may be four processes occurring which foster youth's social responsibility (or youth activism): 1) prosocial modeling by parents, teachers and significant individuals; 2) perspective taking and perspective taking dialogue; 3) cooperative and nurturing relationships with others; 4) learning to manage conflicts effectively by confronting injustices (Berman, 1997).

Data collected to investigate this phenomenon:

Survey of 30 freedom Fellows

Pre-Survey of 8 Teachers

Post Survey of 4 Teachers (all solicited)

3 Focus Groups (3 data points) October; January; April

Observations of Summer Institute selected classrooms

Blog participation of CFS Freedom Fellows (minimal)

The project implemented a mixed method design by use of survey administration, classroom observation, and focus group sessions. In order to measure if youth experienced attributes of a resilient community, a one time survey was conducted (this survey was an adaptation of a 2007-2008 evaluation created by the Center for Urban Research and Learning ,CURL- Loyola

University of Chicago). Three focus groups were also conducted at three different data points from October 2008- April 2009.

In addition, Summer Institute Teachers were surveyed about how their curriculum would, and did possibly promote agency for social change.

Demographics of Freedom Fellows
Race : Black 66.7%; Latino 33.3%;
Language: English 72%; Spanish/English 20%; Spanish 8%
Gender: male 46.4%; female 50% (missing data 3.6%)
Neighborhood (where do you live): Southside 44%; north side 16%; west side 20%; suburbs 8% (gave description of street 12%)
School Type: public 44.8%; charter 48.3%; private 6.9%
Do you have a disability? No-89.3%; Yes-7.1% (3.6% missing)
Religious Affiliation: 48.1% none; 3.7% spiritual; 48.1% Christian
Employment: none 55.2%; paid internship 17.2%; babysitter 3.4%; food service 6.9%; writer/journalist 6.9%; physical labor 10.3%
Community involvement: none 41.4%; community college 6.9%; neighborhood organization 31%; social service organization 13.8%; religious affiliated organization 6.9%
Involved in student organization: none 39.3%; sports club 10.7%; gay straight alliance 3.6%; community organization 25.%; afterschool program 21.4%
Involved in the performance community: none 53.6%; performance arts (acting, dance, music) 21.4%; visual arts 21.4%; computer game design 3.6%
#of siblings (range): only child 11.1%; 1-2 siblings 29.6%; 3-5 siblings 48.1%; 6-8 siblings 11.1%
Members in household: 1-3 members in home 38.5%; 4-6 members in home 42.3%; 7-9 members in home 11.5%; 10+ members in home 7.7%
#Parent/ guardian in home: 1 parent/ guardian in home 51.9%; 2 parents/guardians in home 44.4%

The Youth Survey

Thirty Freedom Fellows completed the one time survey prior to summer institute classroom instruction (See appendix I for copy of Youth Survey).

The sample size was very small 30 often with missing data of 3-5 respondents. The percentage of mode will be utilized to provide summation of responses.

Section I. Perceived Impact on Social Change

Impact of own Racial Identity

Of 29 responses:

- 37.9% (11) FF responded very true (always) that their race could create social change.
- 41.4% (12) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to their race/ ethnic community.
- 41.4% (12) FF responded somewhat true to their race/ ethnicity is my ally for social change.
- 41.4 % (12) FF responded often true to having a strong connection with other race and ethnic communities.

Impact of Friends

Of 29 responses:

- 34.5 % (10) FF responded somewhat true that friends can create social change.
- 55.2% (16) FF responded very true to having a strong connection to friends.
- 34.5% (10) FF responded often true to Friends are my allies for social change.

Impact of Community

Of 29 responses:

- 41.4 % (12) FF had no current involvement in their communities.
 - 7% had a connection to community colleges regarding community involvement;
 - 31% were affiliated with a neighborhood organization;
 - 14% were affiliated with a social service organization;
 - 7% were affiliated with a religious organization.
- 37.9% (11) FF responded very true to community organizations can create social change. The mean response often true.

- 44.8% (13) FF responded somewhat true to community organization are allies for social change. The mean response was somewhat true.

Impact of Family

Of 29 responses:

- 41.4% (12) FF responded somewhat true that family can create social change.
- 34.5% (10) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to family.
- 48.3% (14) responded somewhat true to Family are my allies for social change.
- 31% (9) responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to other families.

Impact of Ability

Of 28 responses:

- 51.7% (15) FF responded often true that disabled community can create social change.
- 37.9% (11) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to the disabled community
- 27.6% (8) FF responded somewhat true to the Disabled community are my allies for social change.

Impact of Religion/ Spirituality

Of 28 responses:

- 25% (7) FF responded somewhat true that their religious community can create social change.
- 28.6% (8) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to religion.
- Multiple modal responses 21.4% FF ***responded not at all true; often not true, and somewhat true*** for religious community is my ally for social change
- 28.6% (7) FF responded often not true to having a strong connection with other religious communities.

Impact of Neighborhood

Of 29 responses:

- 55.2% (16) FF responded somewhat true that their neighborhood can create social change.

- 24.1% (7) FF responded often true to having a strong connection with their neighborhood.
- 44.8% (13) FF responded somewhat true to neighborhood is my ally for social change.
- 31% (9) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection with other neighborhoods.

Impact of School

Of 29 responses:

- 37.9% (10) FF responded somewhat true that their school can create social change.
- 27.6% (8) FF responded often true to having a strong connection with their school.
- Multiple modal responses 27.6% FF ***responded somewhat true; and often true*** for school is my ally for social change
- 37.9% (11) FF responded often true to having a strong connection with other schools

Impact of Job/ Work

Of 29 responses:

- 30% (6) FF responded somewhat true that their job can create social change.
- 35% (7) FF responded not at all true that their job is my ally for social change

Impact of Local Government

Of 26 responses:

- 42.3% (11) FF responded somewhat true that the local government can create change.
- 50% (13) FF responded not at all true that they have a strong connection to the local government
- 34.6% (9) FF responded not at all true that the local government is my ally for social change

Impact of Student Organization

Of 27 responses:

- 37% (10) FF responded often true that their student organization can create social change.
- 33.3% (9) FF responded somewhat true that they have a strong connection to my student organization

- 37% (10) FF responded somewhat true that their student organization is my ally for social change
- 37.9% (11) FF responded often true have a strong connection to other school organizations

Impact of LGBTQ Community

Of 28 responses:

- 89.3% (25) FF responded Yes to knowing someone who is LGBTQ
- 46.4% (13) FF responded somewhat true to LGBTQ community can create social change
- 35.7% (10) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection with the LGBTQ community
- 32.1% (9) FF responded somewhat true to the LGBTQ community is my ally for social change

Impact of Gender

Women

Of 28 responses:

- 53.6% (15) FF responded very true that women can create social change
- 42.9% (12) FF responded very true to having a strong connection with women.
- 39.3% (11) FF responded very true that women are my allies for social change.

Men

Of 27 responses:

- 63% (17) FF responded very true that men can create social change.
- 37% (10) FF responded somewhat true to having a strong connection to men
- 29.6% (8) FF responded somewhat true that men are my allies for social change.

Impact of Performance/ Visual Arts Community

Of 28 responses:

- 37% (10) FF responded very true that arts community can create social change.
- 25.2% (7) FF responded often true to having a strong connection with the arts community
- 22.2% (6) FF responded often true that arts community is my ally for social change.

Section II. Resiliency

The survey polled FF on their previous interaction with traits of a resilient community. Freedom Fellows were asked: (From whom do you receive love and affection; from whom do you receive encouragement to reach your goals, with whom do you participate in this activity; and their range/ level of contribution.

From whom do you receive love and affection?

On average 29 responses:

Context	Percentage of mode %
Racial/ Ethnic Community	37.9 sometimes
Friends	51.7 very much
Community Organization	37.9 sometimes
Family	51.7 very much
Disabled Community	48.3 not frequently
LGBTQ Community	31 sometimes
School	31 sometimes
Job/Work	25.9 sometimes
Local Government	46.4 not at all
Religious Community	27.6 sometimes
Gender Community	34.5 quite frequently
Performance/ Visual Arts Community	37.9 sometimes

From whom do you receive encouragement to reach your goals?

Context	Percentage of mode
Racial/ Ethnic Community	34.5 sometimes
Friends	55.2 very much
Community Organization	34.5 very much
Family	69 very much

Disabled Community	44.8 not frequently
LGBTQ Community	39.3 somewhat
Neighborhood	24.1 quite frequently
School	24.1 somewhat
Job/Work	32.1 very much
Local Government	34.5 not at all
Student Club/ Organization	24.1 somewhat
Religious Community	28.6 somewhat
Gender Community	31 not frequently
Performance/ Visual Arts Community	27.6 very much

Of average 24 responses:

Involved in social change activity:

none 37.9%; educational advocacy (CFS) 10.3%; support group 6.9%; advocacy group 17.2%; violence prevention 6.9%; neighborhood group 6.9%; creative arts community 13.8 %

With whom do you participate in this activity?

Context	Percentage
Alone	26.1 (50% of the time)
Parent/ Guardian	50 (none of the time)
Peer	31.8 (50% of the time, 75% of the time)
Teacher	31.8 (50% of the time)
Other Adult	27.3 (100% of the time)

Type of contribution made when participating in this social change activity?	Percentage
Life experience	33
Physical labor	30

Emotional support (encouragement, help, positive actions/thoughts)	49
Skills (e.g. talents)	46
Knowledge	53
Other	6

Section III. Social Responsibility

Social responsibility scale consisted of eleven items by which Fellows rated themselves. Twenty six (26) to twenty nine (29) Fellows responded to the items. The highest frequency of each response per item is listed below:

Item	Percentage of mode%
When in a group setting, I let others do most of the work	42.3 often not true
I find time to work on other's issues	42.3 somewhat true
I carefully prepare for committee assignments	42.3 somewhat true
I would prefer not to present to a group	42.3 not at all true
My ideas are listened to in a group	38.5 often true
I am good at helping people	38.5 often true
I have much to say about what happens to me	34.6 very true
When good things happen it is because of something I did	38.5 somewhat true
I think that I am able to help solve problems in my community	34.6 very true
I can identify concerns of my community	38.5 often true
My life is interconnected with people in my community, whom I haven't met	26.9 somewhat true

Section IV. Perspective Taking

Perspective taking is one of the processes of social responsibility development. This was also related to the Chicago Freedom School

- Goal 1: Develop, nurture and support leadership (including activism and organizing among youth across Chicago
 - Outcome #5: 75% of fellows will increase their belief that they can have positive relationship with people from different neighborhoods, backgrounds and cultures.

The highest frequency of each response per item is listed below:

Of 28 responses:

Item	Percentage of mode %
I can enjoy positive relationship with people who are different from me	53.6 very true
I enjoy making friends with those who value community service and organizing	46.4 often true
I value role models who value and participate in community organizing	32.1 somewhat true
I enjoy having conversations with people of different perspectives	35.7 often true
I believe that working with people different from myself can bring social change	64.3 very true

Section V. Activism

This section consists of three parts: 1) Ideology; 2) Experience doing activist activities; and 3) Frequency of certain activist activities. The highest frequency of each response per item is listed below:

Ideology

Item	Percentage of mode %
Important to take a political stand	39.3 often true
As an individual I have tried to bring about	42.9 somewhat true

change	
As a leader I have tried to bring about change	44.4 often true
Within my organization I have tried to bring about change	39.3 somewhat true
People in my neighborhood working together can solve problems	32.1 often true; and very true (bi-modal)
People in my neighborhood can get the government to listen to them	33.3 often not true
The government can be trusted	35.7 not at all true
Organizing groups of students can solve problems	30.8 somewhat true; and often true (bi-modal)
Submitting a letter to a newspaper could impact people's lives	46.4 often true
Important to protest when feel strongly about an issue	35.7 somewhat true; and often true (bi-modal)
Protests are worthwhile	46.4 somewhat true
Violent protests are effective	30.8 often true
Violence is justified during protests	46.4 somewhat true
Passive non-violent protest are effective	33.3 somewhat true
Police officers are helpful	42.9 somewhat true
Leaders in government care very little about people like me	46.4 somewhat true

Experience doing activist activities

Item	Previous experience Percentage of mode %	Future plans for activity Percentage of mode %
Participate in a protest rally	58.6 I have done this before	41.4 I am likely to do this in the future
Collect signatures for a	44.8 I have done this before	41.4 I am likely to do this in the

Youth Activism and Resiliency: Is there a correlation for urban youth? | 5/30/2009

petition		future
Start/ join a boycott	51.7 I have not done this before	34.5 I am likely to do this in the future
Collect money for social cause	44.8 I have done this before	37.9 I am likely to do this in the future
Volunteer time to help people in my community	62.1 I have done this before	48.3 I am likely to do this in the future
Run a meeting on my own	48.3 I have not done this before	34.5 I am likely to do this in the future
Run a class on a subject I know about	48.3 I have not done this before	37.9 I am likely to do this in the future
Run my own social justice organization	72.4 I have not done this before	37.9 I am likely to do this in the future
Take action against violence in my neighborhood	48.3 I have not done this before	65.5 I am likely to do this in the future
Organize change in my community	44.8 I have not done this before	48.3 I am likely to do this in the future

Frequency of Activist activity

Item	Percentage of mode %
Discuss issues concerning your community with people of your own age?	41.4 sometimes
Discuss issues concerning the community with parents and adult family members?	31 sometimes and often (bi-modal)
Discuss issues concerning the community with teachers?	34.5 sometimes
Read articles in the newspaper about local current events?	55.2 sometimes
Read articles in the newspaper about national current events?	44.8 sometimes
Watch the news on TV?	27.6 often; and all the time (bi-modal)

Listen to the news on the radio?	24.1 sometimes
Read the news online?	44.8 sometimes

The Teacher Survey

Eight summer institute teachers participated in the pre-survey. The Pre Survey produced the following demographic information for the Summer Institute Teachers:

Race/ Ethnicity: African American 33.3%; Caucasian/White 22.2%; Asian /Pacific Islander 11.1%; Latino/ Hispanic 22.2%; Other 11.1%
Age range: (18-21) 22.2%; (22-25) 44.4%; (26-30) 22.2%; (31-35) 11.1%
Gender: Male 33.3%; Female 66.7%
Type of students taught: Elementary 25%; High School 12.5%; College 37.5%; Informal learning community 25%;
Years of experience (range):37.5% less than 2 years; 12.5%(2-5 years); 25% (6-9 years); 25%(10+years)
Own teaching philosophy: Learner centered 50%; Experiential/ hands on 12.5%; Youth development model 25%; Holistic model 12.5%
Type of justice education incorporated in philosophy: Civic education 71.4%; Reproductive justice 14.3%; Violence prevention 14.3%
Reason teaching at CFS: Promote activism 33.3%; Expand own facilitation skills 11.1%; Get connected with youth 33.3%; Create disability awareness 11.15%; Connection to community 11.1%

Qualitative information: Three main goals/themes of summer: Student development 55.6%; Student teacher relationship 22.2%; and Own professional networking 11.1%;

How do these goals encourage student facilitation of social change?

According to the teachers, the first two goals promote students becoming more aware of social justice infractions; help students realize their own efficacy in a supportive learning environment that encourages shared power between teachers and students; and provide students with the tools and mentoring to support this agency.

What are you foreseen challenges in reaching these goals?

One of the biggest foreseen challenges was the limited time frame by which to encourage this transformation. Other challenges were finding innovative ways to engage students and motivate the students to be active in and outside of the classroom regarding social action.

The Teacher Post Institute Survey provided data regarding their interaction with CFS staff and administration, as well as the teachers' assessment of their impact on the Fellows interest and activity for social change. Initially the post survey was to compare teachers initial expectations with the actual teaching experience by tracking their (personal identification number) PIN requested for the pre- survey. However, the post survey rendered no matching PINs so this comparison of responses was not possible. The post survey was hand delivered to the teachers during the last week of the institute. Teachers were also reminded to complete and submit the post survey repeatedly; yet only four teachers of the eight consenting teachers submitted the survey.

Satisfaction with Summer Institute

Item	Percentage of mode %
Overall communication with CFS committee	50 excellent
Overall level of support by CFS administration	50 adequate and excellent (bi-modal)
Availability of needed supplies and resources	75 adequate
Helpfulness of IC	50 excellent
Physical location of CFS	100 excellent
Level of support from other teachers/staff	75 adequate
Opportunities to voice concerns	75 adequate
Receiving feedback about teaching ability	50 needs improvement
Overall level of organization of CFS	50 excellent

Qualitative information:

Helpfulness of Institute Coordinator(IC)

Overall the teachers found the IC (if they had one assigned) as quite helpful. There however was one comment made of concern:

My ICs were a joy to have and helped me in the day to day activities. However, one my ICs carried conversations with students while I tried to teach, wrote on the board while teaching and played in the hallway with the participants during break.

Usefulness of Pre-Summer Institute

Overall teachers found the Pre Summer Institute helpful, but would like to see the number of days allotted to the training reduced or spread throughout the Summer Institute. Also one teacher became much more acquainted with the CFS philosophy during the Pre-Institute training, and although different from own philosophy was able to teach based on the concretized expectations of the school.

Self assessment of teaching experiences

Item	Percentage of mode %
Had strong connection with other teachers	50 neither agree nor disagree; and agree (bi-modal)
Had strong connection my students	75 strongly agree
Accomplished what I had hoped this summer	50 agree
Developed new teaching strategies this summer	75 agree
Was effective at raising students' social justice consciousness	50 agree; and strongly agree (bi-modal)
Learned a lot from my students this summer	75 strongly agree
Enjoyed the CFS experience	75 strongly agree
Teaching philosophy was similar to other teachers	50 neither agree or disagree
I increased students' interest in the Institute	75 agree
Learned a lot from other teachers this summer	50 agree
Expanded my social network this summer	75 agree
I found it challenging to engage my students	50 strongly disagree
Made a personal connection with CFS	100 agree
Did not get to be as creative as I would like	50 strongly disagree

Youth Activism and Resiliency: Is there a correlation for urban youth? | 5/30/2009

Increased my own consciousness about social justice	50 agree
I feel that my students got what they were looking for	75 agree
Learned more about issues affective Chicago	50 agree

What does effective teaching look like?

Teachers felt that effective teaching resembled:

- Engaging interactive teaching which was rigorous and challenging
- Teachers conveying information through a variety of media
- Teachers connecting with students and having them to participate, respond, teach and ask questions.

Teachers were then asked to rate themselves (1 least effective- 10 most effective) based on their descriptions of effective teaching:

The four teaches rated themselves between 7- 8.5 on the rating scale.

How did you know if you were being effective?

Teachers found that the students verbally expressed their enjoyment of the class and shared their enthusiasm with other students who were attending different classes.

How did you know if you were not being effective?

Teachers felt that students disengaged from the class when they began talking and not paying attention

How will your Summer institute experiences affect how you teach or interact with youth

Of the four teachers, 1 teacher was convinced that teaching youth was not for her. Other teachers found the experience helpful in preparing them to work with youth in the classroom as well as beyond.

Did you teaching philosophy change over the course of the summer?

There was not a shift in philosophy yet one teacher reaffirmed a more conservative stance for interacting with youth regarding creating social change.

Describe how your teaching encouraged students to facilitate social change in their environment?

Most teachers provided students with multiple views of issues and allowed for students to wrestle with these views in order to make their own decision

What were your expectations at the beginning of the summer?

Most teachers wanted students to become more socially conscious, as well as assist students in becoming more familiar with their specific course topic.

Were your expectations met?

Most teachers felt that their expectations were met. Most felt that students were thoughtful and engaged in learning. However there was also some concern that students were not as respectful as they could have been and one teacher felt that the climate of the Summer Institute did not allow for teachers to confront or discipline students when they were not meeting expectations in regards to their behavior.

What was the biggest strength of the Summer Institute?

One of the biggest strengths of the Summer Institute was the selection of youth and the opportunity to expose them to various topics of discussion. Also teachers enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the youth on a more personal level

What was the biggest challenge of the Summer Institute?

Overall most teachers experienced only minor challenges, such as their own work schedule and lack of time to devote to the Summer Institute. One teacher however, felt that the youth were too unruly and unable to conduct themselves in a respectful manner, (e.g. talking on their cell phones during class, playing in the hallway).

Would you come back to the Chicago Freedom School?

Three out of four teachers said that they would return as a teacher for the Summer Institute.

Classroom Observations

Classes Observed:

Political Theatre- Theatrical politics

A Future or a Funeral

Closing Neighborhood School and Changing Communities

Disability Oppression in Today's Society

Identity Politics and the 2008 Presidential Election

Movement Strategies from the Soul

NOW leadership for Public Action

Reading, Writing and Recruiting

Throughout the course of the summer institute all eight classes were observed at least once. In order to protect the identity of the instructor, a compilation is provided regarding the observations of all participating classrooms.

Classrooms were observed on: Physical setting; Culture of the training room; and Methodologies and Motivations.

Physical setting: There was always adequate seating and lighting, and no reported issues with room temperature. When one of the observed classes moved outside youth remained engaged in the outside activity.

Culture of the training room: Ground rules were always reiterated by the teacher (be respectful yet engage in discussion without judging differences of opinion). Toward the end of the institute students were more talkative and playful with one another. Initially the various races did not engage with one another, yet later in the Institute there was much more interaction across ethnic groups. Also toward the end of the Institute the teacher would the students to focus on the Showcase assignment or students took it upon themselves to disengage from the class discussion to focus on other issues. Yet there were also times when students were not very receptive to guidance or respectful of the teacher. In one class, one student slept on the floor in one classroom. Also while speeches played of several activists students appeared somewhat disengaged, busy with talking with one another. Students also were more playful with one another in the hallway which at times made it difficult to refocus after a break during the class session.

Methodologies and motivations: Most instructors utilized some type of media (film, speech) or engaged youth through a form of Socratic questioning about a topic. Small groups were also used heavily so different aspects of a topic could be brought back to the larger group of students for further discussion. Guest speakers were brought in to provide real world experience (e.g. former military personnel to provide their account of the military experience). Role plays were also engaging for youth particularly as they acted out roles very different than their own. Instructors distributed visual guides, newspaper clips or outlines to better explain the particular topic of the session and youth were ask to respond to challenging questions about various issues.

Overall: Within the classroom youth were exposed to various topics and perspectives they may not have had heard before. Sessions that encouraged debate, questioning and discussion may have had the most impact on student's transformative process.

Freedom Fellow Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted during this project: October 2008; January 2009; and April 2009. These focus groups were conducted to record the Freedom Fellow experiences with the

youth –adult partnerships. Although there were no formal mentoring relationships initiated by CFS, Fellows did discuss the impact of adult mentoring concerning their youth led social action project. In addition to the Focus groups, youth and adult allies were asked to participate in a month blog concerning their relationships as well as the progress of the youth led projects, however the blog sites were extremely underutilized with only three entries during the six month tracking.

Guided questions for Focus Group I

Focus group guide Session 1

1. Tell us your experience of the summer institute
2. Tell us about your community (neighborhood or school)
3. When you think of resiliency, what attributes come to mind?
4. How do you describe your community in relation to resiliency?
 - a. How does your community promote resilient behavior? (e.g. parents/guardians, schools, other adults, neighborhood programs etc.)
 - b. If there are adverse situations experienced within your community (i.e. poverty, crime, violence) how does your community help you feel safe and connected to others?
5. What do you aspire for your community?
 - a. What skills do you have that will help bring this about?
 - b. What are other supports that you think that you need in order to see your community aspirations achieved?
6. How do you describe youth activism?
7. What has helped you to gain an understanding about youth activism?
8. Tell us your experience in social change action?
 - a. Were there adult allies involved in you having this experience? Without giving any names who were they?
9. Would your peers or adult allies describe you as having a sense of purpose and hope for the future? If so, explain why.
10. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make or any questions that you would like to raise? If not in this forum, please remember to complete your monthly web logs which will be referred to in the next session. At the beginning of the month, prompts will be made available on the designated website to assist in your journal entry.

Summary of Focus Group I

Ten Fellows attended the first focus group. The above questions guided the discussion with exception of question 9 regarding youth having a sense of purpose and hope for the future. This question was discussed in a later focus group.

The Summer Institute Experience (SIE): Fellows expressed that they ran the Summer Institute with minimal adult interference. This was one of the more memorable experiences. Compared to other summer programs where youth attended, CFS created an atmosphere where they felt a part of the experience not just an attendee. Fellows commented on how the SIE encouraged a family

atmosphere. Fellows felt that they had not only developed friendship but were now family members:

Just like last night, I heard a lady got killed in Little Village coming out of her garage. So I was like, hold up! I know K live near Little Village, I gotta call her. I found my cell phone, I found a phone, I'm like where you at, how you doing, you ok? I will get on the bus and go look for you. She said I'm fine thank you, I'll see you tomorrow"

Another Fellow elaborated that,

We care about each other. It's like we're family. We're all that close. I'm not really afraid to share anything personal with them I feel, safe with them. I've met a lot of amazing people in the program.

The Fellows also shared that they learned about different cultures and people and would not have had this opportunity if they had not attended the SI.

Your Community (School or Neighborhood): Many of the Fellows did not experience the same type of close knit community within their neighborhoods or schools. One Fellow explained that neighborhoods in general are not as cohesive as perhaps they once were many years ago. "There is not a lot of unity, and many people are stressed and looking out for themselves." However, one Fellow explained that she experienced a different community where her friends, although are in different gangs, are still friends. In fact there had not been a shooting on her block in 2 weeks. One Fellow mentioned that he normally avoided certain people at his school,

Because there are a lot of stereotypes and assumptions and you can't socialize on the same level. But here we learn not to make assumptions about people and you get to see people how they are. You get to meet new people and they are really great people.

Youth- Adult Partnership- The Resilient Community: The facilitator explained the different elements of a resilient community: 1) care and concern from adults; 2) high expectations with support; and 3) opportunities for meaningful participation. Fellows described their learning experiences with adults as different from the norm. One Fellow stated that as he was preparing to attend the SI he remembered that, "they kept on saying its not gon be like school, it won't feel like school. But it is school because we are gon be doing work. Its called Chicago Freedom SCHOOL. But this school/program pulls your talent out."

He further explained that,

they weren't really like adults to us, they were like our friends. So it was just like easy to come up to them and be like "... I got a problem". You could tell her and give her the details and she would be like "ok well, I don't know what exactly you should do, but I can suggest something". They not gon tell you what to do, they'll suggest it. They be like if you need my help, I'll be there to help you".

Another Fellow stated that her instructor” didn’t just talk to us about the issues, she showed us like what she’s also done towards fighting things that are important. And we ...had instructors, where people who were doing what they are trying to get us to do”.

The Impact of the Resilient Community- The Beginnings of Youth Activism: As a result of attending the SI one Fellow commented that “I personally think that we’re all scared of difference. I think if we all spoke out about things it would be a better world.” He had begun to practice speaking out against injustices at the SI and was now more inclined to speak in his community. Another Fellow added that,

I used to be scared of speaking in front of a large crowd. I find that easy now. They be like, someone give a speech at an assembly? And I’m like yeah! Let me get up there and talk, and I’ll talk for hours. It’s easy because it shows leadership. They gave us a lot of leadership skills, to be leaders. If you not speaking up, who else is going to do it? They gave us that quality to always speak up and speak your mind. They gave us a lot of good stuff. So I took leadership and being able to talk in front of a large crowd. That’s mostly what I gained.

Additional Comments: A reoccurring comment regarding the SIE was about the Retreat. Many Fellows commented that the Retreat was one of the highlights of the SIE. Traveling away from the city and having the opportunity to see others in a different light, discuss provocative topics and share heartfelt emotions solidified a sense of family for many Fellows. One Fellow explained why,

A lot of people don’t have the chance to talk. They have the chance to talk, but nobody will listen to what they have to say. And if they do say something, they will be judged. In CFS, if we have something to say, we can self-disclose and relate to it. You get to say it and people can feel it and they can relate to it and you can have a conversation.

Guiding questions for Focus Group II

Describe your plans for a youth-led social change activity.

What injustices have you seen that causes you to want to implement this activity?

- What obstacles do you for see implementing this activity?
- How do you handle conflict as it may relate to these obstacles?
- Describe how your mentor has or could be helpful in assisting with this activity.

Describe the relationships that have been created as a result of the Freedom Fellowship

- How do you think this will relate to your own resiliency
 - (autonomy, problem solving, autonomy and hope for the future) match this to survey comments if possible

Summary of Focus Group II

During the day of this focus group, the city experienced a snow storm yet four Fellows attended. The discussion for this focus group revolved around identifying and confronting internal and external obstacles to social change. Although the formal mentor component of the Freedom Fellowship is not in effect, Fellows did share their experiences about how adult allies have provided support and guidance for their youth led projects.

Critical Consciousness and Implementing Social Change: As Fellows began the process of creating their youth led projects, Fellows talked about the injustices that they had encountered in the school environments and how the SIE provided them with resources to recognize and confront those injustices: One Fellow shared that the CFS,

taught us what they don't teach us at school and that's a shame; because school is suppose to give you an education that will help you in the real world. Freedom School taught us our past, each nationality's past. They say, if you don't know your past, how will you know your future?

Another Fellow further elaborated,

the Freedom School really taught us. On a scale from 1-5, all of us were like a two. We knew stuff because of how we were raised in the household, but we didn't know enough that could carry us on. We learned different things like, you might look outside and see little problems, but go further. What kind of problems do you see? You see problems in government offices. You see problems financially, and they want us to work on that. I know Freedom School taught us, you are a youth, start now. Don't wait for another adult to go solve the problem. Because we they are dead and gone, it's your problem, so go fight for it, go try to fix the problem before it gets any worse."

Fellows also admitted to their own thinking as an obstacle to seeing and promoting change. One Fellow explained,

I came into this school not knowing much and I did have some traits that were not that nice. Like I was kind of somewhat judgmental of people and I gave my part in like just oppression in my community. There was a like of problems in my community that I was aware of but didn't look at through the right window. The Freedom School taught me that age shouldn't be any sort of factor in this equation because a lot of people who have started revolutions started when they were young and its because of them that we have some rights that we didn't have some decades ago.

Another Fellow agreed and shared that,

I've always been very head strong about things. So if someone was to say no to me, I wouldn't take no for an answer. But the Freedom School taught me not to just be a little rebellious brat. But to have a reason and to know what your problems are and try to change them in the best way possible.

Through their relationship with peers and adult allies these Fellows' consciousness had been exposed not only to the external oppressor but also the oppressor within, yet these Fellows were committed to making a difference.

Obstacles for Youth Led Projects: As Fellows began to “see” their surroundings more clearly, they were inspired to address issues that concerned them. One Fellow shared how the assumptions of race and age impacted his life:

They say young people stay in school, so you don't know the experience that you have to go through to go get the job. But that's actually wrong because now day's youth have to go get jobs to provide and help around the house. They also talk about my race. They see you are black and that means you are uneducated, poor, and you just don't know nothing. I'm trying to tell them that just because of my race you don't have to fit me in that category. I can do more; just give me a chance to provide it. So, many people will block you because of what they see. So that's what I'm trying to teach them and my peers, just because of where you live or how your people present themselves, that doesn't mean that you have to become like that.

One Fellow shared that his project addressed discontinuing the use of hazardous pool products at his school. Students at his school created a petition and gave to administration who retorted with a nasty letter, yet this Fellow did not give up nor retaliate but continues to try to reason with the engineers of the school through appropriate means.

Support and Sustaining Power: What Fellows have begun to understand is that in the face of adversity they,

...just keep on moving. If they try to block me or stop me in any kind of way the only thing I can do is pray about it. But I will try to get other people who can help back me up”.

In order to make headway on their projects, fellows also have relied on the support of adult allies within CFS or their schools and communities, One Fellow stated, “people can say you are just a kid, but having the adult ally following your plan with you, you have some sort of support from an adult. So it just kind of shuts that stereotype.”

Guiding questions for Focus Group III

Describe your experiences in working with your social justice mentor

Describe the progress made on your youth-led social change activity.

What obstacles have you experienced in implementing this activity?

- How have you handled them?
- Describe how this relates to feeling resilient (autonomy, problem solving, social competence, hope for the future)

- Describe if and how your mentor or other adult allies have been helpful in addressing these issues (i.e. what injustices have you seen that causes you to want to implement this activity)

Describe any new perspectives that you have gained as a result of working with your mentor, other adult allies or just being a Freedom Fellow.

Based on what you know about youth activism, describe what benefits do you think youth activism provides for youth?

Summary of Focus Group III

The majority of comments from Fellows focused on how CFS acted as a positive catapult for creating social change. One Fellow stated, “The Freedom School promotes resiliency because they push us to do things”. Many of the focus group participants had begun or were completing their youth led project so commented on the various aspects of implementing the social change activity. Three major themes emerged from the final focus group. Acquiring attributes of resiliency; Confronting “isms”: obstacles to creating social change; and Hope for the work ahead.

Acquiring Attributes of Resiliency

Being Socially Responsible/ Autonomous

One Fellow was concerned about the spread of STDs within his community and decided to share information with many of his female friends:

H. gave me a list of places they can go in confidence, where they don't really need a parent. Where they can just get checked out, if something happens get antibiotics, or get a shot, get service so you won't be scared to tell anybody and spread it to your boyfriend by mistake or something. ...and a lot of girls, they really weren't shy to ask me for the paper and I give it to them and knew that they were comfortable.

Another Fellow shared his frustration with the amount of work that must be accomplished by youth.

“You are placed here on earth to help someone else behind you and that is why some of the youth activists are having such a hard time because there are people who are not doing their part.

One Fellow spoke of his experience with becoming more autonomous as a result of his participation in CFS:

I've learned how to be more responsible...because [the adults here] ...push us to be individuals and to be leaders, to step up. I had people, not do things for me but I was kinda dependent on them to help me with things or to think for me, but now

I feel like I have matured and I'm a little bit more responsible and I can get things done if I have to and when I need to.

Being Socially Competent

Perspective Taking

As the Fellows became more socially competent they learned how to entertain diverse perspectives from others. One Fellow expressed:

I believe just being exposed to a new environment and a different surrounding of people was one of the main variables or influences that created this change in our mindsets that helped us become better people. But I think that a lot of it had to do with the way that all of these adult allies and the way that the program was... It was kinda diverse with its youth; like there were certain people that I would have never talked to, not because I'm racist or anything, but because that's not the type of people I hang out with. And to come to the freedom school and I was exposed to people who were minorities, like myself, and to have adult allies, it seemed all really new to me, and I realized that's one of the things that changed me.

Another shared in a more global sense that,

CFS tells us the truth they just don't give us a narrow view of seeing the world but they give us information so that we can make our own choices.

Taking on a Collective View

Still another Fellow expressed how he learned to work better with others:

I mean I did work well in groups, but I did not like depending on other people but myself. But going through the Freedom School and studying social rights movements and how you know it was not just one person leading the movements; it was a group of people. It kinda made me realize that you need support from other people to make an impact on society and the world.

Problem Solving

As Fellows implemented their projects they discovered that social change requires organizational skills. One Fellow shared this revelation:

I think that when I first came to the freedom school I envisioned...that I could create change, regardless of my age or ethnicity. However, when going through the freedom school I realized that there are certain steps to take towards preparing and organizing, and being more organized in the things that you do and actions that you take to create change on issues.

Confronting the “Isms”: Obstacles to Creating Social Change

Freedom Fellows commented that many adults outside of CFS believe that youth have potential to do various things but don't treat them as if youth can accomplish tasks now. Obstacles such as sexism and adultism plague some of their interactions with these adults.

Sexism

One Fellow shared that,

“Because I am a girl, people will not help me to be more active in my community because they don't see me as a viable person to do things, because of my gender.

Adultism

Another Fellow expressed frustration with adults downplaying youths' competencies.

Everybody is not the same, but we see ourselves as someone who can make a change in the community, but adults see us differently. They see us as people that's trying to break the community basically.

Still another Fellow emphasized the difference between adult allies affiliated with CFS and other adults.

... the adults see us here like everybody got equal power and everything. But then if you get outside, in the outside world, it's like the youth don't have as much say so or power as the adults. So it's hard to try to get your point across to an adult in the outside world because they'll think you don't know what you're talking about. But in here, everyone listens to each other.

Hope for the Work Ahead

What seemed most concerning for these youth is their lack of hope for the future. Many felt that the world is in such a state that very little progress can be made toward real change, particularly regarding gang violence within the cities:

One Fellow expressed:

Honestly right now, as far as my generation, the way things are going I don't really see hope because, as far as progress we are not all on the same level. I mean we do have positive youth, but at the same time it seems like the negative youth or the negative things that youth are doing are overruling the positive, it's like they're overshadowing the youth.

However, one Fellow was opposed the sentiment of hopelessness:

I want to say, that I do have hope for this generation. A lot of hope, I mean I live on hope.

One Fellow pointed to CFS as a beacon of light in the midst of hopelessness:

For me it's kinda sad to say that I don't have hope at all in our generation. But I just think it's a sense of reality in which I come from with that statement. However, I do believe that if every teenager out there went through this program, the Freedom School, this world would be a way better place. But a lot of teenagers, you know, they don't have access to programs like the Freedom School. You know, there aren't a billion Freedom Schools; there are more McDonalds than Freedom Schools. It would be the greatest thing if every teen or youth could go.

In the final focus group, one Fellow commented on the impact that CFS had on their level of social responsibility, social competence and autonomy to create social change:

“CFS makes you more responsible because we are doing what we should be doing and we have gained the skills from CFS to do the things like talk to adults, officials’ peers regardless. They may just see us as a youth but when we are prepared and organized we have a plan and are able to articulate it. The CFS gives us the space and they expect us to make change in the world that is what everyone is supposed to do”.

Limitations

This project was a strength based inquiry of urban youth at the communities that coalesce around youth activism. The questions which guided this project were addressed utilizing various quantitative and qualitative means of data collection and analysis. However, the small sample size of 38 participants (30 Fellows and 8 teachers) did not render enough statistical power to show a significant correlation between activities of youth activism and resiliency traits (autonomy, social competence, problem solving skills, and having a sense of hope and personal purpose). A larger number of youth participants is necessary in order to provide statistical power in the analysis, and to possibly render a correlation between the variables of youth activist activities and the presence of resiliency traits.

Also although the youth selected for the program presented a propensity toward social justice activity in their pre survey responses, this project did not collect pre and post survey comparison data for Freedom Fellows. However, the focus groups provided insight into their development over time based on their experiences at the summer institute and throughout the course of the Freedom Fellowship.

Fifty percent of participating summer institute teachers did not submit the post institute survey. Also personal identification numbers were changed during the post survey and could not

be used for comparing pre and post survey data. Classroom observations however, aided in providing some real time descriptions of the actual learning environments that participating teachers said that wished to create in the pre institute surveys.

Conclusions and Implications

For this project, Chicago Freedom School acted as a case study for a resilient community. Data was collected to assess the impact of interacting factors of a resilient community on youth becoming activists. The focus groups were especially beneficial in making this assessment. Freedom Fellows constantly identified the importance of dedicated space to actualize autonomy, social competency, and problem solving skills. Freedom Fellows also expressed gratitude for adults acting as allies and partners to their development and transformation in these areas. The youth –adult partnership was displayed by the adults show of care and concern for the development of the youths’ critical consciousness. The summer institute and other informal learning opportunities cultivated an environment of high expectations and support for youth to initiate activities to create social change in their various settings. Freedom Fellows witnessed prosocial modeling of teachers and significant adults; developed cooperative and nurturing relationships with others, often racially different from themselves through interactive and provocative dialogue; and learned how to address disturbing issues within their neighborhoods through planning, organization and diplomatic confrontation. These processes fostered aspects of social responsibility (caring for the needs of themselves and others).

According to the participating Freedom Fellows, a resilient community does assist youth in developing autonomy, social competence and problem solving skills. Freedom Fellows became more autonomous in some cases and more socially competent in others as they experienced the freedom of exploring their skills, and developing a critical consciousness. As Freedom Fellows began to identify problems which concerned them within their neighborhoods, organizational and problem solving skills were developed. Although Freedom Fellows exhibited resiliency traits of autonomy, social competency, problem solving, and even personal purpose, they did not gain a sense of hope for the future or their generation. Now consciously aware of various systems and situations which are oppressive, the Freedom Fellows lamented that the fight was too much without more youth and adults being adequately prepared to create social change. Freedom Fellows expressed that the place for preparation was the Chicago Freedom School.