

Educating Our Children

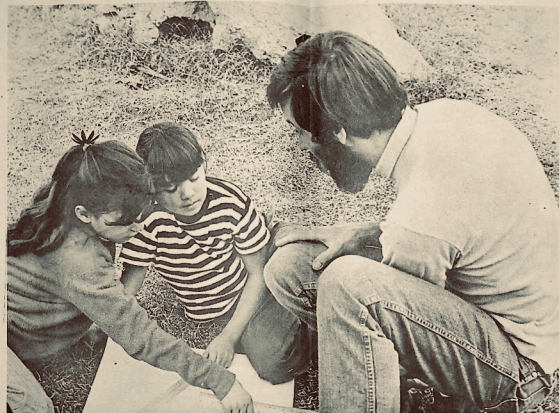
"Huelga School" Tries New Techniques

DELANO, January 31—UFWOC's Huelga School is now a permanent part of the farm workers' movement for social justice. Formed in September, 1969, the school attracts 35 huelguistas between the ages of 5 and 13 to its tutorial sessions. Formerly held afternoons in a local church and evenings at the Schenley Camp, the Huelga School now meets at the Pink House, which was recently vacated when the legal and boycott departments moved to Reuther Hall at the Union's 40 Acres headquarters.

Gordon and Felicia Williamson used funds from the Migrant Ministry to organize the Huelga School as a learning center for children involved in the strike. Although the school presently operates only as a supplement to the students' regular day in public school, the Williamsons, the other tutors, and many students hope that it will soon develop into a full-time school.

"We need our own school," states Dolores Padilla, mother of seven. "Many teachers around here are prejudiced against Mexican-Americans. Just the other day a teacher asked me not to speak Spanish at home with my kids. And teachers opposed to the union are often openly hostile to children of strikers."

The Williamsons and other tutors agree with Mrs. Padilla but go further in their denunciation of the public schools. According to Gordon Williamson, "most enlightened educators today agree that the teaching that occurs in the conventional American classroom fails to interest most children in the process we call 'learning.' Instead of encouraging a child to explore the world at his own speed, teachers in public schools often feel they must teach each child certain things within a certain amount of time. The child that isn't receptive to those things is called a 'slow learner,' or even a failure. Now I believe that those children who don't fit into teachers'



timetables are not slow, but that their experience in school throughout the years has convinced them that they have nothing to gain from learning. So they have stopped trying."

Huelga School embodies the Williamsons' and the other tutors' ideas of the right way to interest children in learning. At the sessions, no one appears to be "teaching" anyone anything. Rather, the students are engaged in independent activity, often involving the educational experiments and objects brought by the Williamsons. A visitor to the younger huelguistas'

sessions, held Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after school might find Jeanette Terronez, age 8, measuring her friends' height with a ruler; Richard Bustos, age 7, working with magnets; and Sharon Padilla, age 5, playing letter dominos with tutor Liz Farnsworth.

At the other sessions, students and tutors work together on many types of projects. Joaquin Murguia, age 11, assembled a plastic model of a human body during several weeks' meetings. Robert Terronez, age 12, compiled a history of his family, and Johnny Perez, age 12, learned to use the cuisenaire

rods, which introduced him to a new way of looking at arithmetic.

A visitor to these sessions is impressed with the students' deep involvement in their projects. No teacher tells them when to open and shut their books; seldom does anyone even tell them to be quiet. They are learning because they need and want to learn in order to do the projects they choose to do. Roger Terronez, age 14, sums up many of the students' feelings when he says, "Viva la Huelga School."

CHILD LABOR: THE SUBTLE VIOLENCE THAT ROBS US OF A LIFETIME OF OPPORTUNITY

A federal investigation into illegal employment of children during the 1969 fiscal year found 11,273 children illegally employed, many of them in hazardous occupations with high accident rates. The investigations, which reached only a small portion of establishments covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, showed about 10% of the violations are in farm labor, in spite of the fact that agriculture has lower standards than industry.

The investigations showed that 47 percent of the children working on farms during school hours were in the 10-13 age bracket, 38 percent were 14 or 15 years old, and 15 percent were under the age of ten.

A majority of the children illegally employed on farms, about 59 percent, were enrolled in school grades below normal for their age. Children of migrant workers who were illegally working, and who were below their grade level in school, was a tragic 72 percent.

How do you keep 'em down on the farm?

By getting 'em out of school and into the fields as early as possible!



ABOVE: Huelga School Director Gordon Williamson discusses a project with students Jeanette Terronez and Jenny Padilla.

RIGHT: OFF TO WORK WE GO