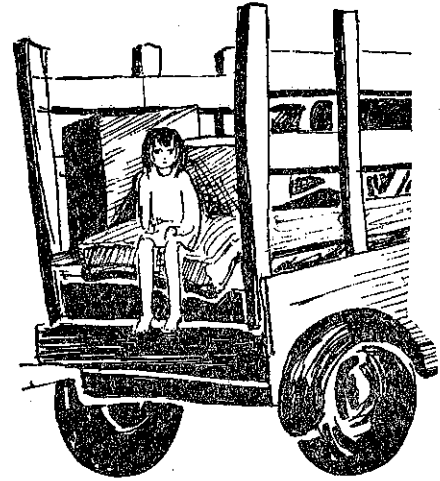


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School Bells for Children Who Follow the Crops

In Colorado the school schedules of hundreds of boys and girls are affected by the growing schedules of sugar beets and flower seeds, peaches, and other crops that grow in great abundance in large irrigated areas of the state. The children are the sons and daughters of the seasonal workers needed in large numbers on the farms and orchards of Colorado.

Workers from Mexico fill a large share of the need for farm labor, but, because these men do not bring their families with them, their arrival in a community does not pose problems for the schools. Our concern in the state department of education is with the migratory workers who come with their families from our own state or from other states.

Almost half of these American nationals come from Texas. Colorado is home base to about a quarter of them, and ten other states are home base for the remainder, except for about 1 per cent who claim no permanent residence.

Three quarters of the workers have a Spanish-American background. Some

are Indian, a very few are Negro; the others are Anglos, a term loosely applied to fairer-skinned Americans.

The length of the workers' stay in a farm area depends on the needs of the crops. Some crops require workers from the migrant group for periods that may extend to several weeks. Peach orchards need workers over an extended period for pruning and spraying, but the demand is heaviest at harvest time, which lasts about two weeks.

The length of the total season in any one community may vary little from year to year, but, because workers do not always find jobs for the entire season, the migrants may come or go from a community quite suddenly.

Colorado has faced the problem of education for the children of the migrant workers. Not only are the children enrolled in the regular schools, but a system of summer schools has been created to offer these boys and girls an opportunity to make up the time lost while families are moving from job to job.

In 1959, five special-term summer schools for children of migratory workers were opened in widely separated areas—the eight-thousand-foot San Luis Valley, the western slope of the Rockies, and the mile-high valleys of the Arkansas and the South Platte rivers.

Special classes were held for periods that ranged from five to almost eight weeks. From sixty-two to about a hundred and seventy-five children were enrolled in each school.

In many ways the children of migratory workers who enter kindergarten or first grade are like most other children coming to school for the first time. Some are frightened, many want their mommies, and nearly all of them have yet to learn to get along in a group. But without question migrant children have special needs that require special attention.

First is the language handicap. A fifth of the fathers and about a third of the mothers of these children speak only Spanish. At home more than half of the children use Spanish as the only, or the main, language. Many children know no English at all, and many more have only a smattering of it.

The fact that many of the boys and girls cannot learn or practice English at home places a difficult burden on the school. All learning must take place in the classroom, where the time for practicing English is limited at best. The language problem must be overcome by teachers who are generously endowed with patience, understanding, and humanity.

Our teachers have had to learn that

there is more to the language problem than practicing words. For children with a background in Spanish culture, a word may have a meaning that cannot be expressed by an English equivalent. In fact, a literal translation of a Spanish term may be quite misleading.

Arthur L. Campa, of the University of Denver, gives some revealing examples of language differences.

Juan cannot find his pencil.

"Have you lost it?" his teacher asks. He quickly replies that he has not.

"*Se me perdió,*" he tells her. "It lost itself on me." As far as Juan is concerned, the pencil lost itself from him.

After school Juan is walking home.

"Did you miss the bus?" a school-mate asks him.

By now we know that Juan was not the active factor in this situation either.

"*Me dejo.*" The bus left him.

Juan is a versatile boy, but don't make the mistake of telling him that he is *versátil*. This would mean that he is superficial and changeable.

It is not easy to take a six-year-old who has learned to think and speak in one idiom and teach him another that involves many totally different cultural concepts. The teacher must have a complete understanding of this problem. She must know that to teach children to speak or write words will not teach them to think in the new language.

Along with language differences children of migratory farm workers bring to school various cultural differ-

ences that teachers must take into account.

The children belong to three cultural groups. The first is composed of boys and girls, mostly Anglos, whose parents have taken on American ways. The children of this group, which is in the minority, have some understanding of American customs. At age six they are much like six-year-olds throughout the United States. They display some readiness for school: they have some knowledge of the ABC's and some skill in getting along with other children.

The boys and girls in the second group have been strongly influenced by patterns of Spanish-American culture. The television sets, the clover-leaf intersections, the speedy cars, the bathtubs, and the colored fixtures that play so large a part in the lives of many other Americans have little place in the lives of this group of migrants. The new life can be confusing, and they may find it necessary to revise their values.

The children in the third group have not yet acquired much of any culture. Many of the children have been taught little discipline except perhaps through expressions of disfavor when they act against their parents' will. The children have had limited learning opportunities. Much of their learning comes from observation, and not all that they observe is dignified. These children know very little about how to live with others. With these boys and girls, education has much to do and much to undo.

Along with differences in language

and culture, the school must take into account differences in values.

The young child from the Spanish culture has already accepted and begun to conform to the values of his group. To understand the child, the teacher must have an understanding of those values.

In general the Spanish-American conforms to the pattern of his group more closely than the Anglo does, though of course individuals differ.

The Anglo strives to accomplish. He plans for his accomplishments and takes pride in achieving. While the Anglo takes pride in what he does, the Spanish-American takes pride in what he is.

The Spanish-American is likely to accept a situation and adjust to it. The Anglo is more likely to act to change a situation.

The Anglo is likely to adopt new methods if he believes they are more efficient than his. The person of Spanish culture places slight value on efficiency.

These are some of the characteristics that confront the teachers of our migrant children. An awareness of them is essential to understand the children, but the teacher will be making a mistake if she assumes that each characteristic is as strong in one child as it is in the next.

The establishment of schools for children of migratory workers is a responsibility of local school districts chiefly, though interested civic organizations and the state department of education may and do give assistance.

The important task of bringing a

community to accept responsibility for the education of migratory children is seen as an obligation of the community itself, though, again, outside sources often offer assistance, especially during the early stages of a program, to stimulate interest.

Special summer classes for children of the migratory workers are only one phase of the migrant-education pro-

pilot schools to serve the research project: they are full-fledged schools that serve a special community of children.

Three major concerns must be considered in organizing the special schools: the pupils, the programs, and the administrative structure. In Colorado no one of these concerns is neglected for the others; however, the ad-

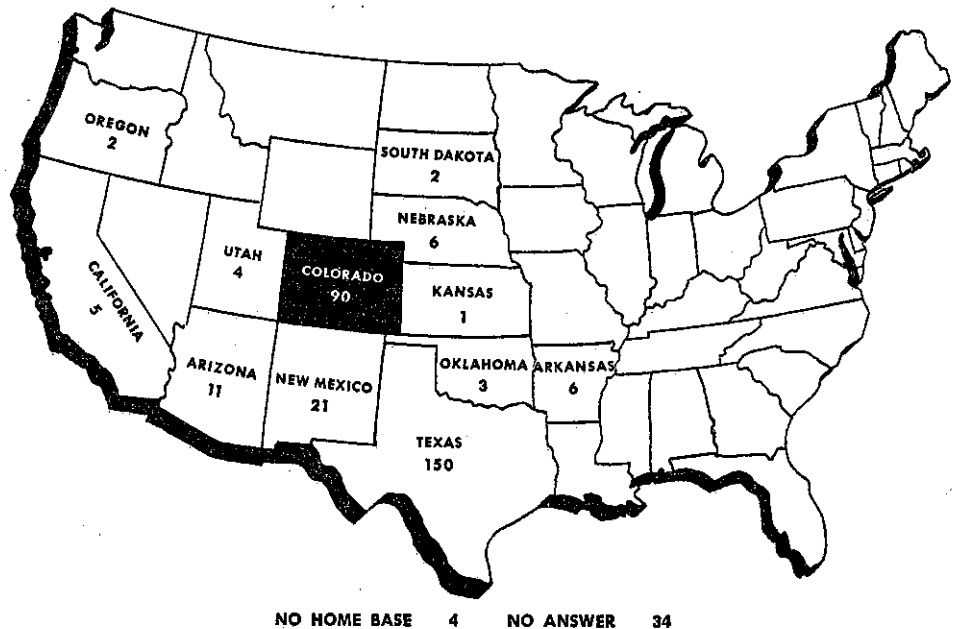


FIG. 1.—Home bases of a sample of migrant children in Colorado

gram in Colorado. Another major phase is the Migrant Education Research Project, which is administered by the Colorado State Department of Education in co-operation with the Co-operative Research Program of the U.S. Office of Education.

The purpose of the project is to study the needs of migrants and their children and to make recommendations to meet those needs. The summer schools are more than experimental

administrative structure, local and state-wide, had to be considered first. Problems on administrative structure were met by adapting the structure of the special schools to the state-wide public school system.

The state offers funds, and the local school district operates the schools. In return for the funds the local district is expected to allow unrestricted use of its school buildings, equipment, and facilities; to provide supervision and

administration above the level of principal; and to develop the community support necessary for the program.

From 1955 through 1958, each school prepared its own budget for summer schools for children of migratory workers. The budgets were submitted through the state department of education to the state board of education. The board reviewed the needs of the local areas and considered each budget on the merits of the program it represented.

The budgets showed considerable variation in allotments for such items as transportation, school-lunch program, and salaries for teachers and supplementary labor. Since there were no standards for class size, teacher loads varied widely.

In preparation for the opening of the special schools in 1959, the staff of the research project worked out a set of formulas for state aid and submitted them to the local school authorities, to the state department of education, and to the state board of education. The formulas were approved and accepted during 1959 by both local and state schoolmen.

The budgets are now under state control. In the budget contracts, the local districts agree to allow the research project to use the schools for experimental purposes. The Colorado State Department provides, besides the project staff, an elementary-school consultant who devoted about half time to the migrant programs.

The research project has given first priorities to the pupils, the program, and the administrative structure, in that order. To ascertain the children's

abilities and achievement, testing programs were started in the first year of the project. Surveys were made to learn the characteristics of the children and their parents. A census was taken to learn how many domestic migrants there were in each agricultural area, the timing of their arrival, and the length of their stay. Figure 1 gives an idea of the far-flung area from which the families come.

The special-term programs continue to develop with the aid of research carried on by the teaching and the research staffs.

In the summer of 1959 a curriculum workshop was held to develop programs, materials, techniques, and methods for the special classes. *Learning on the Move*, a 250-page classroom guide for teachers of migrant children, resulted from the workshop.

Other workshops are planned through 1963. The 1960 workshop at Adams State College will be devoted to principles and practices for the education of children of migrant workers.

The question we in Colorado are asking about the boys and girls who follow the crops is not, "Should these children be taught the ways of our society?" We have gone beyond that question. We are asking, "How can we best prepare these children to live in our society?"

These children are ours. They are of our society. If we teach them wisely, both the children and society stand to gain from the ringing of school bells that call these boys and girls, too, into classrooms.

Resource ID#7212

**School Bells For Children Who Follow The
Crops**