

Edjamacation

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Here's how I've seen good political education happen:

In Spring 2005, the Rural Organizing Project, and its ally CAUSA, Oregon's immigrant rights coalition, launched a March for Truth, Justice, and Community. The goal: march from Oregon's capital, Salem, up the Willamette valley to Portland, 80 miles, to protest the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in favor of immigration reform.

Because people generally hear what they want to hear, the participants who showed up for the kick-off rally were surprised by each other. The 300 or so ROP marchers, recruited from across the state for the week - long march were pure peace-movement counter-culture. Peace signs, rainbow flags, recombinant bicycles, and down-with-Bush signs in every flavor. The Latino immigrant families, 1000 strong, that showed up for the protest at the capital had on their Sunday best, with dozens of red and black farm worker flags and plenty of Si Se Puede hand painted placards. People clearly didn't know what to make of each other, but they were game, and soon the two contingents mingled and ringed the legislature, sharing chants.

OK, so far so good. But now, how to take the ROP marchers, and a smaller contingent of CAUSA walkers up the valley, crossing highways, marching through towns, camping out in fields and church basements, sharing meals, engaging in daily protests and rallies along the way? Because the CAUSA walkers had done this before for farm worker justice campaigns, they organized the essential security team, recruiting tie-dye volunteers to help make sure no one got squashed like a possum as cars barreled by all day long. There was a reasonable amount of grumbling within the ranks of the peace army about the amount of emphasis given to immigrant issues as opposed to peace stuff. But people basically dealt with their 'issues', usually in a graceful way, partly because of the logic and justice of the thing, and partly because the young CAUSA marchers were just so cool. Half way through the march I noticed that half the peace marchers were now carrying SI SE PUEDE signs and young Latino guys in Subcomandante Marcos T shirts were hauling the rainbow flags along. I knew it would work out when the march was passed by a tractor-trailer combo hauling grain up the road. It was a full-on peace-sign farm worker flag waving protest march. The driver leaned on his air horn and pumped his fist out of the window. Si se puede.