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Elena de Costa

Carroll University, edecosta@carrollu.edu

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## *Community-Based Projects and the Performing and Visual Arts: Promoting Cultural Dialogue*

**Elena de Costa**

*Interdisciplinary collaborations between classroom and community can create learning strategies in meaningful contexts. They provide students and community with engaging experiences placing them in participatory roles leading to consciousness-raising, dialogue, and activism. Active and experiential learning through the performing and visual arts can be one of the hallmarks for developmental shifts in thinking, involving students in their own learning processes in stimulating ways. Furthermore, learning in social contexts is critical to the development of a variety of skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning. Through this practical approach to learning, students gain confidence in their own abilities, discover innovative ways to overcome obstacles and turn a class project into a life experience. This essay explores student learning outcomes from a theatre / photography project for a Spanish class guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. The campus and community workshops engage participants in building partnerships and strengthening community ownership, while also disseminating cross-cultural information to a broad audience. Participatory performances and visuals serve to bring together multiple communities, invigorating partnerships and implementing creative collaborations with educational institutions.*

Experiential learning through the arts allows communities to engage in dialogue in safe public spaces. In our annual project Latino Images, Voices and Visions: A Traveling Pictorial Exhibit and Workshop, photos of Latinos in the community are accompanied by inspiring bilingual quotes of the person(s) photographed, the verbal text complementing the visual image.

Participants in this traveling community photo exhibit and dialogue write their initial impressions on flip charts as they look at the powerful photos and quotes, and later discuss their comments/impressions. A culminating bilingual theatre performance on the theme of immigration (Latino diasporas) with the photos as a backdrop follows, including an audience talk-back with the performers and director. Facilitation of discussions between Latinos and Anglos is focused on exploring racism and discrimination in the local community and on contributing to social awareness and viable change to address issues raised in both fora. It is an interdisciplinary collaborative project with the Theatre, Photography and Spanish programs at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin (a city with the fastest growing Latino ethnic

community in Waukesha county).<sup>1</sup> Our motto is Communicate, Collaborate, Celebrate—the key words in building understanding between cultures or any groups exhibiting diversity—racial, ethnic, religious, ideological. The entire project is a semester-long initiative held on campus and in several community venues. Memory is the Soul of a People and these photographs record fleeting moments in the daily lives of our neighbors.

As is the tradition for the annual bilingual performance, the theatrical piece this year (April 2013) was an adaptation from original works. The performance itself was student directed and student performed with collaboration between theatre students and Spanish students. This year's performance blended the short stories of Francisco Jiménez of California, the dramatic Chicano one-acts of the renowned Luis Valdez of the Teatro Campesino, and the poetry of the Chilean Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda from his Canto General verses in praise of the laborer everywhere. The mural piece on the theme created by Taller Yonke<sup>2</sup> artists from Nogales, Mexico and art students served as the backdrop for the performance. Followed by an audience talk-back with theatre, Spanish, and art faculty facilitators as well as the two muralist artists-in-residence and the student director and performers, this performance engaged dialogue on a number of issues: How are migrants' narratives collectively reconstructed over time in the national memory of the host and origin countries? How are migrants represented in our mindset? How does literature and art (murals) portray immigration and emigration? How are racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and discrimination communicated in our culture? The collage adaptation of works (narrative, theatre, and poetry and background music) that was prepared in a bilingual creation, put all the joys, sorrows, history and culture of La Raza's struggles on stage to be examined, to be remade, to pass on to others and to demonstrate to the audience that there are no easy answers to the questions posed. Bilingual programs were provided to attendees.

## **The Civically-Engaged Student in Community-Based Participatory and Action Research**

Civic initiatives are ongoing in democratic societies, but only some of them promote campus conversations about higher education. What are the contexts in which civic values and civic practices operate on a college campus? How do the values of diversity, autonomy, and the common good affect any civic mission of higher education? What are the relevant connections among rights, laws, and freely-met responsibilities in an educational context? Are there global civic values that affect policies worldwide? Are there distinct civic values on which America's 'dream of democracy' is based? And, finally, what does a civically-engaged student look like?

In response to this last question, a civically-engaged student actively participates in the public life of his community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good. There is an institutional imperative to provide a comprehensive climate wherein students develop skills to live, learn and work in a pluralistic society in which they are active participants. Civic engagement is a philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community involvement and development that is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards with civics as a signature component in the Spanish program of Carroll University. And the examples of the aforementioned Community-Based Participatory Research Projects (CBPR) and subsequent Participatory Action Research (PAR) are designed to open a dialogue and serve as a tool for cross-cultural communication in a diverse community.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, CBPR provides a framework to empower our Hispanic community by partnerships with our faculty, students, and the numerous non-profit organizations in which we complete service learning components of our coursework. The CBPR model views community participation, in all levels of the design, as essential to the research process and the end-products—a photographic exhibit and a theatre production. The community's immediate and on-going involvement in the preparatory phase is based on the belief that the community

members 1) are qualified to investigate their own experiences; 2) provide detailed descriptions of social context; 3) establish congruity between the topic and reality; and 4) are entitled to hold the status of researcher.

What are the criteria that shape a civically-engaged student? A civically-engaged student participates in meaningful and personally relevant campus and community activities. Such experiences incorporate multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society. Furthermore, civic engagement in our ethnically diverse society promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all civically-engaged participants. Community partnerships to foster civic engagement are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs while providing students with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating experiences with guidance from community and faculty facilitators. A simple definition of civics is "the study of the privileges and obligations of its citizens." But civic issues are not discipline specific; centering on civics assists the student in seeing issues from multiple academic perspectives. As Higgenbottom argues in the Opinion Papers,

We all have an important stake in the quality of each other's civic education.

While on the one hand, different educational paths lead us to different jobs, salaries, working conditions, and lifestyles, our common humanity, culture and democratic commitments draw us together. That which each of us has in common—democratic citizenship—is a public office replete with rights and privileges, but also mutual obligations (7).

Additionally, centering on civics through a critical issues lens allows the academic institution to build community through the ability to participate in a campus/community-wide common conversation. Cultural experiences provide students with the opportunity to deepen their

understanding of the problems and forces shaping today's changing world through local experiential / immersion experiences. Five key words summarize the intent of such cultural experiences:

Communication: To communicate in the target language in a culturally appropriate manner.

Cultures: To gain knowledge and understanding of the target culture.

Connections: To connect with other disciplines and acquire information.

Comparisons: To develop insight into the nature of language and culture.

Communities: To participate in bilingual communities in local settings as well as abroad.

A civically-responsible citizen must be able to understand a topic from many perspectives, recognize the audience addressed, and effectively communicate thoughts. A civically-minded person needs to make a number of connections related to topic, audience, and method of communication. Students also need to make connections among the many varied disciplines of their academic program in order to progress in their lifelong travels of education and the development of lifelong skills. One of the best ways that students learn to connect disparate materials, ideas, and information is through participation in interdisciplinary experiences. By using the knowledge generated in their participatory experiences (service learning, volunteerism, internships, and participant-observations), community and students working together are able to identify changes needed to bring marginalized communities together with mainstream communities in effective dialogic exchange.

## **Hispanic Images, Voices, Visions: Traveling Photo Exhibits and Workshops using CBPR**

What does civic responsibility mean? As defined by Linda Sax, civic responsibility means “active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good.” (3) Indeed, interdisciplinary collaborations between classroom and community create learning strategies in meaningful contexts. They provide learners with engaging experiences which place them in participatory roles leading to consciousness-raising, dialogue, and activism. Active and experiential learning through the visual arts can be one of the hallmarks for developmental shifts in thinking, involving students in their own learning processes in stimulating ways. Active and interactive learning in social contexts are critical to the development of a variety of skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and life-long learning. Deeper learning can be stimulated by getting past the minimalist notion of subject coverage if students are challenged to think critically and creatively within a performative setting with the students themselves engaging audiences in talk-backs which explore social problems and how they might be resolved. Developmentalists encourage a social context for learning as well as group learning settings whenever possible. In student workshops presented in venues throughout the community, the interdependence of student workshop teams provides a rich milieu for creative ideas, support and feedback. Civic engagement in our ethnically diverse society promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all civically-engaged participants. It provides a comprehensive climate where students will develop skills to live, learn and work in a pluralistic society in which they are active participants. The visual and performing arts in bilingual contexts bring communities together to recognize real-life stereotypes and prejudices in a framework that is developmental, individual, transitional, and transformative. Performance-based teaching is an interactive approach to cultural awareness. Students and community alike

participate in the exploration of cross-cultural conflicts through visual and verbal engagement. It empowers them to identify prejudices, discuss how they might be resolved, and then engage in community action projects to alleviate them. Collaborations, open communication, and the celebration of difference are the key concepts in building understanding between cultures or any groups exhibiting diversity—racial, ethnic, religious, ideological.

A substantial portion of our cultural heritage from the 20th century is recorded in enormous collections of spoken-word materials. Indeed, a great deal of what we know of past communities' and peoples' daily activities (i.e. in immigrant enclaves, rural farming towns, and military encampments) cannot be gleaned from books, digests, or newspapers. Rather, it can only be revealed to us through stories, interviews, and spoken dialogue, or what is known as oral history. Oral history is one of the ways in which people share memories, and how people hear and respond to them is partly shaped by the contexts of their telling and listening. The Hispanic Voices and Images project focuses on a variety of perspectives designed to educate the campus community (students, faculty, and staff) as well as the larger Waukesha community beyond the confines of Carroll University. The goal is to educate non-Hispanics about the fastest growing subculture in our community as well as to celebrate Hispanic cultural heritage and its many enriching contributions to our community. At a time when the topic of Hispanic immigration is one of heated debate in our country, it is imperative that diverse communities come together in productive, open dialogue. In a period when Carroll University is actively seeking a more culturally diverse student body, it is prudent to open our mind as well as the doors of our institution.

Mindful of contemporary concerns, open fora address, but are not limited to, the following issues: archiving memory, healing memories, memory and community, memory and trauma, memory and pleasurable recollections (photographic portraits, performance, theatre,

music), heritage issues and belief systems, diasporas and cross-cultural dialogue (stories in translation). The Hispanic Voices and Images project is designed to be a gathering of voices, past and present, to initiate a dialogue among all community constituents, a vox populi and interrogating discourse, where young people can make a difference in their community rather than just be spectators living on the margins of our city. Students need to take a more active role in their community—after all, they will be residing here for four or more years of their life. The project provides our students with the opportunity to work across disciplines with other students and community members, and gives them a more positive image as community participants and activists and life-long learners who know how to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. In addition to fostering communication among students and the larger Waukesha community (both Anglo and Hispanic), The Hispanic Voices and Images project focuses on the following research components: oral histories and the process of interviewing; the effect of telling one's story to the listener; the examination of oral history in a wide range of environments (i.e., museums, heritage agencies, academic institutions, law courts, radio and television, performing arts, community projects); and the taking of retratos or photographic black-and-white portraits with personal bilingual quotes—all formats expressing a relationship to the past through a particular cultural medium.

This presentation of interactive methodologies to instruct students focuses on performance-based projects used at Carroll University: *Hispanic Voices, Images, and Visions: A Traveling Pictorial Exhibit and Workshops (Remember the Past, Imagine the Future)*, each focusing on student engagement on cultural and sociopolitical issues within a Hispanic context. Performance-based teaching is an interactive approach to cultural awareness. Students and community alike participate in the exploration of cross-cultural conflicts through visual and verbal engagement. It empowers them to identify prejudices, discuss how they might be

resolved, and then engage in community action projects to alleviate them. Interactive discussion of engaging methodologies for exploring racism and discrimination follows. The photographs in this exhibit celebrate the presence of Hispanics in our community—their traditions, their values, their humanity. Since Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic population in Waukesha county, in addition to the many contributions of their language and culture, are their expressions of friendship, community, and an ardent desire to be welcomed and included as equals among us. These photographs were a joint venture between Professor Elena De Costa's Advanced Spanish Conversation and Composition class and Professor Phil Krejcarek's Photography class, both of Carroll University. They have been and continue to be shared in exhibit in numerous venues in Waukesha, accompanied by student presentations on Hispanic culture.

### **Remembering the Past—Imagining the Future: Artistic Expression and the Liberal Arts**

The Performing and Visual Arts are a fundamental means of human expression and communication. Contemporary culture is suffused with visual imagery; we are surrounded by non-verbal cues and visual messages, and visual modes of communication are omnipresent. Thus to be able to speak a visual language and understand the process by which such communication succeeds are useful skills. In the context of a liberal arts education, the study of art introduces students to a non-verbal but rigorous, form of thinking and expression. These photographic images of Hispanics in our community and on the Carroll University campus are complemented by inspiring quotes from their subjects—the verbal complementing the visual! Such projects are in keeping with Carroll University's globalized curriculum and focus on the study of culture, contemporary issues, and dialogic communication beyond the classroom in real-life situations and community applications. They are also relevant to pedagogical innovations inasmuch as the content and methodology of this project present a creative

approach to learning—collaborative, experiential, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, enriching both in content and approach.

### **Project Objectives and Anticipated Outcomes and Methods to Attain Outcomes**

Our goal was to powerfully portray the inequality and injustice, the discrimination, and struggle of Mexican-Americans specifically and immigrants in general in the American milieu through the context of a series of photographs or dramatized vignettes on the topic. Project outcomes include raising consciousness of immigrant problems, beginning a dialogue both in the attendees' talk-backs and beyond. Outcomes include cultural knowledge (values and belief systems), cultural awareness (attitudes, openness, flexibility), and cultural sensitivity (cultural differences and similarities without value judgments.)

### **Value of Projects to Faculty, Students, Community, Programs**

The project directly relates to our cross-cultural seminars and experiences from Carroll University's General Education program, their faculty and students; relative to the fastest growing ethnic population in Waukesha County and its immigrant community from varied Spanish-speaking countries, many of Mexican origin; topic of contemporary concern—the role of Hispanics and immigrants in general in our society; theme of the worker-immigrant. The theatre project, in particular, was a result of our trip to Borderlinks<sup>4</sup> in Tucson and Nogales in January 2012 and the contacts made there.

### **Timeline for the Theatre-Mural Project, Anticipated Dissemination of Results**

We scheduled a series of 10-day workshops and lectures of two artists (Taller Yonke) in collaboration with faculty and student interpreters to assist with communication (April 14–24, 2013). The unique interdisciplinary and experiential nature of this collaboration was presented at various round-tables on campus and in the community. Taller Yonke is the name of the artist collective begun by Guadalupe Serrano and Luis Diego Taddei of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico.

Their work focuses on human rights, particularly around the unique issues of life in a border town. In dealing with the problems of a transitory population in their hometown, they work to create a sense of belonging and pride within their city through public works. Their work also addresses political concerns of regulation and humane treatment of individuals caught between two countries and ideologies. Guadalupe Serrano is a founding member of the Taller de Arte Público Yonke (Junk Public Art Workshop). The purpose of their workshop is to reclaim public spaces that have been contaminated by commercial and political propaganda, and to integrate public art into those spaces to add human and cultural value to the city of Nogales. Taller Yonke has placed sculptures and murals on the border fence among many other locations. The artists have been invited to create works with local artists in many Spanish-speaking communities from the Basque region of Spain, to Colombia as well as creating collaborative works in the United States.

The mural medium was selected for this project since it is an artwork in which the architectural and/or environmental elements of the space are integral to the work. Murals may be painted directly onto walls, or on large canvases attached to walls. In the case of this project, we created a mural on canvas that was a backdrop for our bilingual theatre production on the theme of immigration. This project provided the Carroll and Waukesha communities an opportunity to discuss issues of immigration through public lectures as well as smaller conversations in the community, in the classrooms and through the theatre experience on April 24, 2013. The artists from Taller Yonke worked with painting students from concept to execution of the mural. This professional interaction with the muralists gave students a unique opportunity to work with international public artists as well as to learn how to develop public projects on important community issues. Since several Cross-Cultural domestic and

international Experiences (CCEs) are being developed on this topic, this on-campus experience also generated interest in these off-campus programs.

### **Collaborations**

Theatre, Spanish, Art and Photography programs; community collaborations with La Casa de Esperanza, United Community Center and Latino Arts Gallery of Milwaukee; the Waukesha community—these all were integrated into our project. This endeavor presented a unique opportunity for faculty, students, artists, and community to collaborate in a single interdisciplinary cooperative endeavor to explore the development of cultural identity among Latino immigrants in the community. Diversity Awareness and Training play a significant role in businesses and organizations of all sorts in our globalized society. This performance was designed to promote cross-cultural awareness and dialogue. Given our campus-wide initiative toward multiculturalism and cross-cultural understanding through experiences (both domestic and international) in our new General Education curriculum, the performing arts provide an ideal venue to bring diverse communities (students and faculty, Hispanics and Anglos) together in a setting of entertainment and education.

### **Participatory Action Research Community Projects: Service Learning and Civic Education for Engagement**

The visual and performing arts have the special power to give form to our imaginations. In communities where there is no art, it is hard to imagine a better world. Those voices are stifled and we are weaker as a society. What are the unique roles and responsibilities of an artist in community settings? How do artists shape work to meet the parameters of a community institution without compromising personal aesthetic values? As we continue to explore and interact with residents and institutions in different neighborhoods and learn about the lives and personal experiences of those who live there, they often become engaged not only as artists but also as citizens. Community artistic endeavors work best when all involved take the time to

build relationships with individuals and institutions in the neighborhoods where they are working. This means that the commitment goes beyond the life of the project and the scope is larger than the art itself. It also requires thoughtful listening to community partners as they speak about their vision. Access leads to stewardship. The scholarship of engagement redefines our research and teaching missions to include research that addresses real-world problems and pedagogy that creates involved and committed citizens. Teaching materials from the Teaching Tolerance program of the Southern Poverty Law Center, *The Advocates for Human Rights* and *Rethinking Schools* publications are adopted or adapted to specific courses in the curriculum for ideas generation and implementation. All activities involve our university students in interdisciplinary service learning projects in Hispanic community contexts. In such contexts, students practice what they are learning in their disciplines in community settings where their work benefits others. In our case, we work closely with the Visual and Performing Arts Department (VPA), which includes photography, theatre, and art to inform and enrich our local Anglo and Latino community.

In her widely-discussed essay on “Teaching Thinking: Moral and Political Considerations,” Elizabeth Minnich asserts that, “thinking is exploratory, suggestive... holds us open and able to engage with others—thereby opening us to what is unique about individuals, contexts, and situations.” (20) And so civic learning and teaching provide a vehicle to integrate thought and action; combine diverse pedagogical approaches and educational practices; and engage students, faculty, and other partners on campus and in the community. It includes information and ideas on how students, faculty, and the local community can work together to address problems in society; how campus and community partners can collaborate in mutually beneficial ways; and how learning and teaching can contribute to higher education, civic engagement, and community change. As Malcom Gladwell points out in *The Tipping Point*,

broad change both within the scholarly institution and local community by a few people properly placed, promotes the idea of engagement. Within institutions of higher learning, civic engagement is adapted to disciplinary culture, in a context where society's expectations and need for our energy is continuously growing.

Service-learning is now recognized as a highly effective pedagogical tool in a number of studies, including that of Dilafruz Williams on preparing undergraduates for responsible political engagement by participatory activities in community settings. Simply put, students learn better by doing—by putting the knowledge they are learning in the classroom to work in the real world. Moreover, service-learning can assist institutions of higher learning bridge the gap between their campuses and local communities. One way to achieve both of these goals is to design courses that use service-learning to teach about and work toward social justice (for examples of such courses, refer to the “Profiles of Service” as posted at [www.involved.tcu.edu/sl\\_projects.asp](http://www.involved.tcu.edu/sl_projects.asp)).

Essentially, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) refer to research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it. Participatory Action Research is not just research which is hoped to be followed by action. It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them—whether that is to implement a central policy or an organizational or service change. Instead, it tries to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be

helped, determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry. Mere volunteerism does not automatically lead to speaking out on public matters, no matter how related the activity is to students' areas of concern. We need to help our students to take the lessons of their service a step further to become advocates and witnesses in direct contact with the problems of our community and the people whom these issues directly impact using the linguistic, cross-cultural, and sociopolitical skills that they are exposed to in the classroom. Indeed, a key component to participation in democracy is service. Thus, service-learning, when properly exercised, becomes both a mode of action and a method of inquiry. Service-learning necessarily engages us in the method of political inquiry. It necessarily engages us in the politics of democracy, and, by extension, life—the cornerstone of the Humanities and a liberal arts education.

### **Conclusions**

The year 2012 witnessed an increase in Latino participation in the democratic process, leading political commentators to question the continued value of anti-immigrant rhetoric. There is a national consensus about the need to reform the immigration process. The Obama administration has recently instituted a deferred action program that offers better work and educational opportunities to immigrant children. Community organizations and faith communities are eager to address the injustices in education, health, housing, and local government, but lack experience or knowledge of best practices in outreach to minority and majority communities. Institutions of higher education need to prepare the professionals of the future to bridge the growing achievement divide between immigrants and local populations. By providing programming on these issues, colleges and universities can provide community leadership that allows institutions of higher education to showcase institutional commitments to inclusivity and service learning. The interdisciplinary initiatives formed in Community-

Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) described in this essay, together with ongoing service-learning programs to complement classroom instruction and meet community needs, place civic engagement front and center as learning tools. Some strategies and lessons that proved to be particularly effective for our CBPR/PAR projects include 1) developing an in-depth understanding of the community ethnic culture; 2) developing mutual respect and trust with community members and study participants; 3) appreciating and praising community partners' knowledge, expertise, and experiences; 4) developing a sense of ownership by incorporating their needs, ideas, suggestions, and opinions and empowering study participants to make decisions concerning the study approach and wording; 5) soliciting participant feedback and clarification of study results and involving them in disseminating the study findings to their community. The mandate for our institutions of learning in the 21st century is to engage through actions as well as classroom teaching by building bridges, breaking barriers, and bringing diverse communities together in dialogue.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As of the census of 2010, the racial makeup of the city was 88.1% White, 2.3% African American, 0.4% Native American, 3.5% Asian, 3.5% from other races, and 2.1% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 12.1% of the population.

<sup>2</sup> Taller Yonke is the name of the artist collective begun by Guadalupe Serrano and Luis Diego Taddei of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. For more on Taller Yonke, refer to the following websites: <http://borderwallinthenews.blogspot.com/2011/06/binational-effort-helps-rescue-border.html> and <http://www.nuevodia.com.mx/local/buscan-proyectar-arte-nogalense-en-espana/>

<sup>3</sup> I view CBPR and PAR as a methodology within a total experiential process (ensuring satisfactory productive cycle of life and labor in human communities). The aim is to achieve “power” (a finding of voice, people power) and not merely “growth” for the grassroots population. This total process simultaneously encompasses education, research, and action, whose ultimate goal is to improve the plight of marginalized groups and to advance them toward shared goals of social change by their own participatory initiatives. It has both short-term and long-term goals.

<sup>4</sup> BorderLinks ([www.borderlinks.org](http://www.borderlinks.org)) is a bi-national non-profit organization that leads educational delegations in the exploration of border issues. It prides itself on providing a 360 degree view of border and immigration issues. BorderLinks' Mission and Vision statements are follows: Mission Statement: “BorderLinks is an international leader in experiential education that raises awareness and inspires action around global political economics. BorderLinks grew out of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980's when faith communities, universities, and other organizations rallied to advocate on behalf of thousands of refugees fleeing persecution in Central America. Today, BorderLinks' educational programs focus on issues of immigration, community formation, development, and social justice in the

borderlands between Mexico, the U.S and beyond. As a bi-national organization, BorderLinks brings people together to build bridges of solidarity across North and Latin American borders and promote intercultural understanding and respect.” Vision Statement: “BorderLinks envisions a world in which people, within and across social borders, respect and care for each other, value and celebrate differences, and build healthy and just communities where everyone has equal opportunity for a full and dignified life.”

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