

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Borders to Bridges: Awakening Critical Consciousness

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SCREENSHOT OF A STUDENT FILM FEATURING RODRIGO AS LA LUNA / THE MOON. COURTESY OF AUTHOR

In this period of mass migration, mass incarceration, and tumultuous cultural shifts, many teachers are unclear how to approach the crucial yet sensitive subjects of immigration, racism, and cultural insecurity. A toxic xenophobic atmosphere engenders myths, mistrust, false rumors, and fear of the other, loss of identity, being stereotyped, deportation, family separation, persecution, retaliation, isolation, and loss of status or job. Educators know the effects: students riddled with anxiety; some, not normally disrespectful, spouting racial and ethnic slurs while others simply withdraw, resulting in an inability to engage in the learning process. Educators also face the results of a crippling pandemic that has exposed alarming inequities. Teachers struggle with new technologies and uncertain outcomes. They juggle the demands of administrators, parents, politicians, individual students, families, and their own standards and expectations. Yet, these challenges also provide opportunities to re-imagine education for diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, belonging, resilience, and healing; opportunities for critical educators to find their place as change agents in a changing world.

The two-lesson plan-projects that follow were designed to counter anti-immigrant hostilities that increased dramatically during periods of local and national crises. Both projects aimed to empower students to practice what Isabelle Wilkerson (2020) has now called "radical empathy," an empathy rooted in awareness of social, economic, cultural, and political realities. They are part of what became *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* with supplementary sections *Personal Narratives*, and *Poetry, Prose and Short Fiction*, and related resources (Arts & Literature, News, Teacher Guides, Services).<sup>1</sup> The materials written, compiled, and edited in this *Guidebook* evolved from fifty years of teaching pre-school to graduate school in domestic and international, urban and rural schools, using arts-based creative strategies to address immigration and human rights issues for social justice. The *Guidebook*, written in collaboration with a diverse group of contributing educators and artists from thirty-two countries and fifteen states of the US, is grounded in liberatory pedagogy, arts in education, and expressive arts theories.

## Community Context for the Lessons

Martha's Vineyard, a 90 square mile island community off the coast of Massachusetts, is known as a haven for day-trippers, a wedding destination, and home of the rich and famous. However, the island is part of Dukes County, one of the poorest in the state, because of its seasonal work cycle and long months of unemployment or underemployment for year-round residents. While we have a cohesive community that comes together to lend mutual support during the off-season months, we also have a high rate of alcoholism and heroin addiction, depression, and a critical housing crisis with related stresses and tensions. Thanks to our tax base of wealthy summer residents, our schools are well equipped; yet, not unlike other US schools, our teaching staff does not represent the racial and ethnic composition of the Island.

Martha's Vineyard is the unseated territory of the Wampanoag people whose tribal council, tribal land, tribal

housing, stores, cultural center, and museum are located in Aquinnah, one of the six Island towns. Another town, Oak Bluffs, was one of the earliest resorts for African American people, attracting Black professionals, artists, and literary greats who came to the island for inspiration during the Harlem Renaissance, a tradition that is still true today (Levy). Yet while an attitude of embracing culture and difference is a unique characteristic of Martha's Vineyard, occupation of land, repression, racism, redlining, segregation, bias, classism, and sexism are also a part of its history. During the colonial period and later, whaling drew many immigrants from Portugal, the Azores, and Cape Verde. Recent immigrants who comprise a significant portion of the population since the 1980s are from Brazil. Other newcomers come from Jamaica, Eastern Europe, and Latin America among other places. There is a complicated evolving dynamic between old Vineyard working-class families, skilled laborers, and service workers, and what has been perceived as competing interests with newly arrived Brazilian workers willing to accept lower wages.

Approximately 20% of the year-round population of 18,000 is made up of Brazilian immigrants. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (2020), the current demographics of the regional high school where the lessons that follow took place reflect approximately: 66% White, 21% Latinx, 5% Black, 5% multi-race, non-Hispanic, 2% Native American, under 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander; 23% of the population whose first language is not English, 12% English language learners (ELL), over 21% students with disabilities, over 53% students with high needs, and 34% economically disadvantaged.

## Project #1 Response to a Community Crisis: Roleplay Activities, Empathy, Advocacy, Action<sup>2</sup>

The following roleplay lesson plan project, one of fifty plans later included in *Borders to Bridges*, developed as a response to a community crisis on Martha's Vineyard that stirred up xenophobia. Working in collaboration with two teaching colleagues in two schools, we developed a seven-month curriculum plan using roleplay for our second-year Spanish language classes of fifteen- to sixteen-year-old students. The plan connected our schools and classrooms, the local Spanish speaking immigrant community, the local court system, and local media. Our goal was to encourage our students to take risks, honor diversity, inquire deeply, and think globally. Below is my account of that collaboration which later transformed into one of three connected roleplay lesson plans for *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*.

In January of 2008, a tragic accident occurred in which a young white woman who had graduated from the regional high school was killed when her car crashed into a delivery van driven by an undocumented worker originally from Brazil. In Massachusetts, undocumented people are not permitted to get a driver's license. The effect of the accident was devastating in the schools and the community at large.

That year, in my second-year Spanish language class of eighteen students, nine students were Brazilian immigrants, one student was Black, one was a first-generation student with parents originally from India, and seven were white, mostly born and raised on Martha's Vineyard. There was a mixture of working class, lower-middle class, and middle-class students. All of the Brazilian students and several of the others worked after school. After the accident, the mistrust among students was palpable, as if an invisible line had been drawn splitting the classroom in half by ethnic identity. The roleplay lessons were created to promote deeper learning, community understanding and to prevent hate crimes, bullying, and cultural alienation. Slowly, over the seven-month period, we witnessed a shift in student interactions as a "team" that broke down the wall between the classroom and community.

The three classes, two from the regional high school and one from the public charter school, were divided into small groups designed so that students worked with people they did not know well. Each small group became a "family" (later changing to a "research team" and then "advocates") to work together for the seven-month duration of the unit. Each member of the group was assigned a task which rotated: timekeeper, group manager, recorder, reporter. Each "family" was assigned a country. We purposely chose a Spanish speaking country that did not reflect the backgrounds of participating students—Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay—so that everyone could experience belonging to a homeland different from their country of origin. More importantly, we had connections with community volunteers from each of those countries who guided students as "community advisors" throughout the project.

***This process was especially revealing for the students born in the US who were surprised to compare the average wages and cost-of-living in "their" adopted country to the US.***

One student from each group was assigned the role of sole wage earner for their "family" and given a profession (teacher, farmer, doctor, accountant, landscaper). These jobs reflected the professions of our community advisors. The other three students of the small group decided what family relationship they had to the provider (husband, in-law, grandparent, child). The "family" was given the name of the town or city where they lived, but they had to research and use currency conversion tools to understand what their family income would be, the cost of basic necessities of food, housing, clothing, and hygiene. Using Google Earth, they found a home and neighborhood. This process was especially revealing for the students born in the US who were surprised to compare the average wages and cost-of-living in "their" adopted country to the US. Students shouted in disbelief at the wages of a teacher in Uruguay or an accountant in Chile. They were shocked to discover the income of a doctor in a Guatemalan clinic. The prices for basic food and clothing were sometimes higher than in the US, despite the

significantly lower wages. Their findings and reactions were recorded and later reported to the whole class.

Meanwhile, and throughout the unit, the regular curriculum was incorporated and assessed and, when possible, related to the roleplay activities. In this way, the subject curriculum was enhanced by assigning students tasks like writing a self-portrait in Spanish of their roleplay character; studying literature, tradition, music, history, and culture of their roleplay countries; giving group presentations of their "families" with research findings; keeping a journal; and conducting oral history interviews with the community advisors. During the group process in class, students were purposely not graded or evaluated in order to preserve an open, non-threatening, exploratory atmosphere for teamwork.

Once students had enough information about their countries and families, the three classes organized a luncheon in the Culinary Arts Dining area to invite the community advisors to share their life stories, to listen to what the students had discovered and give their perspectives, answer questions, and eat food students prepared from authentic recipes. We had engaging guest advisors who were tolerant of mistakes, appreciative of the food, and interested in what the students had learned about their countries of origin. The advisors included: a highly regarded artist ceramicist from Uruguay with an enchanting sense of humor, interesting philosophical views, and stories of escaping from the authoritarian military dictatorship as a young man; a young doctor from Guatemala who had worked in a women's clinic in a mountainside village, living through the repression of the civil war, the military coup, and struggles for democracy in her country; an accountant from Chile who had experienced family trauma during the Pinochet regime and discrimination because of her indigenous Mapuche roots; a landscaper from Mexico who shared his extensive knowledge of Mexican history and his critical perspective of immigrant life in the US; and a young woman from Ecuador who talked about her rich cultural background and the struggles of coming to the US with two young children, and studying English to become a teacher.

Because the luncheon exchange was conducted in Spanish, learning the language became relational, challenging, and stimulating. Students were invested in knowing about "their" country and were surprised to successfully communicate with native speakers. Our advisors served as role models for newcomers while being admired by all the students. They provided new perspectives, and the students identified with their struggles learning a new language. Students from the three participating classes collaborated with groups assigned to the same country, sharing information.

In the next roleplay activity, the teachers gave each group a crisis to deal with that was based on a political or natural disaster that had actually occurred in their country. Students researched those events, assessed, recorded, and imagined what the impact on their "family" might be. Then, each group received a letter from "Tío Juan," a lost relative who had immigrated to the US. This "uncle" had heard about the crisis and invited them to come find work and a better life in his new home (our town) in the US. As a family, they

pondered a response, weighed the possibilities of splitting up the family, or not leaving, and facing the results of the crisis, or leaving together to encounter the challenges of living undocumented in a country whose language, customs, and laws were foreign to them. By this time, at least three months into the project, the relationships inside the groups had evolved enough to have a heartfelt conversation about the dilemma. It was during these discussions that students began to recognize the risks and complexity of migration.

In the following phase, students roleplayed as researchers diagramming two parallel timelines from the 1900s to the present, one of important historical events in their roleplay country and the other of the relationship with the US. The information was shared with the whole class, and alarming comparisons were made such as military or policy interventions of the US in each of the countries studied.

The final roleplay activity shifted focus. Each small group became a legal team of advocates who were charged with proposing changes to laws around immigration. Each group was given a topic and a packet of facts and information from the Immigrant Learning Center and other sources about common immigration misconceptions around crime, taxes, entrepreneurship, ethics, welfare, and work. They then researched their topic further and as a group wrote an argument in Spanish to make immigration laws fairer. During the advocacy stage, a bilingual judge visited classes to advise the students as if they were young law students. The student advocate groups then prepared for a field trip to the Dukes County Courthouse to present their final proposals in Spanish to the judge. Community advisors and local media attended the courtroom hearings. Students were passionate advocates and called on characters from their "families" as witnesses to testify, for example, to back a law for community safety allowing undocumented people to legally apply for drivers' licenses and car insurance to be able to carry out the essential work they do for the community.

In my many years as an educator, I have never witnessed such a remarkable growth of proficiency in language acquisition by second-year students. Vocabulary, grammar, history, and culture lessons were incorporated in the assignments organically. Throughout the seven months, we assigned related essays and received profound student reflections on the unit as part of their midterm and final exams. The beneficial intersection of arts and experiential learning, friendly competition, and collaborations engendered meaningful dialoguing as students confronted real-life challenges and advocated for policy change which directly related to a crisis situation they were experiencing. In that way, these lessons become a vehicle for empowerment and application of learned skills with an immediate and a long-term impact beyond the classroom.

In preparing for this article, I contacted a former student for insights. I remembered that Nick, who grew up on the Island, played a positive role in class. As a part of the soccer team, he had more contact than other white students with his Brazilian teammates. His sense of humor and friendly manner made him a constructive member of his small group. I also recalled that, like other students in that

class, he had little interest in learning Spanish at the time and treated the initial roleplay family activity as an awkward exercise. But as the work continued, he became more and more engaged. It was Nick that gave the testimony in the final courthouse hearing as a "teacher" from Uruguay who had left to support his family after the political crisis in his country. He argued to the judge that working as a landscaper on Martha's Vineyard, he needed a driver's license to transport equipment. Here are Nick's words from our recent conversation (January 2021):

At that age, a seven-month project was probably the most immersive experience of my education to date. It forced a different way of thinking than the week or month-long assignments that were the norm. It also served to put you in someone else's shoes for that extended period of time, as compared to more narrow views of the perspectives of others that I had more commonly encountered.... I do remember coming away with a better understanding that all Central and South American countries are not a monolith. They have different sets of challenges and beliefs.... Coming from a place of privilege, that was one of the first and only times I have been inside that courthouse. Being there in a situation that forced me to keep in mind the realities of how someone viewed as 'different' would be treated wasn't something I had encountered before. Especially in an environment like the Vineyard, which for all its incredible qualities is not the most diverse place. That was valuable to me.

As was later revealed, the young woman who was killed in the accident that had brought out underlying racial and ethnic tensions was driving her car at over 80 miles an hour (the speed limit was 35 mph) at 10:30pm (when streets are empty) and was legally intoxicated when she crashed into the van which pulled out of an intersection at nine miles per hour. Long before these details and the state toxicology report were publicly released, our project was under way and the resulting positive changes in our classrooms—attitudes, sensitivity, awareness, and school environment—were substantial. Beyond that, connections were made among the Spanish-speaking immigrant community from which we drew our "community advisors," the Brazilian students and their families, and the larger island community through media coverage of our mock courtroom hearings.<sup>3</sup>

## Project #2 Response to a National Crisis: A Film for Building Community, Inclusion, and Engagement

The school year began with 9/11. Karla Cornejo Villavicencio in her book *The Undocumented Americans* (2020) explains that thousands of undocumented workers in New York City cleaned up the ruins of the attacks, unprotected, often exploited, exposed to hazardous conditions that would permanently damage their health. "Because the antithesis of an American is an immigrant and because we could not be victims in the public eye, we became subjects. And September 11 changed the immigration landscape forever" (pp. 40-41). There were more stringent immigration laws; repressive, militarized

security forces; police cooperation with Homeland Security; private prisons running detention centers; the creation of ICE, increased deportations; and racial profiling.

The national changes in policy intended to combat terrorism had the effect of creating xenophobic aggression, exclusion, erasure, and anti-immigrant fervor that reverberated in our communities and classrooms. In the aftermath of 9/11, even as our nation was closing ports and tightening borders, there was an urge by many to challenge cultural prejudice and resist nativism and isolationist policies. Our post-9/11 film project reflected a collective need for empathy, self-expression, positive identity, and inclusion rather than exclusion.

That year, I had a particularly creative group of globally concerned students. Building on their expertise and energy, and the confidence that the arts provide a pathway to immerse students in rigorous learning that sparks empathy and agency, we had a potential movie crew. In my third-year Spanish class, we were reading *Bodas de Sangre/ Blood Wedding* by Federico García Lorca, a lyrical play that teens relate to because it captures the struggle for identity, the torture of repressed passion, forbidden love, warring families with entrenched biases, rebellion from inhibiting structures of society. The contents of the play and the tragic ending of senseless violence and death resonated fiercely that 9/11 year. The students in that third-year class took the initiative to transform Lorca’s play into a script for a movie, creating the framework so that the project could expand to

the Spanish Club and other 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes to fully orchestrate the production.

The project began in October 2001 and finished in May 2002 with a screening of a student created, full-length film adaptation of García Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre/ Blood Wedding* in Spanish with English subtitles. Seventy students from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades participated as actors, directors of photography, editors, musicians/composers, writers, dancers/choreographers, designers, location scout, lighting, make-up artists, subtitle translation crew, graphic artists, line coaches, assistant director, publicity, consultants, and more. The 800-seat capacity school auditorium was filled, and the YouTube video of the production is still shared in classrooms twenty years later (available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xu2eqfdpjUY>).

Lorca’s poetic words from 1930s Spain remained in our screenplay, but the settings, costumes, and characters molded to our contemporary community. Horses became a motorcycle carrying the runaway Bride escaping her wedding celebration with her lover; the Woodsmen became buskers outside a convenience store; the knife fight took place in a backyard; and the Beggar was draped in a Mexican blanket donated by the secondhand store. The powerful Moon character sang his death threats over and over, “Tengo hambre/ I am hungry,” while multiple moons repeated the phrase in a chorus of eight languages, including Yoruba, Turkish, and Vietnamese, with faces half covered in white grease paint before a green screen upon which the image of a full moon was imposed.



TOP LEFT: RODRIGO – LA LUNA / THE MOON  
BOTTOM LEFT: ASOKA- YORUBA MOON

TOP CENTER: LUKE – EL MENDIGO / THE BEGGAR  
BOTTOM CENTER: LUISINA -ARGENTINEAN MOON

TOP RIGHT: KIM – VIETNAMESE MOON  
BOTTOM RIGHT: EBRU – TURKISH MOON

All participants gained new skills. I learned how to direct a production by encouraging each student to play an active role in their own development, to enjoy the process, laugh at our imperfections, and value each person's contributions. I also arranged coaching with Spanish speaking friends, intervened when an infuriated father found the red kimono costume too suggestive for his daughter, and connected with other parents and families who were supportive and grateful to see their children so engaged, laboring for hours, immersed as a team in a protracted school activity. An important goal agreed upon by all was to be flexible and inclusive. We intentionally extended participation to students who were immigrants or of mixed status, their families from Vietnam, Turkey, Nigeria, Germany, Peru, Bolivia, Hungary, Holland, Romania, France, Argentina, Korea, China, and Brazil. My personal goal was to find ways for our newcomers from Brazil to be an integral part of the film.

Our Brazilian student population was increasing, but with the exception of soccer, few of the newcomers participated in after school activities due to jobs or demands from family and church. One recently arrived Brazilian student in my first-year Spanish language class, for example, spoke no English and worked forty hours a week after school as a hotel chamber maid. To feel welcomed, she needed to socialize, but the only way she and others could be involved in filming activities was to have rehearsals and filming accommodate their work schedules and get support from other teachers and classmates. Consequently, the collectivity of the group was tightened which intensified the impact.

The following year, while on sabbatical in graduate school, I had the opportunity to reflect and analyze the process while examining the high dropout rate from high school among Latinx and recent immigrants nationally. I studied the impact of the arts to engage students and counter that "early-exiter" trend. Encouraged by a professor to do a case study based on our *Bodas de Sangre* movie project, I interviewed thirty-three people related to the film, including students, parents, teachers and administrators, Latinx community members, professors, and a Brazilian Fulbright scholar at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. I have transcribed some of the voices of the newcomers below (see *Breaking Silence/ Linking Voices*. YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjFFjBb-TCc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjFFjBb-TCc&feature=emb_logo)).

Rodrigo first welcomed me to the living room of his home as we watched excerpts from the videotape of the *Bodas de Sangre* movie projected onto a small television screen filled with the powerful image of him in the role of the Moon. Listening again to his original jazz interpretation of Lorca's words, sung with impeccable Spanish and deep emotion, I marveled at his talent and amazing voice. I also remembered how difficult it was to schedule him for rehearsal and filming because of his responsibilities for the evangelical church where Rodrigo's father was the pastor.

Rodrigo is exceptionally friendly, always exuding kindness and appreciation of life and learning; yet in the interview, he shared a profound sadness describing the pain of prejudice.

I've been in this country for five years, and I was born in Brazil. When I came here ... it just gave me like a shock because I never thought that I would face a second culture ... different than the one I had learned ... the first 12 years of my life .... I learned how to deal with it .... In the beginning, kids when they are like very ignorant, they don't know what they are doing or what's happening around them. I heard lots of 'Oh, my God, when are these Brazilians gonna get out of here'.... So, it was kind of like saddening for me because I'd never thought that I'd hear such things .... I learned how to just overhear that ... like when you hear something sometimes you put it down in your heart and sometimes it just goes through your ear .... I learned how not to listen.

Rodrigo described being in the movie as something that "shaped him" and made him "a very lived person."

Before my second interview with Rodrigo, I followed him around the school with my camera capturing his affable gestures and high-fives with every student he passed in the hallways. I was impressed with how much he had become an admired school leader. I learned later that despite his popularity, when he was invited to sing the national anthem at a football game, he heard the remark "these fucking spics" murmured loudly enough to hurt. Our interview continued in the photography shop where he worked every day after school except for Fridays when he volunteered at the hospital. Rodrigo's ambition since he was two-years old was to become a physician.

In our recent conversations (March 2021), Rodrigo said, "Things didn't quite work out the way I planned... I didn't have a green card when I graduated high school, so I had to go into the workforce until the paperwork came through." After 9/11, his father was ordered to reprocess his green card application which postponed Rodrigo's plan to go to college for three years. By that time, he felt discouraged at the thought of many years of training in medical school. "I started out with business classes at the community college, paid for by the local bank I worked at, and then switched to computer engineering." Rodrigo needed to get away from the confines of the Church. He knew he was gay and could not come out to his parents yet, nor could he remain in the "toxic" environment among evangelicals. Because he is resourceful, bright, and brave, he managed on his own to transfer with a full scholarship to the University of Southern California where he could be himself in the sunshine of the other coast.

Rodrigo described going through a period of concern that affirmative action was the reason for his acceptance to USC until he discovered that wealthy white students had test prep tutoring, influential family members promising funding, a sense of entitlement, and other advantages. Rodrigo now works for Microsoft as a programmer, mentors others entering the field, does outreach and recruiting, and is active in the LGBTQ movement. Happy with his career and life, he was recently able to be open with his family about his life choices. He describes a touching discussion with his father who confessed that he was worried that his son would never be married; but he let Rodrigo know he will always be loved.

Andre came to the US from Brazil at fifteen and taught himself English by watching television. His main role in the film was as the director of subtitles, although he acted in some scenes as well. His native language is Portuguese, yet he managed to translate from Spanish to English and to match the text with the action of the film. I'd often see him in the computer room doing this detailed work with professional precision. He arrived in high school mid-year as a junior and regretted not having the full experience. Yet, within a year, he was translating subtitles using three languages.

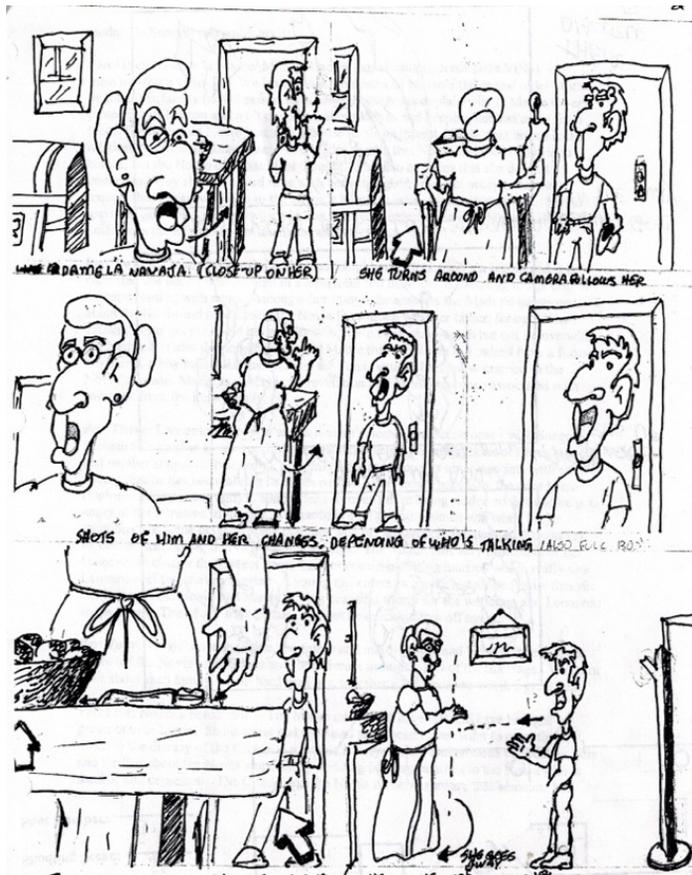
When I conducted case study interviews in 2003, Andre had graduated from high school. I found him at his job in a video store and later we chatted on the porch at his girlfriend's house. "High school just made me like keep growing a bit more so I can go to college, get better, better everything." He pondered his part in the film production modestly. But the smile on his face gave away the pride he felt as he listed the tasks he accomplished and the skills he gained.

In recent conversations with Andre (March 2021), he shared that after graduation his parents returned to Brazil, and he had to work to survive, postponing his dream of going to college. Now he is a new dad with a secure job in financial services and has worked gradually on completing his bachelor's degree in IT and Business at UMass Lowell. When asked what working on the film meant to him, he said "the biggest impact to me is that some experiences will stay

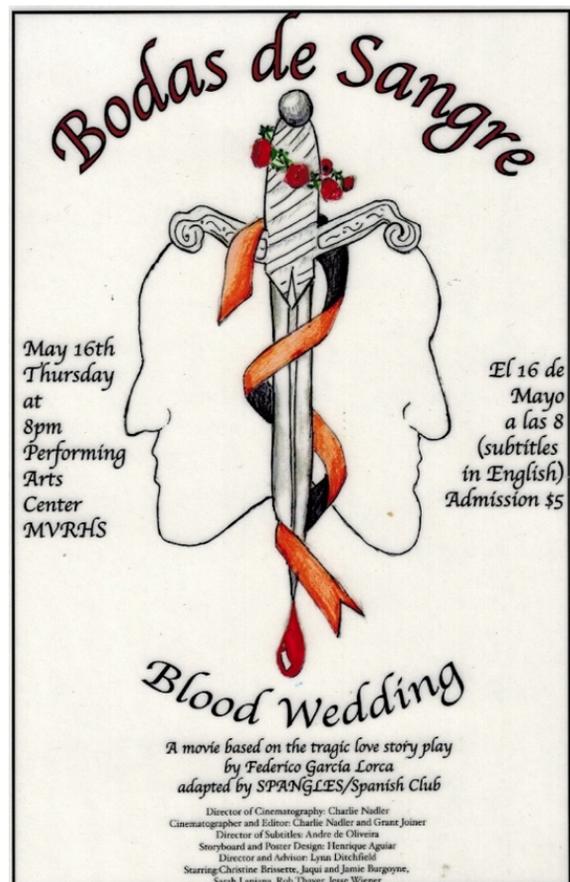
with you no matter how much time has gone by, while others will be buried in your memory somewhere. So, it's important to focus on the moment in order to make the best of everything."

Henrique was seven when his father first left Brazil to get work in the US. Six years later in 2000, he brought the whole family to Martha's Vineyard. After school, Henrique worked in a restaurant, but he was able to create an outline for the storyboard in art class during school. At home after work, while completing assignments for school, he captured the progression of each scene of the film in fifty-one pages of meticulous artistry and aesthetic vision. He described his dedication and fierce discipline as storyboard designer and art director of the film: "I started getting ideas in my head... it was a new experience that I really wanted to try."

When I interviewed Henrique for the case study in 2003, he was immersed in a project at school in the art room, surrounded by paints and brushes, pens and paper. He was an outstanding student who excelled academically as well as being an extraordinary artist. In order to create the storyboard, Henrique, who was a sophomore, had to comprehend Lorca's play in Spanish on his own because his second-year class was not yet reading complicated literature. He consulted with the director of photography, a senior familiar with the play, and together formulated each shot. Although he was reserved and had no desire to act, to please the group he joined the cast during the celebration scene, taking the silent role of wedding photographer.



LEFT: SAMPLE PAGE OF STORYBOARD BY HENRIQUE



RIGHT: POSTER BY ARTIST HENRIQUE AGUIAR

In recent conversations with Henrique (March 2021), I learned that he went to film school and lived in NYC for six years working on independent films and a Brazilian television show that interviewed local immigrants. He credits participation in *Bodas* as the spark that influenced his choice to go to film school. When he could not earn enough income to survive in NY and his part-time film jobs did not allow him to use his creative abilities, he decided to go back to school to earn a double degree in computer science and math at UMass Amherst. I reminded him that in high school he mentioned he wanted to be a lawyer, and I asked if he regretted studying film. Here's his response:

I'd say lawyer because I did not know what I really wanted.... The movie [*Bodas*] certainly gave me more confidence. I never regretted going to film school, although it didn't work out as I intended. I had an amazing experience in the profession and in NYC. I had a chance to express my ideas and creativity in a new media. I lived and loved every second of it. When I look at the bigger picture, choosing film changed the path of my life.... These experiences shape you and become part of your life story.... The value of the experience is something I wouldn't trade for anything.

Today Henrique, like Andre, is a new dad. He enjoys his work as a systems analyst for an investment company, but misses working creatively. "Film is still in my mind, but unfortunately, it is on the back burner for now."

In 2003, when I interviewed Fabricia for the case study, I was pleased to see her progress in learning English and observed the confidence she expressed in the same school environment that overwhelmed her when we first met. She said, "I work at a hotel about 40 hours per week and study. It is hard. But you have to try to get a good future.... I did a part of the movie last year and I didn't speak any English, so now I'm speaking like a little bit more. It was really nice. I love it, and I really want to do it again. And I recommend for everyone."

In *Bodas de Sangre*, she had played a small role in the wedding scene. To make sure she could participate, we coordinated with thirty cast members to film before she had to work and provided a ride so she would not be late. A blonde wig, a colorful scarf, and a fancy hat were enough to transform this shy young woman into a vibrant actress enjoying new friends and owning her contribution. Fabricia did indeed "do it again" two years after the *Bodas* movie project. In her third-year Spanish class, Fabricia played the lead role in a mystery film script we wrote in class. Henrique, by then a senior, shot and edited the DVD which was aired on public access television.

When I visited with Fabricia two years ago, she still spoke with appreciation for the time we had spent together making movies. She had been a student in danger of exiting early from high school, but her inclusion in creative school projects kept her engaged, and her participation fostered the self-confidence she needed to graduate. Rather than pursue her dream to study journalism, Fabricia continued to work in hotels after high school to send money to her family in Brazil. Eventually, she got promoted to what she considered an ideal job cleaning and maintaining properties owned by a wealthy newspaper executive who provided free

housing for her, her husband, and new baby. He also helped her procure a green card making it possible to visit her family in Brazil and to introduce them to her child. I found out just after our reunion that the executive had suddenly died, and her living situation was again precarious. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate her since. I had hoped to encourage Fabricia to take community college courses in the future because my bias is that education is the pathway to greater satisfaction. I wonder now if Fabricia's dreams were more constrained due to gender as well as social class restrictions. From an early age, she was burdened with financial responsibilities to her family in Brazil, yet she had been separated from them since her early teens. All four of the newcomer students shared experiences of sacrifice and deferred choices. Yet, most importantly, they all exhibit wisdom, strength, and resilience as they navigate their adult lives.

I also gathered feedback from recent conversations (March 2021) with other former students with major roles in the *Bodas* project. All four are women who were born and raised on Martha's Vineyard, white and brown, from working-and middle-class families, college graduates, three with master's degrees, all with jobs in helping professions – two in conservation of land and water, one an elementary Spanish teacher, the other a public health nurse. All have done service work in Latin America – in a women's clinic in the Dominican Republic, in an orphanage in Guatemala, building a playground in Peru – exposing them, according to Jennifer, "to both global inequalities and our common humanity ... an experience I carry with me to this day. It was my experience in high school that first sparked my interest ... in creating a sense of inclusion and belonging. [It] planted the seed" (Jennifer Sepanara, conversation March 2021). Jamie Burgoyne in a conversation in March 2021 recalled:

Being a part of the production showed me how my part connected and influenced the roles of others.... I did a poor job of memorizing my lines the days/weeks before the scene was to be shot, however, there was no way I could bail on the responsibility... others were depending on me, imperfections and all...how one's actions can affect the group as a whole... [T]he movie gave me a chance to collaborate and SEE others, students that were not usually a part of my peer group... Brazilian immigrant students, Asian, international students, and students of color in particular. I remember being so wowed .... [It] helped me to build empathy for different communities and cultures around me ... so affirming to my personal life choices.... The message was: get involved.

Students and professors interviewed in the 2003 case study generally agreed that the film project stimulated immersion in the "magic" of the work, collaborating as a team, being recognized by and recognizing the accomplishments of others, and fulfilling their commitment to themselves, the audience, and community.

These collective conversations confirm the power of the arts in education especially during a crisis period. Henrique says, "9/11 was definitely a shocking moment, but my life influences and focus were tied to my family here and my friends and extended family in Brazil.... My family was still planning on going back and making a living there.... Looking

back, I see how the movie brought so many students together whose backgrounds are so different.... It may have helped with the healing.”

Andre’s words sum up much of what I’d hoped to give my students:

[9/11] was the first time that I experienced the difference between patriotism and nationalism. I watched the nation band together in unison to heal, while simultaneously noticing the animosity that brewed for those who were considered outsiders.... The *Bodas* project to me represented the best of inclusivity and what people from everywhere can accomplish when they work together with a common goal.

## Conclusion

Although both projects emerged from crises - the first, a local accident that shook our small island community, the other a shock to the nation with local repercussions - these lessons must not be reserved for extraordinary moments of crises.

Community and the arts, these two essential ingredients, help students affirm their self-worth. Community with its dynamic diversity in nationality, culture, age, and expertise is a vital resource for teaching all students, particularly immigrant/migrant students, by infusing a sense of belonging. The arts and collaborative artmaking provide a pathway for engaging in learning for students to reach beyond themselves. Bridging classroom and community in mutual exchange and relationship inspires students to participate in society with compassion and curiosity, building a more humanizing transformation of the world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Note that *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* is not yet published; however, updated information, resources and teacher guides are in *Focus on Immigration Education and Stories Through the Arts* (FIESTA; <https://fiesta-immigrationfocus.com>)

<sup>2</sup>In *Borders to Bridges* curriculum, the instructions detail nineteen steps divided into seven 45-minute sessions: (1) Family Groups; (2) Crisis in Towns; (3) Gathering with Community Advisors; (4) Research Investigation; (5) Advocacy Research and Preparation; (6) Courtroom (or public) Hearing; (7) Conclusion Assessment, and countries changed to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to focus on asylum seekers at the border.

<sup>3</sup>This project was devised with Spanish teachers Victoria Dryfoos and Justine Shemeth DeOliveira in collaboration with Judge Liza Williamson.

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