

Dearest Colleagues,

Borders are not unfamiliar to us and neither are the literal or nuanced details of them. As “locals,” we entered this institute extremely excited, and yearning to learn more about the nuances of this particular region. The immediate goal was for us to add another layer to our professional expertise even though life had already afforded us with rich personal and professional experiences with Latinx, Hispanic, and Spanish peoples. However, we walked away with much more than the additional proverbial “feather in our cap” during our time in the Borderlands Summer Institute.

In our very first meeting at the Borderlands Institute, Joseph and Ignacio said, “Our border has a life that is full of paradoxes,” and then asked us to use the following weeks to examine and consider as many of those paradoxes as we could. That life comes into the stories that are here, but untold. That life presents itself in the struggles of Borderland people trying to navigate their way through life and the triumphs navigating systems that were not designed to include them. The life is in run of the mill I-10 traffic and the majesty of the Franklin Mountains. One would think that we were aware of borderland paradoxes, but it wasn’t until the institute that we caught ourselves speaking one. We called both our ancestral birthplace and El Paso...Home.

We live in a world that attaches words like “heroes” and “villains” to things. This institute taught us that labels are flat and one dimensional. As teachers, it is our role to be aware of the societal constructs and labels that are usually stereotypical so that our students do not walk away with misconceptions of others or of themselves. However, what the institute helped us understand, is that borders are not just about people or ideas; but the political, social, and the economic. More importantly, it is also the physical borders that we put up for ourselves. It is also the borders we can perpetuate as we practice our profession.

“The Border,” as a concept, border people, and the border as a physical landscape are not one dimensional. The border is not just the south, but it also includes the north, east, and west. Border people are mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. They are conflicted and resolute. They celebrate and mourn. They love and experience regret. They live with dissidence and they also conform. They have success and experience failures. The border is “The Wall,” but it is also our Franklin Mountains. The border is the relentless sun, and it is also desert flowers. It is Mariachi, cumbia, hip-hop, and country. It is Folklorico. It is ballet. It is the authors of Cinco Punto Press and it is Shakespeare.

We will carry what we learned back to the classroom, not just as implemented lesson plans and curriculum. During these past two weeks, you have provided us with the space to reflect on our pedagogy. We will become more intentional in the way we engage and encourage our students to question their own thoughts about themselves as “Border people,” by breaking the borders that we have inadvertently created within the classroom. In these past two weeks, you have all gifted us with the lifelong tools that are needed to continue the process of transforming ourselves as people. Our time together has changed us in that you have given us a deeper understanding of ourselves.

You have inspired us to keep going, to keep questioning. We are delighted to know that we have allies across this country who recognize the nuances of The Borderland but are unafraid of doing the work to learn more.

This is the beginning,

Alisia & Miguel