Beyond the Classroom: Global Education for Girls

By: Victoria Ford



La Bruja.
Photo credit: supplied by artist

How do young women learn?

Here, elsewhere?

How is their learning process, their educational success, influenced by social, cultural, political, economic factors and more?

Because such questions (and more) are worth exploring, Ocean County College offers the six-week pilot program, "Beyond the Classroom: Global Education for Girls," Oct. 3 to Nov. 11 in conjunction with Georgian Court University and Toms River Library.

Mark Wilson is the college's Director of Cultural Affairs and runs the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts. He also teaches World Music. "I bring performance artists here to help spread cultural awareness," he explained. He imparts to students how music ties us all together, unites us as a human race. He is a father of five.

About a year and a half ago, Wilson was inspired by a work of art he saw on display at Bergen County Community College by Mary Mihelic, painter of the "53 Running Girls" series, works depicting the girls running away from the militant group Boko Haram, which denounces women's education in favor of cooking and sexual slavery. "The art reflects on war under the guise of religion, religious freedom, education for women, and global feminism," according to the artist.

The program's objective, then, is to highlight the importance of education, with a focus on the ways in which young women are educated around the world, and ultimately to stop the cycle of interrupted educations, i.e. intermittent college attendance, as opposed to continuous. It's a struggle many OCC students face, due to the lingering economic effects of Superstorm Sandy, Wilson said – and the topics covered in "Beyond the Classroom" may relate such struggles on a global scale.

To pluck but one spectacular example out of the lineup of events scheduled for those six weeks, the visually arresting, lyrically questing, verbal powerhouse of poetry and spoken word known as "La Bruja" ("The Witch") will conduct some workshops with the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission and give a mini-performance with OCC and Georgian Court.

On Wednesday, Oct. 19, at 10:30 a.m. and noon, Caridad De La Luz, a.k.a. La Bruja, delivers "a melting pot of urban rhymes, Nuyorican anecdotes, comedic

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tales, musical renditions and heart-warming storytelling," followed by a Q&A session wherein the audience is encouraged to interact and ask questions in both English and Spanish. Her message is geared toward middle- and high-school-aged audiences.



La Bruja in concert.
Photo credit: supplied by artist

De La Luz was born and raised in the Bronx and is regarded as a world-class poet and performance artist. Her poetic rhyme skills have carried her throughout the world, the World Wide Web, and good old TV, film, theater and radio. The Bronx Living Legend has won numerous awards for her Puerto Rican heritage and her writing and has taught poetry workshops to young people throughout the country.

Investigate **labrujamusic.com.**

The program ties together the talents and strengths of many women in many capacities:

Mihelic's friend Joan Osariemen Oviawe, who teaches at Cornell University and helps build schools in Nigeria;

Jenny Nordberg, author of *The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan* (first-year seminar students will read her book, which follows the lives and social hierarchy of girls in Afghanistan, detailing parents' difficult task of raising daughters as sons);

Actor Piper Perabo, originally from Toms River, her husband a movie director, to lead a talk during the screenwriting series;

Protest singer-songwriter Emel Mathlouthi, hailed as "the voice of the Tunisian revolution"; and

Crystal Bowersox, runner-up on Season 9 of "American Idol."

The program and its special events are not exclusively for students but also for members of the greater community to come together to have conversations about important issues in a safe environment, Wilson explained.

Because it's a pilot program, focus groups and opinion surveys will take the temperature of its various components to gauge their effectiveness. A video diary project will record lectures and take feedback, confessional-style, so citizens and students of the future can know what Ocean County residents thought about girls' education in the early 21st century.

To Wilson, the whole structure of the program is exciting, the idea of bringing diverse speakers to connect with a diverse audience.

"We believe education is an important tool to succeed," he said.

Some events are free to attend, and some are not; check the Grunin Center's 2016-2017 season (at **grunincenter.org**) for details. The acts scheduled for October and November are primarily female-centric, with the exceptions of the New Jersey Tap Ensemble Oct. 9; Ramsey Lewis and John Pizzarelli Oct. 16; and Arlo Guthrie Nov. 10.