



The Great Border

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From the Editors: The Great Border

Michael Kelly, Michael Lauderdale and Noel Landuyt

Volume 12, Numbers 2 and 3, begin a new dimension of our work on professional continuing education. *Professional Development* is the only journal in the human services devoted to academic and practice experts examining the process by which professionals meet their obligations to their client systems and the public via continuous learning, certification, and licensure. The journal has, of course, continued to publish commissioned papers, special issues, and submitted articles such as seen in Volume 12, Number 1, and other previous issues.

Volume 12, Numbers 2 and 3, are special issues devoted to an expanded concept of adult learning and professional development. This new dimension is encouragement of the careful examination of emerging social, political, and economic issues which will impact society and thus shape the profession. It combines academic and practice perspectives on emerging issues with issues drawn from the popular media, the press, and internet sources. The approach combines in-depth knowledge and analysis with reportage, recognizing that much information now comes from non-print sources. We see this as a combination of popular-knowledge development with focused analysis and skillful professional interpretation.

Our Great Border with Mexico

The popular media are brimming with news, both fearful and hopeful, of the U.S. economic crisis and the new administration's efforts to restore confidence and integrity in our basic institutions. While the U.S. crisis has focused our attention on job loss, financial bailouts, and administration missteps, we do not seem to have noticed that the crisis is global. The global economy looks to the American experience for guidance, and sees the U.S. as a unique example of how to address these concerns. As important as these issues are to all of us, we ask readers to consider how one looming, but overlooked, social issue

may have greater political, social, and economic impacts on the U.S. than all of our other "foreign" concerns from anywhere on the globe. In this issue and the next of Volume 12, we examine an issue that is both "foreign" and "domestic" and which may require our attention as suddenly and overwhelmingly as has our recession/depression.

Long considered a unique geographic situation for Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, which border Mexico, La Frontera has become a great concern for the entire U.S. For most Americans outside those border states, "our great southern border" with Mexico is a foreign concern. The agricultural Midwest, the industrial Northeast, the Northern Pacific coast are, seemingly, not affected by events in that remote area. However, in recent years, U.S. citizens have worried about illegal immigration sapping U.S. resources and the southern border as a possible infiltration route for truly foreign terrorists. With a strengthened border patrol supplemented by volunteer vigilantes patrolling the border in their own vehicles and the Texas Border Sheriffs Association video surveillance system available on the internet to volunteer border watchers, we are confident that with "eyes on the border" supplementing the extended walls and law enforcement strengthened by U.S. armed forces if necessary, we will keep the problems down there -- that vigilance and fences will contain the problem on the border.

More recently, though, we have become concerned with the violence orchestrated by the large, well-organized drug cartels of Mexico. Daily news is filled with stories of murder and torture on the border, within all of Mexico and, sometimes, across the border into the U.S. Reports from Ciudad Juarez, the twin city of El Paso, Texas, tell of drug violence so severe that Mexican Federal Police and local authorities are hopelessly outgunned by the cartels. Cartel heads give orders and force mayors, judges, and police officials to renounce their responsibilities or face

death and the murder of their families. These Mexican officials often seek asylum across the border in the U.S.

Mexico's President has sent a large number of army units to enforce order, and the U.S. homeland security secretary has drawn up an emergency plan so that American troops can be sent to the border areas if it becomes necessary. The Drug Enforcement Agency reports that over 250 U.S. cities have cartel members stationed there to ensure that drugs travel into the U.S., and the vast cash supply the drug sales create returns to Mexico or remains under the control of the cartel unmolested by rivals or law enforcement. TV news reports that Mexican-American youth are recruited to serve on assassination squads in the U.S. *Forbes* magazine's most recent list of "self made" billionaires includes a Mexican drug cartel overlord.

While the drug and human trafficking, drug violence, and disruption of civil authority are sensational stories for the media, there is a much larger story which can only be told through careful examination. For example, two of the editors authored a study twenty years ago documenting the movement of the interior Mexican population to the border in response to Mexico's development of maquiladoras. These Mexican factories provide a low-cost workforce for labor-intensive products for U.S. and world manufacturing. The maquilas have been a significant source of economic stability for the border but with export business, particularly the U.S. automobile industry, in difficulty, where will the work force of shuttered factories go? Will they return to the Mexican interior lands of small villages and ranches from which they came or will they surge northward to the U.S.? Also Mexican guest workers, legal and illegal, working in the U.S., send wages back to Mexico to support their wives, children, and parents. That total return is estimated to equal 20% of Mexico total gross domestic economy.

As the U.S. economy seeks a bottom level of

performance, our depression becomes their economic disaster. What will be the consequences for the 15 to 30 million Mexicans that reside in the United States if there are no entry-level jobs for them, jobs that they have assumed in the last thirty year expansion of the American economy. Jobs as roofers, kitchen help, yard tenders, and landscapers have been the mainstay for many of these as well as work in the agricultural and food processing fields. Will anger among displaced American workers be directed toward foreign workers? What will be the impact on Mexican Americans, the largest U.S. minority? How will these issues affect community safety, housing, employment, health care, and nutrition -- all parts of social work practice areas?

These are only a few of the larger issues from which we must not let our attention stray. The U.S. market for drugs and sales of U.S. arms to Mexico are enormous economic issues with important social and political consequences. Mexico's future as a stable nation state may well depend upon active understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and the Obama administration. However, as this issue and the next will detail, the U.S. and Mexico have a long, intertwined, and complex relationship as nation states that, while close geographically and economically, are possibly as distant in history and political futures as two countries can be.

Why should the U.S. care about yet another "distant neighbor's" issues? That is the seminal issue we will explore in last two issues of Volume 12.

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