

## Preface

This booklet works as a tool box. We want this booklet to be read and used thinking on the political dimensions that are part of the cultural mediation as an approach between the artistic practices and the communities, especially, the ones of girls and young girls of color or minorities. The program Voces en Acción<sup>1</sup> (VEA) or Voices in Action (VEA) founded under the leadership of Dr. Arcea Zapata de Aston, is working thanks to the One Time Grant: Girls of Color Voice and Vision, from Kentucky Foundation for Women, and it has as a goal to generate effective and attractive instances of cultural participation through the artistic workshops whose drive are to maximize a conscience around its culture, identity, and territory and with this, to promote processes of leadership and empowerment for young women living in a hostile and patriarchal society. This program involves young women, Latin women, and women of color (whose communities continue to be considered marginal communities) in artistic activities, including music, painting, dance, theater, culinary identity, photography and creative writing; in order to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be a guidance for other young Latin women or other minorities in their communities.

VEA views and understands the artistic practices as valid and powerful spaces to funnel not only the messages and contents but rather to push on with profound processes of social transformation. In this sense, the program defines some goals that have to do with the typical dimensions of being and to be in the world since this concept has a different impact for women in the patriarchal field that is burdensome and full of stereotypes. Therefore some of the questions that we will attempt to answer through diverse experiences of formation and cultural mediation are the following: who am I? How do I see the world? What is my truth today and what do I want?

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In this framework, there are some conceptual points that are important to understand the nature of the VEA booklet. The first thing has to do with the relevancy of pushing on a cultural mediation and learn about the impacts on young girls of color and minorities in our society today. Even if the cultural mediation has been of interest and it has been developed with a greater consistency in some spaces of cultural activity, museums and archives, gradually, we will find out that it will be spreading to other spheres like the social one. The scope and understanding of its power as a facilitator between the communities and those who have as its mission to plan socio economical policies in their territories are each time greater. The urge to activate a cultural mediation in any space has as its mission to build profound processes of transformation among

*The mediation is never a goal by itself, but rather it must be activated in virtue of a central objective to clarify or built collectively.*

those who invite, mediate and support.

One of the contributions of the cultural mediation thoughts from Latino America is that it has gathered all the contemporary critical studies and the contributions to the cultural studies. In this order, the notions of corporality, approach to gender, feminism, sociology of the emotions and ethnography will be paramount and will function as the staple to activate the processes of mediation of VEA.

The woman/women, inside the sex gender system belong to a social category that emerges from the social construction of the sex and to which it is assigned a series of roles and stereotypes, as of how they must behave and react in society. In the case of the program, we will work directly with the shared category of Women, based on the adolescents' own personal

*Monique Wittig, in her text “The heterosexual thought” differentiates the Woman, defining her as a political and economical category, “a myth or imaginary formation that reinterprets physical features” (33)...In opposition to the category Women, people that share a experience and are a product of a social relationship.*

experiences that will also integrate the intersectionality as a central component.

A genealogy of women entails to undertake the task of searching, connecting, and valuing of those women that preceded us. And this is not only in terms of feminine family genealogies, but also the historical genealogies of those women that have greatly contributed to humanity in different levels and spaces. Working on this task includes not only the recovery of a woman, in terms of her individuality, but rather a reconstruction of processes, built on cultural, political, and economical contexts revealing relations of power. As for the VEA Program, these genealogies revolve around the knowledge and spaces used by the women of the program, which have in its turn been inherited from the work of others (mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and other important women that have transcended in their lives). In this sense is relevant, for example, recognizing the importance of domestic work and care, the knowledge associated to the household chores that correspond to the tradition with particular characteristics that have continuously remained invisible.

In this context, the absence of the **body** in the philosophical thinking of the Western culture is a historical process that has had the influence of Christianity, the development of rationalist philosophies, and the expansion of capitalism, among others. According to Silvia Citro in her book “Diverse bodies. Anthropology of and from the bodies”, this process -more than being neglected - has been a confinement of the corporal, through diverse social institutions, where the feminine bodies had to be disciplined more than anything else. Throughout the methodological tools used by the VEA Program, it is that those cultural mechanisms of how the corporal operates have to be revealed in a playful way, nurturing ideas and learnings to the

Rosario Castellanos says that:  
“Throughout the masculine mediator, the woman finds out about her body and its functions, about her persona and her obligations, *everything that is convenient and nothing else*”  
(Woman that knows Latin... 2003: 14).

adolescents in the program.

We consider important to continue motivating the generation of knowledge coming from the women, about their bodies, what will help to not understand like “normal”, nonexistent parameters of feminine bodies that in turn will profoundly make an impact in the perception and auto esteem of girls and women. At this moment, we must incorporate the concept of **diversity**, since it would allow to come to a moment of understanding of the different corporalities that exist in the frame of the Program, and it could be an important instrument of empowerment for the adolescents. These connections are relevant since they define the VEA Program as a space of feminist relationship that recuperates the know ledge of women that position themselves and are able to see and react accordingly in order to produce changes in their environment. In this sense, the testimonial, the personal archives, and their genealogies are vital and also define this program. The biography, the ethnography, and the privileged spaces that are needed to be occupied with such knowledge are crucial and for this reason, we will be very precise on this matter.

The cultural mediation rooted in the Latin American and feminist thinking thrives to built bridges in the less visible communities so that they can have testimonies testimonial and tell their own stories. The VEA Program strategies are for that reason thought from a feminist approach and corpopolitical look that intent to establish a dialogue with the community of young girls from a repositioning of the bodies and the emotions. This is possible by integrating as the core the biographical approach, as an epistemological option that questions the way in which the

knowledge has been produced in the social sciences and also a methodological option that covers the articulation between the social, the historical, and the individual, coming from the stories of the people. This allows building knowledge from the way the subjects tell their stories as Cornejo mentions: “the understanding of the way the individual lives that story in the affective, emotional, cultural, and social level” (2006). This approach allows us to give importance to the stories, perceptions, and discourses of the participants in the program, since it is crucial to understand how they perceive the world from the social categories as women, Afro-American, Latinas, indigenous, among others.

In the case of the VEA program, the ethnography will be used as well as an approach, it means, a look concerning the diversity, the practices and also from the discourses around the identity of the people, but it will also be used as a way to gather information in a context of mediation. An approach that intersects with the ethnography is the biographical, specifically, the use of life stories as a way to understand the reality. A tradition in within the North American anthropology rooted in the XIX century. Marcela Cornejo in her book “The biographical approach: Paths, Theoretical development, and perspectives”, mentions that the use of life stories with the purposes of research, granted the anthropologists the possibility of “Restore the way of life of the observed populations as a meaningful totality and not as a simple agglomeration of elements artificially placed” (2006).

Consequently, the record, systematization, and analysis that will take place after all the strategies of mediation will be relevant to report the process of the Program and also help to think critically of what can be archived and what “it is worthy to preserve,” especially, when it is about the learnings of a group of Afro descendant, indigenous, and Latina women.

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## **2. CULTURAL MEDIATION: VEA PROGRAM**

### **2.1. ¿How to use this booklet?**

This material is addressed to work teams with experience- or not –in cultural mediation. Since participatory experiences are the actions that allow the dialogue and the canalization of the readings and testimonies of the communities before a problematic, the role of the mediator is essential. It means that for each context and Project, there must be some specific strategies thought, and becoming more a facilitator than a protagonist. The relevancy is to understand that the mediation in the program intends to activate reflection and processes of transformation among those participating. The number of workshops that VEA is proposing focus on a varied amount of artistic practices that will function connected to specific objectives of development and recognition of who I am, how I perceive my peers, how they perceive me and how I contribute with my behavior in the society where I am inserted.

The objectives of the VEA Program are the ones that design and define the mediation, being the strategies aspects of encounter with the group of Young girls and girls to arrive to build other spaces of understanding, connection, and new knowledge about their realities. As far as the program, a series of workshops have been designed in different artistic practices. Each one of them will start with a mediation activity in order to activate and produce input that allow the girls

to work in their workshops with different themes. The girls and young girls will arrive to the workshops with a great and important number of experiences, testimonies, and knowledge that will help them to channel focal points of inspiration for the development of the artistic practice.

This booklet will be the prelude to each workshop and for this reason, we suggest the team involved in the project to read it before it is applied in order to adjust each strategy to the number of participants considering their age and origin. The important part is to understand that this is just a route and not an imperative since the contents are flexible and permeable in order to be completed by the facilitators.

## 2.2. ¿What is the objective and what are the experiences/themes that we want to potentiate to the girls and young girls?

| N | Theme                              | Mediation  | Participative Strategies   |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | ¿Who am I, How do I see the world? | Initial exercise of corporal cartography and presentation of VEA Program | <u>The current Venuses</u><br>Potentiate a position of the girls around their corporality, how they perceive it and how the difference is seen as strength.  |
| 2 | My life                            | Creative Writing   | <u>I am my own comic</u><br>The participants will depict through a script or illustrations, aspects of their life and thoughts, working on the autobiography from an easy way to build and distribute. The comic also allows to reveal their life experiences and becomes a space to express freely. |
| 3 | My past and my future              | Culinary workshop  | <u>Recipes and family memories: patrimonial recipe books</u><br>The participants will make a collection of ethnographic food or family recipes that have a cultural background of importance and from that information are able to elaborate creatively a group patrimonial recipe book.             |

|   |  |                        |  |
|---|--|------------------------|--|
| 4 | My truth   | Dance workshop         | <u>I am a body in motion, I am dance I am creation</u><br>Potentiate a position of the girls around their corporality, activate creative processes and the possibilities of the body in motion, as a space to recognize positive aspects and transmit a message. |
| 5 | To what people might say                         | Photography workshop   | <u>Stereotypes of gender in the self-portrait: game and representation</u><br>Understand the effect of gender stereotypes in women through playing and the self -portrait.   |
| 6 | My reality                                       | Painting workshop      | <u>¿Who are these women?</u><br>Thinking of the visual arts as a way to channel emotions and gaze to reflect critically about the society and the way in which women participate in it.  |
| 7 | ¿What do I want?                                 | Singing/music workshop | <u>Listen to know: The ordinary sounds</u><br>Experience from the recording of sounds and its edition, the biography and the daily life of women participating in the VEA program that will allow them to think about what they want for their future.           |
| 8 | ¿Solutions!:<br>My decisions make the difference | Theater workshop       | <u>Transforming the stage transforms me</u><br>Activate an understanding and positive look around our decisions and the way these can change or transform the scenes even if they are adverse.   |