Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the service learning experiences of Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-Mexico border. This study took place in a high school located in south Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border; population approximately 248,142 and ethnically 95.6 percent Hispanic (U.S. Census, 2013). The participants were selected via purposive sampling, thus it was restricted to participants involved in the service learning opportunity with the Volunteer Income Tax Assessor (VITA) program while taking a high school level financial analysis class. Service learning education is defined as the integration of academic material, service activities, and critical reflection based on reciprocal partnerships that engage students and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013).

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted after school in a general education classroom located on the participants’ school campus. Through the use of open-ended questions, participants discussed their experiences. The researcher first analyzed data based upon the preconceived themes of transfer of knowledge, student motivation, and students’ self-assessment of their role in their community through student-centered, participatory, and activist forms of instruction. The researcher found the overarching themes based upon the participants’ experiences included: (1) better understanding and application of knowledge, (2) enjoyment of working with the community, (3) enhanced confidence when problem solving and working with diverse people, and (4) the development of positive relationships.