The Service Learning Experiences of Hispanic High School Students on the U.S.-Mexico Border

A THESIS

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Introduction

- We live in an highly globalized interconnected world. In order to achieve international collaboration and success, students need to develop the capacity to identify issues, create an action plan, and the confidence to realize their goals (Bibbo & d’Erizans, 2013).
- However, current standards based education is inclined to systematically teach students what to think and how to act, thus limiting academic sovereignty (Bibbo & d’Erizans, 2013). Current practices often suppress teacher autonomy leaving students subjected to scripted programs and standardized curricula.
- In contrast, interested a curriculum that incorporates project/service based learning, cultural responsiveness, and student empowerment in order to connect students’ awareness of their community and global interdependence with academic theory — service learning
- Through service learning, students become involved in opportunities that mobilize and transfer their theoretical learning in order to apply their knowledge in practical settings (Roessingh, 2012).
- Ability to apply academic knowledge to relevant situations and critically think about issues to generate solutions, will help students appreciate civic responsibility (Bibbo & d’Erizans, 2013).
- Through student-centered and participatory forms of pedagogy included within service learning, students develop positive feelings towards their learning, gain a greater sense of self-worth, and become better prepared to become competent members in the local and global community (Bradley & Saracino, 2013). This is mutually benefiting to the students, school, community, nation, and world.
Statement of Problem

- Hispanic population is the largest ethnic or racial minority in the U.S. making up 17% population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014)
  - 2012-2013 – 2% growth; 11 million people
  - 2060 – projections approx. 128.8 million Hispanics, making up 31% of nation’s population
  - Number of Hispanic youth is expected to increase 37% by 2015; then another 31% increase by 2025 (NCES, 2013).

- Economic disparities
  - 9/10 schools that are 90-100% Hispanic or Black face concentrated poverty (Orfield, 2000)

- Poor academic attainment (NCES, 2013)
  - 18% Hispanics labeled dropouts; compared to 9% Black, 5% White
  - 75.8% Hispanics with high school diploma; compared to 95% Asian, 94% White, 90% Black, 84% Native American
  - 15.7% Hispanics attained bachelor’s degree; compared to 58% Asian, 40% White, 20% Black, 17% Native American
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES):
Percentage of persons 25 to 29 years old with selected levels of education attainment by race/ethnicity, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
<th>High School Diploma</th>
<th>Bachelor's Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>15.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>75.80%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement of Problem

1. Hispanic Population Growth
2. Economic Disparities
3. Poor Academic Attainment

= Issue of Human Capital

Statistics suggest that as Hispanic population increases, percentage of the population with high school diplomas and college degrees will decrease (West & Simmons, 2012)

- an issue of human capital will shadow the U.S.
In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires states to test students in reading, mathematics, and science (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

When examining the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics scale scores, there are stark disparities between the race and ethnic groups.

Between 1990 and 2013, White and Asian/Pacific Islander students have continuously outperformed their Black and Hispanic peers (NCES, 2013).
Average National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Scale Scores by Race/Ethnicity

Grade 8

Grade 12

Note: Scale ranges from 0 to 500. Includes public and private schools.
Average National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics Scale Scores by Race/Ethnicity

Grade 8

Note: Scale ranges from 0 to 500. Includes public and private schools.

Grade 12

Note: Scale ranges from 0 to 300. Includes public and private schools.
As the country relies more and more on standardized testing, schools focus more and more on achieving necessary test scores. This action punishes the schools serving disadvantaged students as struggling schools respond to pressure with standardized curricula that often teach to the test (Orfield, 2000).

The divide between standards based education and the diverse world outside school doors leads to a disconnect that hinders student interest, motivation, and self-efficacy; leading to poor academic performance, or worse, more dropouts.

When student motivation, interest, and self-efficacy are jeopardized, a sense of empowerment and an interest in civic engagement becomes even more unattainable.

As the nation looks to continue its democratic traditions and cooperate effectively in an interconnected world, we must look into the classrooms within our Hispanic communities and critically consider alternatives to standardized curricula.

With such a large and growing community, alternatives are needed to enhance the engagement of our Hispanic youth and empower them to create change.

Therefore, in order to motivate, accelerate, and engage Hispanic students, there is a need for research that explores the Hispanic experience.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the service learning experiences for Hispanic high school students located on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The researcher explored the service learning experiences as they relate to transfer of knowledge, student motivation, student perception of their civic responsibility and role in their community, and student empowerment.
Research Questions

What are the experiences of Hispanic high school students living on the U.S.-Mexico border when participating in service learning education?

- Sub-questions include:
  - How did Hispanic high school students living on the U.S.-Mexico border make sense of their experience in a service learning opportunity?
  - How did Hispanic high school students living on the U.S.-Mexico border relate their service learning experiences to the transfer of knowledge?
  - How did Hispanic high school students living on the U.S.-Mexico border relate their service learning experiences to student motivation?
  - How did the service learning experience shape Hispanic high school students’ perceptions on civic engagement and community activism?
Significance to Field

- Little research on the implications of service learning at the high school level, many studies pertain to post secondary opportunities. Also, there are few empirical studies that explore the Hispanic community, and little to none that explore the experiences of Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-Mexico border. In order to determine the potential benefits, more research is necessary.

- By exploring the experiences of individuals and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences, the researcher will fill a void in existing literature, establish a new way of thinking, and give voice to an understudied population within service learning pedagogy.
Theoretical Framework

SERVICE LEARNING
TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE
STUDENT MOTIVATION
CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY & COMMUNITY ACTIVISM
STUDENT EMPOWERMENT
Service Learning

- Service learning is an instructional method that connects academic knowledge to community action, enhancing academic growth and encouraging social awareness (Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012).

- Competency-based and/or credit bearing educational experience where students participate in an identified service activity that benefit the community and reflect in the service in order to gain a further and deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013)

- The experiences within service learning serve as bridges between the curriculum and the world outside the classroom (Fitch, Stenke, & Hudson, 2013).

Further and deeper understanding of course content; broader appreciation of the discipline; enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility; become more competent members of the community.
Transfer of Knowledge

- Authentic, meaningful, and relevant learning occurs when academic content is transferred to real life experiences (Zinger & Sinclair, 2010).

- Instruction is motivated by the idea that students will be able to transfer and apply their learning in school to other settings (Larsen-Freeman, 2013) including future academic, civic, and professional arenas (Fitch, Steinke, & Hudson, 2013).

- Service learning expands the student learning experience well beyond the classroom by providing opportunities for students to interact with the community, construct understanding, and apply the knowledge they obtain in both the classroom and while providing the service, to the real world (Bradley & Saracino, 2013).

- Transfer of knowledge can also improve student motivation. Students are more motivated to transfer knowledge when they see the potential usefulness of what they are studying; whereas, students lose interest and forsake their studies when they feel they cannot utilize the information they obtain in school outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2013).
Student Motivation

- Student motivation ranges from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

- Intrinsic motivation involves highest degree of self-determination. Studies consistently demonstrate the positive effects of intrinsic motivation on student performance, self-esteem, and persistence (Lam, Cheng, & Ma, 2009).

- Incorporating a social context for intrinsic motivation, such as service learning, will improve student motivation and attitude towards success (Elliot & Knight, 2005).

- Intrinsic motivation increases when students have a sense of control over their academic experience (Elliot & Knight, 2005).

- Students feel motivated competent when they believe they can successfully complete a task, make decisions, relate and belong to a community, make change, and gain a sense of purpose through empowerment (Herman, 2012).

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**Extrinsic**
- Grades
- Stars
- Punishment
- Compensation
- Rewards

**Intrinsic**
- Autonomy
- Curiosity
- Belonging
- Love
- Meaning

When involved in service learning students become intrinsically motivated as they develop a sense of competence, autonomy, relatedness, and purpose, therefore increasing self-knowledge and self-worth!
Civic Responsibility & Community Activism

- Civic education refers to the transfer of knowledge and morals needed to create responsible, productive, and participative members of society.

- As students participate in service learning activities, civic attitude shifts and self-determination increases in regards to their perceived ability in creating national and global change (Zinger & Sinclair, 2010).

- As students critically reflect on their service learning experiences they generate new meanings, new questions, and enhanced understanding (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013).

- Service learning promotes positive citizenship and encourages students to participate in civic activities that transfer into civic engagement in late adolescence and into adulthood (Zaff, Malanchuk, Michelson, & Eccles, 2003).

Service Learning
- Student centered learning that engages students and taps individual interest and skills

Student Engagement
- Students develop problem solving skills, communication, and conflict resolution

Shift in Civic Attitude
- Self-determination and self-efficacy increase as students realize their ability to create change and the importance of community activism

New Civic Identity
- Students will be more likely to become invested in lifelong civic engagement
Student Empowerment

- Through a student-centered, participatory, and activist form of service learning, students become empowered to take action, make change, and become involved.

- Service learning exemplifies a pedagogy of possibility that shifts service to advocacy, helping students begin to envision a better society, school, or world and take action towards that vision (Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012).

- In order to make a difference in not only our local communities, but also globally, schools must advance the development of student action and empowerment.

- Service learning is the pedagogical component that not only benefits the community in tangible ways, but also incorporates the critical reflection necessary to support the academic, civic, and personal development of students (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, 2013).

- As student critically reflect on their experience, they realize their sense of empowerment and potential as civic actors and leaders.

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”
- Nelson Mandela
Methodology

- Setting
- Participants
- Materials
- Procedure
- Data Analysis
Methodology

- Qualitative phenomenological study – provide an understanding of a phenomenon as viewed from the perspective of research participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).
- In phenomenology, perception is regarded as a primary source of knowledge; human perception is a raw and natural process through which awareness, understanding, and knowledge are derived (Moustakas, 1994).
- Semi-structured focus groups were used to collect data with the primary goal of giving voice to students living along the U.S.-Mexico border in order to interpret the phenomenon of their experiences and gain insight into a particular phenomenon.
- Semi-structured focus group interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes.
High school located in south Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border:
- population approximately 248,142; ethnically 95.6% Hispanic
- 65% people age 25 or older have at least a high school diploma and 17.7% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- Per capita income in 2013 was $14,797 and the median household income was $40,041.
- 91% people in the community speak a language other than English at home and more than 30% of individuals are living below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2013).

The high school included in this research study is one of seven public high schools that service the area:
- 99% of students at the high school are Hispanic, 79% of students are economically disadvantaged, 74.5% are at-risk, 15.7% are limited English proficient (Texas Tribune, 2010).

The semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted after school in a general education classroom located on the participants’ school campus.
Setting

Ethnicity of the Students at the School Site

- Hispanic: 99%
- White, non-Hispanic: 0.40%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 0.20%
- African American: 0.10%

Academic Risk Factors of the Students at the School Site

- Economically Disadvantaged: 79%
- At-Risk: 74.50%
- Limited English Proficient: 15.70%
Participants

- Selected via purposive sampling; participants were restricted to those attending the school site and were involved in the service learning opportunity with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

- VITA offers free tax assistance to low-income households, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and limited English speakers (IRS, 2015). Students in the financial analysis class became IRS-certified volunteers and provided free income tax return preparation services to qualified individuals within their community (IRS, 2015).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Primary Home Language</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Spanish/ English</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marla</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>College - Technical Degree</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Spanish/ English</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisette</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>College - Technical Degree</td>
<td>College - Technical Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Spanish/ English</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group Interview Protocol Form:

- Researcher generated, including general instructions, a few questions to facilitate discussion; and a closing statement.

- When developing the semi-structured focus group interview questions, the language of the participants, how they may interpret the questions, and what may actually happen when the questions are put into practice were necessary to consider (Maxwell, 2005).

- The interview questions needed to elicit thoughtful and honest descriptions and interpretations of the participants’ participation in service learning; focus on a topic freshly and naively, yet abstain from leading participants to answer (Moustakas, 1994).
Semi-Structured Focus Group Schedule

Research Question: What are the experiences of Hispanic high school students living on the U.S.-Mexican border when participating in service learning education?
Primary Investigator: Andrea Garza

Date:
Time:
Location:

Introduction
Our goal for this focus group is to have an open and interactive discussion. Focus groups are guided conversations in which everyone participates. I am interested in your experience with VITA. As facilitator, I will be asking questions to guide the discussion, but will not be participating or offering my own comments or reactions.

The purpose of the focus group is to hear everyone’s ideas and impressions. Generally in a focus group, hearing what others say may stimulate your own thinking and reflection on your experience. You do not need to repeat what others have said, but rather offer your own perspective or expand on what others say. Do not hesitate to disagree or offer contradictory views. The idea is to hear everyone’s thoughts and to capture a wide array of comments, interpretations, opinions, and ideas. There is no right or wrong answer.

The discussion will be video/audio recorded. I will be the only person with access to the video and my data summary will not identify speakers so what you say will be kept confidential. To ensure a quality transcription, it will be helpful if you speak one person at a time, and speak clearly.

Questions
1. How did you become involved in VITA?
   o What encouraged/motivated you to participate?
2. Describe VITA: What was your role? How did you prepare and qualify for participation?
3. Was your experience integrated into school learning?
4. What connections can you describe between VITA and the classroom?
5. Did your participation impact your academic skills?
6. Did VITA impact your perspective towards school?
7. Did your experience change your perception of your community?
   o What did you not know at the beginning of the semester about your community that you now know because of your community engagement?
8. How can the skills or attitudes connected to VITA apply to work within your community?
9. Would you be interested in participating in programs that assist your community in the future?
10. How can you use what you’ve learned with VITA to help a community organization dedicated to improving the lives of people?
11. Compared to a regular class setting, how did this kind of experience impact your education?
12. What do you feel was most beneficial about your experience? What was negative?
13. If possible, would you participate in VITA again? Why or why not?

Conclusion (15 min)
We’ve now come to the conclusion of the focus group. If any of you have any additional thoughts, questions, or concerns this would be a great time to share. We will meet again in a couple days to review our discussion and possibly clarify. If at any time you have any questions or concerns, please contact me. My contact information is on the consent form, you can also find me in room 34.
**Consent Process**
- IRB approval;
- Invitation to participate in research;
- Parent Consent Form;
- Minor Assent Form

**Interview #1**
- Demographic questionnaire;
- Focus group interview protocol form;
- Data analysis happened simultaneously as data collection occurred.

**Interview #2**
- Clarify and extend the discussion;
- Conducted 10 days after the first interview;
- To remain consistent, the focus group interview protocol form was used.

**Member checking**
- The researcher & participants reviewed the transcripts and interpretation of data to allow participants to comment on accuracy of findings for validity purposes.
Reliability & Validity

- **Qualitative reliability** – researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and projects (Creswell, 2009). Reliability procedures included:
  - checking transcripts to make sure they did not contain mistakes made during transcription
  - ensuring that code definitions did not change throughout the study
  - cross checking codes with current research

- **Qualitative validity** – indicates that the researcher assured the findings are accurate (Creswell, 2009) and that the descriptions, conclusions, explanations, and interpretation of data are credible (Maxwell, 2005). Various strategies were used to identify and rule out threats to credibility of the results (Maxwell, 2005).
  - researcher was cognizant of possible researcher bias and effect of reactivity
  - member checking
  - thick-rich descriptions
  - presentation of discrepant information
Data Analysis

- Data saturation was achieved once the researcher began to hear the same thoughts, perspectives, and responses from most participants during the interview process; thus, marking an end to data collection (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

- The goal of data analysis is to find meaning in the data based on the connections, common aspects, and links between the data, the identified categories, and the patterns that emerge (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

- Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through a methodology of reduction, analysis of specific statements and themes, and the search for all possible meanings (Moustakas, 1994).
Interviews were coded by categorically marking units of text with codes and labels in order to indicate patterns or meaning (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Researcher analyzed data for codes on topics that one would expect to find based on past research; codes that are surprising and were not anticipated; codes that are unusual but of interest to research; and codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research (Creswell, 2009).

- The researcher remained open to continual reorganization after each subsequent review of the transcripts until cohesive theoretical units were identified.

Ten broad categories were identified:
1. knowledge of skills
2. enjoyment of working with the community
3. development of relationships
4. student motivation
5. enhanced self-confidence
6. benefits of real world experiences
7. enhanced sense of ability to lead
8. problem solving skills
9. communication
10. professionalism
### Table 3-4
Preconceived Categories – Organizational Data Based on Participant Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer of Knowledge</th>
<th>Student Motivation</th>
<th>Civic Engagement &amp; Community Activism</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Passing on knowledge</td>
<td>1. Wanting to do it</td>
<td>1. Helping others</td>
<td>1. There are a bunch of challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Part of the real world</td>
<td>2. It motivated you</td>
<td>2. Learning from each other</td>
<td>2. Think outside the box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We were educating them</td>
<td>3. Remain positive</td>
<td>3. VITA is something for the community</td>
<td>3. Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Responsibility</td>
<td>5. I just really like doing it</td>
<td>5. People were real</td>
<td>5. You feel proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Knowledge of taxes</td>
<td>6. It’s fun</td>
<td>6. We leave an impact</td>
<td>6. They’re like, “oh wow, she can do something I can’t”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learn and expand knowledge of something you didn’t know</td>
<td>7. It’s motivating taking action yourself</td>
<td>7. Many people actually appreciate our work; it made me feel proud</td>
<td>7. We leave an impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A lot of people don’t even know they have to do their taxes</td>
<td>8. More interesting</td>
<td>8. Helping our community out is a nice feeling</td>
<td>8. Dealing with difficult people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Learning was more complex, your brain works a lot</td>
<td>9. I think you learn better doing it yourself, it’s more interesting</td>
<td>9. Helping our</td>
<td>9. You gain confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A lot of information to work with at once</td>
<td>10. In VITA it’s different everyday</td>
<td>10. Pride</td>
<td>10. I can actually do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In VITA it’s different everyday</td>
<td>11. Self-motivated</td>
<td>11. We’re helping these people out</td>
<td>11. We’re helping these people out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Before this is didn’t know about taxes</td>
<td>12. Before this is didn’t know about taxes</td>
<td>12. Helps you feel nice and warm</td>
<td>12. Helps you feel nice and warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Important cause we are going out to the real world</td>
<td>13. Important cause we are going out to the real world</td>
<td>13. Confidence</td>
<td>13. Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. It will prepare us for later on</td>
<td>14. Done this</td>
<td>14. We give our time even though we don’t have much to offer</td>
<td>14. We give our time even though we don’t have much to offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Knowledge of [taxes] is also something you can carry with you</td>
<td>15. I like helping the people out</td>
<td>15. The experience has opened our eyes to a lot of things</td>
<td>15. The experience has opened our eyes to a lot of things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16. You definitely care more about your community</td>
<td>16. You definitely care more about your community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17. You see that people that need you and need each other</td>
<td>17. You see that people that need you and need each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18. Create awareness</td>
<td>18. Create awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19. I’ll make sure to be involved</td>
<td>19. I’ll make sure to be involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3-5
Emerging Codes – The Substantive Categories Based on Participant Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Relationships</th>
<th>Communication Skills &amp; Diversity</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Patience &amp; Understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learned more because [teacher] had more time to be with us.</td>
<td>1. Communication</td>
<td>1. Responsibility</td>
<td>1. Dealing with different types of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning from each other</td>
<td>2. Working with diverse personalities</td>
<td>2. Confidentiality</td>
<td>2. Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. [Teacher] being your mom or friend</td>
<td>3. Have to speak to customer</td>
<td>3. Time management</td>
<td>3. Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Talk more to my teachers than I would to my mom</td>
<td>5. Confidentiality</td>
<td>5. Well-rounded</td>
<td>5. Working under pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers see our interactions throughout the day so I think they understand</td>
<td>7. Spanish skills</td>
<td>7. You need to be the professional one</td>
<td>7. You need to be the professional one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. [Teachers] know more of who you are</td>
<td>8. Dealing with different types of people</td>
<td>8. Become more responsible</td>
<td>8. Become more responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I have become best friends with [the other participants]</td>
<td>10. I like the atmosphere between us</td>
<td>10. Dealing with different types of people</td>
<td>10. Dealing with different types of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I like the atmosphere between us</td>
<td>11. Bringing us together</td>
<td>11. They become your mentors</td>
<td>11. They become your mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bringing us together</td>
<td>12. Being close to teachers and friends impacts school</td>
<td>12. They become your mentors</td>
<td>12. They become your mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Being close to teachers and friends impacts school</td>
<td>13. They become your mentors</td>
<td>13. They become your mentors</td>
<td>13. They become your mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. They become your mentors</td>
<td>14. They become your mentors</td>
<td>14. They become your mentors</td>
<td>14. They become your mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. We’re made for people having high expectations for us and to push us and support you</td>
<td>15. We’re made for people having high expectations for us and to push us and support you</td>
<td>15. They become your mentors</td>
<td>15. They become your mentors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

The final coding included four overarching themes:

1. Better understanding and application of knowledge
2. Enjoyment of working with community
3. Enhanced confidence when problem solving and working with diverse people
4. Development of positive relationships
Better Understanding & Application of Knowledge

- Participants’ service learning experience with VITA helped them better understand and apply knowledge.
- Skills acquired included: financial awareness, time management, communication, being responsible, working under pressure, problem solving, and working with diverse individuals.
- Participants described VITA as a program with many tasks that students do not typically face in the classroom. The experience was more complex, engaging, and included new scenarios everyday. Considering that life is not standardized, one participant stated it clearly:

  “It’s different seeing something in paper and videos and through a PowerPoint or presentation [than] actually being apart of what’s supposed to be done in your community and taking action yourself. So when you’re there in direct contact with other people and you’re seeing the impact you’re making, that’s when you learn the most. I think that’s when people are more exposed and become more open minded because you yourself as a person are seeing through your eyes the difference you’re making.”

- Another participant echoed, “I think a regular class setting is very consistent, it’s like routine, everyday and your focus is standardized testing but in VITA it’s different everyday.” This exciting and relevant academic setting allowed the participants to delve deeper into their studies and obtain profound knowledge.
- Authentic, meaningful, and relevant learning occurs when students can transfer learning objectives and academic content from the classroom into real world application (Zinger & Sinclair, 2010).
- The understating of academic material and the application of knowledge impacted student interest and motivation as the participants realized the potential usefulness of the content they were studying (Larsen-Freeman, 2013).
Enjoyment of Working with the Community

- Participants stated that prior to their involvement in VITA they were unaware of how local organizations were involved with the community and how local organizations had the potential to help those in need.

> Rosa: I realized that there are so many people that actually help out and volunteer, I thought it was very little before.
> Marla: Before VITA I really didn’t see how our community helps the people but when we were at our ceremony we have at the end of the year, like the dinner, you could see we were not the only people that do this.
> Katia: Yeah, and it was amazing to see how much we accomplished together!

- The participants often referred to the good feelings related to working with the community. When asked to describe the feelings they stated:

> Rosa: Satisfaction.
> Marla: It’s kinda like when you find the golden ticket.
> Lisette: It just makes you feel nice and warm inside.
> Sarah: It feels good [sic] doing something good for others, doing something that leaves an impact.

- The positive feelings the participants related to the satisfaction of working with the community while completing a task is related to intrinsic motivation. Students become intrinsically motivated when academic tasks provide a sense of competence, autonomy, relatedness, and purpose (Herman, 2012). Therefore the students may have been intrinsically motivated by their desire to do good for the community and the satisfaction of learning and completing meaningful tasks.
Enhanced Confidence When Problem Solving & Working with Diverse People

- VITA provided real world experiences via problem solving scenarios. One participant stated:

  “You have to be able to think on your feet...being able to quickly think outside the box and [figure out] how am I going to solve this? Who am I going to call? Where am I going to look?”

- Discovering how to handle such situations with different people while continuing to persevere with the work at hand was a skill all the participants greatly valued. The ability to remain calm and patient was thoroughly discussed. One participant said:

  And you want to make sure you’re getting every number right, their social security number specifically, while their kids are running around and they’re talking on the phone and they’re not really paying attention to what you are doing so you have to re-explain everything to them and they’re like “But why? But why?” and of course you have to tell them why, it’s their money, it’s the government, right. So yeah, being patient is important.
Enhanced Confidence When Problem Solving & Working with Diverse People

- By solving problems on the spot, overcoming the challenges of working with diverse people, and acting with professionalism, participants’ self confidence increased. One participant said,

  “I thought, ‘Hey I can actually do this!’ So I really enjoyed [VITA] overall because now I know that I can not only do [VITA] but I could perhaps join other organizations that could teach me other things that I could actually use to benefit other people besides myself.”

- When considering civic engagement and community activism, one can assume that the enjoyment of working with community, the awareness of community organizations, and the confidence and empowerment cultivated when problem solving may increase community activism and civic engagement.

- Participants felt competent as they successfully completed tasks, made decisions, worked with the community, and gained a sense of purpose through empowerment (Herman, 2012). Due to the realization of potential and power they possess, the participants may be more likely to become civically involved in the future (Malone, 2008).
Development of Positive Relationships

- The relationships that developed throughout the participants’ experience were profound.
- Participants enjoyed working with their peers and felt their relationships were beneficial to their success. Through their interactions they created friendships, mentored one another, and generated a positive atmosphere.
- The participants also expressed that their relationship with their teacher was very important, they felt their teacher had more time to focus on student growth and developed a stronger relationship.
- The teacher served as a mentor and facilitator, giving more autonomy to the participants, as a result participants felt they achieved greater academic gains because the relationship boosted student confidence and created a smaller learning community within a large high school.
- Such a relationship gave the participants a sense of belonging. One participant said,

  “I think it’s just part of being human, we’re made for people to have high expectations for us and to push us and support you, but if you don’t really talk to people or teachers then you don’t really have that encouragement.”

- This development of positive relationships was an emerging concept. According to data, the strength and bond between teacher and students were instrumental to the motivation and confidence of the participants. Suggesting that the community within the classroom served as a safe house where participants felt comfortable taking risks and asking questions.
Limitations

- **Defined Service Learning Opportunity** – the school site considered VITA as community service component to a financial analysis class. However, the researcher determined that VITA served as an adequate example of service learning education since the experience incorporated all three components of service learning: classroom learning in a credit bearing financial analysis class, service to the community, and critical reflection.

- **Logistics of semi-structured focus group interview** - often times the open-ended questions did not elicit lengthy descriptive answers beyond a yes or no, consequently the researcher had to follow-up by asking the participants to elaborate on their answers. The limitation lies in the fact that it was difficult to probe the high school students without suggesting and being leading; the researcher was very limited in options and some questions went without a descriptive answer.

- **Time constraints** – there were time constraints that limited the scope of the study. The semi-structured focus groups were conducted in the spring semester on the eve of graduation. Being that all the participants were in the senior class, they each had very busy schedules including award ceremonies, end of year celebrations, and graduation rehearsal. Although sufficient data were collected to accomplish saturation, the focus group interviews were challenging to schedule and felt rushed at times.

- **Sampling of participants** – the sampling of participants was restricted to those involved in VITA. The limitation lies in the fact the students involved in this program were top of their class, highly motivated, and involved in many school organizations. Although the participants’ demographic background pertained to the sample desired for the study, having some students who may have not been so involved and motivated in the academic setting may have offered different insight on the service learning experience applicable to the general Hispanic student population.
Recommendations

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
CONCLUSIONS
Implications for Future Research

- A larger window for data collection, or other research methods of triangulation, in order to conduct more sophisticated analyses.
- Studies that evaluate the various methods of critical reflection utilized in service learning programs and how the methods may impact the construction and application of knowledge.
- Explore the formative role positive relationships play on the impact of service learning education and the construction and application of knowledge. The researcher suggests future studies that examine the following research questions:
  - How does the development of relationships impact Hispanic high school student academic development through service learning education?
  - How does the development of relationships impact Hispanic high school students’ confidence and motivation?
  - How do social relationships and the sense of community impact the success of service learning education?
  - How does teacher effectiveness impact the success of service learning education?
Implications for Future Research

- Quantitative research that compares test scores of Hispanic high school students involved in service learning to students who are not. Considering the benefits of service learning, if empirical research were to prove a positive relationship between service learning and standardized test scores of Hispanic high school students, then predominantly Hispanic serving high schools may be more compelled to incorporate service learning into the curriculum.

- A longitudinal study that examines the retention of service learning participants in various forms of community activism and civic engagement. Tracking participants’ long-term commitment would contribute more insight on the impact of service learning on participant community activism and civic engagement.

- Studies that explore the experiences of Hispanic high school students who are underperforming academically. The researcher recommends examining how service learning education may impact Hispanic high school students who are specifically struggling academically, who are unmotivated about school, or have a learning disability in order to make the study more generalizable to schools and communities along the US-Mexico border.
Implications for Practice

- Teachers can individually look towards incorporating service learning opportunities into their classrooms by starting small.
- Consider an existing community service activity within the high school and make the necessary changes and accommodations to convert the community service to service learning.
- For ideas and guidance, teachers can refer to the Generator School Network’s (GSN) National Service Learning Clearinghouse or Campus Compact to establish a starting point, gather ideas, and determine a service opportunity.
Conclusion

The results of this study led to four major conclusions:

1. Service learning education improves understanding and application of knowledge for Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-Mexico border. The authentic, meaningful, and relevant lessons were enhanced as academic content was transferred to real life experiences.

2. Students genuinely enjoy working with the community as community activism fosters motivation and an inclination to be involved.

3. Confidence is engendered when students solve problems and face challenges when working with diverse people.

4. Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-Mexico border are greatly influenced by the positive relationships developed when participating in service learning education; these relationships translated into increased motivation, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging.
Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-Mexico border would be well served by the implementation of service learning opportunities.

Educational system needs to evaluate current educational practices and determine the most advantageous opportunity for all students, including minority populations – a society that produces slightly higher test scores but does nothing about educational disparities and inequalities will continue to leave children behind (Orfield, 2000).

If implemented successfully, service learning education may give students an opportunity to develop global knowledge by obtaining local wisdom, experience the value of interdependence when working with others, and navigate the potential tensions between cultures and diverse peoples (Battistoni, Longo, & Jayanandhan, 2009).

Therefore, students who are connected to civic spaces in local communities may come to a greater understanding of global forces and simultaneously become better global practitioners (Battistoni, Longo, & Jayanandhan, 2009).
Questions?

THANK YOU!
References

References

References