The United States Virgin Islands cultural perspectives and education: a qualitative study

Vanessa Suzanne Doran

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Recommended Citation
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/6359

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES 
AND EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Vanessa Suzanne Doran, Ed.D. 
Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education 
Northern Illinois University, 2018 
Jorge Jeria, Director

The purpose of this research was to gain a rich understanding of cultural perspectives for fostering quality and relevant education in the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.VI). Research explores which perceived cultural perspectives are functioning in the Territory. Specifically, how adult economic survival is sustained in the territory. Findings are built on previous research, and global organizations’ acknowledgment of the role culture plays in educational achievement. Consideration is given to historical occurrences. The task of the research is to understand cultural perspective as it relates to educational achievement, not to solve a problem.

The (U.S.VI) Board of Education policies, rules, and regulations have been implemented in accordance with the United States of America (U.S.) Federal Constitution. However, the U.S.VI displays significant academic underachievement when compared to the U.S. Despite this, the U.S.VI culture continues to successfully learn and implement survival techniques as they strive for their autonomy. Reality is, academic educational deficiencies were noted by the U.N. as impeding U.S.VI struggle for autonomy. Due to educational advancement being used as an economic indicator.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a great pleasure to thank everyone who helped me write my dissertation successfully:

My Director, Dr. Jorge Jeria, for his vital support and assistance. His encouragement made it possible to achieve the goal. Committee members Dr. Laura Ruth Johnson, who helped assure my research was tailored to Adult Education, and Dr. Hidetada Shimizu.

Michael J. Martinovich, who not only assisted me financially, but also extended his support morally and emotionally.

Elizabeth Collins and Leon & Jackie Schochet, who kindly offered me the use of their homes to assure uninterrupted privacy during organization of research, field notes, and analysis process.

For her valuable help in the preparation of this paper I would like to thank Michele A. Nesbitt for critical and helpful comments on my earlier drafts. I would also like to thank Diane Johns for all of her assistance in the final stages of preparation.

I add a special note of thanks to Doreen Walsh and my U.S. Virgin Islands family who allowed me to share their realities and compassion. Dr. Yegin Habtes, professor of Education & Senior Executive Director, VIUCEDD, who acts for the betterment of individuals, communities and the future. His belief in the possibilities of education geared toward the learner offered much-needed support during my ongoing research. Susan Kwosek, who understood the need to discuss complications as they were realized during the progression of this dissertation. Beatrice Mwinzim, Illinois Department of Human Services Rehabilitation Senior Councilor, whose help and caring attitude made it possible to achieve my goal.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge, with gratitude, the love and support of my family—my mother, Theresa J. Doran; my children, Jessica L. (Zallis) Goc, David S. Zallis, Grant M. Zallis, Brian B. Oakley, and their spouses/significant others; my grandchildren, Sophia, Zachary, and Josephine; and my sister, Mary Lou Riley. They all kept me going and this dissertation would not have been possible without them.
DEDICATION

To Brian, my youngest son,
who patiently spent his youth receiving support from and offering support to his mother while I obtained and completed higher education degrees
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF APPENDICES</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter**

1. **INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 1
   - Problem Statement ............................................................ 3
   - Purpose ............................................................................... 5
   - Research Question ........................................................... 6
   - Rational and Significance ................................................ 6
   - Qualitative Methodology .................................................. 7
   - Research Focus ............................................................... 8
   - Historical Background .................................................... 9
     - United States Virgin Islands ........................................ 11
     - Educational Reform 1917-1949 ...................................... 18
     - Education and Demographics ....................................... 22
     - Educational Disparity .................................................. 24
     - Autonomy ....................................................................... 25
     - United Nations Reports ................................................. 26
   - Theoretical Framework and Research Progression .............. 30

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW** .............................................................. 32
   - Relevance of Literature .................................................. 33
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the Value of Culture</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Perspectives</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Variance</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Mistrust</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situated Learning</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situated Learning in Action</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Factors</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Cultural Dominance/Hegemony</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Capital</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic Methodology</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Process/Participants</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Background</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESEARCH FINDINGS</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surmounting Obstacles</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Island Culture</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival: Shared, Taught, Bartered</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding Culture Perceptions</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Learning</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics: Horrific Learning Experiences</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Survival</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success and Education</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Cultural Perspectives</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepping Away</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain Drain</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. INTERNSHIP INFORMATION</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. YEGIN HABTES, PH.D. PERMISSION LETTER</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.E. - Adult Education
ACE - American Council on Education
BVI - British Virgin Islands
CEDS - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy team
CELL - Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning
CER - Center for Education Reform
CFVI - Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands
ECC - Eastern Caribbean Center-Social Research Institute
ESD - Education for Sustainable Development
ECLAC - Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EFA - Education for All
GED - General Education Degree
GU.S.VI - Government of the United States Virgin Islands
NCES - National Center for Educational Statistics
NYU - New York University
OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ped - Progressive Education Association
RI - Resident Islanders, individuals who were or raised children born in the U.S.VI.
SHEEO - State Higher Education Executive Offices
SIDS - Small Island Developing States
U.N. - United Nations
UN-OHRLLS-U.N. Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
UNESCO - United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S. - United States of America
USDE - United States Department of Education
U.S.VI - United States Virgin Islands
U.S.VI BER - United States Virgin Island Bureau of Economic Research
UVI - University of the Virgin Islands
VICS - Virgin Islands Community Survey
VIDE - U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Education
VIUCEDD - Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
WAPA - Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority
QA - Quality Assurance
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Historically, adult education (A.E.) practices were established as part of an independent culture or community’s needs regarding the absorption and integration of cultures (assimilation) and forward progress in the United States of America (U.S.) (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Changes over the years, including population diversity and economics, saw A.E. rise to prominence in educational circles throughout the U.S. The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed A.E. learning described as having personal and social dimensions in which learners combined their own cultural practices to find meaning in their new country’s culture (Curry & Cunningham, 2000).

For the purposes of this research, culture was defined as societies with socially learned/shared beliefs, knowledge, values, customs, and habits existing in a particular group (Doda, 2005). Two types of societies (cultures) have been acknowledged as functioning within the global population (Billing, 2004; Fitouri, 1986; Hall 1963; Jones, 2007). These cultures have been identified as individualistic and collective societies. Previous research findings have suggested cultural differences may be a factor when two societies functioning under similar educational policy have conflicting achievement reports (Billing, 2004, Boreham & Morgan, 2004; Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2009; UNESCO, 2010; Vegas, 2007). Individualistic societies (low-context cultures) are commonly described as being imbedded in an “I” mentality where success is associated with the individual’s achievement, whereas collective societies
(high-context cultures) function on strong-cohesive group relationships which understand achievement to be accomplishments that benefit unity in the cultural group (Billing, 2004). Acknowledgment of the differences discoverable in these cultures have been influencing A.E. outcomes throughout the world.

As Curry and Cunningham (2000) noted, responding to cultural and community needs for A.E. guidelines have resulted in positive/meaningful learning outcomes. However, distinguishing cultures and cultural concerns have become more complex. Many of the contemporary complexities are due people living longer due to medical advancements, preventive health care, advances in climate control, food inspection/regulation, etc. These advances combine our current Information Age has brought increased possibilities and necessity for effective A.E.

The increased global interest in cultural influences on A.E is associated with human capital theorists’ views of investment in education as a venture for prosperity and sustainable country development (Agger, 2006; U.N., 2009a). In brief, contemporary human capital theory demonstrates that globalization and disparities in social stratification and national cultures require a nation’s inclusive implementation of effective, equitable education to assure forward progress and autonomy (Agger, 2006; Boulton-Lewis & Purdie, 2003; Lakin, Mullane, & Robinson, 2007; Wood, 2003).

The importance of human capital theory in conjunction with A.E. was brought to the global forefront in 1995 when the United Nations (U.N.) announced: “We are witnessing an unprecedented development of higher education and increased awareness of its vital role for economic and social development” (UNESCO [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization], 1995a, p. 3). Their announcement also emphasized the importance of
including culture in educational considerations as an essential underlying dimension for achieving sustainable development (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). Specifically, to achieve and sustain positive competitive economic development, advancement and national autonomy, successful implementation of A.E. is required.

Historically, the U.S.VI. desire for national autonomy has been recognized and supported by the U.N. However, education is considered the key for social and economic development according to World Bank and UNESCO experts (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007; World Bank, 2010). Therefore, territories such as the U.S.VI must have strong positive educational outcomes to move toward attainment of autonomous standing. Unfortunately, when the U.S.VI assembled their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy team (CEDS), for the advancement of sustainable economic success toward the Territory’s autonomy, CEDS strategic goals revealed severe deficiencies in territorial education achievement (Caribbean Net News, 2010).

Problem Statement

Although federal educational policy is observed in the U.S.VI, secondary educational achievement lags far behind the mainland (Mills, 2008, U.N., 2009a). This low educational achievement has been cited by the U.S.VI Bureau of Economic Research (U.S.VI BER) and the U.N. as inhibiting the Territory from gaining desired national autonomy (U.N., 2009a; U.S.VI BER, 2014). Similar situations have been acknowledged in developing countries worldwide. The result has led to global organizations advocating for an understanding of unique cultural perspectives when executing educational strategies (Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002; UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2010). Historic research demonstrates that U.S. federal educational
guidelines were instituted in the U.S.VI Territory toward the end of the Industrial Age with no consideration given to the Islands’ cultural differences.

Understanding the need for educational change, the first U.S.VI governor appointed by the U.S. requested the mainland’s Progressive Education Association (Ped) to direct an institute for Island teachers. The institute was arranged to be held on the Islands during the summer of 1933, offering Island educators the opportunity to study U.S. educational principles and observe those principles in practice (Lane, 1934). In 1934, members of the U.S. progressive education movement reported that the mainland’s formal curriculum was not beneficial on the U.S.VI. They decisively announced that island history and culture should be taken into consideration when implementing education in the Territory (Lane, 1934). Unfortunately, the recommendations were not given serious consideration.

When U.S. education implementation began in the Territory, the Information Age was not visible on the horizon. As a result, most learners were being prepared for industrial employment to insure retention of the mainland’s dominant culture and national advancement. This ethnocentrism (the dominant, privileged population’s cultural belief in inherent superiority), or ethnocentric thinking, prohibited the possibility of acceptable cultural variations for the U.S. residents in the Territory (Domhoff, 2002).

In 1962, when the Commissioner for the Department of Education was announced, educational achievement in the U.S.VI was still far below par. The commissioner contracted New York University (NYU) researchers to complete a comprehensive school survey in the Islands (Dejnozka, 1972). NYU’s report was released in 1967 and stated that island climate, speech patterns, and value systems were unique and set the Island learners physically, as well as culturally, apart from their mainland counterparts (Dejnozka, 1967). Shortly after the beginning
of the twenty-first century, U.S.VI educational achievement was still below standards (Stillwell, 2011). Fortunately, at the beginning of the twenty-first century UNESCO, World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) formally recognized value in understanding cultural perspectives for aligning educational strategies (Robertson, et al., 2002; UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2010). This global validation that encourages educators to work with a community’s unique culture has fostered increases in both the quality and the relevance of education when it is implemented (UNESCO, 2010).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research was to gain a rich understanding of cultural perspectives relevant to education in the U.S.VI. Despite the long-term scholastic disparity between the U.S. and the U.S.VI, the Territory residents have continued learning and implementing survival techniques. This, along with previous research, and global organizations’ acknowledgment of the role culture plays in educational achievement, validates this study.

Due to endurance and effectiveness of learned survival techniques, I explored perceived perspectives of cultural learning and formal education’s relationship to Island survival. Understanding cultural influences on learning in the Territory will assist policy makers and educators with the alignment of strategies to increase formal education’s achievement levels. Increases in education obtainment will foster positive steps toward the Island gaining desired national autonomy.

Information obtained may also be of value to educational policymakers, advocates for educational reform, educational anthropologists, and for A.E. practitioners. Findings should also
result in increased inclusion of qualitative and ethnographic techniques to enhance multicultural educational understanding.

Research Question

This study was designed to gain an understanding of unique cultural perspectives’ relevance to education in the U.S.VI. To obtain understanding my research examines two questions: What perceived cultural perspectives are functioning in the Territory? Specifically, how is adult economic survival sustained in the Territory regardless of educational under-achievement? Questions guiding this study included:

(a) How do adults narrate their past and current educational experiences? (b) What perceived cultural notions of education function within the community? (c) How do adults perceive economic survival is learned and sustained in the Territory?

Rationale and Significance

This research is relevant and timely because (of): (1) UNESCO, World Bank, and the OECD have formally acknowledged that understanding cultural perspectives boosts the quality and relevance of education; (2) Research advocates education as the key to national development and autonomy; (3) U.S.VI citizens’ ongoing desire to become a self-sustaining entity; and (4) U.S.VI educational achievement lags far behind mainland achievement.

Understanding of the Resident Islanders’ (RIs’) cultural perspectives offers policymakers and educators substantial insight toward the promotion of desired quality and relevant educational needs. It will also assist facilitation of successful educational realignment toward the advancement of academic achievement in the Territory. Increases in the Island’s academic
achievement will be a step toward gaining a sustainable economy, which will directly benefit the Territory’s desire for national autonomy.

Qualitative Methodology

Cultural perspective is important because the research findings assert that people produce meaning through knowledge generated by the context of lived experiences: past, present, and perceived future (Craig, 2009; Mattingly, 2008). Rather than providing and analyzing statistics, qualitative research offers cultural perspectives related to successful learning. The qualitative research methodology used for this study presents culture within recalled translations of history (Mattingly, 2008). Historically inclusive qualitative research increases the depth of cultural understandings (Guba, 1987; Lattuca, 2002; Nasir & Saxe, 2003). Since the U.S. purchase of the Virgin Islands, academic achievement has been below par. Yet, RI have survived disaster after disaster. Their learned survival techniques have been conveyed and preserved in the Island culture for generations.

Regardless of ongoing disasters, the Territory has a desire for autonomy which requires improved educational achievement. Previous research recognized significant cultural differences between the Mainland and the U.S.VI which were viewed as influencing educational underachievement in the Territory. Today, global organizations are advocating cultural understanding and inclusion in efforts to increase academic achievement. Discovery of the unique nuances found in the Islands’ culture will offer relevant knowledge for effective realignment of formal education. Successful realignment of education will narrow prevalent underachievement gaps, bringing the Territory closer to desired autonomy. Qualitative research is designed for such discovery (Nolan, 2003).
Research Focus

With attention given to historical occurrences, in this study I explored an understanding of cultural perspectives’ relevance to education in the U.S.VI. The qualitative data collection method I employed applied ethnographic research techniques within the community. Specific ethnographic methods included: field-notes, open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and observation (van Baren & Ijsselsteijn, 2004-2005). Applied ethnographic techniques established how culture perspectives influence sustained survival in the U.S.VI, despite low academic achievement.

Research outcome warrants interest due to the Territory’s need of effective, equitable education to assure forward progress and autonomy. Regrettably, when educational realities are examined globally, it has been noted that equitable educational opportunities are not available (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). This is thought to have occurred due to educational policy makers whose ethnocentric views are based in the competitive individualistic culture of capitalistic competition (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). Ethnocentric individualistic-based policies do not consider patterns in collective cultures where group outcome is respected more than individual clout (Edwards, 2003). This basic cultural difference results in a distinctively diverse preliminary knowledge base affecting educational value, wants, and needs.

Fortunately, cultures retain and utilize the ability for critical judgment of educational value. Understanding community cultural perspectives is important to offering the culture a group voice. When given a voice, individuals are afforded the capacity to assert their learning needs and desires. Given the importance of educational achievement on national success, I believe it is essential to understand the perceived educational needs and values of residents in their historically distinct cultural community. Clarification of research focus includes historical
background relevant for understanding the positioning of the U.S.VI cultural situation and place of occurrence.

Historical Background

As the world continues to change, life occurrences have become more polarized, hierarchical, and conflicted. The gap between rich and poor is widening and eliminating middle ground, resulting in many people viewing the term *globalization* as synonymous with capitalism (Agger, 2006). Unfortunately, this view is frequently warranted because knowledge is a social product and not outside the reach of power or power relations. The group creating the policy for education also controls the power and institutes the guiding principles for education (Agger, 2006). Educational policies which have resulted in achievement disparities have been traditionally created using a top-down approach, with the upper class at the top receiving a distinctive, ethnocentric education which encourages their self-absorbed conviction of superior values, beliefs, and behavior (Domhoff, 2002). As professor Michael Harris Bond stated, “We are all ethnocentric to varying degrees because we are born into a culture at birth and we cling to that culture….perceived superiority of one's own group is a basic component of ethnocentrism” (Bond, 1995, p. 3). George Overholt and Don Martin (1973) note ethnocentrism as

The habit of assuming that values, beliefs, and practices of [one’s] own culture are somehow better than those of any other and that thus provide appropriate standards for making judgments about people and cultures different from [one’s] own. (p. 409)

Howard J. Wiarda wrote a scathing article concerning how a vast amount of what literature and policies are supporting as universal are in fact biased, based on ethnocentric thinking (Wiarda, 1981).
Wiarda espoused this has occurred because Western-independent politics have dominated the globe through sheer might, technology, and finances. He also noted that researchers who have spent extensive time in developing nations have realized that Western-independent ethnocentric notions often have no relevance in parts of the world where collective cultures function for the betterment and survival of the group. Unfortunately, in the late twentieth century scholars and policy makers overtly held ethnocentric patterns as truths (1981). Wiarda (1981) emphatically states:

The necessity of analyzing indigenous institutions on their own terms and in their own cultural contexts rather than through Western social science frameworks seems particularly appropriate in the present circumstances, given both the assertion of indigenous ideologies and movements in many developing nations, and the corresponding rejection of European, American, and Western ones. (pp. 195-196)

Wiarda’s article was published in 1981, almost 40 years ago. Four years later the U.S. withdrew from UNESCO. It took 18 years before the U.S., thus U.S. policy makers, re-established itself with UNESCO (UNESCO, 2007).

UNESCO promotes international cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. This withdrawal not only drew attention to U.S. retention of territories and possessions but raised awareness of ethnocentric practices and an individualistic cultural base. Today, UNESCO continues the promotion of equitable education worldwide to shrink educational underachievement gaps. UNESCO’s actions have created an awareness, making ethnocentric patterns overtly unacceptable in global society. However, established ethnocentric patterns still endure. On October 12, 2017, the United States announced they would be withdrawing from UNESCO once again on December 31, 2018 (Nauert, 2017). The following national statement was delivered by Chris Hegadorn, the chargé d’affaires ad interim, to the UNESCO 39th General Conference (2017):
As we emphasized at the time of our recent announcement, we intend to remain engaged while still a full member and later as an observer, and to support related international cooperation in educational, scientific, cultural, communication and information activities—in line with U.S. values and interests. (last para.)

This announcement may be viewed as asserting rights to the retention of ethnocentrism.

Equitable education requires policy makers and educators to step outside ethnocentric thought patterns and acquire informed knowledge to understand education’s influences. Qualitative research gives cultural voice, thus offers informed contextual understanding of educational underachievement (Lam, 2000). Implementation of cultural voice increases autonomy and self-reliance in developing, landlocked, or island nations (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Currently, to ensure that the traditionally marginalized cultural voice is heard, contemporary researchers advocate “Greater emphasis on the social context in which learning takes place” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 158), especially considering that education has a very relevant role in how economies in wealthy and developing nations evolved over time (Adida, 2006). As an island nation with a traditionally marginalized cultural voice, this is particularly true for the U.S.VI.

**United States Virgin Islands**

Today, there are four main islands directly associated with the U.S.VI—St. John, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and Water Island—and approximately 70 smaller islands, islets and cays (Government of the United States Virgin Islands [GU.S.VI], 2007). Their total land mass extends to approximately twice the size of Washington, D.C., or 214,994 square miles (GU.S.VI, 2007). Ultimately, colonization was responsible for demographic and environmental changes throughout the Caribbean, including the U.S.VI. These changes quickly transformed the region from an inhabited jungle into a virtually devastated, desolate, organically new region.
These new regions in the Caribbean became European colonial holdings used for profiteering. In the early eighteenth century the Danes controlled the U.S.VI and began establishing sugar plantations using African slave labor (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1982; Olwig, 1999). By 1717, on St. John alone, there were over eight times as many slaves as Whites (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). The Danes’s first royal orders regarding good treatment of slaves were made in 1718 and ignored by the planters, who were not willing to give up powers of life and death over their slave property. Danish planters justified ignoring the orders by claiming the Blacks retained vicious practices and force was the only way to ensure order, although “Nothing could raise the blacks to the status of human beings” (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977, pp. 388-389).

During the slavery era, the Danish were not as merciless as other colonial powers (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). When the Moravian missionaries arrived in 1732, they ignored planter opposition and began educating the slaves in Dutch Creole (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989). The Creole customs and habits were perceived as little more than deficient in both form and content by the Danes (Mohammed, 1998). Therefore, by establishing the Dutch Creole language, education, and encouraging customs, the Moravians established the only sense of dignity the slaves knew (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977; Nero, 2000). In 1733, after a prolonged drought, the slaves’ plight became unbearable due to extra work loads and deaths from starvation, and a slave uprising occurred on St. John. The slaves killed a majority of the White population and succeeded in taking over most of the island for six months. In the end, several slaves surrendered after their owner made a rousing appeal. Eight of the slaves were publicly executed in horrific ways (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001).

Three males were sent to different plantations where they were burned at the stake. Three other males and two females were sent to the governor with the understanding they would
not be executed until the owner arrived. The slaves were publicly tortured with hot pinchers. One man was slowly burned to death, another was sawed in half, and the third was impaled. The two women had their hands and heads cut off (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001). Despite abuse being common, this type of public brutality was not the norm. Indeed, by 1773 free Blacks outnumbered the Whites on the Island of St. Thomas. Cornwell and Stoddard (2001) remarked:

Free blacks became a part of the society at an early period, freedom being either bestowed by white fathers or purchased. The free were mostly “colored” and emerged from the ranks of house slaves or artisans who were in a better financial position to affect their own purchase than were plantation slaves. (p. 389)

During this era Black was a term used to signify pure-bred (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001), whereas Colored was the term used to depict ancestry and whether one was free or not. It implied a higher social status despite the fact they could not vote or hold office. Over time, the Moravian efforts gained Danish support and in 1787 public schools for black slaves were established in the U.S.VI. By the early nineteenth century Denmark was recognized as having the world’s largest number of literate slaves (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Today, the slave uprising and the horrific public executions continue to live on as an emotional element of plantation history on the Islands.

The plantations flourished until the declaration of emancipation in 1834. After emancipation, loss of slave labor placed the plantations’ profitability margins in danger (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001). Profitability was quickly ensured through the importation of indentured servants from China, the East Indies, and India (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989). The ensuing diversity created by this action altered regional, social, political, and island culture, and assured White European racial minority. From engaging in commerce and through government employment, many Colored people prospered to the point of owning their own slaves. Racial awareness was prevalent and resulted in intensely racialist attitudes but, because the islands were
small and started with the racial imbalance, formal discrimination was not common (Lowenthal, 1971). Despite being the minority, White dominance continued through preservation of property ownership and law making. This resulted in retention of White social and political power (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989). After U.S. purchase of the U.S.VI in 1917, White dominance continued (Emerson, 1953).

Prior to the 1917 sale of the Islands, natural disasters and the invention of steam transportation caused the Islands’ profitability and population decline. These were not factors in the U.S. purchase of the Territory. The reason for the purchase was for strategic military positioning to protect U.S. interests in the Panama Canal. After the U.S. purchase, population decline continued as able-bodied males out-migrated to the mainland. Between 1920-1930 the Territory experienced an over fifty percent population decline (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1982). The people who remained on the Islands were granted American citizenship in 1927 (Dejnozka, 1972; GU.S.VI, 2007).

During the first few years of out-migration, the U.S. Navy administration reports to the federal government concerned the Islands’ deplorable conditions. These included: lack of employment opportunities; intolerable social conditions; disgraceful infant mortality rates; extreme poverty; totally insufficient education; primitive sanitation; water and food deficiency; insufficient hospitals, trained hospital staff, and medical equipment; and overcrowded and inadequate living conditions (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Although the U.S. had been a colonial power for quite a while, they were unprepared for the Islands’ reported conditions or for administrating as a minority over a Black colony (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989).

And while it is true that blacks were a depressed and despised minority in several states of the Union, Americans had neither previous experience nor adequate preparation to deal with the task involved in the new undertaking. (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977 p. 394)
The U.S. Navy and civilian officials, many from the southern states, found themselves in a society that had been functioning for a long time with persons of mixed blood in the aristocracy with high social status and considerable wealth (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Continentals’ (RI term for residents from the mainland) attempts to adjust in the Territory were to be a learning experience strewn with faux pas resting on assumptions of U.S. cultural dominance known as hegemony. Hegemony is the acceptances and unquestioned authority of a dominant culture’s conformist ideal. As in the U.S.VI case, after the initial purchase, Continentals’ predominant ideals were used as an attempt to transform the Islands’ vulnerable cultures into an acculturated society that perpetuated dominate U.S. cultural beliefs, values, and norms (Agger, 2006; Burke, 2009; Eriksen, 1992; Mayo, 2005). The U.S. Marines did nothing to hide racial prejudice. Their racist contempt resulted in nightly impromptu battles with the island men, but island girls appeared to be made for loving (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Thus, the resulting hegemony appeared to begin as a natural phenomenon.

Regardless of hegemony, initial island deficiencies, and racist contempt, the Islands’ Continental population grew rapidly between the 1940s and 1960s (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). The first retirees from the Mainland arrived on Island and established their own areas so as to have minimal contact with the U.S.VI society. As tourism grew, many Continentals jumped at the investment possibilities (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977; Lowenthal, 1971). These business-conscious Whites attracted more Continentals who would take on any available work. They even took the work that the residents would not. The increase of Continentals on Island strengthened hegemonic Americanization even when mainland beliefs, values, and/or norms conflicted with island culture. The cultural conflicts that arose were overshadowed by a positive rise in the Territory’s economy. However, the rising economy also resulted in an influx of people
from other areas in and around the Caribbean. Some of those people left after they earned a sufficient amount of money, and others stayed in the Territory illegally (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977).

The alien influx produced increased cultural diversity in the U.S.VI. During this time, approximately 21 percent of aliens who arrived had either been born in the British Virgin Islands (BVI), were White-French arrivals from St. Bart, “down Islanders” from the West Indies, or people of color arrived from Puerto Rico (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1982). Increased road construction and automobile availability in the 1970s resulted in the residential and Continental populations’ exodus into the rural areas of the Islands. The exodus, combined with increased government-sponsored low-income housing, reinforced the Islands’ segregation. The public housing easily absorbed the Black population of “down Islanders” into the Territory’s community. St. Bart’s White-French and Puerto Ricans remained isolated in their original areas of settlement (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1982).

When the White-French RI had migrated to the Territory they had a very difficult time assimilating in their new surroundings. The French fishermen had been culturally and geographically isolated along the coast in Charlotte Amalie, the capital of St. Thomas. The French farmers acquired or purchased land along the northern highlands (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1982; Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Regardless of where the French lived they were culturally, linguistically, and racially different, making it easy for U.S.VI residents to view them as inferior. But, because they were fishermen and farmers, they were not considered competitive to the Black majority. The Puerto Ricans lived in a segregated area in downtown Charlotte Amalie. Unfortunately, the Puerto Ricans were considered inferior to the U.S.VI residents and competitive for employment. The combination of inferiority and competitiveness resulted in
open hostility toward Puerto Ricans (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Puerto Ricans were viewed as unsanitary, with behavior problems, monopolizing sources of income, and were thought to have White superiority beliefs (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). As the U.S.VI economy continued to grow, the occupation stratification was almost predictable considering the Islands’ past cultural history (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Continentals were mainly concentrated in personnel; residents were in the political sector, while the labor force was composed mostly of aliens (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977; Lowenthal, 1971). During this period of economic growth Puerto Ricans’ presence became easier for island people to accept.

Despite all the known segregation and social stratification, the U.S.VI became labeled as the “showcase of democracy.” The people were presented as living in dignity and harmony with each other, producing a better life (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Years later it would be described as an informally organized segregationist body with jealousy, hostility, and fear offset by the pride in being a “Native Virgin Islander.” “Native Virgin Islander” was an acceptable term used to retain the segregation and inferiority of aliens under U.S. rule (Lowenthal, 1971).

Segregation is not the only dilemma discoverable on Island. U.N. identifiers provide the bleak reality of the Territory’s dependence on the U.S. The U.S. retains ownership of the Islands, the U.N. Office of the High Representative identifies the U.S.VI under: Least Developed Countries, UN- OHRLLS, and Small Island Developing States [SIDS]. This identification is a result of the Territory’s severely limited opportunities, lack of natural resources including fresh water, intense dependency on the U.S., inflated cost of living, and elevated vulnerability to natural disasters (U.N., n.d.). The U.N. also includes the U.S.VI in their list of Small Island Non-Self-Governing Territories (U.N., 2002).
The Territory’s location guarantees natural disasters such as Hurricane Irma and Maria in September of 2017 (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], 2017). Historically, it has also guaranteed long-term isolation and political dominance. Combined, these realities made it easy for the U.S. to attempt transformation of the Islands into an acculturated society that perpetuated dominant U.S. culture. However, Island residents already had intricate diverse cultural backgrounds. Backgrounds included former slaves who had been educated by the Moravians and were encouraged to retain their own cultural customs.

**Educational Reform 1917-1949**

When the Islands were first purchased, the possibility of intense dependency on the U.S. did not appear to be taken into consideration. U.S. federal government interest in the islands resulted in minimal changes of U.S.VI culture during the early years (Dejnozka, 1972). However, during the initial period of U.S. control the Admiral left in charge noted a need for educational change in the territory. In the 1920s, when elementary educational change began in the U.S.VI, it was based on the Utah school curricula. This change was followed by the junior high school curriculum being altered to follow New Mexico’s curriculum (1972). Educational concerns on the Islands were soon overshadowed by the 1929 stock market crash, the Great Depression and, the Dust Bowl.

During the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, the U.S. economy experienced economic crises and bank failures. These resulted in record high unemployment, poverty, and homelessness throughout the United States. The mainland’s historical crises resulted in the first real U.S. government involvement in the Territory (Archives, 2016). In 1931 U.S.VI jurisdiction transferred from the U.S. Navy to the Department of the Interior. With that transfer came the first U.S.-appointed civil governor (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977).
At the request of the civil governor the Ped arrived in the Islands during summer 1933. The Ped was formed as an alternate response to education’s overall growing reliance on scientific techniques, including intelligence testing and cost-benefit management: “progressive educators insisted on the importance of the emotional, artistic, and creative aspects of human development” (John Dewey Project on Progressive Education, 2002, p 3). However, facilitators of the Ped were not prepared for what they encountered: The Islands’ teachers were all residents of the Territory, with education levels ranging from college level to totally uninformed. Some teachers had taught for many years, others had never taught, and schools went from small rural schools to large urbanized schools (Lane, 1934). The U.S.VI teachers noted what they wanted, and facilitators summed their lists up with two specific thoughts: (1) All learning should be a means to an end, and (2) Learning should meet the needs of the individual and of the group of which he is a member. It did not take long for the facilitators to become aware that mainland curriculum was not very effective in the Territory. Ped facilitators also noted the curriculum did not take into consideration the physical, cultural, and economic conditions on the Islands (1934).

One of the facilitators, Bess Lane, wrote an article published in The Journal of Negro Education discussing the different avenues that should have been explored regarding education in the U.S.VI (Lane, 1934). Lane noted that it would be wisest to spend available educational funding on improving the teacher’s knowledge concerning values of skin color, possession of goods, and church affiliations (1934). She strongly urged teaching replacement values such as knowledge related to appreciation of spiritual qualities, and identification with home and community problems.

In her article Lane discussed the RI as possessing undernourished and underdeveloped heights and depths of feelings. Her implications for educational choices revolved around the
residents’ lack of self-worth and feelings of not belonging (Lane, 1934). Her first suggestion noted that, before people could learn together, they should be able to live together. For successful learning they need help finding common interest. Lane emphasized, before any changes were made to the curriculum, or to the perceived physical needs of the school, people needed security in their physical surroundings and sense of self (1934). In 1934, under the shadow of this type of controversy, the departments of health and education began working together. Realizing a person cannot learn if they are not healthy, an adequate number of school nurses were hired, and facilities for healthcare were set up, as well as a program in agricultural and industrial training (Cook, 1934).

Educational change does require financing. To increase the Islands’ economy, in 1935 President Roosevelt established an airbase in St. Thomas. This was followed by a submarine base in 1939. The mainland’s economy began benefiting from the institution of federal welfare and public works policies by the end of the 1930s. However, the president’s attempts did not stop the U.S.VI territory from facing bankruptcy in 1939. By July 1939 President Hoover announced the U.S.VI as the “Poor House of the United States” (*The Chicago Defender*, July 15, 1939).

Further attempts to revitalize the Territory included federal legislation that decentralized the U.S.VI education system in 1940. Education’s decentralization created two separate superintendents, one for St. Croix, and another for St. Thomas and St. John. At this time teachers in the territory were only required to have an eighth-grade degree. Three years later the municipality of St. Thomas passed an ordinance raising the minimum requirements for teachers to a high school diploma (Dejnozka, 1972). Then, in 1949 an amendment to the 1946 Vocational Act entitled all U.S.VI residents to participation in successive programs of educational federal
aid (De Castro, 1950). In the 1950s, more than 30 years after the U.S.VI purchase, President Truman appointed the first official Island governor. With a governor appointed, it appeared RI would now have a voice in Island affairs, including education. Real change occurred in 1954 when the U.S.VI was federally recognized by ratification of the Organic Act of 1936, allowing the Island government a democratic structure (Emerson, 1953). The ratification of these amendments coincided with U.S. economic growth and resulted in the migration of Mainlanders to the Territory (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977).

As the Mainlanders established business, property ownership, and educational facilities for their children, the ideals of intensified hegemony and overt prejudice were reinforced in the U.S.VI. The resulting inferior treatment of RI produced contempt and distrust throughout the Territory (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Expected conformance to U.S. hegemonic ideals were causing the U.S.VI culture and economy long-term problems. Harrigan and Varlack (1977) explained, “Whites grew to understand the limits beyond which intolerance brought regrettable results. Displays of prejudice would elicit a disdain and contempt from non-Whites that would make them feel vulgar and inferior” (p. 400). The RI nonconformist displays were amplified and viewed as unjust when the Mainlanders sent reports state-side (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). During this period, Mainlanders’ private education for their children assured minimal interaction with the RI. Eleven years after President Truman appointed the Islands’ first governor, President Kennedy appointed the nation’s first Commissioner of Education to work with the appointed Virgin Islands Governor. Together the governor and the commissioner arranged for accreditation of the islands’ three high schools, NYU completion of a comprehensive school survey in the territory, and arranged the three-year project implementing the study’s recommendations (Dejnozka, 1972).
The results from the NYU survey stressed cultural differences and the necessity to upgrade educational programming at all levels. The NYU project report included the fact that 49.6 percent of the Territory’s teachers did not have degrees (Dejnozka, 1972). The report also noted it was imperative to increase funding before educational changes could effectively be made. Administrators’ and educators’ requirements were changed in 1962 mandating degrees of higher education (1972). This mandate resulted in the 1963 opening of a two-year college offering an Associate of Arts degree. The governor’s dream was to establish a college encouraging RI who were not able to travel to the mainland to obtain degrees and raise the islands’ status (Dookhan, 1981).

**Education and Demographics**

By 1972, the college had included a master’s program in teacher education and was awarded Land-Grant status. The Land-Grant status was to assure curriculum growth for adults and sustained development (University of the Virgin Islands [UVI], 2010a). In 1986 the continuing expansion of the college resulted in the UVI becoming the only Historically Black College and University not located on the U.S. mainland (2010a). UVI now retains established ongoing community outreach programs as well as an Agricultural Experiment Station; Cooperative Extension Service; Eastern Caribbean Center; the Reichhold Center for the Arts; a Marine Center, Fitness Center; and the Virgin Islands Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (2010a).

UVI’s most recent contribution to the community is its Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning (CELL) center. The Center focuses on quality training opportunities that contribute to organizational and individual achievements, research, human resource
development, professional services, consulting activities, and personal enrichment programs (UVI, 2010b). As of this writing, UVI remains the only formal adult educational and research facility in the U.S.VI. Its sustainability and growth has been attributed to the considerable relevance of local Caribbean culture encompassed in its programming (Dookhan, 1981).

As the only formal A.E. offered in the Territory, CELL administrators are aware that they are serving a multicultural population. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the U.S.VI total population to be 108,602 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). However, as of the 2004 U.S.VI Community survey, the U.S.VI population had increased to 111,459 (Mills, 2006). Both reports classify over 76 percent of the population as having Black ethnicity. However, the U.S.VI 2000 census of Population and Housing Technical Documentation, Definitions of Subject Characteristic, noted the U.S. Census (2010) definition:

Black or African American. A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “Black, African Am., or Negro,” or provide written entries such as African American, Afro-American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian. (B-38)

Race is based on self-report. Due to traditional dominant White cultural ideal (i.e., hegemony), individuals are likely to report their race based on skin tone rather than heritage. I witnessed this firsthand while on island when individuals with dark skin reported themselves as Black or African American. Black ethnicity in the U.S.VI more likely incorporates cultural heritage from, but not limited to India, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, indigenous islanders throughout the Caribbean, and various other countries in Africa, Europe, Latin America, Central America, and the U.S. In contrast, in the aftermath of the 1960s U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Mainlanders have been encouraged to report their race based on ethnicity.
Educational Disparity

After the U.S. Civil Rights movement, U.S.VI educational standards were reviewed and subsequently changed to align with U.S. federal education guidelines. The U.S.VI public education system was modeled on the mainland’s public education following the same accrediting procedures as all U.S. public schools. The Territory does have access to federal funding and initiatives such as Head Start, nutrition, and Upward Bound (Global Education Reference, 2010). Today, the U.S.VI Department of Education falls under the executive branch of the U.S.VI government. A commission is appointed by the governor and approved by the Senate (UVI, 2002). As part of their drive for independence, the Territory’s Administrative Efficiency report was conveyed to the U.S.VI Constitutional Convention’s Education Committee (2002). The report noted:

Mandates of the United States Department of Education have resulted in the Virgin Islands Department of Education creating a structure for legal and reporting purposes, which does not entirely exist operationally. (Key Findings)

Fundamentally, the U.S.VI Department of Education [VIDE] is viewed to be recreated every time a new governor is elected due to upheavals following new administrations and policy disconnect (UVI, 2002). As recently as 2008, public concern was voiced because the Commissioner of Education had never lived in the Territory:

Many of the problems we see here are social, and those are the things that need to be fixed. It would take anyone from the outside time to acclimate to the people and be in a position to address those issues. (Key Findings)

Public concern was proven defensible when the 2008 U.S.VI Community Survey Educational Statistics reported that only 50 percent of the Territory’s 25 or over population had obtained a high school degree or equivalent (Mills, 2008). These statistics demonstrated major inconsistency when compared to the 2008 National Center for Education Statistics (Stillwell &
Sable, 2013). The mainland’s 2008 NCES statistics showed 87 percent of the U.S. population 25 and older had obtained a high school degree or equivalent (Institute Education Sciences, 2009). The disparity between the U.S. and U.S.VI high school degree achievement exists despite the U.S.VI Board of Education Authority being committed to devising policies, rules, and regulations in accordance with the U.S. Federal Constitution (Virgin Islands Board of Education, n.d.).

**Autonomy**

Statistically noted educational underachievement has negatively influence the Territory’s economy and its desire to be recognized globally as an autonomous entity. The following excerpts from the U.N. Special Committee Meeting on Decolonization confirm U.S.VI desire for autonomy: “Because your drafting of a constitution is an exercise in self-government…” (U.N., 2008, p. 1). At the same U.N. meeting Juliette Chin presented a statement by Judith L. Bourne, President of the U.N. Association of the Virgin Islands: “Territories committed to self-determination were deeply troubled” (U.N., 2008, p. 1). In 2009, Carlyle Corbin reported the U.S.VI constitutional convention was not adequate for full measure of self-governance (U.N., 2009b).

To achieve self-determination, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy team (CEDS) was assembled for the advancement of sustainable economic success in the U.S.VI. The team comprised top U.S.VI government executives and community stakeholders from the public and private education sectors (U.S.VI BER, 2014). On February 20, 2009, CEDS submitted the U.S.VI economic development plan to the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Administration. As reported in the U.S.VI BER [Bureau of Economic Research]
CEDS strategic goals revealed deficiencies in territorial education and noted that educational advancement was being used as an economic indicator:

Build solid foundation in education, workforce skills, and training to integrate residents into the economic marketplace and position them to be competitive in the global economy. (p. 4)

The report also noted:

“The US Virgin Islands will capitalize on its unique human, natural, cultural and industrial resources and location to create a robust and globally competitive econom[y] …that provide for the highest quality of life and sustainable prosperity for citizens. (p. 3)

The U.S.VI CEDS proposal was initiated after the 2007 Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the UN Concerns working paper from the U.N. General Assembly was released (U.N., 2007).

United Nations Reports

The February 2003, March 2007, and March 2009(a) U.N. General Assembly reports included repetitive concerns related to U.S.VI’s economic sectors and social conditions. The majority of the concerns had ties to educational matters. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) analysis stated: “Threats to the education sector in Caribbean SIDS from the impact of natural disasters are real and frequent…. [I]t may be considered one of the most vulnerable sectors to any form of natural hazard” (U.N., 2009a, p. 6). The ECLAC analysis also noted that ideas of vulnerability-risk vary and are based on cultural belief and social position, which influence individual judgment. Therefore, decisions based on assessment of risk were labeled as a “complex social process” (ECLAC, 2009, p. 4). According to The Coordinating Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America, the risk brought on by natural disaster, the effects on education, and social vulnerabilities result in
combined/ongoing tension. This tension, along with inherited rigid structures of stratification, accounts for speculations of Caribbean education as an “optimistic enterprise” (ECLAC, 2009, p. 5). However, a former delegate in the Caribbean for UNESCO argued that past social stratification structures have internally resulted in views of educational obtainment being the key to human improvement (U.N., 2009a).

In 2008, a senator from the U.S.VI told the U.N. General Assembly that the Territory’s request for an emergency summit was made as a preliminary effort to move toward improvement and autonomy (U.N., 2009b). He noted it appeared that potential investors had backed out due to crime rate and the challenge education presented. This was highlighted by implying legislators and educators concerned with poverty, crime, and education complications were behind the request for the summit (2009b). The request was expected based on the U.N. 2003, 2007, and 2009(a) reports.

Each of the previous U.N. reports noted education was compulsory and free through the age of 16; 48 schools were administrated by the VIDE. St. John, with a 2006 population of 4,250 residents on approximately a 20 square mile land mass there are two schools administrated by VIDE (U.N., 2003, 2007, 2009a). St Croix, the largest island, encompassing 134 square miles of land, has 14 schools administered by VIDE, including two high schools. St. Thomas covers 32 square miles of land and is home to the U.S.VI capital, Charlotte Amalie. Although St. Thomas is smaller than St. Croix, the populations are comparable: 30 schools and two high schools are administered by VIDE on the island (U.N., 2003, 2007, 2009a).

The U.N. 2003 report highlighted the concern that all four of the Territory’s public high schools lost their accreditation with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA-CESS) in 2002 (U.N., 2003). The two public highs schools on St. Thomas did receive
their accreditation back. One on St. Croix had its accreditation stipulations removed in 2015 (MSA‐CESS, 2015). As of January 2018, the second public high school on St. Croix was not accredited (St. Croix Educational Complex High School, 2018). Among other things, responsibility for the original loss was attributed to poor student attendance and significant teacher absenteeism. The three U.N. reports also included pressing concerns related to 10 percent of 16-19-year-olds in the Territory not going to school, or working (U.N., 2003, 2007, 2009a).

By 2007, educational performance reports were underscoring other U.N. educational concerns in the U.S.VI. Their report demonstrated that only 16 of the 33 public elementary schools were meeting reading and mathematics performance levels, and third through sixth graders were receiving higher performance scores than seventh, eighth, and eleventh graders. Finally, the U.N. also recorded that only seven of the schools followed adequate yearly standards (U.N., 2007). The accumulated concerns resulted in a U.N. 2009(a) report stating that 81 percent of the U.S. federal government stimulus package the Territory was receiving was to be spent on educational initiatives. The report also mentioned that a hearing had commenced in the U.S. Senate regarding setting up the first high school on St. John (U.N., 2009a).

U.N. social concerns, ECLAC basing social vulnerability on cultural beliefs, discussion concerning inherited rigid structures of stratification, and ongoing tensions suggest RI have culturally transmitted perceptions that are affecting the decision-making process. However, it was also mentioned that in the Caribbean, views of educational attainment were considered the key to human improvement. The view increased in times of crisis when adults requested education for their children (ECLAC, 2009, p. 6). Combined, these notions demonstrate U.S.VI
low academic achievement may be reflecting a misalignment of perceived educational needs and/or transmission of educational features.

Lopez’s (2006) State Higher Education Executive Offices report asserted:

Their addition to the workforce is crucial for U.S. economic growth and stability. Raising their educational attainment levels will be equally as important...If predictions remain accurate, the large Latino and African American population will grow substantially, yet if their educational levels do not rise as substantially, the nation’s economic disparities between the social classes will increase and make the United States poorer as a whole. (pp. 7-8)

If steps are not taken to understand these diverse learning communities’ human capital, models demonstrate that current educational patterns in the U.S. will lead to decreased national productivity, reduced efficiency, and further marginalization.

Concerns of educational underachievement, its effect on national global standing, and the U.S.VI desires of autonomy led to the 2016 VIDE Strategic Performance Management System. The system is being used in the U.S.VI to formulate a strategic direction for improving the quality and responsiveness of education throughout the Territory. Action goals conclude with: “VIDE will achieve its goals through its people, the families and communities, the businesses and organizations of the Virgin Islands” (Educational Testing Services, 2018).

U.S.VI 2016 VIDE action aligns with global leaders advocating the importance of cultural consideration in education efficiency. It is now over 50 years after mandated educational reforms in the U.S.VI, the NYU survey, NYU project, and over 85 years after the Progressive Education Society stated that educational deficiencies were based in cultural unawareness. Cultural awareness stances may be obtained through perceived cultural perspectives functioning in the Territory and the understanding of theory associated with my research.
Theoretical Framework and Research Progression

Due to continual changes and advancements, independent cultural and educational context has never been easy to define or understand. Contemporary cultures have become even more difficult to distinguish due to rapid technological advancements, increased human longevity, and border crossing. Using culture as a deciding factor in educational achievement, Wan Shun Ewa Lam (2006) noted, it is often viewed as possessing holistic attitudes, values, and behaviors predisposing the group’s educational underachievement outcomes. As a result, her research examines “culture beyond a majority-minority state-bound category” (p. 228). Lam (2006) postulates:

people draw upon and reshape diverse cultural materials, develop multisite and multilayered identifications, and navigate the overlapping and dividing lines among cultures, ethnicities, languages, and nations. These forms of learning deviate from the historical construction of education and schooling…. (p. 228)

The evolution of education and the effects of globalization have resulted in a collective concern for understanding how underlying factors contribute to achievement gaps in education. Researchers have asserted that people produce meaning through the knowledge crafted from past, present, and perceived future cultural experiences (Craig, 2009; Mattingly, 2008).

Historically, U.S. ethnocentric educational policies have repeatedly ignored the underlying factor of culture. To increase understanding of cultural influence on educational achievement in the U.S. VI, Chapter 2 includes information relating to educational reform advocates, Greeno’s situated learning theory, Hofstede’s cultural factors, Gramsci’s hegemony, and contemporary human capital theory.

Chapter 3 on methodology examines details of ethnographic methods, fieldwork, data collection, analysis description, researcher background, research setting, and interview
demographics. In Chapter 4, I offer the results from my ethnographic research, open-ended interviews, and a brief discussion of the research results. The summary of my results and analysis are presented in Chapter 5, which concludes with research recommendations.

Discovery of extensive quantitative research on educational advancement and achievement relating to race, gender, sexual, and cultural orientation is currently available from The Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). The Institute’s online site The National Assessment of Educational Progress offers information related to gaps in higher education, secondary education, long-term trends, and many other educational statistics (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational underachievement has been established through quantitative research measures (Guba, 1987). However, it does not sufficiently explain the phenomenon of underachievement in the U.S.VI. Low educational achievement has been cited by U.S.VI BER and the U.N. as prohibiting the U.S.VI territory from gaining desired national autonomy (U.N., 2009a; U.S.VI BER, 2009). In this chapter I provide a theoretical framework relevant to my study alongside cultural perspectives, reports, and findings from national and educational reform advocates recognizing the value of culture including: World organizations acknowledging the value of understanding cultural perspectives, and influence in educational attainment.

The chapter opens with the findings from educational reform advocates followed by information regarding Greeno’s situated learning theory and the theory’s relationship to A.E. in the U.S. A segment on cultural context will include: how knowledge is transmitted, idea of social positioning, importance of national culture, and Hall and Hofstede’s cultural factors. The chapter concludes with a discussion on U.S. Cultural Dominance, Gramsci’s hegemony, and human capital’s economic view pertaining to educational advancement.
Relevance of Literature

My research examines understanding cultural perspective’s relevance to education in the U.S. VI. Cultural perspective includes but is not limited to: issues of social support, perceived family and community views, education’s value, formal education, and historical influences. Inclusion of cultural perspective moves learning from the traditional notion of fixed internal-individual cognitive process to an enduring-dynamic process shaped by cultural interactions placed in time (Lattuca, 2002):

- cultural perspective extends the understanding of context so it includes both the immediate context…and larger contexts (the social, cultural, and historical settings in which this particular social interaction takes place). Learning, then, is shaped not only by what happens between individuals in interaction, but by the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which their interaction is embedded. (p. 713)

Recognizing the Value of Culture

The seriousness of growing economic disparity of poor countries (such as the U.S. VI) compared to rich countries (the U.S.) has resulted in global organizations promoting intervention through education. UNESCO’s (2010) Strategy for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) overall goal is:

- To support Member States and other stakeholders in addressing global sustainable development challenges through ESD, thus addressing the challenges of learning for bringing about a more sustainable world. (p. 3)

World Bank’s (2010) 2020 Educational Strategy states:

- The 2005 sector strategy update (ESSU’05) more explicitly reconnects education to the economic development agenda: “Our strategic thrust is to help countries integrate education into national economic strategies and develop holistic education systems responsive to national socio-economic needs.” (p. 4)
These excerpts demonstrate UNESCO’s and World Bank’s acknowledgment that educational advancement assures national development and therefore autonomy. This view of education is the foundation behind the economic development of human capital theory’s argument; educational underachievement is detrimental for national development (Woodhall, 1995).

However, the underlying cause of educational underachievement must also be substantiated. UNESCO and World Bank educational strategies concur with this notion. As a result, UNESCO (2010) educational strategies recognize the value of understanding cultural perspectives and influence in educational attainment:

Humankind will not solve the problems it faces today with the same values and approaches that created them....A key advantage of the concept of sustainable development is that, through its social, economic and environmental pillars as well as its cultural and ethical dimensions, global challenges are understood in all their complexity....The current context therefore gives us a chance to improve educational systems with a view to increasing both the quality and the relevance of education in this fast-changing world. (pp. 3-4)

**Cultural Perspectives**

Individual perspectives are embedded in social and cultural contexts. Education is most effective when learning occurs within the cultural context of a learning group (Boreham & Morgan, 2004). Unfortunately, in the recent past and often in contemporary society, when cultural factors clash with a dominant group, emphasis is placed on how the dominant group’s social world defines acceptable individual norms (Merriam et al., 2007). When outside cultural norms influence a nation, by either force or covert means, the occupying society’s education policies are instituted. This occurrence displays the dominant cultures total disregard of the occupied nations instituted cultural norms.
Dominant educational communication, norms, and expectations of success do not always blend with the realities of the subculture where these are instituted. Subcultural resistance may be displayed through perceived acts of disrespect, violence, disinterest, or lack of community support. If the dominant group also brings in their educators with no knowledge of the learners’ culture, the learners may be perceived and labeled as lazy and/or lacking intelligence. For educators who are attempting to integrate A.E. this presents a multitude of challenges (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

The most effective educators realize that instituting education without considering underlying subcultural factors are often attempts to eradicate the unfamiliar or opposing culture, commonly described as deculturalization. This imposing of ethnocentric educational policy has been historically repeated by U.S. policy makers (Spring, 2006). Rather than considering the diversity of cultures and continuing measurement of educational achievement based on ethnocentric norms, Shields (2000) stated it would be more effective to focus on similarities:

Rather than thinking of schools as communities that exist because of a common affiliation to an established school ethos or tradition, it might be more helpful to explore an alternative concept. A school community founded on difference would be one in which the common centre would not be taken as a given but would be co-constructed from the negotiation of disparate beliefs and values as participants learn to respect, and to listen to, each other. In this concept, bonds among members are not assumed, but forged, and boundaries are not imposed but negotiated. (p. 275)

Concentrations on differences rather than similarities are commonly due to fears or naive ethnocentrism. This often results in misunderstandings, resentment, protest, and violent altercations. Reforming the long-standing ethnocentric cultural norms in education may initially result in policy makers’ and educators’ covert objections.

Overcoming these covert objections will not only assist the generating of forward progress in the U.S.VI, it may advert U.S. educational underachievement and assure continued
forward progress for the U.S. as a nation. Edmonds and McDonough’s (2009) article in the
American Council on Education reported that long-term education projections have
demonstrated students’ non-dominant cultural groupings will be the norm:

The tradition of young adults in the United States attaining higher levels of education
than previous generations appears to have stalled, and for far too many people of color,
the percentage of young adults with some type of postsecondary degree compared with
older adults has actually fallen, a new report by the American Council on Education
(ACE) concludes…According to the Minorities in Higher Education 2008 Twenty-third
Status Report, the percentage of young adults aged 25 to 29 and older adults aged 30 and
above with at least an associate degree in 2006 was about the same, approximately 35
percent. For Hispanics and American Indians, young adults have even less education than
previous generations. (pp. 1-2)

Educational Variance

The national association of State Higher Education Executive Offices (SHEEO), located
in Boulder, Colorado (SHEEO, 2013), was formed during the Cold War to serve “statewide
coordinating and governing boards in developing and sustaining excellent systems of higher
education” (SHEEO, 2008, homepage). Today, their objectives include acting as a liaison
between the states and the federal government while studying education policy issues, state
activities, and publishing reports to inform the field. In 2006, SHEEO supported Janet Lopez’s
research to encourage education policy makers in the development of essential and additional
initiatives. The report identified key demographic trends, their effect on education and on the
long-term economic wellbeing of the nation (Lopez, 2006). The report included:

The United States leads all developing nations in the overall percentage of children
living in poverty…shifting demographics will create substantial increases in the
population of American youth who historically have been the most poorly served, least
economically successful and most under prepared for college level work. (pp. 4-9)

The report went on to discuss how projected population trends for 2040 demonstrate the
U.S. White population will comprise 32 percent of the total student population, the Asians 15
percent, and Blacks 8.1 percent. Conversely, Latinos will represent almost half of the student population, at 44 percent. However, if educational trends do not improve, 47.8 percent of the White population, 29.6 percent of the Black, and 68 percent of the Asian population will obtain degrees. Sadly, Lopez (2006) noted only 18 percent of the Latinos are predicted to have equivalent degrees:

If predictions remain accurate, the large Latino and African American population will grow substantially, yet if their educational levels do not rise as substantially, the nation’s economic disparities between the social classes will increase, and make the United States poorer as a whole…. As the nation becomes more ethnically diverse, social stratification will become more prominent. If trends regarding income disparities and access to education persist, the uneducated and unskilled workforce will be a social and economic detriment to the nation. (pp. 13-14)

Recommendations to avoid this negative requires considering the needs of immigrant students in relation to specific programs to promote opportunities for Latinos’ increased A.E. completion. The report also discussed that many high school students are not unmotivated to learn, they simply cannot relate to curriculums that are not applicable to their circumstances. If the U.S. is to remain competitive it needs an overall, well-constructed education system based on effective policy.

After the Lopez report, the American Council on Education (the coordinating organization for all the nation’s higher education institutions) established Solutions for our future: A National Project to Demonstrate How American Colleges and Universities Serve the Public. Their financial solicitation flyer noted the importance of research and that a nation could not “Expect to remain economically competitive in the international economy without increasing our educational capital by increasing achievement levels across the educational pipeline” (SHEEO, 2006, p. 5). As advocates for educational reform, The Center for Education Reform
(CER), based in Washington, D.C., uses their unique knowledge base to provide ardent insights into a variety of issues realizing educational reform in diverse communities.

CER is a non-profit organization that has been working toward diversified research and increases in educational achievement since 1993 (CER, 2005). “The center was founded in 1993 to bridge the gap between policy and practice and restore excellence to education” (CER, 2013, homepage). In the CER 2005 annual report, their purpose is listed, “To create and influence changes in American education that put people, not systems first” (p. 3). Emphasis on people, along with the predominant placement and repetition of the full phrase, directs understanding that people are cultural and social beings, as opposed to simply being a cog in an economic system. CER recognizes that educational variance, cultural beliefs, social occurrences, and history create diverse educational needs; however, the Center’s proponents view education as a foundation for greater moral and emotional development: “Understanding, civility, justice, and even love are influenced by an excellent education” (USDE, 2004, p. 3). Their efforts to reform educational choice that assures social justice have resulted in their maintenance of one of the largest educational databases in the nation (USDE, 2004).

Maintenance of the database and the dedication of the CER community made it possible to assist learners in the Mississippi Delta immediately after Hurricane Katrina. Their response to New Orleanians’ educational needs resulted in over 25 charter schools opening before public schools became operational (CER, 2005). In the aftermath of the hurricane, CER (2005) also noted:

90 percent of the public schools in New Orleans were performing below the state average. Children were failing to learn the most rudimentary skills, facilities were falling down, drugs and violence were rampant, and teachers often lacked basic credentials. (p. 6)
Educational situations like this are becoming more pronounced in non-White communities throughout the U.S. because historically public education was based on a socially class-based, patriarchal-instituted system (Wood, 2003). With the U.S.VI education achievement performing below the national average, Senator O’Reilly, District of St. Croix, introduced legislation for Charter Schools in the U.S.VI in 2013. Ms. O’Rielly was a fifth-term senator in September 2017 when Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused devastating destruction to the Islands. Damage included four of the schools being condemned (Virgin Islands Consortium, 2017). Scarcity of materials and equipment, structural damage, dangerous mold growth, and modular structures scheduled for late June have resulted in teachers’ and other personnel’s resignations and students relocating to the mainland (Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 2018). U.S.VI educational needs may result in renewed interest in charter schools.

According to the USDE (2009):

The basic tenets of charter schools give them room to be innovative, hold them accountable for results, and let parents decide if the learning meets the needs of their children….One of the most striking features of these schools is their diversity. (p. 3)

Historically, U.S. educational systems are learner silenced. This is especially true when the learners’ ideas clash with dominant beliefs of effective practice. The fact is that enforcement of the dominate class’s educational policy was to ensure that all cultures adopted the dominant culture’s traits, requiring denial of one’s own cultural past (Wood, 2003). In short, the goal was to assure acculturation.

CER has produced an opportunity for diverse cultures to circumvent acculturation. Their educational alternatives allow for retention of key cultural factors, acceptance and integration of cultural factors, and ownership of individual and group educational advancement. Ownership breeds educational success, increasing the odds of national advancement and retention of
autonomy. To assure that the diverse students in New Orleans, and in the multitudes of other
diverse areas, achieve academic and social prosperity, CER advocates qualitative and action
research (CER, 2005). CER realizes that research informs governments, policy makers,
educators, and learners which results in viable educational reform. Successful reform outcomes
advance educational attainment which, according to the economic development of human capital
theory, assures national development, and thus autonomy (Woodhall, 1995).

In today’s globalized world, the growing needs of diverse students are vast due to the
dynamics of economic globalization. Globalization’s transformative effect has eroded
geographical barriers due to technological developments producing ease of movement across
borders for economic or political purposes (Robertson et al., 2002). This movement is resulting
in transforming traditionally homogenous communities into culturally diverse populations. For
this reason, teachers, parents, community members, and researchers need to coalesce with
determination to provide quality education while working aggressively to dismantle the barriers
that shape and reproduce hegemonic ideals (Macedo, 2000). By incorporating cultural research
within the context of hegemonic educational processes, researchers will equip policy makers and
advocates for educational reform with:

The necessary tools to embrace pedagogy of hope based on cultural production where
specific groups of people produce, mediate, and confirm the mutual ideological elements
that emerge from and affirm their cultural experiences….Only through experiences that
are rooted in the interests of individual and collective self-determination can we create
democratic education. (Macedo, 2000, p. 23)

Given that successful learning has been perceived as part of life that is based on personal
experience, learning should be part of the culture capitalizing on knowledge found in diversity
which encourages positive identity (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).
In 2005, the U.S.VI Community Survey Educational Statistics reported that a mere 50 percent of the 65,716 people in the 25 or over population had obtained a high school degree or equivalent (Mills, 2008). The report demonstrates a serious educational underachievement in the U.S.VI. This educational underachievement exists despite approximately 50 years of adherence to, and reforms in, U.S. education policy. Deficit theory reasons that these underachievers display a deficiency in genetics, communities, or families (Palmer, 2010). The theory may be compared to a lack of motivation to achieve. Both assumptions place the blame on the learner for the underachievement phenomenon. In the U.S.VI case, blaming the learner would indicate that 50 percent of the Territory’s adults are incapable of realizing expected capitalistic notions of educational potential. As subsequent information of Phelps, Taylor, and Gerard’s (2001) research demonstrates, however, I believe the current disparity in U.S.VI education may be a cultural phenomenon related to history, influence, and diversity.

Rosemary E. Phelps, Janice D. Taylor, and Phyllis A. Gerard’s (2001) article titled “Cultural Mistrust, Ethnic Identity, Racial Identity, and Self-Esteem Among Ethnically Diverse Black University Students” documented that varied history, complex influences, and diverse circumstances result in “within group” cultural diversity. Their research results highlighted the importance of understanding the role cultural mistrust plays in education. Phelps, Taylor, and Gerard (2001) recommend that “Further examination of the impact of one's sociocultural experience as a majority or minority group member within a given society seems warranted” (p. 214).

Conventionally, culture has been viewed to possess stable identities, categorical memberships, and holistic traits shared by members of a particular population with hierarchal
representations of power. Contemporary views are shifting to incorporate social practices and history as vital to an individual culture (Lam, 2006). In 2008, Cheryl Mattingly’s research noted that culture provides a resource for sense making because it offers scenarios that assist in the placement of actions within recalled translations of histories. These researchers’ findings have demonstrated that people produce meaning through knowledge generated by the context of lived experiences; past, present, and perceived future; personal and social interactions; and the particular situation and place of occurrences (Mattingly, 2008). Therefore, understanding the cultural phenomenon encompassing academic educational achievement includes examining “The meaning people construe of their lived experiences in context” (Craig, 2009, p. 1039). These lived experiences are more readily understood through the cultural combinations found in learning experiences. A good example of this is found in situated learning.

Situated Learning

Describing learning as situated is a way of expressing the need for knowledge to be transmitted in relevant settings and situations. Situated learning requires social interaction and collaboration allowing the learner to become involved in the community of practice (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2009). In 1977, Greeno presented the situated approach of learning, emphasizing an interactive system composed of groups or individuals learning with materials and representational resources. His approach promoted actually being involved in the learning experiences (Kirshner & Whitson, 1998).

Advocates for Greeno’s approach began examining learning as a process of participation in cultural practices and shared learning behavior (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). They determined that knowledge does not occur in its own world but is created through social occurrences while
participating in cultural practices (Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004). This is representative of the basic tenet that knowledge and knowing cannot be separated from situations where they occur (Paavola et al., 2004). An approach was founded on the principle of object-orientedness found in activity theory. Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999) explained the principle as follows:

Activity theory is a socio-cultural, socio-historical lens...analyze human activity systems. It focuses on the interaction of human activity and consciousness within its relevant environmental context. (p.61)

Realities of learning experiences in the U.S.VI include: cultural perspectives, hegemonic affiliation, and application of human capital. Combined, these realities all become interrelated sections influencing an individual’s narrative of self.

**Situated Learning in Action**

How situated learning influences cultural learning may be understood through historical exploration of A.E. in the U.S. Until the mid-1920s A.E. was limited to a few formal educational programs, vocational training, and Americanization in the U.S. (Clark, 1958). The term *Adult Education* was established after World War I when it was recognized to have general purposes, especially for immigrants (Clark, 1958). Although immigrants were often viewed as unskilled laborers or agricultural peasants, there were also many craftsmen and artisans. Regardless of skill, all Europeans were welcomed, as long as they were able to cohesively melt into U.S. society (Schied, 1995). This resulted in the U.S. becoming known as the melting pot. This metaphor inconspicuously encouraged swift immigrant acculturation into their new, ethnocentric, superior group (Wood, 2005).
Reinforcement toward the assimilation process took many forms: Education, social discourse, legal action, and/or vigilantes (Wood, 2005). However, the immigrants’ move toward Americanization was intertwined with the ethnic values and traditions they were raised in. Partial assimilation resulted in marginal status for the working class (Schied, 1995). Working-class immigrants discovered that personal advancement required educating themselves to attain knowledge, understand power relations, and gain politic understanding. These needs resulted in dynamic educational practices that matured into part of their cultural life: worker clubs, reading rooms, churches, socials, dances, festivals, and sporting events (Schied, 1995).

By 1953, American educational consensus asserted that A.E. should be diversified to meet the needs of the individuals, groups, and societal problems (Clark, 1958). In the 1960s, working-class investment in education was recognized as beneficial for the individual, and society as a whole: “investment in human capital, particularly education, could explain [a] substantial proportion of the growth rate in the United States” (Woodhall, 1995, p. 2646). Comparatively, investment in A.E. may be viewed as the underlying force which propelled the U.S. to become the most powerful nation in history (Novak, 2002).

**Cultural Context**

In 2000, Phyllis Cunningham enhanced understanding of situated learning by described learning in a sociocultural context. Cunningham noted learning has both personal and social dimensions which the learner combines with their cultural practices to find meaning. Her view is sustained by the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, and central, as human beings attempt to make sense out of the world they live in (Curry & Cunningham, 2000). Today,
globalized world efforts to increase educational advancements through effective practice necessitate improved understanding of cultural context.

In 2009, the ECLAC described socioculture as the consequences of cultural belief and social positioning (2009, p. 4). The idea of social positioning complements Cunningham’s sociocultural depiction by drawing attention to multiple positionality. Multiple positionality develops personal and social dimensions through inclusion of cross-national differences, social organizational use, level of inequalities, locality, previous educational positionality, and other untold social factors (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). Because of globalization, cultural belief may no longer be easily distinguished by localities’ established cultural practices. Social construction explains how human beings structure and pass on to others in their culture perceived realities in context (DiMaggio et al., 2001).

Growing desire to understand how cultural contexts shape learning realities has resulted in increasing support for the use of qualitative-ethnographic research in the field of education (Brown, 2005; Epperson, 2007; Erickson & Gutierrez, 2002; Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002; Lam, 2009; Lipman, 2005). This qualitative research technique has gained support because development of contextual understanding through ethnographic research elicits emic (community insider) perspectives. Inclusion of the emic perspective allows educational realities to become central in the realignment of successful programming for national development. Quantitative research demonstrates the U.S.VI has severe educational underachievement. However, quantitative results are not explaining why educational underachievement persists. Qualitative-ethnographic research is designed to answer the why questions, allowing for realignment of successful educational programming.
Recently, the U.S.VI has acknowledged the importance of successful programming for educational achievement and national development. This acknowledgement has transpired due to the U.S.VI working, in conjunction with the U.N. and under U.S. federal education guidance, to achieve free association with the U.S. Free association is a status option which would remove the U.S.VI from its present existence within the sphere of sovereignty of the U.S. and establish a separate U.S.VI sovereignty outside the political union and federal constitutional system of the U.S. (U.N., 2010). Albeit, U.S. education is a state responsibility and removed from federal regulation, the USDE does fund several educational programs and therefore the U.S. federal government exerts influence even in the U.S.VI through funding control (Philbert, 2016; U.S. Doe, 2008). Regardless of their adherence to U.S. federal guidelines, U.S.VI educational statistics reveal extreme educational underachievement. Unfortunately, the hegemonic practice in the U.S. is to label this educational discrepancy under lack of motivation to achieve (Lesch, 2007). This transfers the responsibility of achievement from the policy makers to the individual learners.

Howard Gardner (1984), when discussing the institutions of education, noted, “No matter how well motivated, [they] are based on implicit assumptions about what knowledge is and how it should be transmitted” (p. 239). Gardner’s point was clearly illustrated by the U.S. after their initial colonization of the U.S.VI. During that time U.S. policy makers determined how education in the Territory should be implemented based on their past knowledge and experiences rather than the island residents’ realities. Ethnocentric thinking prohibited the consideration that learning occurred through a cultural group’s past knowledge and experiences which were built on unique shared insights, knowledge, and mental models (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003).
This neglect of national culture negated the importance of the established languages, behaviors, values, and norms shared throughout the Caribbean or within the U.S.VI subcultures (Bing & Ai-Ping, 2008). As noted in their current Education for All (EFA) movement: The importance of national culture for successful implementation of education is now considered a driving force by UNESCO’s general education department (UNESCO, 1995b). EFA stands on the belief that education “Should be developed through more transparent and democratic processes, involving stakeholders, especially peoples’ representatives, community leaders, parents, learners, nongovernmental organizations and civil society” (Barry & Brun, 2000, p. 9). Acknowledging the importance of socialization, UNESCO has identified culture to be defined and influenced by the conscious or subconscious behavior which gives structure and meaning to community identity (Missana, n.d.). For EFA to globally meet its goals, discrepancies fostered by societal assumptions must be exposed by challenging cultural assumptions accepted and embedded in educational design through understandings of the socially cultural perspectives (Epperson, 2007).

Cultural Factors

To challenge cultural assumptions in educational design, contemporary educators need a basic understanding of cultural differentiations as defined by Edward T. Hall (1963) and Geert Hofstede’s cultural factors. Edward T. Hall’s perspective divides culture based on the way a society communicates. He sums up culture as a way of life distinctive because of learned behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of time and space. Hall’s factors distinguish two types of culture: low-context and high-context (1963). In high-context cultures, rules are covert and therefore difficult for outsiders to perceive. Metaphors are often used to describe a situation, strong bonds are formed between family groups and their community, space and time are
considered flexible because relationships are more important than tasks or individual ownership, and process is more important than actual end-products (Hall, 1963). In low-context cultures, such as the United States Mainland, rules are overt with very clear messaging. Loyalty to a group is not as important as self-advancement. Ownership and personal space are given high priority in these cultures. End-products are more important than process because time is viewed as structured and unyielding. The way time and space are viewed is a key element in Hall’s cultural dynamics.

After Hall identified his cultural factors on communication, Geert Hofstede identified culture based on societal factors. Comparatively, Hofstede’s cultural factors are somewhat similar to Hall’s. Hall’s low-context cultures are relational to Hofstede’s individualistic societies, and the high-context cultures are like Hofstede’s collective societies (Billing, 2004). However, Hofstede views culture as a slow process occurring in society from association with family, religion, school, friends, and community involvement: i.e., societal influences (Jones, 2007). In Hofstede’s individualistic society people are described as responsible for themselves and their immediate family. They are portrayed as embedded in an “I” mentality. Individualistic cultures traditionally view education as learning how to learn and teacher centered. In this culture, Hofstede also notes, task is more important than relationships (Jones, 2007).

Hofstede’s collective societies integrate community members into their strong-cohesive groups. They are devoted to protecting each other from birth on. The collective cultures, rooted in “we” mentalities, result in relationships being perceived as more important than task. Their education is commonly student centered and commences in an effort to learn how to do something purposeful (Jones, 2007). Hall and Hofstede’s cultural factors have been criticized for imperfections discoverable in each of their theories, but the fact that there are two distinct
cultures functioning in globalized society is not disputed (Jones, 2007). This understanding of two distinct cultures functioning simultaneously enhances opportunities to expand insight of knowledge and knowledge attainment in diverse environments.

U.S. Cultural Dominance/Hegemony

U.S. cultural dominance went unquestioned by RI after the U.S. purchased the U.S.VI territory, and the resulting hegemony appeared to be a natural phenomenon. As identified by Gramsci, hegemony is acceptance and unquestioned authority of a dominant culture’s conformist ideal. As in the U.S.VI case, after the initial purchase, U.S. Mainland predominant ideals were used to transform the Islands’ vulnerable cultures into an acculturated society that perpetuated dominate U.S. cultural beliefs, values, and norms (Agger, 2006; Burke, 2009; Eriksen, 1992; Mayo, 2005).

Hegemony carries with it the danger of distorting objectivity by neglecting the importance of non-dominant cultural factors. Cultural neglect has become a formidable foe in efforts to create educational equitability in today’s globalized society. As a result, previous Westernized-ethnocentric educational patterns now need to be revised to promote inclusive achievement of learning potentials (Monkman & Baird, 2002). Unfortunately, societal leaders, the persons who examine and reform political systems, rely on their unique education and acquired knowledge for instituting actions related to such problems as educational reform (Monkman & Baird, 2002). Their assessments denote what progress is, and how progress is to be measured. These decision makers are also the ones who influence the national and international trends in education. They, and the organizations they are involved with and/or
represent, are engaged in the globalized discourse that perpetuates and imposes hegemony in educational problem-solving techniques (Monkman & Baird, 2002).

Gramsci recognized successfully establishing ideological hegemony to socialize individuals into maintaining the status quo required instituting the dominant culture’s language and education (Burke, 2009; Fischman & McLaren, 2005; Mayo, 2005). This recognition adds communication to skin pigmentation as a perceived diversity maker. Like skin color, communication is inherent in every culture. The difference in communication is the way culture is transmitted. Verbal and nonverbal communication are learned through social interactions. Learning takes place in the context of day-to-day social interaction and activities of culture (Meacham, 2001). In their article “Educational Change in the Context of Globalization,” Karen Monkman and Mark Baird (2002) noted:

Agendas become hegemonic through international (global, supranational) discourse among the myriad of actors and organizations that are involved in development and education. This hegemony over national and local educational development is not consistently represented in these books or in much of the other literature on globalization and education. It is, of course, much more complex than one agency telling a country to follow a certain reform strategy. (p. 503)

Contemporary mass communication facilitates hegemonic influence affecting the integration of societies through capitalism’s global economic and political ideals. This mass dissemination places global pressures on nations with vulnerable minority populations to assimilate to a globally homogenized culture (Eriksen, 1992). Much of the assimilation is not even articulated as a form of oppression. In fact, oppressive processes are frequently not spectacular or physically visible unless scrutinized. They are usually considered processes of modernization, social change, or strategies minorities use to accumulate power (1992). Propagation in the form of well-chosen semantics is used by the dominant power’s policy makers to distract people from uneven power relations (Eriksen, 1992; Mayo, 2005).
Hegemony has been perpetuated in education because of the distinctive education policy makers experienced. Their social cohesion has been derived through schooling methods developed over 200 years ago and which is now known to foster group pride identification, provide opportunities to display similarity of individual traits, and allows the upper class to mentally discern their distinction of superiority through refinement, also known as ethnocentrism. Because the upper-class numbers are not significant compared to the world population, they assure cohesiveness and power retention through their distinctive educational opportunities (Domhoff, 2002).

Members of the upper class begin education very early in life, usually at a local private day school. As adolescents, they often find the opportunity to spend one or two years away from home overseas, or at a boarding school in a rural setting. Adolescents may attend public schools if they live in a secluded suburb or attend a state university if that school is associated with high esteem and tradition dictates its exclusiveness (Domhoff, 2002). However, many of the upper class never enter a public school. This educational system insulates the upper class, reinforces their distinctiveness, ingrains traditions, and prepares them as world leaders (Domhoff, 2002).

As leaders they are the persons who examine and restructure our political systems. They use their educational training and acquired knowledge for problem-solving activities such as educational reform. Their proclamations relay to the masses what progress is, and the measurements of progress (Monkman & Baird, 2002). Because they retain the power, these isolated few have major input on global educational discourse and have recurrently imposed supremacy in problem-solving techniques. World Bank (2005) commented:

Inequalities in economic and political power in the global arena influence the design of rules in ways that often restrict, rather than expand, the opportunities of poorer countries—and, even more, of poorer groups within these countries. (p. 229)
Who is monitoring the power relationships intrinsic in these exchanges? Are the policy makers subconsciously or consciously more interested in sustaining their own economic interests than assuring educational equity? What real-life experiences do they bring to the table with them, and are their measurements for advancement relative to the diverse cultural needs throughout the world? (Monkman & Baird, 2002).

In the 1990s, educational policy makers publicly purported the international effectiveness of a higher education external quality assurance (QA) framework (Billing, 2004). Their imposed supremacy was later exposed when the report eventually was discovered to overlook variance occurring in culturally diverse communities not centered in Western culture. Due to rising controversy, Billing challenged QA’s genuine applicability in an international forum. When applied in culturally diverse societies, in varying stages of development, Billing found that the subject-based culture was weakened, while power distribution shifted from departments to institutional management. These changes resulted in a greater focus on economic concerns over academic concerns (Billing, 2004). Billing thus demonstrated that while most elements of the model worked, they were not universally applicable. Billing proposed the model could be used as a conceptual framework for QA structure. Recommendations included caution when applying to countries with divergent cultural bases (2004).

A year after Billing’s report was published, Evan Schofer and John W. Meyer (2005) published their research using pooled regressions to analyze cross-national higher education rapid-worldwide expansion during the final half of the twentieth century. Their analysis included traditional socioeconomic functionalism, or conflict and competition theory. They found: (1) Education expanded faster in countries with formally instituted secondary education systems and in countries with strong links to international systems; and (2) Education expansion
was slow in countries that were ethnically and linguistically diverse or under centralized control (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). This information suggested competition led to exclusion of particular groups and government capacity to limit growth. They were able to link rapid growth, after the 1960s, to global institutional changes (Shofer & Meyer, 2005). World movements had been increasing attainment rights for women, minorities, and lower classes at the time they were completing their research. The movements’ influence resulted in Western universities competing to bring people from traditionally collective cultures into their institutions. Their research resulted in Toshie Habu designing qualitative research to explore perceptions of Japanese women with limited visa status in Britain (Habu, 2009).

Habu’s research found mixed responses that displayed contradictory consequences of globalization in education. He discovered education’s globalization could also result in students becoming economic commodities (Habu, 2009). The educational shift had created an integrated population with common educational status generating global integration. Universities had become central, rather than specialized institutions. Habu, Billing, Schofer and Meyer found that higher education may serve as a mechanism that enhances social conflict through marginalization. Their research also all concurred that the inequality and diversity enhanced by education’s growth was causing major stratifications that are difficult to legitimize (Billing, 2004; Habu, 2009; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Habu’s research revealed a misconstruction of the human capital concept that was resulting in the marketing of humans as economic commodities.

Human Capital

The first component of the human capital concept is reliance on people investing in self through A.E., training, and other types of learning activity. This investment raises an
individual’s future income potential by making them more marketable for employment, as they are not meant to be the economic commodity. Education is considered an asset because it generates future income, or positive economics (Woodhall, 1995). However, education may also be a community and national deficit when selective cultural limitations or exclusions are instituted due to policy oversight. Education solely situated in economic paradigms results in negative educational perspectives, magnification of diversity because of societal fragmentation, and increases in the world’s marginalized population. Human capital concepts may also provide legitimacy for policy oversight and neglect (Woodhall, 1995).

Realizing the probability of misconstruction, Robertson, Bonal, and Dale (2002) discovered equity should be a central concern when instituting educational policy. They noted that the human capital models have resulted in significant increases in educational funding for technology, research, and development infrastructures. The increased funding, combined with the powerful effects of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank’s policy agendas influenced education redesign in developed and developing country programs and policies (Robertson et al., 2002). Conversely, the intentions of the OECD and World Bank education agendas differ. World Bank’s design revolves around the market and individualism for developing knowledge and proficiency. The OECD’s educational design is concerned with socially rooted open-mindedness to remedy problems of knowledge exchange and shared learning. Shortly after Robertson et al.’s (2002) report was published, World Bank (2005) released The World Development 2006. The report opened and closed with the same realization:

The implication of this message for the work of the World Bank and others in the development community is that a focus on equity should be a central concern in the design and implementation of policy for development and growth. (p. 1)
In today’s varying culture, debate over the challenges facing education parameters is ongoing in OECD countries (Robertson et al., 2002). The OECD postulates that a new set of demands will be made on education and the world must be prepared. In response to OECD, the International Bureau of Education examined redesigning education attainment in developed and developing country programs and policies (Robertson et al., 2002).

For example, when they examined cultural community perspectives they determined that various developing countries in Africa conveyed an 80 percent approval for future schools to be organized under a re-schooling initiative (Robertson, et al., 2002). Re-schooling spotlights schools as negotiating the power of social displacements in the wider society or as the juncture for experimentation, diversity, innovation, information technology, research, and development. Notably, the developing countries found significance in scenario-based thinking. Whereas, when policy-makers and school leaders in England examined redesigning education, a combination of options which were more likely to work for their society was determined.

Comparisons between reports advocate recognition of discoverable variation, and similarities across national and sub-national educational desires and goals based on cultural dilemma. Therefore, variations on educational initiatives may be necessary based on subcultures. World Bank (Robertson et al., 2002) concurred, “School autonomy, community control, nongovernment providers, voucher programs, and public-sector reforms can strengthen the ability of citizens, communities, and public organizations” (p. 141). Considering this announcement, in 2007 Emiliana Vegas, the senior education economist at the World Bank, reviewed the similarities between inequality and poverty in developing nations and the U.S.

Her review resulted in the recognition that developing nations throughout the world and developed countries’ at-risk school conditions were very similar. The review demonstrated that
the U.S. is not the only developed nation with at-risk school situations. Consequently, the quest for equitable globalized educational reforms resulted in research involving developing countries and their educational reforms. Increased understanding of varying societal, economic and geographical circumstances affords developing nations varied choices of educational reform initiatives based on a large scale of rich diversities (Vegas, 2007).

Vegas (2007) noted the most effective, and long-lasting, initiatives were discovered to be reforms that granted decision making to the schools and their surrounding community:

Reforms that devolve decision making authority to the schools… had important effects on teacher performance and student learning by making teachers (and schools) more accountable to their communities…. in Central America…[this] led to lower teacher absenteeism, more teacher work hours, more homework assignments, and better parent-teacher relationships….promising changes, especially in schools where educational quality is low. (p. 229)

Positive effects occurred in schools even when they lacked basic infrastructure, adequate facilities, teaching materials, textbooks, up-to-date tests associated to there were large number of teachers per student ratios. Vegas determined that situations in the poor rural regions outside developed nations are often compounded because everyone in the family is needed to earn living income. Realizing this was a substantial variation, Vegas (2007) stated:

In an ironic turn, developed countries may be able to gain educational insights from developing countries: With their low quality of education and wide gaps in student outcomes, schools in developing countries strongly resemble hard-to-staff urban U.S. schools. Their experience with reform may thus provide insights for U.S. policymakers. (p. 219)

Vega demonstrated that effective educational reform requires understanding cultural beliefs and behavior concerning educational attainment in diverse communities. However, understanding cultural diversity also requires release of ethnocentric educational views. Historically, negating the importance of diverse communities’ cultural perceptions was originally encouraged through ethnocentrism and hegemony.
Contemporary problems are often a result of culturally neglected occurrences resulting in outside economic reliance. This reliance has resulted in an economic emphasis being placed on education across the globe (Kwak, Shah, & Holbert, 2004). Altering the narrow economic views of education to include cultural perspectives will assist modern understanding of educational needs, encourage effective reforms, and engage forms of action and culture to encourage education advancement, and—under the premise of human capital theory—assure future national autonomy.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Educational underachievement has been studied through quantitative research measures in much of the educational literature (Guba, 1987). Quantitative research offers numeric statistics, but it does not help us gain an understanding of cultural perspectives relevant to education in the U.S.VI. With the knowledge that educational gaps do exist, my research focus was on the perceived cultural perspectives functioning in the Territory.

Ethnographic Methodology

The main research techniques for this study were based on qualitative approaches in applied anthropology: specifically, the principles Alexander M. Ervin (2000) identifies for effective practice. Many social sciences have played their part in contemporary understanding of culture, context, and content. The related research has contributed to the development and emergence of qualitative methods. Included in these methods are: content analysis, interviews, and ethnographic approaches (van Baren & Ijsselsteijn, 2004-2005). As the root word *ethnic* suggests, ethnography is geared toward exploring cultures (Salkin, 2003).

When research is focusing on the exploration of cultural phenomena, ethnographic methodology is often applied. Ethnographic methods include in-depth descriptive field-notes, open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and observation (van Baren & Ijsselsteijn, 2004-2005). Ethnography establishes the existence of cultural realizations (Marcus, 1997). Ethnography’s individual methods are used in combinations to study naturally occurring behavior with description of the social phenomenon. The most common method combination used to gather
data during exploration are interviewing and observation (van Baren & Ijsselsteijn, 2004-2005). In this manner ethnography directs interest to the experiences of the people (Herzfeld, 2005).

Ethnographers viewing the study group or phenomenon in its entirety allows the researcher to obtain a holistic perspective when taking up residence in the culture being studied to become a participant-observer (Salkin, 2003). The ethnographer’s participant-observation allows the researcher to view nuances, activities, semiotics, linguistics, and other factors relevant to culture from the residents’ point of view (Shank, 2006). Thus, ethnographers are privileged to understand experiences and interactions between intertwined subcultures and a perceived dominant culture as part of the group or individuals located in the subcultures (Agger, 2006).

Fieldwork

Fieldwork for this research study was designed to discover if cultural occurrences have influencing factors related to educational achievement. Generally, individual perceptions are influenced through interactions over time within community, government, family, friends, hegemonic interactions, law enforcement, and other social experiences discoverable in the culture.

Perceptions may be based on a single experience, involvement in a historical event, imposed/perceived positionality, or a combination of factors…those perceptions are generationally passed on through social encounters. (Nasir & Saxe, 2003, p. 17)

Data collection was comprised of ethnographic techniques including: observation of response and activity (detached observation), becoming an accepted, active participant within the community (participant observation), and interviewing indigenous residents with heritage based in St. Thomas. My research base was located on the main island of St. Thomas, near the U.S.VI capital of Charlotte Amalie. Besides interviewing, the location provided ease of access for
observation and access to: UVI main campus; Eastern Caribbean Center-Research Institute and a Conservation Data Center; Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning center; 30 schools and two high schools administered by VIDE; and 10 private schools, seven with curricula for grades K-12.

Other factors for location choice included access to a condensed majority of the Territory’s education and cultural population for observation purposes. Financial concerns were also factored in. According to the U.S.VI relocation center, the legislature estimates cost of living in the Virgin Islands averages 33% higher than most of the U.S. The legislature also noted that comparing per-capita income demonstrates the U.S.VI has the third lowest wages offered in the U.S. (VI Moving Center, 2009).

Data Collection

Qualitative research is a powerful and appropriate non-experimental method for valid, rigorous exploration of an academic question. Properly performed, qualitative research adds to a body of research and may be used to explain a phenomenon that quantitative research methods cannot validate (Salkin, 2003). In an official document titled Towards a Constructive Pluralism, UNESCO (1999) specified:

Consider the nature of pluralism and the role of the state and civil society in preventing pluralism from becoming divisive, and assisting the building of a positive and constructive pluralism for the future. There exists a need to show that being part of a multicultural society is an enriching experience. (p. 7)

The United States of America has had a strong dominant cultural presence in the U.S.VI since the early twentieth century. However, the Territory itself incorporates cultural pluralism: groups that have maintained unique cultural identities, values, and practices within the society.
Understanding how cultural attributes influence educational needs for survival in the U.S.VI will assist in the escalation of positive and constructive pluralism.

Societies consist of an interacting web of cultural groupings that compose the communities’ cultural whole (Jordan, 2003). To obtain rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed research findings, I applied a triangulation method. My data research collection included: Historical and contemporary educational information, participant-observation, and personal interviews. Personal interviews targeted U.S.VI residents’ perceptions of education. The study was designed to uncover the influence of cultural attributes on educational achievement gaps—specifically, cultural influence on educational needs for residents indigenous to St. Thomas from the time of U.S. purchase. The U.S.VI has been listed as a Non-Self-Governing Territory by the U.N. (SIDS, n.d).

Field notes related to cultural phenomena were taken during observation and participant observation on the Territory. Details examined social and interaction processes. Field notes’ information related to cultural interactions, how culture was sustained, transmitted and enacted. Family and friends in the Territory were made aware that I was working on my dissertation research. I gathered field notes when observing and interacting with the family I lived with on St. Thomas and from activity with the impromptu family I was adopted into at Pelican Cove. I also gathered field notes from observations or participation at festivals, birthday parties, weddings, funerals, and other spontaneous outings I was invited to participated in. Field notes were written shortly after the time of an occurrence and included a separate section for my reflections.

I established a system to file field notes under the dates they were collected, in the order they were collected. Descriptions of occurrences, settings, participants, and my frame of mind
were included in the notes. Special attention was given to understanding the local vernacular. When necessary I would ask for clarification, translations, and meaning. I would separate myself if necessary to verbally record information to assure authenticity of field notes when required. Later recordings were transcribed and filed under the appropriate day. This organization assisted future coding and analysis.

Interview Process/Participants

To ensure interview findings are authentic, original, dependable, and credible, data collection included interviewee feedback. During the interview process, feedback was solicited through inclusion of summarizing or restating information. Participant observation assisted in building trust and rapport within the community to obtain honest and open responses.

The interview format was semi-structured with open-ended questions. Questions were structured to determine if residents’ perceptions of cultural experiences influence educational achievement in the U.S.VI (see Appendix B). When cultural attributes reflected an effect on educational achievement, further questions were incorporated to ascertain perceptions of influence. Interviewees were determined with the aid of a key informant who arrived in St. Thomas 20-plus years ago commencing a teaching position in a VIDE-administrated school.

Historically, the U.S.VI Territory includes three major islands which offer formal learning. However, travel to each individual island was not cost- or time-effective. Fortunately, the island of St. Thomas is home to approximately half of the Territory’s residential population. This made it feasible to interview St. Thomas residents for Territory representation. Before beginning interviews, I had a discussion with my key informant concerning the interview process. Due to the Territory’s diverse population, our discussion revealed benefits to inclusion
of cultural components to obtain diverse group representation. Joining in everyday island occurrences, participating in island celebrations, and attendance at friends’ and family gatherings offered the opportunity to acquire the desired interviewee diversity. Family gatherings often included extended relations, friends, and friends of friends at hospitable occasions. Formal introductions and random conversations would determine the initial person I interviewed. Suggestions and introductions for future interviewees were then solicited. This system is referred to as a *snowball technique*.

Interviews were conducted with 30 residents of diverse age, gender, and ethnicity. Each interview process took approximately one to one and a half hours. Minimum criteria for interviewees were that they be adults 18 years and older. Open-ended interviews were completed with interviewees’ consent. Consent for verbal recordings during the interview process was also received. Verbatim transcripts were completed using the recorded interviews. Prior to actual fieldwork, an Institutional Review Board application was submitted and approved (see Appendix C). A total of 30 interviews were conducted to reach the saturation point eliciting emic views of U.S.VI indigenous residents’ culture. Employing Mills’s (2006) U.S.VI Community survey of a 111,459 population, a sample size of 30 has a statistical significance affording a 90% confidence level (Survey Monkey, 2018).

Using the snowball technique, 30 semi-structured, open-ended interviews were completed and transcribed by January 2017. To assure confidentiality in data reports, transcribed interviews were numbered, pseudonyms used, and identifiers removed for coding, analysis and reporting. Sixteen of the interviewees were female, and 14 were male. Age groups were broken down into three clusters: 18 to 29, 30 to 49, and over 60. Nine people were in the 18 to 29 age group. Thirteen were in the next group, and eight were over 60 years old. I
recorded interviewees’ age and gender, as this allowed me to initiate conversation and verify diversity in educational experience. Due to the open-ended format there were occasions where an interviewee answered a question prior to the question being asked formally. Participants were encouraged to answer the open-ended questions but not required to do so. Occasionally, interviewees chose to skip a question.

Interviewees self-reported on their educational achievement, which included a mix of one grade school dropout, nine high school dropouts, and 19 high school graduates. Of the 30 respondents, 13 participated in some form of A.E. or received a college or university degree to aid in job placement and/or advancement. Report showed the grade school dropout was a male over 49 years old. He later received specialty training off Island when an older brother paid for his travel and education. Out of the nine high school dropouts (four women and three men), two had high school territorial degrees from the Caribbean Islands. Both migrated to the U.S.VI after receiving their degrees and noted their Territory secondary educations were not considered equivalent to the U.S. high school diploma. This resulted in their educational demographic classification as dropouts. One of the migrants also received a professional college degree and completed a post-graduate degree before relocation. A 22-year-old female reported dropping out of high school to work in low-pay-scale jobs for just under two years before deciding to earn her General Educational Development Certificate (GED) and went on to receive her Associate of Arts degree. At the time of the interviews, three people were attending UVI. Two other females held university degrees for their chosen professions.

The interview questions included a question related to race. The question was revised after a female noted that, if forced to pick a race, she would prefer to be identified as Black. However, she identified herself as Mixed race. After her interview, I revised questions to also
gather heritage information. Checking on the interviews completed before the revision, I discovered everyone who had originally identified themselves as Black listed a parent, set of parents, or grandparent/s from either Germany, France, Kenya, West Indies, BVI, Denmark, South America, North America, or Puerto Rico, or mentioned heritage from another island in the Caribbean. These Black identifiers should theoretically have been reporting Mixed race.

Interviews began with basic educational and cultural enquiries. Information was collected concerning residence, island education, gender, age, heritage, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and older siblings. These questions are generally used for statistical information, but for these interviewees, they established rapport and solicited accurate reporting. Rather than asking people to fill out a form, I listened to their responses and made inquiries. Because of my real-time interest, interviewees responded on intimate levels, frequently adding pertinent unsolicited data.

Confidentiality

Physical or electronically recorded information was identified by numbers during transcription, preceded by coding, and analyzed. Identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were used in data reports.

Analysis

Analysis included inductive analysis; open coding; and participant feedback during interviews. Inductive content analysis was used to identify themes, patterns, coding, and categorization of the collected data. Broad concepts were broken into categories which were developed throughout a second review of data. This technique allowed categories and subcategories to emerge. Broad concepts included demographics, formal education, non-
formal learning, cultural perceptions, Island survival, advice, and supplementary information.

Fieldnote and interview data analysis began by sorting family, friends, and community cultural occurrences. Comparable categories were then established under each of the main headings. Categories were sub-divided by details relating to family culture, personal experiences, cultural learning, formal learning, educational involvement, educational beliefs, community involvement, survival techniques, observations, suggestion for education policy, and other information. Main headings were cross-referenced and concepts from comparable categories/sub-categories were developed.

A separate heading was created for “Multiple Positionality” to establish participant diversity. Categories under Multiple Positionality included age, gender, family heritage, number in family, where they were raised, who they were raised by, and formal educational achievement.

Researcher Background

In 2007 I arrived on St. Thomas as a guest of a relocated Mainlander. I socialized with many relocated White Mainlanders, a few White Island residents, and one adult Black Island resident. During the groups’ conversations, RI were described as having very poor work ethics and “confused” family values, and it was noted that they did not appreciate money and/or education. In one conversation, it was even suggested that the most important things to the RI were drugs and drinking. Everyone in the group, including the RI agreed they were unpredictable, lazy, dangerous, and/or not intelligent; and several different people in the group stated that most RI wanted something for nothing.
Several of the comments were made as spontaneous remarks, quick comments, and annotations to be laughed at. Statements were seemingly accepted as fact by everyone present. Occasionally some people commented that the only people worse than U.S.VI people were the people of color from other areas of the Caribbean or India. No one showed discomfort or fault with any of the portrayals of RI. Being an outsider in a strange land and dependent on these people, I surprised myself by questioning nothing.

I became friends with a White woman who had relocated to the Island and taught at UVI. She talked with me about public and private schools along with a university on island. I also came to understand there was a wide educational achievement gap between Mainlanders and the RI. On my return to the Mainland I contacted the university and applied for an internship with CELL, the Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning center. I completed my internship under the tutelage of the CELL director during the following summer session (see Appendix A). I worked with adult residents on the Islands as an ethnographer studying CELL’s marketing procedures. That summer I learned to suspend the knowledge gained from my earlier Island visit. My internship experience led to living with the residents on the Island of St. Thomas and completion of this dissertation.

Research Setting

The first few weeks of my CELL internship I lived in temporary teachers housing before moving to dorm life. The teachers housing was semi-connected, furnished, and air-conditioned homes. They offered privacy, a large living space, internet access, television, kitchen with updated appliances, large bedrooms, and a balcony with a spectacular island view. Dorm life was the polar opposite. The small dorm rooms are housed in plain symmetric style, large reinforced concrete buildings built to withstand hurricanes. In the room there is a hand-crank
paneled-glass window. Hallways are narrow with doors on rooms open to dissipate the building’s accumulated heat. Basically, dorm residents make a choice between privacy and slight air circulation.

Lodging differences were conflicting, but Island time was a huge adjustment. Trained to work by Mainland standards, I arrived at the office approximately twenty minutes early. My second day at work the director called me to her office to explain that she had worked on the Mainland most of her life and knew Island time was a transition. When I was told work began at nine, an unspoken Island assumption was to be in by ten. Scheduling appointments taught me further notions of time and Island travel.

My cultural assimilation began with adjusting my learned notions of time, understanding island mobility, and becoming aware that my White skin tone put me in the minority. The only people who stand out in a crowd are the very light skinned. Skin tone, along with dialects, easily vary from person to person. Dialect variation occurs due to past family colonial history, island residence, migration patterns, educational attainment, and/or for many other reasons. Most RI speak using Virgin Islands Creole, a variation of English. Formal education on Island was taught in American English. Therefore, I did not have to speak Creole to participate in activities. Because I was from the Mainland, speaking in Creole could commonly be misconstrued as mimicking and rude. However, I did learn to understand the Creole language in real-time.

As for travel, most island residents walk, rely on friends, use public transportation, or are the friends or family responsible for providing transportation. This makes it neither desirable or possible for people to own private means of transportation. Island topography varies from rocky arid desert areas to mountainous rainforest. White sand-covered coastlines lie at sea level, holding back the crystal clear, warm blue-green water along the Caribbean Sea.
Comparatively, the coastline along the Atlantic side of the islands always appears slightly dirty, with a mix of organic and inorganic debris rising from the ocean bottom to cover the shore. After a storm, the ocean bottom would be so stirred up that the water tended become very murky. The beach areas would be littered with seaweed, broken shells, dead coral, broken tree branches from the mangroves, and other organic items not normally associated with a pristine beach. Among the natural items there were always the inorganic items that would need to be removed after a storm. People avoided swimming on the Atlantic side of the islands after the storms and in months containing the letter “R” because the ocean water was murky and cold. The beaches closest to the Atlantic were not considered tourist areas. As a result, segregated White residents rarely traveled to the Atlantic Ocean beaches, leaving them to the U.S.VI residents.

RI socialized and fished on the Atlantic. They were keenly aware hot weather and the limited public transportation usually varied daily. This along with narrow roads, extreme road disrepair, and limited roads in and out of towns appeared to be a major reason for Island-time. Well paved, wide roads, and road repair were only commonly found along the routes regularly used by tourist and the private-isolated communities of the wealthy white property owners. Common roads leading from major roads traversing the island may have been originally constructed from asphalt but were frequently weathered to varying points of deterioration. Roads traveling into a family’s property may have been covered with gravel, but the gravel was often compacted into the ground leaving bare sections of dirt which turned to mud during the rains. Travel in the city and rural residences was often difficult to traverse due to overcrowding, large cars, narrow one-way streets, foot traffic, and lack of posted identifiers. Roads were very narrow, especially the capital, Charlotte Amalie and other areas that had risen before the age of
automobiles. The main cities had been overbuilt and were overpopulated, which made it very difficult to find parking or an individual’s residence.

I had become comfortable with the cultural differences and was able to complete my internship with CELL. My study revealed that CELL’s techniques to attract adult learners would not be effective unless the educational opportunities were considered relevant to the RI needs. Most adults interviewed noted that they were not as interested in scholastics. They were concerned with information related to subsistence, life, and finding work (see Appendix A).
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research analysis revealed culture perceptions functioning within the U.S.VI community. Narrated cultural experiences demonstrated formal education and learning are commonly perceived as independent phenomena. Culturally, attainment of formal education is considered a priority. However, because disasters are imminent, education is secondary to learned group survival. Sustaining adult economic survival requires learning how to successfully endure being cut off from the global culture due to island isolation during natural occurrences/disasters or man-made phenomena. RI successful survival entails hands-on practicing-experience, negotiating knowledge and skills. Consequently, for an individual’s formal educational activity to be considered culturally effective, it should be viewed as beneficial to the community at large.

In this chapter I share information about overcoming the initial research obstacles I encountered related to understanding U.S.VI culture. This is followed by a section on RI perceptions of cultural outsiders and my experiences being accepted by the residents into family groups. I then present a brief study associated with my island families’ cultural dynamics and history. The island family information leads into observational experiences of the communal culture’s relationship dynamics association with historical survival. Expanding on cultural perception includes how community information is transmitted, and ways that traditions of shunning and learning occur...
within the Islands’ family culture. Culture and Learning explores the perception of learning and formal education functioning in the community. Finally, I assess the findings relating to perceptions of Island survival.

**Surmounting Obstacles**

Prior to returning to St. Thomas to begin collecting preliminary research for my dissertation, I had two major setbacks. First, up-to-date demographic information was not available online. Second, the only contemporary research I discovered was a 1985 article written by Yegin Habteyes and Marjorie W. Steinkamp: “Sociocultural Factors and Achievement Motivation in the United States Virgin Islands.” Search for more research suggested author Yegin Habtes, a professor at UVI. His online vita showed Dr. Yegin Habtes, Professor of Education and Executive Director at The Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VIUCEDD), had also published ethnographic research under the name Habteyes. My initial return to the Territory was to obtain the needed demographic information and for appointments with the director of CELL and Dr. Habtes.

During my meeting with the CELL director, she made me an appointment with the professor at the Eastern Caribbean Center-Social Research Institute (ECC) to obtain the Territory’s up-to-date demographic information. At my meeting with the ECC professor I received a copy of the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) *Kids Count Data Book* (CFVI, 2014). In non-census years they relied on the Virgin Islands Community Survey (VICS) for the statistical information. VICS analysis is based on a scientific sampling technique using a broad five percent of households in the U.S.VI. This is the same technique used at the national level to obtain data from individual states. He explained the CFVI was established in 1990 with endowed assets. Demographic gathering and reporting began in 2000 as U.S.VI
began an effort to be included in future annual American Community Surveys. He also noted that the *Kids Count Data Book* was not yet available online. My next appointment was with Dr. Habtes.

On my way to the appointment with Dr. Habtes I realized I had never been on the UVI Upper Campus. It was very different from most every campus I had been on. A road went around the outside of the campus, lined with student housing. New Faculty and Administration was up a road that branched off into the distance. I parked between student housing and the library to enter the main campus.

I walked through the library and entered a courtyard. In the center of the grounds were buildings aligned like a separate city on a square/rectangular stepped platform. From a distance, each building appeared to be a copy of the other. There were no extravagant markings or readily visible differences. I had to ask a student where the professor and the education building were located.

She smiled and informed me she knew Dr. Habtes and where his office was. As we began walking, a friend of hers joined us. Both girls began talking to me at the same time. They talked excitedly about being accepted at the university and how much they enjoyed college. Dr. Habtes heard us approaching as we entered the English Building and stepped out into the hall to greet us. The students returned his pleasant greetings, introduced me and excused themselves. Before leaving, they turned to me and thanked me for the opportunity to assist.

After a brief explanation about my research, I asked Dr. Habtes (personal communication, June 23, 2013; see Appendix D) about the ethnographic research he had completed on U.S.VI. I became confused when he immediately began talking about students with disabilities. He noted, “There are about 16 thousand people in the Virgin Islands with
disabilities. Especially, you have to understand we have only 110,000 people.” Smiling and transitioning the conversation back to the research, he relayed a true story about a man he knew on island:

St John, the guy who owns one of the barge, ‘is mother was Ethiopian and his father a Virgin Islander. He came an’ he didn’t speak English very well. Ah, and they put him in special Ed. So, now he is a special Ed child and he told me the only, the only problem that he had is he doesn’t speak English very well. They put him in special Ed, and he got frustrated so in eight’ grade he drops out. Now he’s running the business….

He seamlessly transitioned the story to the articles he authored from earlier research in the U.S.VI.

Dr. Habtes began explaining the nature of his research while looking for copies of his articles. During the search, he spoke in a slow, deliberate tone. This deliberate speech pattern seemed quite abrupt. He stopped looking for the articles and looked directly at me as he continued to speak. His eyes held a deep, urgent expression. They appeared to be asking if I understood or if his dialect interfered with his rhetoric. I suddenly perceived the change of speech as a habit acquired to assure people understood the details and importance of his research. He continued, “Now, now, don’t confuse mental challenge, with, or learning disabilities with learning in different styles….Some people learn in different ways. Learning in a different way…does not necessarily mean that you are different….” As Dr. Habtes talked his voice became slightly raised and higher in his excitement as he noted the things that the VIUCEDD administrators have learned—the good and bad.

I asked him how long the program had been available at UVI. He stated the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) at UVI was not the only one in the country. Currently, 67 UCEDDs are located throughout the U.S. and territories associated with the U.S. He emphasized UCEDDs assist and encourage universities and their communities
an educated understanding of disabilities and related issues. Acknowledging that the UVI program was fairly new, less than fifteen years old, he noted the importance of working with the disabled and the community as a whole. Part of the program includes educating businesses regarding accessibility for the disabled, increasing their patronage. Owners’ education includes how upgrades were deductible from their taxes. This transitioned into explanations related to advances in available assistant technology for the disabled and the community.

I agreed that that educating the community was very important and noted it must be very time consuming to organize. I mentioned my learning disability and the cost of up-to-date assistance technology. This led to questions concerning people at or below the poverty line and up-to-date technology expenses. At the end of our meeting, Dr. Habtes asked me not to forget about the disabled. He stated the university itself had been one of the worst offenders of disability accessibility. He also noted that UVI is now over 70 percent accessible. The struggle for updating the other 30 percent remains ongoing.

Dr. Habtes was so sincere, caring, and reassuring. He believed in the possibilities of education geared toward the learner and the future. This man was not interested in self-promotion. He acts for the betterment of individuals, communities and the future. Before leaving, I thanked him for taking the time to talk with me. Leaving the university, I became aware I had drifted away from the people I met during my first trips to the Island. However, during my CELL internship I had gone to Pelican Cove (Cove) - Se Shanty (Shanty) and remembered it was quiet and welcoming. The Shanty was a place frequented by RI rather than tourists or the segregated White residents. It was out of the way, but the food was affordable. I also remembered the RI there appeared different from the initial verbal impressions I had been given. I decided to head to the Cove and find the Shanty.
The Cove was marked on the map, but the roads leading to it were not. I headed in the
general direction traveling on curving, narrow roads going through the mountain rainforest
region of St. Thomas. Streets on island were laid out according to the landscape, not gridlines. I
found a freshly painted signed shaped like a surfboard reading “Pelican Cove” pointing down a
very narrow, steep road. As the road turned to dirt and made a very sharp turn, it flattened out.
The dirt turned to broken pavement. When I reached the light at the end of a tree-canopy tunnel,
the road changed to sand. I saw the beach, people in the water, on the sand and walking across
the street toward the beach bar, Pelican Cove-Se Shanty.

The Shanty sits across from the beach and is enclosed by a very high fence. Inside the
Shanty I walked across the open ground to the bar in the back. Sitting at the end of the bar was a
person who I had interviewed while working for CELL. The man sat reading a newspaper and
occasionally glanced up at the nearest television. I sat down in the center of the bar area and
began looking over the menu. I jumped in surprise as I heard my name being called.
Embarrassed, I realized the person calling my name was a bartender who befriended me at a
different establishment when I was working with CELL. He was now working at the Shanty. As
I ate a late lunch I also enjoyed our pleasant conversation.

The next few days I collected information I wanted. It was several days before I returned
again to the Shanty for lunch. It was late afternoon when I parked at Pelican Cove. As I was
getting out of the car I recognized a few people I had previously met working for CELL. They
also recognized me, remembered my name, and invited me over to their picnic table. There were
no other picnic tables on the beach. I learned one of the men at the table had brought it down to
the beach. I also discovered this group of seemingly mismatched people functioned very much as
a family group. The group was a mix of varied skin tones, ages, and genders, I later discovered
some were blood related. The picnic table functioned as the group’s beach home. If anyone, other than the occasional tourist, sat at the table they would move as soon as a family member was sighted. The family member did not even have to be heading toward the table, just in the area. I did not realize it at the time, but I would become part of this family and live in the mountainous rainforest area above the Cove.

**Experienced Island Culture**

At Pelican Cove I discovered how individuals were adopted into the RI beach table family. Like myself, newcomers did not know they were being scrutinized prior to their figurative adoption. The first day I arrived alone at the Shanty for lunch I had covertly been observed during my interaction with the bartender. The Marlboro man (Marl) at the end of the bar had listened to our conversation and sized me up. Remembering me from the interview he completed during my internship with CELL and knowing others at the Cove remembered me, he decided to talk to the bartender after I left. From what I was told later, he had a lengthy conversation with the bartender concerning my values and intentions on the Island. The next day when I parked at the Cove to go to lunch, the people at the table were not simply being polite when they started talking with me and invited me over.

Standing almost a foot away from the side of the beach table, I was offered a beer and introduced to everyone there. There were visible age, gender, cultural, and educational differences among the people gathered at the table, but somehow they all seemed to fit together perfectly. The banter was very relaxed. I never felt an attitude of violence, never heard a threat or a voice raised in anger. Yet, to offend or threaten a single person present was taking on the
group. After being invited into the group it took a very serious offense, such as a crime against another family member, to be exiled from the family.

Although the beach was public, the people who frequented this bay were island residents mostly of French heritage from St. Bart, or Mainlanders who had “Gone Native.” “Gone Native” was how the wealthy referred to the Continentals who came to the islands, did not live in the areas segregated for the White upper-class, took jobs on island, participated in community activities, and associated with the locals. Mainlanders who had “Gone Native” usually worked or volunteered for activities that benefited the community and they had no intention of voluntary departure from St. Thomas. Those who eventually left did so because of serious illness, or an obligation on the mainland. Frenchies at the table were descendants of families who lived on the island at the time of U.S. purchase.

Over the years, I observed situations as they unfolded. Frenchies from the south coast would visit the table when they came to the Cove. They joined in conversations and other antics but never actually sat at the table. Most evenings, regulars could be found late in the afternoon sitting at the table talking about community or family events while they waited for the ocean sunset. It was during such evenings that people who were not island-born had to earn trust or were shunned.

Shunning could happen to an Islander for a grievous offense to cultural mores. Shunning of non-RI occurred most often after the first meeting. During the initial encounter the outsider may have been judgmental, displayed intolerance such as stereotyping, exhibited impairment due to overuse of drugs, or a combination of behaviors viewed as underhanded, selfish, or antisocial. Littering, not picking up trash, and being rude on the beach also resulted in a harsh judgment. Harsh judgment could be suspended if the person apologized and demonstrated their sincerity
through future actions. If a newcomer to the Cove was immediately rejected/shunned by a majority of the family table members, an individual was still free to pursue a friendship with the shunned. The individual would not be shunned for their choice. They were free to continue spending time with the family if the rejected person was not brought to or discussed at the table. These were covertly understood cultural norms I learned over time. Immediate shunning occurred three separate times while I was at the table. Interestingly, every time it happened it only took two weeks, at the most, for the individual to admit the family had been correct to shun the outcast. Once blatantly rejected by all, the shunned rarely came back to the beach area.

Because I had been invited to join the family, I began working on my oil paintings next to the table in the morning. By early afternoon, family would start to arrive. After awhile, the painting and supplies ended up in my car trunk in favor of joining the family’s conversation. Among other things, activities included card games, dominoes, snorkeling, and swimming. Table conversations floated from current events, historical events, family concerns, children, crime, and politics, to employment activity, Island entertainment, day-to-day activities, and the weather. One day as I was painting the wind picked up off the ocean and blew sand in my oil paint. Picking the grains out of my artwork, I noticed people were starting to arrive. As people stood by cars talking and drinking I decided it was time to pack it up. A few of the people noticed I was packing up earlier than usual and asked if there was a problem. As I joined several of the regulars at the table I explained the situation. Darrell, the regular who brought the table to the Cove, suggested I paint on the patio of the house where he lived. Marl was sitting at the table when the suggestion was made. Over time, family actions and remarks had demonstrated that Marl was viewed as the patriarch of our table family.
The offer took me by surprise; as a result, I did not instantly respond. My lack of response resulted in Darrell looking toward Marl. Then the other eyes at the table followed Darrell’s gaze. For the most part Marl kept opinions to himself but, in the role of patriarch Marl was often deferred to for advice, decisions, and approval. I quickly realized he would have the final approval and therefore the decision on where I was to paint. As Marl agreed with the suggestion, I discovered Darrell rented a back room at Marl’s home. The patio offered belonged to Marl.

Realizing I would not find the home on my own, we went for a drive. Marl drove precariously up the side of the mountain through the rainforest. Suddenly, he turned off the paved road onto a once-graveled, almost hidden, unmarked road going down under the tree canopy. Driving a short way down he turned again and parked between coconut trees and a mango tree in front of his house. The home’s porch extended from side to side across the front of the house, hanging over the edge of the mountain. There were large iguanas eating fruit and sunning in the tops of the trees all around the house. Iguanas were a threatened species that could grow over five feet long. Many RI thought the iguanas were a nuisance, but the Haitian immigrants thought iguana meat was a feast. Since the Haitians did most of the landscaping they would occasionally ask if they could take an iguana for a family meal. RI regularly turned a blind eye to the large reptile’s disappearance.

Seeing the big iguanas sitting on top of the trees with the ocean far below was fascinating. As the others began laughing I was politely nudged to continue across the porch. Separate from the porch, along the side of the house, was an exposed large cracked concrete patio half-covered with rainforest growth. Darrell told me he would clear the area as Marl noted this was where I could paint. Walking over to the spot, I disturbed three wild chickens, who
scattered into the growth. I stood looking out over a beautiful vista of the rainforest. Houses were scattered far down the side of the mountain until the view turned into specks of boats dotting the ocean.

Driving back to the Cove, I learned Marl had built his home in the 1960s on his family’s land. Before the Islands were purchased by the U.S., a Black female resident-landowner had adopted Marl’s mother, Mary, as a small child. In her early teens Mary ran off and married a French emigré from St. Bart. As a wedding gift the girl was given a portion of her adopted mother’s land. Marl’s father built a house and the couple raised thirteen children there. When Marl was old enough, he built his home on a parcel of the land above his parents’ home. At the same time his father constructed a building divided into apartments. They were hidden by the rainforest growth off the same gravel road that led to Marl’s home. Three of his sisters also lived in homes going up the side of the mountain above the apartments. When Marl’s father passed away, Mary continued to live in the family home. An unmarried adult brother, Andy, lived with their mother. All the dwellings built were on family-owned property. The youngest brother, who was to inherit the parents’ home, lived in Florida but came home regularly. The apartments were rented to Marl’s nephews, nieces and/or friends. His other siblings and ex-wife lived on St. Croix, and in Puerto Rico.

Days later, as I was painting on the patio, Marl’s youngest sister, Angela, stopped by for a visit. I discovered Marl was the patriarch of his family. Later in the week when I mentioned returning to the mainland for a visit, Darrell asked if I would be staying at the home on my return. To my surprise Marl announced I could store my items in his spare bedroom and move in when I came back. Angela mentioned it would be nice to have me at his house.
Upon my return to St. Thomas I met the family matriarch and other siblings, along with several nephews and nieces. Marl explained how he built his home so well it stood up against tropical storms and over 15 hurricanes. He also remarked that I would not have to worry about lack of water: he had built his own cistern and foundation. I did not understand just how important cisterns were until my first dry season. With no fresh bodies of water on island, water supplies are collected from rainfall and secured in cisterns. Marl noted that Island contractors often kept home cost low by cutting corners on cistern construction. When built incorrectly, cisterns crack and run dry. The only way to refill a dry cistern before it rains is to purchase a tanker truck of water for delivery. The following dry season I witnessed family and friends with small children doing laundry on Marl’s back porch due to water shortages or fear of water shortages.

As for the interior of his home, it was stark. Furniture consisted of a small end table and matching overstuffed arm chair, love seat, and couch. The couch cushions were so worn that the springs hurt me when I sat down. There were no family photos or art displayed. Mainland technology such as a personal computer, X-Box, DVD player and CD player were not in the home. The only electronic item was in his bedroom across from the bed: a television on a stand. The Electronic/Information age is not swiftly advancing on island due to isolation and poverty, and there was certainty no sign of electronic progress in his house.

Every morning Mary and Angela stopped by for early morning coffee with Marl. Occasionally other family members joined us. Over time, I observed main debates based on current events in the Territory and occurring around the globe. Many family stories were also shared. My favorites concerned formal education. Marl and his older brothers and sisters started school in a one-room schoolhouse. As he got older, his parents registered all the children in the
Catholic school. One day in eighth grade, Marl was walking past his younger sister’s classroom and heard her teacher, a Catholic nun, shouting and berating the girl. As he had been raised to do, Marl went to protect and defend his little sister. During this era, it was permitted for teachers to discipline using corporal punishment. Children were not to question the teachers’ authority. However, upon entering the classroom Marl promptly threatened the teacher. As he turned to check on his sister the nun struck him up the back of his head with her open palm. Cultural experience had taught him that a child saw when physical punishment from an elder was coming. Aggressive advances came from behind and could come from anyone. His defensive reaction was to punch the offender/attacker, the nun. The incident happened shortly before his eighth-grade graduation. His actions resulted in expulsion, which meant no graduation. He did not exactly know what his parents did but their intervention resulted in Marl being allowed to graduate. Deciding high school was not for him, he (like many men at the time) started working and was never without a job until he retired.

Marl’s other siblings continued their education at the Catholic school. One day his father came home early and found his daughters had come home from school wearing their gym uniforms. Like most school gym uniforms stateside, the girls were wearing uniform shorts. At that time shorts were unacceptable dress for a young lady on island. The father immediately pulled his daughters out of the school and deemed them old enough for accepting a suitor and marriage. Traditionally, men who were interested in a young lady approached the father for permission. Before approaching a father, established tradition required the suitor own a home. Following the tradition was the reason Marl started building his house as soon as he had enough money saved to lay the foundation and build the cistern. He hauled the sand from the shore up into the mountains along with other necessary supplies before formal roads were constructed.
He continued building when he had saved enough to start the next section of the house. He married with no debt and a completed home.

As a young man Marl married a Puerto Rican woman. Together they had three daughters and two sons. As the children grew, he insisted they obtain an education. When the children were older he was informed that one of his sons had not been attending school. He remembered immediately leaving his job that day to track down his truant son. Upon finding the boy, he grabbed him by his ear and forcibly took him out of the pool hall. He literally led him by the ear. After the boy was set straight, he returned to school to complete his education.

Over the years an elder’s direct involvement with family and community gives him the insight and ability to properly judge an individual’s intentions. This is only true when the elder has partied with the best of them but never lost perspective. The elder will have compiled a mix of understanding that may include human nature, mechanics, electricity, car repair, horticulture, finances, and animal husbandry. Elders are also known to keep up with community and world affairs. They read the paper regularly, listen to the news, and debate current affairs with understanding and awareness. Because of the historic era in which they were raised, elders may have had only a grade-school diploma, but their insight, common sense, and functional intelligence made them people to emulate and respect.

**Survival: Shared, Taught, Bartered**

Residential dynamics are steeped in perceived historical undercurrents relational to surviving natural and man-made crisis. My observational experiences of this phenomenon began after a trip to the mainland upon my return to St. Thomas, when the Shanty had a live band scheduled for the early evening. That night the Shanty seemed like a huge family reunion. As I
was introduced to new people and groups my name was announced along with a brief description of where I came from, what my specialty was, and whose family I was associated with. I was not actually introduced to individuals in the group, but I would be told how people in the group were related to whoever was introducing me and the person’s specialty. Whether I had been introduced or not, people would just start talking to me like they had known me for years.

When I asked who a person was I would receive a brief history which included family association, residence, specialty they excelled at, employment history, and character description. If a person had graduated high school or accomplished any level of higher education, it was also noted. Most of the RI I met that night who earned college degrees had moved state-side and were just home for a visit. It became apparent that a person’s family history or association comprised their main credentials. When people learned I was continuing my education at a university, if possible, they would announce a family member who had graduated college and was successfully working state-side. Having a college graduate in the family was a claim to status. Traditionally, family with higher status had earned the status over generations. They could afford at least one of their children or grandchildren the opportunity to receive a college degree. Employment and specialties were announced to acknowledge an individual’s responsibility levels. Long-term reputable employment earned high respect. However, traditionally specialties that could be bartered combined with family association carried top weight in the overall culture.

Within a family group, the status of a family member appeared to be determined by the specialty they could barter. I learned the highest rank in an Island family was the family matriarch. Among other things, they raised the children, cared for other family members, saw to religious traditions, cooked, had knowledge of medicinal herbology, gardening, cleaning, and
retained some art and/or craft skill. The patriarchs who took responsibility for their own family and the less fortunate in the community could also retain a high status. Usually, individuals who were raised to know a specialty unique to the family group received a status rank directly under the matriarch and/or patriarch. This occurrence is most likely to happen when the head of the family has trained the new person in the specialty. Specialties could range from home repair, furniture repair, gardening, herbal medicine, sewing, woodcraft, weaving, or fishing, to a broad range of other skills and crafts. Specialties related to skilled knowledge are shared and taught to other family members or used for barter. Children grow up learning the specialties through watching and helping parents, grandparents, and other family members. Others learn their specialties through formal education. Bartered specialties could be exchanged for money, another specialty, or a personal favor. Bartering is important because RI grow up knowing the skill can be used to obtain necessities. They also know surviving the next natural or man-made crisis makes skilled knowledge highly valuable.

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority’s (WAPA’s) regular but unplanned power surges are responsible for recurring man-made crises. WAPA power surges cause blackouts that can be costly for RI. WAPA does not take responsibility for damage caused by a power surge. Damaged electronics may include refrigerators, water pumps (needed to flush toilets), televisions, computers, and any other equipment relying on electrical power. RI cost includes disposal of damaged appliances, spoiled food, cooler or insulated box, ice, batteries, paying for prepared food, lost wages waiting for delivery, etc. Nonessential electronics such as televisions, room fans, air conditioners, DVD players, and computers often must wait to be replaced. Excessive heat and lack of computers has created problems for educators and island learners. WAPA is not the only crisis generator. Electricity may be knocked out because of hurricanes.
Hurricane survivors discussed not having electricity for months. RI talked about the excess damage several hurricanes caused which many mainlanders go unaware of.

Back-to back-hurricanes, such as Irma and Maria in September of 2017, leave destruction on top of destruction, taking out the electric grids and devastating island infrastructure. In 2017 when I finally received response from the islands, I discovered RI were left with minimal or no communications, electricity, transportation, grocery stores, or functioning schools. In 2017, the post offices, banks, hospital, and the water desalination plants were damaged or deemed nonfunctional because of damage. Single- and multi-family homes and apartment buildings were gone, or left standing with missing or heavily damaged roofs and walls. Wind and rain further damaged furniture, appliances, clothing, or other material belongings, and of course deaths occurred. The hurricanes also result in the lush green rainforest left stripped by raging winds. The devastation of greenery eliminates nature’s protection, fresh fruit and produce. Realities leave residents with minimal protection from the weather and the diseases mosquitoes carry. The rainy season that follows hurricanes, mixed with housing problems, a drinking water shortage, and difficulty obtaining medical care, medicine, and food supply cause a multitude of survival problems.

Survival requires but is not limited to the following: Cisterns being opened so buckets can be used to retrieve water, taking in displaced family and friends, looting because of food supply shortages or simply opportunity, and reliance on walking because of damaged or blocked roads. Martial law and curfews may be enacted as early as six at night until six in the morning. Repairs are stalled because of lack of manpower and supplies. Goods must be shipped to the islands for replacement. However, ports and the airstrips also suffer damage, causing further delays.
When relief workers do arrive with food, water, tents, roof tarps, medicine, radios, batteries, and other necessities, the people in Charlotte Amalie receive help first. This results in rural residents’ reliance on each other and the knowledge passed down through generations for survival and rebuilding. Formal education may be interrupted for extended periods of time, but people continued learning, accumulating, and retaining and passing on valuable knowledge. After essentials are acquired, the RI worry about the damage done to their main source of economy: tourism. Although it is considered important, formal education does not have top priority in the aftermath of a hurricane.

The RI culture has been molded by living through destruction and devastation equivalent to that found in continuous war zones. During those times of destruction, the community encounters life-threatening forces which create fear and despair. Yet, RI worked together with compiled knowledge to transform their realities into hope through camaraderie. The fear individuals have lived through, the realities they experienced together during the rebuilding process, the shared fortitude found through human nature, the knowledge that another destructive hurricane will come, will never fully be understood by a person who has not personally experienced it. Nor could the education individuals acquire during times of disaster be quantitatively recorded, or tested on paper.

The way island residents work together when faced with problems, and after a major crisis, is more than commendable. Many RI view people as humans who make mistakes and have poor judgment at times. They also understand the importance of acceptance, respecting a person’s weakness, and offering forgiveness and cooperation when warranted. Different intellectual strengths are needed and valued in a crisis. Working together, the RI succeed
and overcome their desperate situations. However, the RI are not naive; they have human limits and faults such as prejudices.

The island residents’ preconceived prejudices and opinions are open to change depending on negative or positive experiences. Unfortunately, most of the prejudice on island has been fostered and reinforced over time for the retention or advancement of the status quo. My island family was predominately considered White-French heritage. However, Marl’s children were French and Puerto Rican. His sister Angela’s grandchildren’s heritage was mixed with the island’s Black heritage. Marls nieces, Annie and Elly’s were often at the Cove with their bi-racial children. At the Cove one day I asked Annie about the racial prejudice on island. She informed me it was very real, and people looked down on her and her sister for having children of mixed blood. She noted that even some blood family members still had a tough time with it. I admitted my surprise when I previously heard Mary openly, in a loving tone, refer to Angela’s infant grandson as her “sand baby.” Annie pointed out that island beach sand was light; therefore, distinguishing a person as “sand” color was a positive. Listing other distinguishing skin tones, she included terms such as caramel, coffee, chocolate, dark chocolate, brown, blue-black, ebony, and paper bag. She noted that, back in the day, if a person’s skin tone was lighter than a paper bag, they were passable for White. Annie also noted that people do not freely use the terms outside of family and friends because they could be misconstrued as being offensive, rather than as descriptive.

The most recent status quo focuses on prejudices toward immigrants arriving from the Dominican Republic and Haiti rather than relying simply on skin tone. Dominicans and Haitians are legally and illegally arriving in St. Thomas out of financial need. I was explicitly told by several RI these new immigrants should not be trusted because of drug trafficking and
dishonesty. It does not seem to occur that each new wave of immigrants from other islands have faced similar disparaging prejudices before being blended into the island communities. Yet, prejudice against the Mainlanders/Continents and Europeans living on island seems to have remained strong, consistent, and covert over time.

Most segregated White residents are clumped into a group of individuals who are considered totally objectionable because they do not even feign politeness to the RI. RI consider these segregated White residents’ faction to be controlling untouchables who are to be tolerated. RI were overtly courteous; however, out of the segregated White residents’ earshot, I have heard the IRI refer to the offending person or group as having a “plantation owner attitude.” Prejudice toward the segregated White residents and others may be based on a one-time offense, or on multiple occurrences. Island prejudices have been cultivated historically, grounded relationally to power, control, and ethnocentric belief. Historical prejudice may be reinforced though the laws, media, and/or by word of mouth. Cultural groups’ memories are long, and they live or have lived with real experiences of tyranny which influence behavioral and belief patterns. On the island, historical experiences tend to be incorporated into cultural teaching opportunities. Experiences resulting in prejudice may be transmitted to clarify understanding, warning, or as cautionary tales. Subcultures reinforce prejudice through word-of-mouth teaching opportunities. Collectively, the culture allows prejudice to be questioned, objectively applied, or discredited.

My discoveries included that techniques used to transmit cultural teaching and fostering prejudice may also be used to teach procedures used for supplementing income. Several of the RI earn or supplement their income through Island folk-art techniques. These people may be found creating their items in real-time for tourists. Among others, these folk artists may craft dolls, jewelry, hammocks, and souvenirs fashioned from island vegetation and sea shells. Some
RI quickly weave fresh coconut palms into hats, baskets, jewelry, flowers, beach bags, and/or floor mats. Weavers and other folk artists talk about learning to weave as small children. They noted learning from grandparents, siblings, or other relatives. Many artists charged negotiable prices, while others worked for tips from the tourists.

Some art entrepreneurs stand on the side of road or an area frequented by tourists with a machete in one hand and a coconut in the other. Holding the coconut in one hand, they sculpted heads of people or animal figures with great speed and skill using their machete and a smaller knife for details. Depending on the season, there may also be a card table set up selling freshly picked fruit.

Folk art and fruit may also be found at the many U.S.VI celebrations. These celebrations are frequently accompanied by combinations of music, dancing, presentations, displays, demonstrations, activities, and specialty-item sales. Some have been around for over fifty years to bring cultures together. The resulting attendance is often quite large. However, there are noticeable racial divides at some events. Although almost 90 percent of the population are people of color, the festivals’ participants and attendees are not always representative of the islands’ population. Some, like the Carnival, have accurate population representation. Others, like the Regatta, have largely White representation. Bastille Day activities are organized by those of French descent and a large percentage of the participants are White, but they do draw an ethnic diversity of island residents.

**Expanding Culture Perceptions**

Being of French descent, Marl’s family attended Bastille Day activities. Like other ethnicities on the Island, the French have unique cultural beliefs. Marl’s sister Rose loved her cultural heritage. She used Western medicine and her mother’s herbal knowledge to explain her
standings stating the importance of both. She believed both had significant use and thought there
was value to be learned by combining the practices. Love for her culture did not stop her from
breaking away from traditional patterns as a teenager. On one hand, she valued family very
much and loved St. Thomas. On the other, she recognized her culture depicted women as being
subservient to men:

I did not want anything to do with “Frenchies,” the way Frenchies ... Well, you get married
young. You have [a] whole pile of kids... the women have no rights. The men say when
you move, when you sit, when you do whatever. And I didn’t want that. When I became
18 years old I went to the States... they knew I was working after school so they knew I
was going to go to the States... I, uhhmm, use to give mom, in the beginning, my paycheck
and eventually I started to save my money... left for the mainland...

Although not the youngest child, Rose had witnessed her older sisters arranged
marriages. She also saw their unhappiness and the problems that could occur from arranged
marriages. At an early age, Rose decided there had to be another way. In her early teens, Rose
went to the tourist area along the waterfront and began working for a jeweler. She saved her
money, went mainland, got married, had children. The family moved back to the Island to raise
until she perceived her children’s’ educational was being jeopardized:

I’m telling you, she was a horrible teacher... She had a contract for one year. I left also
that same year from here to go to Connecticut with my kids because. Even though it was
a private school it was not the best education... I taught a lot of things to my kids, home
schooling. ’Cause when my daughter was in first grade she got promoted to second grade
because she was smarter than what the grade was. And the youngest one had dyslexia and
he was kept back in kindergarten MY Choice [emphasis on “my choice”] because he,
emotionally I think, I didn’t think he was ready. Now when he went to first grade he was
an A student. Emotionally he wasn’t ready (to start first grade)... today he is a teacher.

While on the mainland she also continued her education, taking several courses in higher
education to assist job attainment and promotions. She ultimately came back to the island after
her children graduated and she divorced. Rose understood that change was difficult for her
culture to embrace, especially when traditions appeared to be devalued. She noted she was not
devaluing cultural tradition; she had a desire to see the culture she had been raised in integrating ideas of equitable treatment regardless of sex and color.

Rose did not go to the Cove often because she did not want to deal with the older French, especially the men, who lived by the traditional standards. Some of her family and family friends had, and still do, view her actions as a teenager as a betrayal or denial of culture. However, Rose made it clear she especially did not want to run into her cousin Tom. Tom had helped UVI publish a book on U.S.VI healing plants. Rose’s mother taught Tom the herbal healing specialty, but he did not acknowledge Mary in the book. Rose felt it was a family betrayal.

Tom did not come to the Cove regularly. He would appear more often when his daughters and grandchildren were there. When he did come to the Cove, he pulled his truck up close to the table and sat on a cooler in his truck bed talking. He never directly sat at the table. He talked about family and indigenous plants used for healing, but mostly about a legal settlement he was attempting concerning family property on St. Bart. He always appeared quite inebriated but would acknowledged his daughters, Annie and Elly, and his grandchildren. He talked about the legal process he was going through to prove ownership of land in St. Bart. He would loudly boast that when he succeeded in proving ownership he would sell the land and save the profits to assure his grandchildren a college education. I asked if the girls’ children were why he was working so hard to claim the land inheritance and he immediately responded:

Yeah, dey children never have to worry, the money der’ college all paid… Dey’ all go to college…

Occasionally, he would mention regret about not attending high school but would add formal education was not necessary in his youth. Nonetheless, he would mention success in contemporary society required a strong formal education base:
Wen’ young…no need fo’ high school, you learn’ from oters’… work, Navy…now yo’ need education, ev’body wan’ proof…[waving toward the children] Dey go t’ college…

With all his insistence about the importance of education, he never uttered a negative word against his daughters, who were in their thirties and both high school dropouts, or about his grandchildren being biracial.

Elly and Annie lived together on the family property, raising their children in one household with their mother nearby to help. His youngest daughter, Elly, had no regrets about getting pregnant and dropping out of high school even though her children had no father in their life. However, on more than one occasion Annie would talk about how she loved school and that she was in the National Honor Society. She regretted being forced to drop out her senior year because she was pregnant. System policies had not forced her to drop out, nor had her parents. When Annie told her mother she was pregnant, Annie was told she was old enough to make her own decision regarding her education.

When Annie talked about her formal education, she was proud of her accomplishments but realistic about survival:

I liked school, was a’ honor student… I was uhhh, going on 17… in tenth grade and I dropped out… my color, going to that school and being with a big belly, could be very dangerous. [She is a slim light-skinned blonde.] We never know what could happen….There is so much kids in the school and I’m clear, white… some kids are not nice. And some kids don’t have conscious’. And they’ll probably just run up behind me and punch me in my belly, or something. So… You never know, you can’t trust things…. That’s why I feel very bad for those girls when they are going to school. They should have, like, another place where it’s probably in the same school, but they don’t get to….Or they have their own classroom is what they should have. Or even in a different area where pregnant, young pregnant women could go to school. They don’t have that.

Annie had dreamed of graduating and going to college but before her pregnancy she witnessed a group of Black girls gang up and punch a White girl at school. They held the girl down and
punched her in the stomach until she lost her baby. The violence had occurred after the Black girls learned the White girl was pregnant by a Black boy.

The father of Annie’s baby was also Black. Being of French descent, Annie’s concern for the baby’s safety had forced her to decision to drop out. She still dreamed of receiving her GED, but there was no available transportation to get to the classes or testing offered on the other side of the island. Even if there had been transportation, there was no spare money to spend on her continuing her education.

Annie did encourage her children in their education and assisted them with their homework. She would even help type the older children’s homework on the computer at her mother’s house. But after watching her children do research and homework on the computer, Annie admitted that being in her early thirties and not knowing how to use modern technology was intimidating. Fortunately, the father to her youngest children was involved with raising them. He often talked about relatives on the mainland and how he would send the children stateside to finish their education when they were older if the finances could be found.

These cultural perspectives demonstrate the importance RI place on education and educational achievement. Unfortunately, financing and perceived survival needs disrupt attainment. Acknowledging how and why island prejudices have been fostered, cultural learning has been transmitted, and traditions function affords increased understanding of cultural perspectives’ relevance to education.

Culture and Learning

As discovered in the participant observation, RI cultural perspectives are rooted in family history and connection. When observation and interview results were assessed, patterns
displayed recognizable personal contemplation and/or emotional connections to past reflection about family, learning, historical aspects, formal education, and cultural tradition. This reaction assisted in validating the interviewees’ cultural perspectives. When asked about learning influences they remembered from their youth, they reported influence came through actions, actual teaching, and through verbal utterance. Many of the interviewees referred to a memory of a family member. One male instantly remembered his older brother teaching him to ride a bike:

I think I was about four…having my older brother teach me how to ride a bike…but you know, as I was younger he seemed so much older than me.

Another man remembered dropping out of school to help support the family at a very young age. Over time his older brother saved enough money, and sent him to a specialty college to insure his life’s well-being:

Well, when my broder’ took me on…a plane to Puerto Rico to launch a classes … I was about 17… college I went to…”

Often cousins and uncles were just as influential. This young man dropped out of high school and went to work with his cousin before continuing his education:

And that would be when I went into, ahhmmm, refrigeration and air conditioning. I went to school for that…22-23 [age at time of specialty schooling] and when I was going to school, I had a job with my cousin who had a used refrigerator shop and I use the work with him before I went to the school…when I went to school, I could have helped the other students in school…

An older cousin’s assistance was not unusual. Another young man, raised without his father, talked of an older cousin who became his role model:

There was a cousin of mine that I had. He was self-taught… He was about 20 years older than I was and he kinda’ took me under his wings because I wasn't living with my father. I was living with my mother… he kinda’, sorta’ adopted me and whenever he saw me, he gave me little tips and so forth and such, small things…Another thing he told me was that when you think nobody is looking and you do something wrong that's when they're all looking.
Shared cultural values were spread by extended family members and fondly remembered. As the next man spoke, his eyes seemed to be seeing the action as he remembered an experience with his uncle:

I was about maybe about four years old… My uncle… We made bamboo kites. You know sometimes you made a kite, the kite was so big, maybe about four foot by three feet and I was so young and like… With bamboos and you use paper, papier-maché like the maché paper you use in art and big bamboo. They be so big that it take you off the ground… it goes up into the air, you know… the first thing I could say I create and actually know how to make a kite now. Like, you know, it was a nice learning experience, you know?

Other times, it was a father, grandfather, uncle, or a combination of these people who influenced learning habits:

Uh, my father. He tell us to work hard… a good life you gotta’ start from early… He, uh, my father give me a lot of encouragement that way, ya’ know, it started from a early age…

Fixing cars. Father, uncle, everybody. I start with my father…

Family, relatives… I started, uh, wood carving at a very early age. I was about 10 or 12…

First school of fish I ever caught with my grandfather and my father. A school of fish. I was 6 years old and I was the first one in the water. I had to swim to tie the net to the rack… It’s not a hook on a line… you tuck the net up under the fish and you pull it on the boat. We did it all by hand…

For many, their mother was often the earliest influence on learning. They remembered their mothers reading to them, going over class material when they got home from school, and asking what the child had learned in school that day. This man clearly identified how combining family cultural factors influenced his young learning experiences.

Yeah, dis’ is my family, I grew up right here in de’ house… dat’ my cousin. All these properties here are me family. Dhoes’ apartments. Dats’ me uncle’s house right dere’. Dat’s our apartment, have ten apartments. My grandfather build dem’ upstairs downstairs. Dis’ where he use’ta’ live. My muder an’ everyting’ we had to come next door an’ say prayer an’ grace en like, church [Moravian]. My grandfader’ use’ta’ cook for everybody, everybody in de’ yard. An’ he cook, everybody eat. Kill goat, skin goat, pig… Anybody come around, dey’ welcome. All de’ land back dere’... all dem’ my grandfader’s property… All de’ way back… I liked my grandfather bad. Everywhere he go, I go. He’d
took’ me to the beach an’ trow’ way’ over, learn how ta’ swim…he teach me my
trade….Gardening, farming, carpentry, everyting’. he useta’ go fishing an’ everyting’.

There was only one person who talked about a person outside the family who influenced his
learning when he was young:

   Well, a lifeguard lady taught me….Yea. It was on Linguist beach. I was with my family
and the lady offered to teach me how to swim and I got it right off hang. I was like five
years old, the most. We had known her from going to the beach. She was just a cool,
down to heart spirited. Like a good family friend.

Because of her actions, rather than simply being referred to as a good person or a friend she
became viewed as a long-term family friend. Essentially, her actions were the reason for
figurative adoption into the family. He credits her as the main influence on his educational
choices which allowed him to become a professional lifeguard.

   The commonality in each of these learning experiences goes beyond fond memories and
cultural responsibility. All the respondents were unaware that they had described a learning
experience that would be influential to their long-term survival on island. Like my island
family’s matriarch, the lifeguard’s story also shows how people who are not blood-related are
welcomed into a family for retention of similar values.

   When discussing learning influences, it is important to recognize that there was a
difference established between formal education experiences and learning. Learning/life lessons
could be experienced both in the community and through formal education. However, formal
education experiences referred to being taught with a pre-planned itinerary in a formal setting.

   “Educational experiences” and “life lessons” were both found to be distinctive forms of
learning. However, there were only two people who stated a formal education experience was
their most important learning. Their reasoning was logical:
I would say elementary school was the most important. It forms the basic. Reading was important, and you can’t learn without know how to read.

Uhhh, I was in a philosophy class and I was show[n] what a, a, a., a presupposition was ….Your base line for your logic, and I realized other people had different ones. And that was extremely interesting for me that I was approaching a subject in a different way than someone else was. And I hadn't realized that, that was possible…I was…I think, 16.

The remaining respondents looked at life lessons as their important and/or effective learning. The positive life lessons were also listed as their favorite learning experiences. The favorite is important, as this adjective was commonly used when discussing and/or describing experiences with hands-on-attributes. Hands-on-learning goes beyond listening to explanations or theory and allows the learner to participate.

When formal education experience was described as effective learning, it was also associated with hands-on experience: “my teacher made me understand fractions using a pizza”; “science, it was hard, but we had hands-on experience”; “Twelfth-grade English, the teacher talked with us, kept us interested, he explained the material very well. He was easy to understand. We made displays…did plays…”; “One-on-one experience made writing more interesting…by reading and giving examples…critiquing the things I had written…There were ways to improve.” One young lady who had just started college explained her perspective on the effectiveness of interactive learning:

I like … college-level teaching opposed to high school and middle school because you research [to learn]. You get deep into it and you do your own research and you read and you figure out things and it’s not like somebody telling you what happened, but you figure it out for yourself and you know it’s good because it’s what you yourself searched for. As opposed to reading it in a history book.

Even though this woman described researching, she is referring to the experiences as positive due to the hands-on-attributes that function with finding information on your own, as opposed to being handed a book and told what chapter or pages to read.
These respondents were quick in answering questions about their effective learning experiences. They wanted to share the experience. They spoke emphasizing certain words while looking directly into my eyes. I was left with the impression that until the interviewee personally experienced hands-on involvement in their educational process they assumed learning in a formal setting was not fulfilling or useful. There was excitement in their answer; they wanted everyone to know so others could try teaching the same way. That distinct experience raised their self-confidence, allowed them to understand they were capable of learning if taught by a person who shared rather than lectured.

Finally, there were displays of how effective learning was not always a positive memory. Both of the following incidents occurred in formal education settings. They were repeated by the speaker slowly and in quiet tones. Facial displays were pensive as they spoke:

Uhmm, Junior High walking the hall, and this boy came up and punched me in my head….I was 15—no, 14. No, 13….No reason… just came up and punched me in de’ head. And what I learned was, is, don’t trust anybody. ’Cause you never know what they’re capable of doing…Well, it learned me to not to trust a lot. Trust people that you more know an’ don’t trust people you just meet. Git’ to know them first before you get to trust them. And always stand up for yourself.

Um, I remember having um, some, persona’ confrontation with a teacher. Because she was teachin’ something, I’m like, “Ahh, we done learned that!” [He learned a different fact in eighth-grade history.] …She was teachin’ Caribbean history… “Uh an’ she sent me to the office but what the principal did was make me prove it. And I proved it. So, it made me, you know, you can’t just go by what people tell you. You have to find out for yourself….Oh, yes. She picked on me [after proving her wrong] … All the students hated me for a while…She was doing it [picking on] to the whole class…she would, um. She would pick on me. You know, try to bring me down in front of the class and I told her, because I’ve always been outspoken, that by doing that you’re not helpin’. Yeah. Well, of course I got sent to the office for….But I was right.

Both respondents associated their learning experiences with formal education because of the location in which they occurred. Had the same random act of violence for the first person
occurred outside the school he may have remembered it but, not associated it with learning and formal education.

The second respondent displayed self-confidence and the fortitude she learned through cultural upbringing. The instructor apparently believed they were the undisputable representation of power and authority, with the ability to hand out verdicts and punishment. After proving herself correct, the student was subjected to further mental abuse chosen by the instructor to vindicate herself. The instructor also apparently attempted to punish the entire class for the individual student’s questioning. This could be translated into a two-fold action. First, the instructor’s action could be perceived as attempting to further punish the student through isolation: she did receive jeering from her peers. Next, embarrassing one student unmercifully for questioning the instructor’s perceived self-importance would intimidate the other students. This underlying motive could be an effort to create a submissive group of learners. Unfortunately, the fear and tension created would also produce a non-learning environment.

**Semantics: Horrific Learning Experiences**

Over time I discovered the importance of understanding and using the semantics found in the Islands’ language. This was especially true when “horrific” learning experiences were described. I was surprised to discover many perceptions of horrific learning were part of formal education: public speaking, being teased in school, being used by a teacher as an example of what not to do, teachers pinching students, being called teacher’s favorite, memorizing facts that will never be used, boredom, getting answers wrong, math, and spelling. On Island, formal education and horrific learning is clarified by noting: Instructors who used intimidation, who did not respect or made no effort to understand the Islands Creole and/or who were not engaged in
the material being taught were reported to be horrific. A young lady in her early twenties expressed the situation well:

Uhhh, I had a teacher that was so scary that I was pretty much petrified in class and he would do erratic things… sometimes people were sleeping and he would kick the bottom of their desk, or something very dramatic…violent…and that really made it hard to concentrate on what he was saying… and he would humiliate the kids sometimes… then make fun of their answer… he was a teacher there for quite a while [at a private school].

There was also a person who was not physically capable of completing a project who the teacher tried to fail:

…had to dissect a… Well, the teacher did not believe that I was petrified of frogs… I passed out… When I came to, my mom was actually, like, standing over me… She’s like, “Didn’t you tell him you’re afraid of frogs?” and I’m like, “He didn’t believe me… Um, he tried to fail me.” But, my mom took it to the principal.

Then there are the cultural notions of language. Because the U.S.VI is part of the U.S. and does follow federal education regulation, and use books published on the mainland, instructors who are not from the area do not acknowledge the semantics found on the island.

These instructors often make learning in general horrible. It was stressed by more than one person that teachers needed to at least respect the language differences between the island and mainland:

…advanced for English for my age. I used to be the one to say…I understand what you’re saying but you’re on the Islands and how we speak and how we spoken in the books is very different… Most of my teachers from the States…

Proud of his culture, and the difference found within it, this man said it all:

…I’m tellin’ them like, you can speak to us and teach us, but you have to understand down here the edition we are speakin’, so it’s like, I could a, accept what you’re saying but you must also accept how we speak. ’Cause you’ll get mad at, like, for example I’ll say *them* but I won’t be saying it “T-H-E-M”. I’ll be saying “DEM”, D-E-M. Yeah, and they’ll be like, “No, you don’t say that.” I say, unfortunately we do. And, for you to understand how we lern’, we cut words down, very much so, very much so, very much. Yeah, I, I, I truly like it that way. I like knowing we’re different in that was that we can understand you but we can still give you that different flavor of how we speak. Our accent, our dialogue, very different, very different, so…
Usually the related experiences could simply be viewed as a life lesson. This is not said to diminish the learning experiences, but to put them in perspective. Experiences that change how a person prepares for the future may be perceived as horrible. In fact, the following lessons were considered dramatic enough that the speaker freely expressed them to others in hopes they would not make the same mistake. First, a woman in her twenties who had dropped out of high school went to the mainland and worked at an amusement park, restaurant, and cleaning establishment. She realized she was bored, got her GED, and went to college to work at her current job. Whereas, a fisherman mentioned an incident that occurred while he was on the ocean and engine problems occurred:

…my boat breakdown… not that far out, about 2 miles out, 3 miles…usually a boat pass by there sometime… you gotta’ wave a shirt or somethin’ for someone to see you… had no phones in dose’ days. Went out about, seven o’clock, we got picked up about four o’clock.

Both experiences were horrific, but the individuals had time to reflect on the decisions they originally made. In retrospect they mentioned going back to lessons they had learned when they were younger, their cultural upbringing, and realized how to rectify their situations to help insure a positive outcome for the future.

Where most horrific learning may be viewed as temporary or as having solutions, there are the experiences that slip into tragic. After two men related their stories of tragedy I realized aspects of tragedy on the Islands were not uncommon:

Well. When I see, uhmm, somebody got killed down here, at my job. A tire blow off and’ kill de’guy….He was putting air in da’ tire an’ it blew out, a big truck tire…it explode. Fling him up in the air… I guess he was about 20…, de’ tire bust” [hand motions to depict the explosion]….He didn’t put it in a cage [said with slow, sad voice like he was reliving it in his mind’s eye], ya’ know what I mean….It sent him straight up in the air. He hit the rafters in the roof an’ when he drop down here he was dead. There was blood all over. I run…straight home. I still went back an’ work. I went back down when the ambulance an’ police car came…
At the age of fifteen another man was present when his friend was murdered:

… I learned not to really trust people…this argument or whatever… I don’t know how the other fella’, you know, see in his mind to kill….We was all on the basketball court playing…during the day….The fella [killer] came like two-three times during the day [to the court] so nobody really expect him to do….The other fellow [the speaker’s friend] was sleeping on a bench….he just walk up to him and shoot him in the head… so then when he come, you know he lookin’ at me like.  I ask him. “What you do to…Am I crazy?”  Him pointin’ the gun at me and tellin’ me to shut up… [in a childish crying voice he says] “What you do to my, why you keep telling me about shut up?  Are you pointing gun at me?”…. He…running away…and I, like, see the dude’s head, like, brains just.. blood and all kinda yellow, green… I could see the life breath going out of him… Everybody just start disappearing, you know, but then I saw a marshall who lived in the neighborhood, so I end up telling him about it, you know, and then…Yeah, he’s in jail I know, yeah.

Unfortunately, according to the FBI annual report, released on September 27, 2016 for 2015, U.S.VI had the highest murder rate per capita than any territory, state or commonwealth in the U.S.  Data revealed 32.9 murders per 100,000 (McCathy, 2016).  Death is a natural reality in any culture.  On the island of St. Thomas, it is more than a natural reality: murders, accidents, disease and natural causes combine and touch everyone.  Within one year, my Island family had one man in his thirties die from a tragic accident at work, another from drugs, and a third was murdered saving a woman from attempted rape.  With high crime and only one hospital on the Island of St. Thomas, cultural survival of natural and man-made disasters are complicated by survival and survivor’s guilt.

Island Survival

Perceptions of how economic survival is learned and sustained in the Territory resulted in a large combination of responses.  This occurred because respondents offered multiple ideas of how people lacking a high school diploma or taxable income on island survived.  Many answers included phrases like “I know or have known people who do ‘such and such,’” and “I have done
Survival through means of corrupt activities including thieving/stealing, selling, growing and/or distributing weed and pharmaceutical street drugs, becoming a stripper, selling their food stamps for cash, selling sexual favors or firearms, and/or pirating music and movies on the black market were offered as explanation over one third of the time. A few discussed men who found a woman receiving aid to live with. Then there was a woman in her thirties who started a hearty laugh when I asked about survival. The laugh was followed by:

They just pop anoter’ child out so dey’ don’ hav’ta work, dey’ jus’ keep collectin’. A lady right now, she has twelve, every time she pop one, she pregnant again.

Hers was not the only response acknowledging women had children to collect government assistance. As sordid as these techniques may sound, almost half of the responses included some type of corrupt activity as a means of survival. One gentleman put the situation into perspective:

…do wat’ ever ya’ gotta do…wat’ ever ya’ can, you gotta do wat’ ya’ gotta do ta’ survive. I mean most people wit’ kids start doin’ illegal stuff. Most people don’t hav’ no choice…

Many respondents noted that survival was maintained by government assistance such as welfare, food stamps, nutrition programs, social security, and housing. Some would double up and receive assistance from the Salvation Army or Red Cross also. Others admitted to borrowing money or knowing a person who begged. A thirty-year-old man stated (with conviction):

If dey’ didn’t have any welfare here, it woud’ be chaos here…Dey’ ain’t got no work—going to school, ain’t got no work.

However, it was repeatedly pointed out that people could not live on government assistance alone. Displaced RI, including the chronically ill, and single mothers relied on family and friends for help and/or trade training. A woman with two children added:
Since the Virgin Islands is so small, people are close to family. They have good family structure. Family is always willing to help you out.

After thirty interviews I counted over one hundred descriptions for surviving on the Islands. Several of the responses were similar, but the one answer that almost everyone agreed on for survival was “hustling.” The first time I heard someone use the term “hustling” I assumed they were talking about being deceitful or swindling people. When I asked the person for a definition I discovered it was another instance of misunderstanding Island semantics. Hustling on Island means picking up odd jobs, jobs that pay cash:

It’s a positive word, because everybody hustles whether you know it or not, trying to make extra money to pay your phone bill, helping [a] tourist with their luggage, teaching swimming, I braid hair…doing somethin’ apart from a main job…getin’ paid cash…

I observed and was told people who want to learn something will find a family member to teach them. Women responded the fastest with an extensive number of non-corrupt ways to survive:

…cuts hair…she braids hair in her house for cash. They take care of other people’s children…they sell tea…lemon grass…I know of people who transport others for money. I give you a ride from home and you pay me fifteen dollars. Not everyone is selling drugs or their body.

Make craft, braid hair…clean houses…do laundry…cook…They have their own place and, like, for the neighborhood, she cooks up food and stuff. Vegetarian, and the boys come there. She charges three dollars for a small plate, six or seven for a large plate…she calls them specials. Pour Kool-aid in a cup, put it in da’ freezer…kids come home from school…run to her door…all these different kinds of specials, candy, chips.

Men seemed to have distinct ways to hustle for extra money. They suggested doing odd jobs for people, including plumbing, landscaping, carpentry, playing music, fixing appliances, sewing, selling fruit in season, and selling arts and crafts items. The arts and crafts knowledge was usually passed down in the family like making soaps or body creams, knotting hammocks, coconut sculpting, and wood carving.
Gender aside, it was regularly acknowledged that trading necessities/bartering was a mainstay of survival. If you did not have money, there was always something that needed to be done or you were proficient at something another person did not know how to do or have time to do. Having a plot of land to grow your own food on and selling part of it was considered a hustle. One man summed up means of survival in the Territory:

Well, some people rely on the government…. Others can do odd jobs… Hustling, charging less to make it, drug activities….selling stuff from stealing, you see what I mean?...That’s how dey’ survive. Even if it may not be right. Dey’ don’t do it because dey’ want, dey’ do it just because dey’ have to. I know a few people. Yeah, I does talk to dem’ …Well, they need to survive.

Success and Education

Although the U.S.VI is a territory of the U.S., their culture is aligned with the collective societies found in the Caribbean. Like other collective societies, relationships and processes are more important than individual ownership and end-products. Thus, responses to questions such as “What makes a person successful?” reflected a collective society’s perspective.

Interviewees perceived a person was successful if they enjoyed contributing in a positive way to their society. The focus was on a person or group of people being happy with their decisions. To some, it was important that a person appear comfortable around people. There were two people who saw educational achievement as a measure for success. One recently graduated from high school and was a freshman at UVI. The other had dropped out of school as a teenager. Regretting the decision made in youth, the person did go back and received a GED.

More than half the people interviewed had no regrets regarding their formal education decisions even if they were high school dropouts and/or did not earn their GED. Others wished they had studied harder, paid attention in school, and didn’t drop out of high school; one said
they wished they did not quit college, and two wished they could receive a college degree. As if to totally contrast the dreams of going to college, one was bitter about the formal education he had completed.

I feel like I could have started working when I was 12. I would have had more money. I feel like in the end I could have learned my own trade.

He validated his view by describing an older brother and a couple of acquaintances who had received their college degrees and could not find jobs. He was also bitter when he mentioned a friend who received a college degree who, after graduation, was working at McDonalds. Clearly, this man could not find a reason to encourage a person’s attainment of a higher education degree. Although not for the same reasoning, his opinion was not unique:

I don’t think is education down here in St Thomas, that I can speak for ’cause I went…I tink’ der’ bullshit…I don’t tink’, I tink’ dey’ set up, dey’ teach dey’ kids, dey’ have one or two kids dat’ don’t understand it. They leave them and just continue teachen’…Dey’ [students] do ask questions, and because they’re slow, a slower learner, it’s like dey’ don’t give a shit. [the “give a shit” was stated with tone of personal anger, emphasis on shit.]…I think they learn differently…if you jus’ go ahead and jus’ talk the kid ‘s not going to understand it as much as oder’ kids will.

Another respondent, with a high school degree obtained on island, was not hesitant to mention:

… in the States I would have finished school [received a college degree]. The teacher did not really care. I think they don’t care.

Throughout the interviews, several respondents talked about not feeling right about encouraging education on island because they did not perceive their instructors as good role models, and/or the subjects being taught were perceived as ineffective:

I hated my mat’ teacher. It was that bad that I did not go to class. I hated it… I was not payin’ attention…I tink’ it should have been more hands-on. It was like, just open your book and read.

…I have a hard time…just boring things and remembering facts. Dat’ kinda’ stuff. More so memorizing. I have always been a good student but that harder part for me… Having a teacher dat’ wants you to learn make a difference.
I am not going to tell dem’ dey’ have to finish school. Tink’ about their future. Dey’ want to get you’ GED, finish school den’ go to college, maybe.

Previously, other respondents brought up similar issues when asked about educational experiences and again when discussing horrific learning experiences. When respondents brought ineffective teachers up as a reason they question encouraging formal education on island, the problems may no longer be excused as isolated situations. Fortunately, not all the interviewees were hesitant about encouraging education.

There were many reasons for encouraging formal education, but the majority felt encouragement was a priority:

You see young kids not going to school and they are there selling bottles of water [on the street corners] and so they need to learn both school and survival. Go to school and work as hard as they can. And work so hard that they can become somebody.

Respondents who agreed that encouragement to finish formal education was a necessity believed that without an education a person does not have a chance in today’s job market. Others made statements noting that education is the difference between humans and animals, it makes survival easier, knowledge is power, and education leads the world. The respondent who exclaimed “Without education, you is nobody!” realized how abrupt his response was; he paused, smiled, and went on to say:

It builds self-esteem and it also [pause] Uhmm...it helps your confidence in your job. It, Uhmmm. It gives you that extra....It gives you a foot in the door that you might not have otherwise. I really only had that come up one time when I was working in health care. That I could have gotten a promotion, had I finished [hesitation] my degree.

Discussion

As technological advances continue, reorientation and transformation will be necessary to match the massive changes expected in the labor market and to ensure social inclusion. Whether defined as knowledge transmission, skills formation, research, innovation, or as social and
institutional capital, education will largely determine the ability of countries and citizens to transform the economy (UNESCO, 2016, p. 62). This discussion reviews results of qualitative data collected to increase understanding of U.S.VI cultural perspectives to increase the quality and the relevance of education in the Territory. Central consideration includes how adult economic survival is sustained through learned specialties and bartering.

Understanding culturally perceived influences’ relations to education requires stepping outside ethnocentric thought patterns and acquiring informed knowledge. Education’s cultural perceptions are intertwined with the culture’s realistic needs for survival. Hegemony in federal education policies were highlighted when the U.S. withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 to avoid attention to its territorial holdings and ethnocentric practices. In 2004 the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO was finally re-established (USDE, 2012). As of January of 2017, when referencing the U.S. mission to advance The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNESCO Deputy Director-General stated:

The public-private partnerships that the U.S. Mission to UNESCO have put in place are on mobilizing education to prevent violent extremism, and empowering girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, art/design, and mathematics (STEAM). They link closely to the founding principles of the Organization, that peace must be established drawing on humanity’s moral and intellectual solidarity and recognition that gender equality is a fundamental human right, a building block for social justice and an economic necessity. (U.S. Mission UNESCO)

This statement acknowledges U.S. contemporary alignment with UN educational views:

“…education will largely determine the ability of countries, firms, and citizens to transform the economy” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 62). On February 6, 2017, the U.N. General Assembly Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries demonstrated continued concern regarding
U.S.VI desire for autonomy and the Territory’s reported educational underachievement gaps (U.N., 2017a).

As a dominant power during the Industrial Age, U.S. education policy revolved around preparing most students for industrial employment. During that era, colonial powers used hegemony to oversee their land possessions. This included the U.S.VI’s education policies. The U.S.VI had never been part of the U.S. continent’s industrial world. The Territory’s primary economic activity had been sugarcane and pineapple cultivation before the U.S. purchase. After World War II the U.S. promoted tourism to support the Island economy.

Ethnocentrism

Initially I associated and participated in activities with the Island’s segregated White residents. The courtesies I experienced made me feel important, privileged, and influential. I was told how ignorant and rude all the RI were. How they did not want to succeed; they had no drive other than drugs? During that period of my Island life, I experienced firsthand how ethnocentric notions and hegemony sustained negative interpretations of U.S.VI cultural manifestations. On the Mainland, individuals are judged to be successful through obtainment of visible commodities. Encouraging individualism begins at an early age through federally established education policy.

U.S. education has been set up to award individuals who excel at predetermined challenges. The power of the individual’s success is viewed as the road to the White upper-class rewards and, therefore, entitlement. Traditionally, feelings of entitlement encourage ethnocentrism and allow oversight, misaligned judgment of intelligence, learning, and learning ability. This reality may be witnessed through observation of vacationing and transient U.S.
Mainland segregated White residents. U.S. ethnocentric notions have encouraged separation of the “haves and have-nots” along with White and Black stereotyping in the U.S.VI.

I did not recognize anything was amiss until I was taken to the K-Mart on island. While checking out, I noticed the woman in front of me was talking to the cashier in a tone that was not the least bit respectful. The cashier returned the favor with a mechanical rudeness. As I checked out, I commented on the previous woman’s inconsiderate-entitled attitude. A full smile appeared across the cashier’s face and we both continued with friendly and polite small talk. As we returned to the car, I was informed by my host that he had never seen an Islander cashier behave so politely. Reality hit me: the cashier was a Black Islander and the woman checking out in front of me was a White Continental. I was associating with people who desired being distinguished as part of the segregated White upper-class and therefore entitled to be arrogant. If I was going to work and live on island I would have to keep an open mind and put aside the lessons I had been covertly taught. The overall Island realities I experienced demonstrated that diversity is not as simple as the Black & White but is steeped in differences found in cultural heritage.

Understanding the cultural factors of island diversity requires adjustments in ethnocentric thinking. Hall and Hofstede’s cultural factors demonstrate that there two types of cultures functioning in the contemporary global community. U.S. Mainland culture has traditionally been considered low-context/individualistic, structured and inflexible. On the Island, time and other belief patterns are not viewed as strictly structured, which categorizes the U.S.VI under a high-context/collective society. Therefore, a cultural disconnect is trying to function through educational policy steeped in cultural beliefs that are foreign to the Island culture. This has resulted in RI associating U.S.-imposed scholastic education as important, but not relative to Territorial survival. Long-time Territory traditions have established that learning occurs in
diverse ways. Successful learning is viewed as beneficial to the culture, making it flexible and dependent on the RI perceived survival needs.

The VIUCEDD Executive Director confirmed the importance of understanding differences in culture perceptions. He stressed his program’s major concern to be that policy makers and educators realize people learn in diverse ways, emphasizing it does not mean those people are deficient. Experience with the program has taught the importance of working with people who learn differently, as well as teaching family and community members how to transition expectations to understand that diversity. He also noted that many of the RI live in poverty and have no way to afford up-to-date technology that could positively change educational outcomes. UCEDD’s educational procedures have been aligned to assist and balance the U.S. federal policies, thus encouraging measurement of educational advancements based on hegemonic bias.

The Island family I was associated with is considered poor by U.S. ethnocentric standards, but they were landowners. Their matriarchal ties went back prior to the 1917 U.S. purchase of the Territory. The patriarchal side arrived from St. Bart around the time the Islands were purchased. Knowledge for survival was successfully transmitted long before U.S. intervention. The learned knowledge passed down through the family included, but was not limited to: herbal healing, food preparation, midwifery, childcare, fishing, construction, horticulture, agriculture, and bartering. The Island’s collective society strongly reinforces patterns of family alliance. Family members may be known to make poor or uninformed choices but are not directly judged because of those choices.

An individual may not agree with all the family opinions or traditions, but they do not berate those who do. Family rifts may be initiated because of differences with limits and
boundaries being set, but that does not sanction a family member being neglected in times of disaster and dire need. Family members are raised to give credit where credit is due. A skilled wood carver is not viewed as being superior to a traditional farmer, or vice versa. The skills are not comparable, and both are necessities. An arrogant person is viewed as working only for the betterment of self. Continual displays of superiority commonly lead to community-wide ostracizing. An excellent example would be “the professor.”

One afternoon a man to be dubbed “the professor” appeared, sitting uninvited at the family table. The man was well dressed and faced away from the water as he sat slowly drinking his glass of wine. He did not move when the family started arriving. Standing near the table, family members began conversations. This was done as much to be polite as it was to announce the group’s presence. After an hour passed, people began offering the man polite greeting as they sat down. When asked about himself he responded that he was from the mainland and was a professor at UVI.

For a week he showed up, well dressed, sitting at the table, glass in hand. Everyone just started referring to him as “the professor” and sat at the table. Questions would be offered as invitation for inclusion. He would answer but would not join in the conversations. Occasionally he would make critical comments about the beer drinking, poor choices of wine at the Shanty, or offer unsolicited judgmental comments. The comments would be laughed off by the family members.

Over the years, U.S.VI cultural traditions had silently permitted non-Island teachers the right to perceive RI behaviors as eccentric. This allowed family members to view the professor as odd but basically inoffensive. One day I asked what he taught at the university. His response was gruff as he stated he had retired from teaching and earned good money working as a ghost
Encouraged by his response, I asked for clarification. He explained he worked for people who did not have time to research and write information for certain topics being posted online. As I attempted to engage him further in conversation I asked how he came about finding his job. He gave me a nasty look and curtly noted I should figure it out myself. Our conversation was abruptly over. His past arrogant remarks could be overlooked as eccentric; this could not. His blatant response and rudeness was viewed by the family members as offensive and self-serving. He no longer was perceived as a teacher attempting to help the community. He was now viewed as only working for the betterment of self. After he left, the table position was moved. For the next week a family member arrived early, covering the table with their possessions and leaving no room for him to sit. If he spoke, people seemed to look right through him, rather than at him. By the end of that week he was never seen at the Cove again.

To insult or harm a family member was equivalent to acting against them all. Some family members made their livelihood through bartering their construction or other specialty. Others relied on food stamps to feed their children. They did not need an arrogant, selfish person disrupting their life.

A sizable percentage of the Island’s community relies on government stipends combined with bartering for cash, favors, or concrete items to sustain them and their families. When Island residents are spotted walking up and down the mountains, they are doing so out of necessity. Limited human capital, financial resources, and poor public transportation are often considered the main causes for this and other phenomena considered peculiar by U.S. Mainlanders’ ethnocentric notions. Reality dictates that the majority of RI are poor. When a person cannot afford the luxury of owning a car, he or she is not going to find the money to purchase personal computer technology.
Because of the expense and training required to effectively use information technology, RI do not recognize it as overtly beneficial to their way of life. Technology has not been embraced on island in the same fashion as found on the mainland. Information verbally crosses subculture groupings throughout the island (and occasionally to neighboring islands) by word of mouth. St. Thomas’s condensed population not only fosters collective societal norms, it also assists in keeping island residents well informed. In the early morning, family members discuss the previous evening’s occurrences before venturing out to school, visiting family, going to work, or taking care of daily chores across the community. When they meet up with other family and friends they casually exchange information. Hence, a majority of the island’s population knows about any incident within hours of its occurrence.

**Shared Cultural Perspectives**

Observations and interview results demonstrated that perceptions and information were generationally passed on through cultural interactions with community members, family, friends, and through other social experiences. Results also showed that perceptions are influenced through hegemony, law enforcement, and governmental fluctuation. Discovery revealed cultural views were based on a combination of factors including, but not limited to, a single experience, involvement in an historical event, imposed/perceived positionality, family perception, and/or other factors.

Perceptions of success were not directly associated with educational achievement. Success was based on how individuals felt about their life choices. An individual generally perceived themselves as successful when they enjoyed the way they contributed to society, were happy with their decisions, and were comfortable around people. Learning and education could
be used as interchangeable lexicon, but learning was never directly associated with formal education. Further clarification required understanding how the terms *learning* and *education* were being covertly divided within the community.

Learning and educational perceptions were associated with cultural behavior. When asked about learning, formal education was only mentioned when a person described receiving help from a family figure when formal education required homework. Education was more than formal situations; it was an ongoing process of learning throughout a person’s life. Yet, formal educational degrees were encouraged and fostered as important within the culture. There are several ways this was verified this through my data collection.

First, when people who met me discovered I was going to a university on the mainland, they would immediately bring up a family member who had graduated or was going to college. The pride in their voices was unmistakable. Then there were the father and the grandfather who were trying to accumulate the financial means for family members’ college education. Conversations, as well as the open-ended interview responses, expressed the belief that college education gave people the chance to obtain better jobs and job advancement. Respondents were aware that a family member’s educational advancement raised the family status in the community. Even the government executives and the community stakeholders from the public and private education sectors of CEDS noted Island deficiencies in education were inhibiting U.S.VI national autonomy. The culturally perceived importance of higher education may be traced back to the first Islander-appointed governor when he began the initiative to establish a college on the Islands.

Formal education is viewed as a necessity for making global survival easier. But it was not mentioned as necessary for Island survival. The majority of “important” learning
experiences could be categorized under cultural life lessons needed for survival. Educational experiences that expanded to include a cohesive atmosphere by using cultural norms were described as “Effective when formal learning experiences were perceived as positive and memorable.” “Effective learning experiences” were associated with: one student/one teacher occurrences, hands-on learning in class, two-way learning between students and teachers, and teachers who took the time to help parents understand what their children were learning. Educational experiences with teachers who showed little or no respect for cultural norms often fell under horrific learning experiences. Excluding experiences when respondents witnessed sudden deaths, horrific learning included disrespectful teachers who used intimidation, exhibited disrespect related to language idiom differences, did not engage with the students as they taught, and/or did not understand the Territory’s cultural realities.

Over 100 descriptions for survival were counted from interviewees. After similar descriptions were categorized together, realities demonstrated the use of 76 culturally learned techniques based on shared knowledge used for ongoing island survival. Several respondents who initially listed island survival techniques solely dependent on illegal drug trade, or dependency on government siphons, revealed their opening responses were perpetuated by public news sources. The outlier was a White adult in her twenties who answered the interview questions in a matter-of-fact manner with obvious tones of conviction. Although she was raised and attended private schools on the island, she reported that her parents originally arrived on island for a vacation and stayed to become residents. Her parents connected with other relocated White mainlanders who lived on a segregated section of the island. The families socialized together, sent their children to the top private school, and retained U.S. ethnocentric beliefs. The young woman had a great deal of individualistic idealism toward her position in the community
and extreme bias against the RI. She stated RI were lazy and enjoyed living off government benefits. She did not consider other sources for survival relevant. Her convictions included views that RI chose to survive through illegal drug trafficking and government siphons because it was convenient and easy. Further questioning revealed she did not socialize at all with her co-workers, and admitted her family never associated with or had any friends of color. It was apparent the individual was largely influenced by the segregated White upper-class minority’s cultural truths.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Historically, hegemony appears to have influenced cultural perceptions in the U.S.VI. My research setting reinforced the idea of distinct class separation in the Territory, allowing segregation of relocated White Mainlanders to perpetuate their ethnocentric thinking. The ethnocentric thinking has prohibited accepting or understanding differences discoverable between the U.S.VI Territory and Mainland’s cultures. Residences for the relocated White segregated population and housing intended to entice university instructors to stay on island was far superior to other living conditions. This encouraged residents who were born on island and eventually accumulated financial gains to segregate themselves when building on family property. The segregation could include private gate access, unobstructed island views, and pools. In contrast, urban residents with limited financial stability or at the poverty level lived in much smaller dwellings in overcrowded conditions or government-built tenement housing.

In 2008, the U.N. emphasized cultural consideration was an essential dimension of successful educational outcomes for sustainable autonomy (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). CEDS 2010 strategic goals realized several deficiencies in the Territory’s educational achievement. For successful educational realignment to be instituted, a fundamental understanding of underlying cultural attributes is necessary. As Dr. Habtes’s involvement with the UCEDD revealed, when implementation includes the cultural aspects of the community, programs have a better chance of survival and success.
As Dr. Habtes concentrated on the positive he noted:

And that’s why we try to, to, help people understand the barriers…we just don’t go and focus only on students….Our program VIUCEDD…funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities and the U.S.DOE, Office of National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (VIUCEDD, 2016)... children do not learn from their teachers and parents only, but they learn from their peers as well. So, if we segregate them and put them, we are denying both parties the opportunity from learning, of learning from each other…. (Dr. Habtes, personal communication, June 23, 2013)

The UCEDD at UVI introduces the technology to students, families and in the community:

So we show this an’, an’ we do explain this. So, ahh, the reason we do that is you see there are nurses, there are teachers, there are social workers. If they don’t know about it, they are not going to advocate. But, if they know about it [said with excitement], AHHHa! [Snaps his fingers], my students would need such a device. The nurse would say, my patient would need such a device. So, we educate the community… If, if, these people don’t know about it, they don’t miss it! But if they know about it and they see it they say, Hey! That’s goin’ to help me. An’, that will help their life. (Dr. Habtes, personal communication, June 23, 2013)

This led to questions concerning people at or below the poverty line and up-to-date technology expenses. Dr. Habtes explained:

So, later on we found out that most of the people with disabilities is also poor. Well, poverty and disabilities go hand in hand… We created an endowment and a foundation. And we give loans now, at a low [emphasis on low] rate to people with disabilities. So, if you have a child, and your child wants a laptop and he has a disability… [exaggerated pause] We could give you a loan … I started it. But when I retire, and I’m gone, I hope this will stay for many years to come. Because, the interest, we don’t charge the principal, we only charge the interest. And we use the interest…we don’t touch the principal. In this way the bank, and then the people that get the loan, they pay you back. So, the idea is that this will stay for years and years to come. (personal communication, June 23, 2013)

He believed in the possibilities of education geared toward the learner and the future.
Summary

Shortly after the U.S. purchased the U.S.VI., education was initially reported to the federal government as inadequate. Since that time the government has initiated many changes related to education. Regardless, the Territory’s educational underachievement persisted. Outside agencies were brought in for assistance as early as the 1930s, when Ped was invited down to the Islands. Their final report included details regarding the cultural differences discovered in the Territory. Their recommendations noted that consideration of the culture should be made when introducing educational change. In the 1960s, continued persistence of underachievement resulted in the request that NYU conduct a three-year education study. NYU’s researchers announced that the cultural differences between the U.S. and the U.S.VI were distinct and needed to be taken into consideration for the establishment of successful educational reform. Ped and NYU’s results were released in eras when ethnocentrism and hegemony had been accepted world norms.

Stepping Away

Historically, in the 1930s and 1960s ethnocentric thinking in the U.S. was advocating acculturation: the belief that others should adopt U.S. culture. This prohibited the U.S. from considering the reality of cultural variation in the U.S.VI. Today, organizations around the world acknowledge the importance of recognizing cultural differences. They are now advocating that educators and policy makers understand cultural perspectives for the implementation of successful education strategies (Robertson et al., 2002; UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2010). To do this, ethnocentric belief must be recognized for what it is: The predisposition to view a group’s own cultural perspective as the only correct choice.
Understanding diverse cultural perspectives requires accepting that culture’s tangible realities. In the U.S.VI there are limited job prospects, household and food supplies, health care choices, transportation, available land mass, and functional technological advancements. Items such as goods, housewares, major appliances, automobiles, and medicine must be shipped into the islands, and fresh water does not flow in the Territory, so that must be imported as well. Language barriers, natural disasters, and man-made crises add to constraints on educational opportunities, job prospects, and misunderstandings in general. Historically, prejudice has thrived on island based on individual skin tones (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). Skin tones are broken down into shades from Clear to Ebony with distinctions made between white, sand, brown paper bag, mocha, and other tones in between. White Mainlanders and Europeans have visually retained upper-class status. Commonly, the lighter a person’s skin tone, the more favorable their outlook in life will be. Over time, the influx of immigrants from nearby islands has resulted in additional bias, with the most recent group of immigrants raising the social level of the previous groups.

Within cultural groups, a family’s history is a person’s most recognizable credential. This is followed by the specialty they have learned through association. The acquired specialties offer bartering opportunities for survival options. Traditionally, acquiring skills used for bartering were taught through interactions with family members. Learning is perceived as an ongoing process of retaining and increasing knowledge for survival and rebuilding. As a result, knowledge is shared, passed down through generations. Formal education is perceived as important, whereas survival knowledge is known to be a necessity. As a result, continuing formal education is not practical for many RI. The experiences offered do not benefit them in their day-to-day struggles to survive in a territory fraught with natural disasters, limited food,
water, and other challenges of living. Contemporary necessities are shipped in, which often makes the financial burdens extreme for individuals but tolerable for the group. Technological advances are known to have beneficial advantages but are not viewed as practical due to cost, need for repairs, replacement cost, and limited connectivity. In one form or another, bartering is accepted as a means of survival. RI ultimately respect each others’ knowledge and strength and accept that everyone has weaknesses.

The cultural group has learned to rely on each other out of necessity. Natural and man-made crises regularly reinforce this reality. Accepting the situation during times of crisis requires knowledge. It is understood that no individual will have all the responsibility for the group’s survival. Therefore no one person is thought to possess all the knowledge. When a person behaves in a fashion that negates another cultural member’s self-worth, the group defends the injured party. Arrogance is not acceptable within the culture.

When a culture has been raised with regularly reinforced beliefs, it becomes their norm, much like the young adult White woman who was raised from infancy on island in her segregated upper-class household. Her parents never associated with people of color and neither had she. When questioned about her perception of residents’ Island survival she noted:

I think everyone is doing the best they can. They may not know that there is more out there. They are struggling. They are just working at job[s] that they don’t make as much as they probably need to, to survive….I’ve been unemployed…so you just use your resources…Food stamps or unemployment. Or you get help from family and friends. It depends on what you have, I mean how much you have to work with…how much you have to pay for. Honestly, some people sell drugs.

When I asked for clarification regarding her perceptions, her response was curt:

It is really about how badly they want it….If they want to do something, they can… you cannot have any blockages and bad thoughts that are going to stop you….That’s the only
thing that will [improve their way of life]…thinking you can’t. Choosing not to have the bad thoughts that can block…knowing you can.

Apparently, ethnocentric notions had been fostered by her family culture and growing up in a segregated White residential area. This was difficult to understand considering the mainland White population is the Island’s minority. However, she affirmed her perceptions were genuine when she noted her family never socialized with any people of color, followed by the statement that she never even considered the possibility of socializing with Black peers from her workplace.

Because of the diversity on the island, the people have been taught, through actions, to overtly be respectful about differences: for example, the RI who quietly referred to the White upper-class person, after walking far enough away not to be heard, as “acting like a plantation owner.” They obviously did not agree with what the person said or her actions, but they showed respect for the person’s cultural behavior during their direct interaction. It was also clear they pushed aside whatever she had said or done after their comment was made. When a teacher arrives from the mainland and has not learned about the culture, she will not realize a student is simply being overtly respectful but not hearing a word she says. Rather than being engaged in the learning process, that student is bored.

Conformity

However, data reveal that the majority perceived receiving a formal education as culturally important. Different interviewee responses also revealed that formal education continues to be supported by Island residents. Responses included, but were not limited to:

[Formal education] is something you need to finish. If I was in the States I would have finished school. The teacher did not really care. I think they don’t care…
Of course. Definitely. Education makes a difference between humans and animals.

It builds self-esteem and it also [pause] Uhmm...it helps your confidence in your job. It, Uhmmm, It gives you that extra... It gives you a foot in the door that you might not have otherwise. I really only had that come up one time when I was working in health care. That I could have gotten a promotion, had I finished [hesitation]... my degree. I would’ve, and that would have been a big [hesitation]... pay raise. Uhmmm, So, that, that's the only time it has actually been specifically pointed out but, uhmm., People do ask you what your credentials are when you telling them you know what you're doing...

This next person almost sounded like a commercial until you understand that they could not afford higher education and learned to educate themselves through reading and volunteering to assist others:

Education is everything. Literally it stands out for itself. A brain is a terrible thing to waste. Education is everything. Knowledge is power. All of those little words that people say about going to school is 100% true. A brain is a terrible, terrible, terrible thing to go to waste, if you know the true potential of it. Know what I mean? You know what your brain can do? Yep, you realize how much you don’t know…

Over the years, families and individuals in the family have been trying to adapt to the mainland’s educational policy, but they cannot wholly conform. RI continue to express their perceived concerns, including the relevance of language differences, bias based on skin tone, safety in schools, cost-effective extracurricular activities, benefits and cost of adult education, and transportation issues.

An Islander may be able to speak English proficiently but continue to write using the island vernacular or vice versa. Perhaps they understand what they read in English but retain their Island accent when reading out loud. Just about anyone who has learned another language or talked with a person from another country has learned to adjust to these idiosyncrasies. The speaker who is not raised as an American English speaker does not get reprimanded in front of peers, business clients, store clerks or while they are out socializing. The person reprimanding them would seem arrogant, insensitive, or disrespectful.
For many RI, mainland education remains preferable over the education available in the U.S.VI because educational dilemmas found on the island are often considered avoidable on the mainland. Rarely does a person participating in mainland education have to wonder if their school will lose accreditation before they graduate. Booster clubs are organized on the mainland to help supplement the cost of extracurricular activities.

**Brain Drain**

When possible, children and young adults are sent to live with family members stateside for educational attainment. This educational relocation has contributed to the island brain drain. Many who traveled stateside for their education do not return to island due to lack of available jobs, cost of living, and/or safety threats related to island living. When a person is accepted off island to a mainland college or university they have chances to make connections with a larger variety of businesses professionals. Their human capital increases, opening previously unknown opportunities. They gain access to home essentials, a variety of clothing, entertainment opportunities, cross-country travel and an expanded variety of friends.

Everything is suddenly available on a whim. After they receive their degree, there are a wide variety of prospects to obtain well-paying jobs with benefits, sick days and paid vacations. Despite the distance and distractions, family ties stay strong. When family members need financial help or items easily available from the mainland, they are usually able to help and/or mail items back to the islands. The Islander who has relocated to the mainland may also be able to bring a younger member of the family to the mainland for educational opportunities. While the degree benefits the family, it also creates a cultural gap. The person off island is not available to continue learning, practicing, and teaching culturally learned specialties. They are
not available on island during natural or man-made crises, and they are not sharing their knowledge on island. The college graduate does return to the Island for special occasions and the holidays, but they are not being counted in the Island census. The Islander will move back to the Territory after their children are raised, for retirement, and/or when they are perceived to be needed long-term by the family for survival.

For the RI who remain in the Territory, ongoing formal education is only viewed as essential when it is viewed as effective. It is hard to prove formal education is effective when perceived educational benefits collide with reality, as stated by an interviewee:

   Going to college down here don’t mean you gona’ get a big job, it don’t work. My broders’ friend, he graduate out of UVI and still working McDonalds.

   With the next natural or man-made Island disaster guaranteed, learning cultural life lessons are vital for survival. This would include fishing, cooking, music, architecture, trades such as welding, or any other skill worth bartering for survival. Cultural exposure and hands-on experience results in a person’s becoming an expert at something. That expertise offers a way to support and/or supplement the individual and family survival on island. Bartering becomes a mandatory means for survival in times of natural disasters, when many of the RI are disconnected from the global environment. Objectively, RI are aware that the effectiveness of cultural learning does not provide a globally accepted formal education certificate.

   It is understood that success in the global economy requires obtaining a formal certificate or degree. Unfortunately, contemporary formal educational requirements and policy are not balanced for the territorial realities and needs. As one interviewee stated:

   Once I can read and write and count, I good to go. What they are teaching you in school, you are not gona’ come out and do. That don’t pay no bills. I even wish I was out of school from 13 so I could save up all my money now. What they teaching you in school is nothing. They ain’t teaching you bout your history, nothing.
Recommendations

Research findings are supporting the 1933 Ped Association report, 1963 U.S.VI education study by NYU, and global organizations advocating culture as an essential and underlying dimension to educational success (Dejnozka, 1967; Lane, 1934; Robertson et al., 2002; UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2010). The following recommendations acknowledge that implementation of successful educational policy in the U.S.VI should embrace the Territory’s cultural perceptions.

Policy makers and educators need to recognize that current educational policies based on federal mandates do not adequately understand or represent all needs of the Island culture. Hegemonic realities of island education that are not beneficial to the Island community should be identified, phased out and, replaced with culturally appropriate policies.

Formal education creates an opportunity for development of positive social and cultural understanding and interactions. This opportunity should be stimulated through interactive, hands-on activity and encourage the process of critical thinking. University administrators should consider partnering with companies that can supply jobs for the graduates. Future researchers could examine the influence of partnerships on the educational outcome and the community. Students, their families and the community need to be part of the educational process for education to effectively cultivate the Islands’ sustainable economic success. Available educational resources should also be considered when U.S.VI comparisons are made to educational obtainment of the U.S. mainland. Education needs to be regarded as beneficial for the islands’ collective-social and cultural survival to be perceived as effective.

Educators in the U.S.VI should be taught how and why significant differences between mainland individualistic culture and the islands’ collective culture exist. This will offer
understanding of the emotional tools necessary to stimulate effective learning in the Islands. Understanding cultural perspectives will demonstrate an interest in and caring for the Islands’ people and help avoid misperception of inappropriate actions as arrogance.

Take advantage of assistance offered from the U.N. per: *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 December 2016 [on the report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) (A/71/502)] 71/188 Question of the United States Virgin Islands (2017b):*

*Aware also* of the fifth attempt of the Territory to review the existing Revised Organic Act, which organizes its internal governance arrangements, as well as its requests to the administering Power and the United Nations system for assistance to its public education programme, Article 73 *b* of the Charter, and in that regard calls upon the relevant United Nations organizations to provide assistance to the Territory, if requested…(p. 3)

Fostering A.E. success in the territory requires understanding that cultural perceptions about education beneficial to RI include survival techniques due to historic realities and future fears of being cut off from the technologically driven world due to a natural or man-made crisis.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTERNSHIP DESCRIPTION
Summer, 2008: Internship program with the Community Engagement & Lifelong Learning (CELL) center, University of the Virgin Islands, Supervisor:

Objectives and Activities/Strategies:

1) Become familiar with the overall structure and function of UVI’s CELL center, and the director’s responsibilities.
2) Participate in activities related to: The organization and collection of enrollee descriptive-statistical data.
3) Assume responsibility for research (qualitative data collection) assisting the Center’s director and the marketing department’s effort to increase CELL participation.

Purpose: The goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of adult residents’ perceptions of the Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning center (CELL) in the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.VI).

Problem: Understanding the effects of globalization and technology, cultural needs and barriers, and influence of marketing strategies in a community.

Suggested Follow-up:

Understanding phenomena and how they interrelate will assist in surmounting adult learning challenges in marginalized and culturally diverse communities. Policy makers and educators should be aware: understanding phenomena and implementing actions to increase equitable learning environments must be pioneered with the knowledge that adult learning-community transformation is a long-term, ongoing process. This overall process is based on making changes in strategies, structure, and ideology (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). The current worldwide effort to increase participation in A.E. requires acknowledging the diversity found in cultures and sub-cultures. The primary objective is to step outside ethnocentric limitations and identify forms of knowledge dissemination that will allow individuals within diverse communities to transform into constructive multicultural learning units.
Evaluation to Assist Adult Education in United States Virgin Islands Community Engagement Lifelong Learning Center (CELL)

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to determine if adjustments in advertising strategies are necessary for adult education on the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.VI).

Conclusions/Recommendations: Format adjustments for advertising will enhance community participation.

CELL’s basic format including; current course offerings; and rates do not need alteration at this time.

Project Based on response, recommended changes include:

- Multilingual Outreach advertising through public space.
- Increased availability of financing; scholarships/grants.
- Clarification of post-job opportunities.
- CLARIFICATION OF ‘adults’.
- Review of barriers.

Issues: The main issue is how to create positive advertising to increase community participation in adult education. The director has requested information on:

1) What barriers are preventing adult participation?
2) What type of information and knowledge are people acquiring about CELL?
3) How does the adult public gather community information?
4) Should advertising be altered; if so, how?

Data Gathering: Data collection techniques used for this evaluation included:

- Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with CELL employees, community members, and educators.
- Detached observation.

Audiences: Data was collected from stakeholders directly related to the organization.

The criteria for the stakeholders interviewed included:

1) Current employees of CELL and/or U.S.VI community members.
2) Adult residents of the United States Virgin Islands.

[This report will be available to all the current employees of CELL.]

Next Steps:

This report is a pilot project completed within time restrictions. As a result, the data collected reveals limited information. Limitations were due to the number of participants included in the semi-structured one-on-one interview process. Self-reported race identity was based on skin color rather than cultural heritage.

For the project to move forward:

- A relationally proportionate number of U.S.VI residents from each island and district should be interviewed.
• Observations should include currently available adult education.
• Data collected from all of the interviews should be analyzed and used to create a survey.
• The survey results would allow for obtainment of more conclusive, inclusive information related to adult education format and advertising adjustments.
• Future evaluation should also include an investigation on perceived transitions from traditional primary education and the benefits of adult education. This is based on the facts that:

  For this report adults interviewed referenced their traditional primary education when reflecting on attitudes concerning adult education.

  The current analysis revealed a major desire for adult education which personally assists increased job opportunity.
APPENDIX B

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview questions were formatted to be open-ended. This style of interviewing leads to responses related to individual perceptions of sociocultural experiences on education related to affects on adult education achievement in the United States Virgin Islands. Interviews will be scheduled for minimal disruption of interviewee responsibilities and will take approximately one hour each. Follow up will be pursued with permission from the interviewee.

*Sample Questions:*

- Where did you grow up and where were you born?
- What is your most distinct memory of childhood?
- Please define learning as you understand it.
- What is the earliest learning experience you can remember?
- What is your favorite learning experience?
- What is your most horrific learning experience?
- Please tell me about an effective learning experience you had.
- What has influenced the choices you make in life?
- What experience(s) do you think have influenced your career choice(s)?
- While you were growing up: What was your mother’s attitude concerning school?
  - [Fathers/Grandparents/Aunts/Uncles/Other Adults/Cousins/ Brothers and/or Sisters attitude about school (NOT learning or education)?]
- How would you define education?
- What formalized educational experience have you participated in?
- Describe the most educated person you know.
- Please tell me about the most important learning experiences you have had.
- Please describe what you feel makes a person’s life successful and satisfying.
- What would you suggest a person do to succeed/survive in the Territory?
- How do the people you know earn an income/survive in the Territory?
- What advice would you give to someone who wanted to move to this territory?
- Why would you suggest an Islander move from this territory?
- Describe the friend(s) you had when you were younger.
- Describe your current friends.
- Why do you think you would be considered a role model?
- Why would you encourage others to continue their education?
- What regrets do you have concerning education?
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

"SOCIOCULTURAL EFFECT ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT"

I agree to participate in the research project titled *Sociocultural Affect on Educational on Educational Achievement* by, Vanessa Doran (doctoral student) at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to gain understanding of how social life and culture influence education in the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.VI). This study will be conducted over a six-month period.

In order to participate in this study, I acknowledge that I am considered an adult resident of the United States Virgin Islands (U.S.VI), or a past, present or future beneficiary of education in the U.S.VI. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will be scheduled at my convenience to minimize responsibility disruptions and will take approximately one hour. Interview questions will be looking for opinion and may include:

- What were your educational experiences in the U.S.VI?
- How did educational experiences influence your employment choice(s)?
- What would you suggest a person do to succeed/survive in the Territory?

I am aware that my participation is voluntary, I do not have to answer all of the questions, I may withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice, and if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Vanessa Doran 815.433.9429, or Dr. Jorge Jeria 818/753.8032. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815.753.8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study may provide no direct benefit to me. The research could produce knowledge that may help adult educators, non-formal community education programs, and formal education programs implement or revise adult lifelong learning programs. In addition, the results from this research may result in increased multicultural educational understanding.

I have been informed that potential risks and/or discomforts are minimal. I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. Individual interviews will be conducted in a private setting. Physical or electronically recorded information will be transcribed and assigned a coded identification number. When the results of this research are reported, the people who take part will not be named or identified.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
· ADULT 18 OR OVER
"SOCIOCULTURAL EFFECT ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT"

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I understand and have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject                     Date

I have read the explanation concerning this study and have been given the opportunity to discuss it and to ask questions. I hereby consent to be audio recorded for this study.

Signature                     Date

Subject Name

Signature of Subject                     Date
APPENDIX D

YEGIN HABTES, PH.D. PERMISSION LETTER
Hi Vanessa,

I finally got a chance part of your thesis. I just have one suggestion and that is if we would write our (mine and yours) as a written statements rather than a talk. For example, while we were talking I was repeating words. I don't know if it is necessary to write it that way. Regardless, it is your choice and you have my permission to use my name.

Congratulations.

Yegin Habtes, Ph.D.
Professor of Education & Senior Executive Director, VIUCEDD
# 2 John Brewers Bay, St. Thomas, VI 00802
Tel. 340-693-1323
Fax 340-693-1325
E-mail: yhabtes@live.uvi.edu
Website: www.viucedd.org