Gifted, Creative, and Talented Native Americans: A Call for Relevant Research for Marginalized Cultures

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Research Agenda Needed

★ “As a group, Native American students are not afforded educational opportunities equal to other American students”

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003, p.xi

★ One of the least researched, most overlooked, and most underserved populations in the field

Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Yoon & Gentry, 2009
Collaborative Approach

We developed relationships and worked with Native Americans communities from three nations:

★ Diné, AZ
★ Lakota, SD
★ Ojibwe, MN
Purposes

1. Test literature-based assumptions about gifted, Native American students

2. Set a research agenda for the field of gifted education that addresses needs and gaps concerning the discovery and development of giftedness, creativity, and talent among Native American populations
Background

In the GCT literature…
★ Limited number of empirical studies, scholarly articles, chapters, and government reports in the past 30 years.
★ Literature is largely dated
★ Native Americans are frequently homogenized as one group of people rather than as culturally diverse populations, leading to stereotyping and overgeneralization
★ Little knowledge exists of needs and talent pathways
★ Literature from outside the field often takes a deficit viewpoint (e.g., poverty, learning deficiencies, violence, substance abuse)
Method

Literature Review

We searched ERIC and PsycINFO for publications (search terms: gifted/talented, Native American/American Indian), which revealed a limited number of empirical studies, scholarly articles, chapters, and government reports in the past 30 years (e.g., Bradley, 1989; Christensen, 1991; George, 1987; Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010; Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; Kirschenbaum, 1989; Maker, 1989; Mead, Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010; Montgomery, 2001; Omdal, Rude, Betts, & Toy, 2010; Peterson, 1999; Tonemah, 1991).
Method

Analysis of the literature yielded general assumptions. From which we identified four themes.

Theme 1 – Talent Development
Theme 2 – Culture and Traditions
Theme 3 – Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences
Theme 4 – Communication
Methods

Participants

$N=100$ teachers, aides, and administrators (50% Native American, 46% White, 4% Hispanic) $n=20$ Diné, $n=16$ Lakota, $n=64$ Ojibwe

2 Focus groups (Diné, Lakota) and 1 professional development group (Ojibwe) responded to the literature-based assumptions using Tony Stead’s (2006) Reading Analysis of Non-Fiction Framework (RAN):

- A modification of the traditional KWL chart
  - KWL charts are limiting
  - They do not sufficiently support the research process
  - They do not take into account misinformation
Methods

RAN process\(^{(43)}\)

What we think we know

★ Assumptions that are believed to be true
Yes, we were right!

★ Confirmation of assumptions

Misconceptions

★ Assumptions that should be disregarded

New Information

★ Additional information not stated in our assumptions that should be considered

Wonderings

★ Important research questions raised based upon the new information
Theme 1: Talent Development

- Talented youth exist among Native Populations\(^{(49)}\)
- Recognition, development, services, and programs are needed to nurture these youth\(^{(49)}\)
- More youth can achieve at higher levels than current expectations indicate\(^{(49)}\)
- Consideration should be given to develop spiritualistic, naturalistic, leadership, visual/spatial, artistic, musical, CPS, and communication strengths\(^{(18,47)}\)
- Programs and curriculum should be tied to culture\(^{(31)}\)
- Group work and solving relevant problems should be a focus\(^{(18)}\)
- Early and on-going identification and enrichment should be done in a variety of areas\(^{(17)}\)
Theme 1: Talent Development Misconceptions

All three tribal groups agreed with the assumptions found in the literature regarding talent development.

★ We have yet to fully engage in this work
★ Professional Development is needed to for school administrators, teachers, and helping professionals

No misconceptions were identified.
Theme 1: Talent Development New Understandings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Ojibwe</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>★ Boys see women as dominate in the family structure</td>
<td>★ A lack of knowledge exists among Lakota students regarding their post-secondary and career options</td>
<td>★ Students are aware of and want to be part of the global community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Need for positive, male role models</td>
<td>★ There is a lack of understanding between Lakota students and non-Native educators</td>
<td>★ Cultural teachings should begin with the home and with elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Group work and problems should be aligned with students’ needs</td>
<td>★ Some Diné students prefer to work individually</td>
<td>★ Native Americans’ strengths in verbal and mathematical areas should be acknowledged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 2: Culture and Traditions

- Collective society
- Matriarchal society
- Respect for authority and elders
- Traditions/cultural knowledge important for future generations
- Oral traditions, ceremonies, and storytelling are important
- Present, cyclical view of time
- Religion and spirituality are ways of life
- Live in harmony with nature
- Non-materialistic
- Patience and self-control are valued
- Tribal leaders, spiritual leaders, & medicine people are valued
Theme 2: Culture and Traditions

All three tribal groups agreed on the importance of culture knowledge through oral traditions\(^{10,34}\)

★ Students in Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools are more likely to have opportunities for cultural integration\(^{28}\)
Theme 2: Culture and Traditions

★ Six foundational elements (Demmert, Grissmer, & Towner, 2006)

1. Recognition and use of native language
2. Pedagogy reflecting the current cultural characteristics and values of the community
3. Strategies that combine traditional culture with contemporary techniques
4. Recognition of spirituality of the culture of visual arts, legends, and oral histories in a contemporary context
5. Community participation and collaboration with parents, elders, and other community resources
6. Understanding and use of social and political mores
# Theme 2: Culture and Traditions: Misconceptions

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## Theme 2: Culture and Traditions New Understandings

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<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Clan system following mother’s family. Uncle serves as the role model. In school, group work usually follows clan groups.</td>
<td>★ Collective society is generational, not as prevalent with youth</td>
<td>★ Ceremonies/pow-wows more important than oral traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Increased materialism among youth</td>
<td>★ Move away from matriarchal society</td>
<td>★ Focus on present with little consideration of future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Tribal leaders are politicians, not respected like elders and medicine people</td>
<td>★ Importance of tradition culture varies among families</td>
<td>★ Value of religion/spirituality varies by family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Alcoholism affects everyone</td>
<td>★ Culture integrated into school curriculum</td>
<td>★ Gang affiliations replacing search for spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Teachers are valued</td>
<td>★ Value of religion/spirituality varies by family</td>
<td>★ Widespread abuse of nature…but escape to woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Adults returning to school, spiritual awakening</td>
<td>★ Harmony with nature is a 1970’s stereotype</td>
<td>★ Possessions=status; Money=power and happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>More women than men in workforce</td>
<td>★ Non-materialism due to Poverty</td>
<td>★ Little patience, lack of self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td>Self-determination is valued</td>
<td>★ Tribal leaders=politicians</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>★</td>
<td></td>
<td>★ Practice “give-away”</td>
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Theme 3: Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences

★ Public display of knowledge is not encouraged\(^{(23,35)}\)
★ Cooperative and sharing\(^{(6)}\)
★ Anonymity\(^{(18)}\)
★ Non-competitive, non-aggressive\(^{(46)}\)
★ Watch, learn, then do\(^{(23)}\)
★ Practice\(^{(23)}\)
★ Hands-on participation\(^{(23)}\)
★ Spatial strengths\(^{(34,39)}\)

★ Simultaneous processing\(^{(11,34)}\)
★ Naturalistic, holistic views\(^{(29)}\)
★ Story telling, auditory learning\(^{(10,18)}\)
★ Psychomotor, physical learning\(^{(18)}\)
★ Concern for accuracy over speed\(^{(29)}\)
Theme 3: Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences

All three tribal groups agreed on the following assumptions:

★ Cooperation and sharing\(^6\)
★ Watch, learn, do\(^{24}\)
★ Hands-on participation\(^{24}\)
★ Spatial strengths\(^{35,38}\)
★ Simultaneous processing\(^{11,35}\)
★ Storytelling, auditory learning\(^{10,18}\)
★ Psychomotor, physical learning\(^{18}\)
### Theme 3: Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences

#### Misconceptions

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<tr>
<td>Differences exist between urban and rural (Rez) youth</td>
<td>Fear rejection by peers for being smart “not cool”</td>
<td>Quiet, guarded, most prefer to work individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of anonymity depends on individual</td>
<td>Fighting and aggression are common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-discipline leads to perfectionism</td>
<td>Younger generation pushed to be assertive, leading to aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Students prefer to learn through modeling</td>
<td>Instant gratification/self preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little connection to Earth, focus on instant gratification</td>
<td>Practice is viewed as a sign of weakness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Naturalistic views replaced by ideals of pop culture</td>
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The influence of peers can have a profound effect on achievement due to similar values, level of achievement, and academic goals.
Theme 4: Communication

★ Soft, slow speech, quite, few interjections, delayed responses

★ Non-verbal communication emphasized

★ Indirect, non-verbal cues to speaker or listener

★ May be fluent in two or more languages

★ Introspective rather than questioning

★ Feelings unlikely to be openly expressed
Theme 4: Communication Misconceptions

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<td>☐ May be fluent in two or more languages</td>
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The assumption of fluency in two or more languages came from a study by Hartley (1991) comparing similarities and differences among gifted Diné and gifted students in dominate culture.

★ Traditional—lived on the reservation
★ Acculturated—lived within a community in which they had become integrated and assimilated with Anglo culture
★ One Anglo community
### Theme 4: Communication New Understandings

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| ★ Diné is an oral language  
★ Educators view Navajo language as a liability  
★ Diné students frequently lack fluency in both languages  
★ Strong visual and spatial skills incorporated into traditional Diné communication  
★ Concern that lack of expression may contribute to alcoholism | ★ Many Lakota students placed in special education due to a lack of understanding of their communication norms  
★ Majority of students speak only English  
★ Many students speak in gang-related slang  
★ Takes time for Lakota students to warm up to their non-Native peers | ★ Few are fluent in the Ojibwe language, which some see as a dying language  
★ Prevalent use of gang related slang |
In order to conduct valuable and nuanced research when working with Native youth, it is important to understand and value the language, communication style, and culture.

(Peterson, 1999)
A Call for Future Research

Gifted, creative, and talented Native American children are frequently overlooked by researchers. They face many barriers including:

- marginalization\(^{(5,15)}\);
- living in remote, rural areas\(^{(4,8)}\);
- poverty; \(^{(16,28,50)}\) and
- issues with obtaining a quality education (infrastructure, technology, funding, teacher quality, dropout rates, access to post-secondary opportunities) \(^{(13,22,27)}\)

Address the needs of Native American children and their educators.
A Call for Future Research

★ Researchers need to address the needs of Native American children and their educators

★ Result in improvements in the recognition and development of talent
Ideas generated by participants and from the literature

★ Culture and Tradition
★ Family Roles and Connections
★ Gender
★ Curricular and Instructional Considerations
★ Technology
★ Connections to the Future
Culture & Tradition

★ How do 21\textsuperscript{st} century skills align with tribal practices?
★ How do youth fit into the assumptions of tradition and culture?
★ How are cultural values changing?
★ How do (can) teachers integrate cultural mores and values?
★ How does knowledge of traditional ways affect students’ sense of self, self-esteem, and achievement?
Family Roles and Connections

★ What enrichment can be developed/provided for parents of gifted students?
★ What role does family play in school success?
★ How can home-school connections be strengthened?
★ What methods can be used to connect students to the “outside” world?
Gender

★ What methods best address the needs of gifted Diné, Lakota, or Ojibwe boys (or girls)?
★ What implication does gender have on educational services and their delivery?
★ How does a matriarchal society affect the social and emotional development of the whole child?
★ What can be done about gangs?
★ How can youth be connected to school and education?
Curricular and Instructional Considerations

★ How can the non-verbal, visual, and spatial strengths of these youth enhance their learning and success?
★ How can curriculum be adapted to fit the knowledge, background, and experiences of the children?
★ What is the role of PBL in educating these populations?
★ Can teachers better meet students’ needs through accountability, goal setting, and reflective practice?
Technology

★ What is the role of technology for this generation of learners?
★ How can technology bring learning to the reservation?
★ How does technology inform the culture of today’s generation of Native students?
★ How can the need for infrastructure in many schools be addressed?
Connections to the Future

★ How can innovation and creativity be promoted among this generation of learners to improve infrastructure and living conditions on the reservations?

★ What steps can be taken to address the tension between educational attainment and the poor job market on the reservations?

★ How can educated young people effectively bring their knowledge and skills home to the Reservation?
Limitations

- Findings from these tribal communities are not generalizable to all tribal communities on these reservations nor to those members who live off the reservations.

- Data collection procedures from the Ojibwe differed from that of the Diné and Lakota participants.

“I will not fill this out. If you need research about Natives, come and live with us for a year and visit with the families around here. It’s not even accurate because there are different degrees of being traditional.”

--Ojibwe (non) Participant
References


References


References


