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Marcia Gentry¹, C. Matthew Fugate¹, Jiaxi Wu¹,
and Jaime A. Castellano²

Abstract

A national research agenda focused on gifted/creative/talented Native American students is needed, as this population remains one of the least researched, most overlooked, and most underserved in the field. Literature-based assumptions surrounding Native American students' talent development, culture and traditions, cognitive styles and learning preferences, and communication were generated and then reviewed by educators and tribal members for relevance and accuracy. This article has three purposes. The first is to analyze the literature-based assumptions concerning gifted education in three Native American communities—Diné, Lakota, and Ojibwe. The second is to call on gifted education researchers to include Native American students in their research. The third is to suggest a research agenda based on data gathered within these communities

Keywords

Native American students, Navajo, Diné, Sioux, Lakota, Chippewa, Ojibwe, gifted, talented, creative, underserved populations

Research Agenda Needed

To date, issues of talent development, giftedness, and creativity among Native Americans have largely been ignored in our field, yet these populations of students deserve our attention as researchers and educators. “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).

However, because the diverse nature of Native American cultures prohibits their generalization into one single cultural group, individual differences among Native American populations should not be oversimplified or ignored. Input from educators and stakeholders on the reservations is needed because they are keenly aware of the need for research concerning the development of giftedness, creativity, and talent, and they are able to articulate important areas that form the basis of this research. As a field, we need to ensure that these populations of young people—their cultures, families, and educators—are included in our research agenda.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is threefold. First is to call on researchers in the field of gifted education to include Native American students in their research, as these populations have been absent from most research in gifted education. Second is to report empirical analyses of assumptions from the literature concerning gifted Native American students from the viewpoints of three different tribal education

communities and, in doing so, provide other researchers with a framework for their inquiry. Finally, we seek to suggest a possible research agenda based on data gathered within these communities. A national research agenda focused on gifted/creative/talented Native American students is needed, as this population remains one of the least researched, most overlooked, and most underserved in the field (Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). This agenda, in our opinion, should address the needs and gaps concerning the discovery and development of giftedness, creativity, and talent among Native American¹ populations. By setting a collaborative research agenda with three groups of Native Americans—the Diné, the Lakota, and the Ojibwe—we have begun to address the long-overdue inclusion of Native American children and their educators in research concerning giftedness, creativity, and talent. With the field's current emphasis concerning the need to address issues of equity, underidentification, and underrepresentation, the time is right to ensure that Native American children are included in this important focus.

To address these purposes, we first reviewed the gifted education literature and sought input from educators on the Navajo, Standing Rock, and Red Lake reservations

¹Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA

²Vida Charter School, Gettysburg, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Marcia Gentry, Department of Educational Studies, Purdue University, Beering Hall Room 5116, 100 North University Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2098, USA.

Email: mgentry@purdue.edu

concerning literature-based assumptions about gifted Native American youth. By working with these educators, we confirmed some of the assumptions, identified misconceptions, and added new understandings to what we found in the literature. Differences existed among the three groups concerning these assumptions, misconceptions, and new understandings, confirming that each group needs to be viewed as its own culture with unique characteristics and needs. Next we engaged the educators in a discussion about research they believed would be important to helping discover and develop talents among Native American children and youth.

Background Literature and Thematic Findings

A comprehensive review of the extant literature on gifted Native American children (Wu, 2011) 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; Mead, Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010; Montgomery, 1989; Omdal, Rude, Betts, & Toy, 2011; Peterson, 1999; Tonemah, 1991). Likely, because of their small numbers, only a few researchers have engaged in the study of gifted Native American students. In general, this literature about gifted Native Americans is largely dated and frequently generic, generally viewing all Native American children as if they were one population rather than individuals who come from many different cultural groups from among 566 recognized tribes in the United States (Bureau of Indian Education [BIE], n.d.). In one third of the empirical literature about gifted Native Americans, researchers did not identify the tribal affiliation of their sample. The homogeneous view of Native Americans within past gifted education literature leads to stereotyping and overgeneralization and results in little nuanced understanding of how to discover and develop gifts and talents among these diverse youth. In addition, other literature from outside the field of gifted education concerning Native American children frequently takes a deficit perspective focusing on poverty, learning deficiencies, violence, and substance abuse (e.g., Brandt, 1992; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Mead et al., 2010; National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, 2008).

Because the literature on gifted Native Americans is limited to only a few studies, with many published years ago, and tribal affiliations only reported in some of the literature, it is important to determine which of the findings are relevant today and in what contexts. To conduct this inquiry, we reviewed and analyzed the literature from within the field of gifted education, identifying general assumptions and grouping them into four overarching themes: *Talent Development*, *Culture and Traditions*, *Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences*, and *Communication*. The assumptions

underlying each of these four themes are contained in the Results section in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Discussion of each theme follows.

Talent Development

Several assumptions were identified that defined the theme of *talent development* in the gifted literature. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE; 1993) acknowledged that gifted, creative, and talented young people *exist within all cultural and economic groups* in a variety of areas of human endeavor. This same definition acknowledged outstanding talent or potential for outstanding talent as recognizable when young people are compared with others “similar in age, experience, or environment” (p. 3). Despite long-standing and severe underrepresentation in programs for gifted and talented children, gaps in achievement, and lower performance on measures of achievement than most other cultural groups (Grigg et al., 2010; Mead et al., 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), talent exists among Native American populations. Recognition, development, services, and programs are needed to nurture these youth (USDOE, 1993). Unfortunately, most Native American children and youth with high potential go unrecognized in today’s schools, resulting in the underdevelopment of their gifts and talents (Yoon & Gentry, 2009) and the loss of human potential. In addition to being underrepresented as gifted (Christensen, 1991; Hartley, 1991; Tonemah, 1987, 1991), Native American students are not only more likely to live in poverty but also less likely to graduate from high school, attend college, or graduate from college (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010) than their more affluent, non-Native peers. Poverty alone decreases the chances that students will be recognized as having high potential or remain high achieving (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2009).

These issues of underrepresentation and underperformance warrant reexamination of how students from these populations are identified as gifted, what services are provided for them, and what efforts are made to develop their strengths and talents. According to the literature, early identification, enrichment programming, and ongoing identification should be done in a variety of areas (Callahan & McIntire, 1994; Gentry, 2009; Montgomery, 1989). Furthermore, for Native youth, specific considerations should be given to developing their strengths in naturalist, spiritual, leadership, visual-spatial, art, music, creative problem solving, and communication domains (Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Tonemah & Brittan, 1985). Programs and curriculum should be tied to culture and delivered according to learning preferences and cognitive styles of the students (Omdal et al., 2011), with a focus on opportunities to solve relevant problems in a small-group setting. Unfortunately, many Native American children living on reservations face a “triple threat” to their academic achievement because they deal

with poverty, marginalization of their cultures, and the challenges of living in remote, rural areas, frequently without the technology and basic resources taken for granted in most schools and communities.

Culture and Traditions

Native societies have been described as collective (Bradley, 1989; George, 1987; Kirschenbaum, 1989; Sisk, 1989) and matriarchal (Gentry, 2010; Hartley, 1991), as well as places in which authority and elders were highly respected (Christensen, 1991). Christensen described tribal leaders, spiritual leaders, and medicine people as valued community members and suggested that oral traditions, ceremonies, and storytelling are important facets of the respective culture. She also stated that according to Native standards, shamans, holy men, and medicine people are the only individuals actually perceived as gifted by the tribal people. These gifted individuals understand that their abilities are given to them by the Creator with careful instructions from the Master of Life, and should be practiced properly for the purpose of enhancing the life experiences of the next generations.

Christensen (1991) and Peterson (1999) also stressed the importance of traditions and cultural knowledge being handed down to future generations through ceremonies and storytelling. According to Herring (1996) and Sisk (1989), religion and spirituality were integral to Native Americans' way of life. Additionally, assumptions existed in the literature that Native people lived in harmony with nature (Zintz, 1962), pursued a nonmaterialistic life (Sanders, 1987), and valued patience and self-control (Bradley, 1989). A present, cyclical view of time was prevalent (Bradley, 1989; Garrison, 1989). Thus, it was important for Native youth to understand their culture and accept the responsibility of handing down these cultural values and traditions to future generations.

Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences

With regard to cognitive styles and learning preferences, Bradley (1989) reported that Native American children preferred cooperation and sharing. More specifically, Hartley (1991) explained that Navajo children learned the best when they could engage in hands-on, active participation only after watching and learning. They required some time to think about, practice, and perform the task. Several researchers discussed the spatial strengths of Native American children (Preston, 1991; Sarouphim & Maker, 2009), as well as their ability to engage in simultaneous processing (Davidson, 1992; Preston, 1991) while emphasizing their need to be humble in their public displays of knowledge (Hartley, 1991; Robins, 1991). Christensen (1991) and participants of the Inaugural Leadership Summit on Identifying and Serving Gifted Native American Students (Gentry, 2010) discussed students' preferences for storytelling and auditory learning. Additionally, these Summit participants emphasized

students' preferences for psychomotor and physical learning. Montgomery (1989) suggested that Native American students had a naturalistic and holistic view of the world around them with concern for accuracy over speed in their educational endeavors.

Communication

Assumptions derived from the literature regarding the theme of communication varied. Hartley (1991) stated that a gifted or talented Navajo student might be fluent in two or more languages. Montgomery (1989) reported that Native American children had soft, slow speech; they tended to be quiet and had delayed responses. Zintz (1962) found minority groups (including Pueblo, Navajo, and Spanish-speaking students) in New Mexico placed emphasis on nonverbal communication. Christensen's (1991) evaluation of the teachers and their classrooms in an Ojibwe summer school revealed that these students were accustomed to indirect communication and that educators needed to be competent in the use of these skills. Hartley (1991) and Robbins (1991) stressed that feelings and display of knowledge were neither openly expressed nor encouraged by teachers and parents or within tribal traditions. When asked to describe the typical student, 2010 Summit participants stated that their students tended to be more introspective than questioning.

Method

Participants

One hundred individuals consisting of teachers ($n = 92$) and administrators ($n = 8$) who work in schools located on the Diné, Lakota, and Ojibwe reservations participated in this study. The sample included 20 educators (two administrators) from the Diné Nation who attended the 2011 Leadership Summit on Gifted Native Americans in Ganado, Arizona, 16 educators (one administrator) from the Standing Rock Lakota Nation who attended a professional development day hosted by Sitting Bull College and the Standing Rock Tribal Education Department, and 64 educators (five administrators) from the Ojibwe Nation in Red Lake, Minnesota. Of the 100 teachers and administrators in the sample, 50% were Native American, 4% were Hispanic, and 46% were White. Women comprised 85% of the participants. The years of experience ranging from 1 to 30 years ($M = 12.5$, $SD = 5.2$), all respondents worked full-time with Native American youth. Each of these sites enrolled 95% to 100% Native American students in their schools.

Data Analysis

We sought to determine if the assumptions we identified within the themes that emerged from the literature were

applicable to the Diné, Lakota, and Ojibwe people in 2011. This was important because many of the assumptions were generalized across several different Native American populations; in some instances the Native American population was not specified; and most assumptions were from dated literature. We applied Stead's (2006) reading analysis of non-fiction (RAN) framework with each focus group. Participants of these groups were asked to analyze, refine, and augment the assumptions that we identified in the literature using RAN as follows.

Specifically, at the 2011 Summit and at the Standing Rock Reservation professional development day, we formed four groups and had each group review a different theme and its underlying assumptions. As they read and discussed each assumption, following the RAN protocol, they were asked to (a) identify those they believed were correct, (b) identify any misconceptions, and (c) add new culturally specific understandings that were not included among the literature-based assumptions. Group members presented their revised assumptions to the large group with input from the large group leading to further refinement of the assumptions, misconceptions, and new understandings. With the Ojibwe site in Minnesota, two colleagues presented the themes and underlying assumptions to members of the Red Lake teaching and administrative staff using an individual response form during their professional development day. Educators were asked to complete the form in writing, confirm assumptions, identify misconceptions, and add new understandings, thus providing the same feedback as the Summit and professional development day participants. After completing their response forms, these educators were instructed to discuss their responses. Forms were sent to us, and our research team then aggregated the responses from these educators.

Results and Discussion

The participants from the three nations identified some commonalities and differences when they reviewed the literature-based assumptions under each of the four themes. The results of these analyses yielded unique perspectives across Native cultures that were representative of their tribal communities and in the schools in which these educators were employed. In the following sections these differences and similarities are presented and discussed by theme.

Theme 1: Considerations for Talent Development

Although members of all three tribal focus groups agreed with the assumptions found in the literature regarding the *talent development* theme, they also identified several new understandings. Table 1 contains these results. The Diné focus group pointed out the need for more positive Native American male role models. They blamed the high rate of alcoholism for the lack of good role models for talented boys

on the reservation. Brandt (1992) identified a lack of academically successful role models as a contributing factor to the number of dropouts among Navajo students. For many students, a caring adult with whom they can relate can be a lifeline that keeps them in school and puts them on the path to success (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Furthermore, the Diné focus group identified a need for greater emphasis on and recognition of verbal and mathematical strengths while acknowledging the importance of naturalist, spiritual, leadership, visual-spatial, art, musical, creative problem solving, and communication domains stated in the literature (Gentry, 2010; Tonemah & Brittan, 1985).

Educators within the Lakota Nation pointed out that students lacked knowledge about their postsecondary educational and career options. Though they agreed that there should be a cultural connection within the talent development curriculum (Omdal et al., 2011), members of the Lakota group identified limited cultural understanding between Native students and non-Native educators. They emphasized that this cultural disconnect needed to be addressed in order to improve teaching, learning, and talent development. However, members of the Ojibwe focus group indicated that cultural teachings had to begin at home and with the elders before they could be addressed in the schools. They also noted that their students were very aware of and wanted to be a part of the larger global community.

The fact that members of these focus groups agreed with the assumptions concerning talent development confirms that the literature in our field accurately reflects considerations concerning developing talent among these populations. As affirming as this is, it is troubling that even though as a field we seem to have the right instincts concerning developing talents among these underserved populations, as indicated by our literature, we have yet to fully engage in this work. It is equally important that school administrators, teachers, and helping professionals commit to professional development that will increase their knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of the students and their families whom they serve (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010), especially in the case of non-Native educators who work with Native American children. These educators, together with their Native American colleagues, must embrace the idea that talent exists within the Native American populations, and they must advocate for and develop services for these children. Unfortunately, with some exceptions, in many of the reservation schools that serve these students, few, if any, are identified as gifted, and fewer still receive any services (Yoon & Gentry, 2009).

Theme 2: Culture and Traditions

Members of each tribal focus group identified several assumptions within the *culture and traditions* theme that they believed were no longer relevant to their communities (see Table 2). Although the Ojibwe group agreed with the

Table 1. Analysis of the Assumptions Concerning Theme 1: Talent Development.

Diné	Lakota	Ojibwe	Assumptions	New understandings
✓	✓	✓	Talented youth exist among Native populations (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 1993).	Diné
✓	✓	✓	Recognition, development, services, and programs are needed to nurture these youth (USDOE, 1993).	Diné boys see the female figure as dominant in the family structure: "Boys know their place."
✓	✓	✓	More youth can achieve at higher levels than current expectations indicate (USDOE, 1993).	More positive Native American male role models are needed.
✓	✓	✓	For Native youth, specific considerations should be given to develop spiritualistic, naturalistic, leadership, visual/spatial, artistic, musical, creative problem solving, and communication (naat' aanii) strengths (Gentry, 2010; Tonemah & Brittan, 1985).	Group work and relevant problem solving should be focused and aligned with student needs.
✓	✓	✓	Programs and curriculum should be tied to culture and delivered according to learning preferences and cognitive styles of the students (Omdal, Rude, Betts, & Toy, 2011).	Native youth are perceived by outsiders as being artistic, quiet, naturalistic, musical, and spiritual; however, more acknowledgment should be given that Native Americans also have strengths in verbal and mathematical areas.
✓	✓	✓	Group work and solving relevant problems should be a focus. (group work is important; however, just like other students, different preferences exist among Navajo students—some prefer to work individually; Gentry, 2010).	Lakota
✓	✓	✓	Early identification, enrichment programming, and ongoing identification should be done in a variety of areas (Gentry, 2009).	A lack of knowledge among Lakota students exists concerning their postsecondary educational and career options.
				There is a lack of cultural understanding between Lakota students and non-Native educators.
				Ojibwe
				Students are aware of and want to be a part of the global community.
				Cultural teachings should begin at home and with elders.

Note. A "✓" indicates agreement with the assumption by the group.

assertion of a collective society (Bradley, 1989; George, 1987; Kirschenbaum, 1989; Sisk, 1989), both the Diné and Lakota group members revealed that this notion did not represent current views within their tribal communities. Rather, these groups stated that the idea of a collective society tended to be generational and was not prevalent with today's youth. The Diné identified self-determination as the primary value for their youth. The Lakota, by contrast, suggested that the shift away from a collective society was a result of changing family structures with more single-parent homes and "kids raising kids." They also said that although women are influential within the family, there had been movement away from the traditional matriarchal structure within their Lakota communities. Additionally, the Lakota group explained that the importance of traditions and cultural knowledge varied widely from family to family.

Only the Ojibwe agreed that tribal leaders, spiritual leaders, and medicine people were valued. The Diné and the Lakota stated that spiritual leaders and medicine people were valued (Christensen, 1991) but explained that tribal leaders were viewed as politicians and therefore did not garner the same respect. Focus group members explained that Ojibwe youth, though searching for spirituality, have begun to reject formal religion. These focus group members stated that this spiritual quest has resulted

in many students turning to gang affiliation. They explained that these students also show a lack of patience and self-control. Both the Diné and Ojibwe reported an increase in materialistic attitudes among their youth, who view possessions as a status symbol, equating money with power and happiness. The Lakota focus group explained "give-away" practices on someone's death in which material goods are given to others as a way to remember and honor the deceased.

When asked about the assumption that Native Americans live in harmony with nature (Zintz, 1962), members of both the Lakota and Ojibwe groups rejected this idea. The Lakota identified this as a pre-1970 stereotype that is no longer true today. The Ojibwe focus group members reported widespread abuse of animals, overfishing for profit, and extensive pollution of land and water. Conversely, they explained that youth would escape to the woods or the lake when they were feeling stressed or needed time to think, maintaining a connection with the natural world.

Although these three focus groups identified several misconceptions related to their communities and schools, they identified many assumptions related to the importance of culture and traditions as relevant to all three populations. Included in these is the importance of traditional cultural knowledge (Christensen, 1991; Peterson, 1999) through oral

Table 2. Analysis of the Assumptions Concerning Theme 2: Culture and Traditions.

Diné	Lakota	Ojibwe	Assumptions	New understandings
No	No	✓	Collective society (individual less important than the group; Bradley, 1989; George, 1987; Kirschenbaum, 1989; Sisk, 1989)	Diné Clan system follows the mother's family. The uncle serves as the role model. In schools, group work usually follows clan groups.
✓	No	✓	Matriarchal society (Gentry, 2010; Hartley, 1991)	The current generation of Diné youth are materialistic much like other youth in American culture.
✓	✓	✓	Respect for authority and elders (Christensen, 1991)	Tribal leaders are considered politicians and therefore not valued like others in this assumption.
✓	✓	✓	Traditions and cultural knowledge are important to hand down to future generations (Christensen, 1991; Peterson, 1999)	Alcoholism affects all ages from infants to elderly.
✓	✓	✓	Oral traditions, ceremonies, and storytelling exist and are important (Christensen, 1991)	Teachers are valued.
✓	✓	✓	Present, cyclical view of time prevalent (Bradley, 1989; Garrison, 1989)	Many 40+-year-olds return to school—spiritual awakening.
✓	✓	No	Religion and spirituality are ways of life (Herring, 1996; Sisk, 1989)	There are more women than men in the workforce.
✓	No	No	Live in harmony with nature (Zintz, 1962)	Self-determination is valued.
No	✓	No	Nonmaterialistic (Sanders, 1987)	Lakota The idea of a collective society tends to be generational and is not as prevalent with the Lakota youth, often because of changing family structures with more single parents or "kids raising kids."
✓	✓	No	Patience and self-control valued (Bradley, 1989)	Though women are influential in the family, the Lakota have moved away from a traditional matriarchal society.
No	No	✓	Tribal leaders, spiritual leaders, and medicine people are valuable community members (Christensen, 1991)	The importance of traditions and cultural knowledge varies from family to family.
				Schools have been given a mission to integrate culture into the curriculum.
				The value of religion and spirituality is dependent on the family.
				The idea of living in harmony with nature is a pre-1970's stereotype that is no longer true today.
				Though most students are nonmaterialistic, it may be because of a lack of resources. Many teachers see this changing.
				Tribal leaders are viewed as politicians and are therefore not valued like elders and spiritual leaders.
				Practice "give-away" to honor loved ones' achievements/life.
				Ojibwe For youth, ceremonies, particularly powwows, are more important than oral traditions.
				There is primarily a focus on the here and now with little consideration for the future; seasonal cycles have lost their importance.
				Connections to religion and spirituality are dependent on the family.
				Rejection of religion but a search for spirituality; these concepts are being replaced by gang affiliation for some youth.
				Widespread abuse of animals, overfishing for profit, and pollution of land and water exist, yet many youth "escape to the woods or lake when stressed and need to think."
				Possessions are important as status symbols; money is equated to power and happiness.
				People have very little patience and a lack of self-control.

Note. A "✓" indicates agreement with the assumption by the group.

traditions, ceremonies, and storytelling (Christensen, 1991). Students who attend schools run by the BIE are more likely than their peers in the dominant culture public schools to experience opportunities for cultural integration into the school day (Mead et al., 2010).

Demmert, Grissmer, and Towner (2006) identified six foundational elements for culturally relevant education:

1. The recognition and use of Native American languages for bilingual instruction or as a first or second language
2. Contextually based pedagogy stressing the current cultural characteristics and values of the community
3. Pedagogical strategies that combine the traditional culture with contemporary techniques allowing for

Table 3. Analysis of the Assumptions Concerning Theme 3: Cognitive Styles and Learning Preferences.

Diné	Lakota	Ojibwe	Assumptions	New understandings
No	✓	✓	Public display of knowledge not encouraged (humility; Hartley, 1991; Robbins, 1991)	Diné
✓	✓	✓	Cooperative and sharing (Bradley, 1989)	There are differences in the learning preferences of urban and rural (Rez; Diné youth).
✓	No	✓	Anonymity (Gentry, 2010)	Lakota
✓	✓	No	Noncompetitive, nonaggressive (Tonemah, 1991)	Students suppress displaying knowledge in school not out of humility but more out of fear of being rejected by peers for being smart, "which is not cool."
✓	✓	✓	Watch, learn, then do (Hartley, 1991)	The level of anonymity is dependent on the individual.
✓	✓	No	Practice (Hartley, 1991)	Self-discipline often leads to perfectionist tendencies.
✓	✓	✓	Hands-on, participation (Hartley, 1991)	Students prefer to learn through modeling.
✓	✓	✓	Spatial strengths (Preston, 1991; Sarouphim & Maker, 2009)	Little or no connection to the Earth exists; rather the focus is on instant gratification.
✓	✓	✓	Simultaneous processing (Davidson, 1992; Preston, 1991)	Ojibwe
✓	No	No	Naturalistic, holistic views (Montgomery, 1989)	They tend to be quiet and guarded with most preferring to work individually rather than in groups.
✓	✓	✓	Storytelling, auditory learning (Christensen, 1991; Gentry, 2010)	There are high rates of aggressiveness; fighting and aggression are seen as normal.
✓	✓	✓	Psychomotor, physical learning (Gentry, 2010)	The younger generation is being pushed to be more assertive, sometimes to the point of aggression.
No	✓	✓	Concern for accuracy over speed (Montgomery, 1989)	Desire for instant gratification and self-preservation is prevalent.
				Little value is seen in practice, which can be viewed as a sign of weakness.
				Naturalistic and holistic views have been replaced by the ideals of pop culture.

Note. A "✓" indicates agreement with the assumption by the group.

- opportunities to observe, practice, and demonstrate skills
4. A culturally developed curriculum recognizing the spirituality of the traditional culture of visual arts, legends, and oral histories in a contemporary context
5. Strong Native community participation and collaboration with parents, elders, and other community resources
6. The understanding and use of the social and political mores of the community

In keeping with these principles, the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 requires that Navajo language, culture, history, government, and Ké (character) be taught in school in addition to the core curriculum areas required by the federal government (The Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, 2011). Integrating cultural understanding and acceptance into the fabric of the school environment can serve to foster relationships with, connect to, and inspire learners of all ages (Demmert et al., 2006).

Theme 3: Cognitive Style and Learning Preferences

Table 3 shows that members of the Diné focus group rejected the *cognitive style and learning preferences* assumption that

their students had a greater concern for accuracy over speed (Montgomery, 1989). Additionally, participants explained that Diné students are more inclined to publicly demonstrate their academic achievements, contrary to the assumption of humility found in the literature (Hartley, 1991; Robbins, 1991). Although the Lakota group members affirmed the assumption of humility with regard to academic achievement, the teachers explained that they believed this perceived humility was out of fear of being rejected by their peers for being smart, rather than from an inherent sense of humility. They also rejected the assumption of anonymity put forth by participants of the 2010 Summit but did acknowledge that this varied from student to student. Ojibwe educators explained that their students place little value on practice and that in some instances, view it as a weakness. Furthermore, they stated that many of their students viewed aggression as a normal behavior, with the younger generation becoming more aggressive, driven by desire for instant gratification and self-preservation. They concluded that these values have led to an increase in violence. Finally, focus group members from the Lakota nation reported that today's youth have little or no connection to the Earth, and Ojibwe focus group members explained that naturalistic views have been replaced by the ideologies of pop culture.

The peer networks with which students surround themselves have a profound influence on their achievement because

Table 4. Analysis of the Assumptions Concerning Theme 4: Communication.

Diné	Lakota	Ojibwe	Assumptions	New understandings
✓	✓	✓	Soft, slow speech, quiet, few interjections, delayed responses (Montgomery, 1989)	Diné
✓	✓	✓	Nonverbal communication emphasized (Zintz, 1962)	Diné is an oral language that was not intended to have a written form.
✓	✓	✓	Indirect, nonverbal cues to speaker or listener (Christensen, 1991)	Educators viewed the Diné language as an impediment. Diné students often lack fluency in both the Diné and English languages.
No	No	No	May be fluent in two or more languages (Hartley, 1991)	Strong visual-spatial skills are incorporated into traditional Diné communication.
✓	✓	✓	Introspective rather than questioning (Gentry, 2010)	There is concern that lack of expression may contribute to alcoholism rates.
✓	✓	✓	Feelings unlikely to be openly expressed (Hartley, 1991)	Lakota
				Many Lakota students are placed in Special Education programs because of a lack of understanding of their communication norms.
				The majority of Lakota students speak English only.
				Many students speak in gang-related slang.
				It takes time for Lakota students to warm up to non-Native peers.
				Ojibwe
				Few are fluent in the Ojibwe language, which some see as a dying language.

Note. A "✓" indicates agreement with the assumption by the group.

the members tend to have similar values, levels of achievement, and academic goals (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Bandura, 1986, 1988; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). This influence can be seen in many of the new understandings put forth by the focus groups. They noted that just like other students, different cognitive styles and learning preferences exist among their students. Thus, it is important to cultivate a learning environment in which achievement is valued and expected among the students.

Theme 4: Communication

As depicted in Table 4, the three focus groups agreed in their evaluation of the assumptions of the communication theme. They confirmed every assumption except for "fluency in two or more languages," which they identified as a misconception. Hartley (1991) compared the similarities and differences among gifted Navajo and gifted students in the dominant culture. She compared three communities, which she labeled as Traditional (those who lived on the reservation), Acculturated (Navajo students who lived within a community in which they had become integrated and assimilated with the dominant Anglo culture), and one Anglo community. One of her findings was that gifted Native students might be fluent in two or more languages, something with which all three focus groups disagreed in 2011. All groups identified English as the primary language spoken by the students in their schools, with very few fluent or even familiar

with their native languages. Members of the Ojibwe focus group said that many members of their community view Ojibwe as a dying language because the youth lack understanding and fluency in this language. Though the Diné language is valued in the culture and taught in schools on the reservation (The Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, 2011), the difficulty lies in the fact that it is an oral language that was never intended to have a written form. Focus group members explained that some youth are not proficient in either English or Navajo. The Diné view their language as a key to the survival of their culture. This is reflected in the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 that mandated the teaching of the Navajo language in all BIE schools to help ensure the identity and survival of the Navajo language for future generations (The Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, 2011).

Agreeing with Montgomery's (1989) assertion that Native students have a soft, slow speech pattern, are generally quiet in class with limited interjections, and frequently have delayed response times, Lakota group members stated that a lack of understanding of these communication norms by non-Native teachers frequently resulted in students being identified and placed in special education programs. Additionally, although these group members identified English as the primary language, they expressed concern that their students most often used gang-related slang. Inherent in working successfully with Native youth is valuing their language and culture, which includes understanding their communication styles. It is through a lens of understanding that

researchers can conduct valuable, nuanced research (Peterson, 1999).

A Call for Future Research

All of the barriers associated with poverty (Callahan, 2007; Ford, 2007; Miller, 2004; Wyner et al., 2009), being a member of a marginalized culture (Bernal, 2007; Ford, 1998), and living in remote, rural areas (Bauch, 2001; Bryant, 2007) deeply affect high-potential children living on these three reservations. Typically, reservation schools are poorly funded, lack up-to-date infrastructure and access to technology, struggle with attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, face dropout rates many times greater than those in other schools in their states, and produce fewer graduates who continue their education at the postsecondary level (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Grigg et al., 2010; Mead et al., 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

An important focus of developing a meaningful research agenda is to address the needs of Native American children and their educators. By conducting research and providing resources that will lead to improvement in the recognition and development of talent among these children, scholars can begin to redress the omission of Native American children from the literature in the field and contribute to understanding about methods, materials, and programs that are effective within these populations. To develop an initial research agenda, we turned to our three focus groups for insights. Once the assumptions were refined and agreed on, participants from the Diné and Lakota groups generated important areas for research related to discovering and developing talents among the youth from their cultures. Their ideas were collected on chart paper. They then worked in groups to refine the questions. The Ojibwe participants were asked to list areas they believed were important for researchers to consider. Their suggestions are grouped categorically and outlined in Table 5. These participant-generated research questions reflect the perceived interests and needs of members of the educational communities on these reservations, rather than the research interests of those of us from the outside. We note that not all of the questions generated focused on developing gifts and talents, but what was generated came from the participants as important areas from their perspectives for researchers to consider.

It is important that researchers in the field of gifted, creative, and talented studies engage with these populations and begin to develop a basis in the literature on identifying, developing, and serving gifted, creative, and talented Native American students in many different cultural groups. It is clear from this work that generalizing across Native American cultural groups should not be done, but this does not mean that the study of giftedness among individual groups should be avoided, or that these populations should be omitted from larger studies because of their small numbers from potentially different cultural groups. So little current research

exists about these populations, and gifted Native American students are underidentified and underserved within the field, that it is an imperative and ethical obligation to begin to deliberately consider how to include them and the issues that surround identifying and serving them in our research. Researchers must be willing to understand the context and culture and discuss these within their research findings. Doing so will begin to create a richness in the understanding of gifted, Native youth—something that is currently absent from our literature.

When conducting studies, researchers should sample from the Native American populations in the geographic area in which they conduct their studies. Because there are generally fewer Native American students than other ethnic groups, and because there are even fewer identified as gifted (a small subgroup from a small population), it will be necessary to oversample from the Native American groups. Additionally, we recommend including schools that serve Native American students when conducting large-scale studies and purposively sampling from the states with the largest numbers of Native American students such as Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Washington, each with more than 100,000 Native Americans. Another consideration is to conduct research with those members who live on federal reservations and who attend either BIE or public schools with other Native American youth. Rural studies should include schools that serve Native youth.

It is our hope that researchers will find the work discussed in this article interesting, compelling, and replicable. We encourage others to test assumptions and to take the time to learn about the culture they intend to study. We encourage our colleagues to include these students in their work, even if the sample size is very small. One reviewer raised the question, “Why should this group be included in future research in the field if they are not generalizable on most topics of interest?” We discussed this assertion at length, and the answer is simple. There are many groups, and because of their exclusion from the majority of the existing research in the field, we do not know whether findings concerning these groups are generalizable or not. Including them will help answer that question. Furthermore, generalizability is not necessarily the goal of all research. Sometimes findings lead to understandings and applications, to interventions and improvements in education, to inclusion in programming, and to development of human potential. However, such findings and effects can only occur if researchers take an interest and study varied cultural groups even if their population numbers are small.

All of our focus groups agreed with the assumptions concerning talent development, calling into question the stereotype of Native Americans being unwilling to recognize and serve giftedness. In fact, each of these schools has gifted education services. We wonder if others from among the 566

Table 5. Important Areas for Research as Identified by Study Participants.

Potential researchable questions by categorical area

Culture and tradition

- How do teachers take into consideration cultural issues when working with gifted youth?
- How do 21st-century skills align with the specific tribal philosophy of life and education?
- How do youth relate to traditional ceremonies?
- How do youth, and gifted youth, fit into the assumptions of tradition and culture?
- How are cultural values changing with the generations?
- How does knowledge of traditional ways affect students' sense of self, self-esteem, and achievement?
- What generalizations can be made across settings, and what differences exist across settings (e.g., rural/urban/remote)?
- How do members of the 565 federally recognized tribes view gifted education? Do they identify and nurture talented youth?

Family roles and connections

- What enrichment can be developed and provided for parents of gifted students?
- Many children lack basic supplies (e.g., desks, chairs, a place to study, lights, paper, school supplies, technology) needed to do their school work at home. How can these basic needs be met to foster achievement?
- What role does family play in school success for students from different nations?
- How can home-school connections be strengthened on and off the reservations?
- What methods can be used to effectively connect students (and/or their families) to the "outside" world?

Gender

- Are male students at risk?
- What methods best address the needs of gifted Diné, Lakota, or Ojibwe boys?
- 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, boys, and girls?
- What can be done about gangs?
- How can youth be connected to school and education so they can reach their potential?

Curricular and instructional considerations

- How can the nonverbal, visual, and spatial strengths of these gifted youth enhance their learning and success?
- How do the spatial strengths of these children fit with STEM education, specifically engineering?
- How can curriculum be adapted to fit the knowledge, background, culture, and experiences of the children?
- What is the role of problem-based learning in educating gifted, Native youth from different tribal groups?
- In what ways can teachers' use of nonverbal strategies encourage communication?
- How can nonverbal communication and activities enhance learning?
- Can teachers' better meet students' needs through accountability, goal setting, and reflective practice?

Technology

- What is the role of technology in this generation of learners?
- How can technology bring learning to the reservation?
- How does technology inform the culture of today's generation of Diné, Lakota, or Ojibwe students?
- How severe is the technological divide and its effects, and how can this disparity be addressed?
- How can the need for technological 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 reservations?
- What tensions exist between education and the job market? Gifted, educated Native young people are often forced to leave the reservation to find employment, how can this be addressed?

Note. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

federally recognized Indian Nations are also in agreement with the talent development assumptions and are acting accordingly in their schools and communities. By setting a collaborative research agenda with these three Native American populations, we have begun to address the long-overdue inclusion of Native American children and their educators in research concerning giftedness, creativity, and talent. We invite others to consider investigating questions

from this research agenda or to replicate this process with other underserved Native American populations to set similar, important, research agendas.

Limitations

It should be noted that these findings are dependent on the tribal communities represented and are not generalizable to

all tribal communities within the three Native Nations represented or to members of these nations who live off the reservations. The perspectives reported here are primarily those of educators, and other members of the society might have differing perspectives. It is possible that the generational differences identified by the participants could disappear as the youth mature and embrace the cultural values of their elders. This is an area for follow-up study. Furthermore, the procedures for collecting data at the Red Lake site was different from the procedure used at the Summit in Ganado and at Sitting Bull College on the Standing Rock Reservation. Finally, we would like to refer to a comment made by one Ojibwe teacher when asked to participate: "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." It is important to note the validity of this statement and the desire of this population to be recognized. With 566 federally recognized Native tribes, there is much work that needs to be done in order to address the needs of each of these *unique* populations, and it is our hope that others will join us in this important work.

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Note

1. Another generally accepted term is *American Indian/Alaskan Native*; however, our initial work was with the Diné (Navajo) people, and they prefer the term *Native American*.

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Author Biographies

Marcia Gentry directs the Gifted Educator Resource Institute at Purdue University where she serves as a professor of Gifted, Creative, and Talented Studies. She is a scholar, teacher, and practitioner who enjoys working with her doctoral students and contributing to her field. She is interested in the discovery, study, and development of talent, especially among underserved populations.

C. Matthew Fugate is a doctoral candidate in Gifted, Creative, and Talented Studies at Purdue University. Prior to attending Purdue, he received his bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Houston and master's degree in Educational Psychology, Gifted Education, from the University of Connecticut. In addition to his research on twice exceptionality, Matthew is part of a team focused on increasing research, identification, and servicing of gifted Native American populations. He has served on

several National Association for Gifted Children committees as well as being Student Representative for the American Educational Research Association Research on Gifted, Creative, and Talented Special Interest Group. He has presented to parents, teachers, and schools in Texas, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Arizona, and North and South Dakota on topics such as creativity, twice exceptionality, underserved populations, and Total School Cluster Grouping.

Jiayi Wu is a doctoral candidate in Gifted, Creative, and Talented Studies at Purdue University. Prior to attending Purdue, she received her master's and bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Fudan University in China and taught English to high-ability Chinese learners in Shanghai for 6 years. She has been coordinating student programs for Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue for 3 years. She has served on several local and national graduate student committees. Her research interests include gifted Native American students, English Language Learners, out-of-school enrichment programs, and advanced statistical measurements.

Jaime A. Castellano is an award-winning principal, author, scholar, and researcher; the 2010 principal/administrator of the year for Apache County, Arizona; and a 2012 finalist for the same award; a published author with four books in the field of gifted education, including dozens of articles and chapters written for multiple publications. His 2011 book, *Special Populations in Gifted Education: Understanding Our Most Able Students from Diverse Backgrounds*, was awarded the Legacy Award for Outstanding Scholarly Publication in Gifted Education. Published in November 2013, his latest book is titled *Talent Development for English Language Learners: Identifying and Developing Potential*. He is recognized as one of our nation's leading authorities in identifying and serving low-income, racially, culturally, and linguistically different gifted students, with particular expertise on identifying gifted Hispanic/Latino students, Native American students, and English languages learners.