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Summer Residential Program Experiences as Perceived by Gifted Diné Youth

Jiaxi Wu and Marcia Gentry

University-based, summer-residential enrichment programs may provide academic and social benefits for high-potential, underserved students from low-income families, but Native American students from low-income families often lack access to such programs and receive fewer opportunities for academic enrichment than students from other ethnic and higher income groups. This qualitative study examined the experiences and perceptions of 10 gifted Diné students from low-income families who received full scholarships to attend a university-based summer residential program. Interviews revealed five themes: (1) affirming social interactions with teachers and peers; (2) life-changing experience; (3) positive academic experiences; (4) excitement and motivation; and (5) challenges met. When provided with opportunities in advanced classes that interest them, gifted Diné youth from low-income families had positive academic, social, and emotional experiences.

Although an increasing number of studies have been conducted concerning the needs of gifted students from ethnic minority groups, most of the research focuses on how to identify them rather than how to help them achieve their potential (Kerr & Cohn, 2001). Native American youth have received limited attention in the gifted education literature, and they have had limited opportunities for gifted education services (Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Gentry et al., 2014; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). What has been written in the past 50 years regarding the discovery and development of talent among this underserved population is limited and dated, and frequently views children who come from different tribes as one homogeneous cultural group (Gentry et al., 2014).

The educational literature concerning culturally diverse populations often adopts a deficit perspective (Ford & Harmon, 2001), focusing on poverty, learning deficiencies, violence, and/or substance abuse (e.g., Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010). Additionally, Native American populations are underrepresented in gifted

programs in most states (Yoon & Gentry, 2009); have lower performance on reading and math proficiency than other cultural groups (Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010; Mead et al., 2010); have a greater percentage of the population living in poverty compared to the general population (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008); have higher absence rates among high school students than any other ethnic group (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008); and are less likely to graduate from high school or college than students from most other cultural groups (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Although gifted Native American students have largely been ignored in the gifted education literature (Gentry et al., 2014), talents exist among these populations, and they need programs that address their learning needs and develop their potentials (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 1993). These students need resources that can help shape their educational aspirations, improve their academic attainment, and satisfy their social expectations. University-based, out-of-school summer programs for gifted youth are an exemplary practice in the field (Robinson, Shore, & Enerson, 2007), resulting in increased self-esteem among disadvantaged, gifted students (Griffin, 1992; VanTassel-Baska, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Kulieke, 1994). This qualitative study examined how a summer residential program affected 10 gifted Diné (Navajo) students from low-income families by exploring their perspectives of and experiences in the program.

Results from this research outline gifted Diné students' summer program experiences, provide a foundation for future research on gifted Native American students, and add to the limited literature regarding gifted Diné students. Educators who work with Native American students can use the results to help understand how summer enrichment programs may benefit these students and with this knowledge begin to develop intervention programs to address their academic and social-emotional needs.

Underrepresentation of Native American Youth in Gifted Programs

More than two decades ago, researchers documented the underrepresentation of Native American students in gifted and talented programs in U.S. public schools (Christensen, 1991; Hartley, 1991; Hunsaker, 1994; Tonemah, 1987, 1991). The United States Department of Education (USDOE, 1993) in defining giftedness stated, "outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (p. 3). Recent demographic data on children enrolled in gifted programs have consistently revealed that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, specifically Native American, Hispanic, and African American, remain underrepresented in most states (Ford, 2010; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Native American students are disproportionately underrepresented in gifted programs, comprising only 1 percent of all students enrolled in such programs (Office for Civil Rights, 2012).

Native American students are not only underrepresented in gifted programs in most states, but also they face other problems. In 2006, 27 percent of Native Americans lived in poverty compared with 13 percent of the general population (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Their achievement test scores in reading and math on the 2007 SAT college entrance exam were lower than the overall average by 15 and 21 points respectively (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Their achievement test scores in 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)² reading were 17 points lower on average than non-Native students at grade 4 and 13 points lower at grade 8 (Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010; Mead et al., 2010). Fourth-grade Native American students scored 16 points lower on average in NAEP mathematics than the non-Native American students in 2011, and eighth-grade Native American students scored 19 points lower on average in NAEP mathematics than non-Native students in the same year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). Native American students achieved at two to three grade levels below their non-Native peers, and only 7 percent of Native American kindergartners would go on to earn a bachelor's degree, compared to 34 percent of White students (National Caucus of Native American State Legislators [NCNASL], 2008). Additionally, Native Americans were 73 percent more likely to receive special education services, 117 percent more likely to drop out of school, and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than their White peers (NCNASL, 2008). The high school dropout rates for Native American youth were higher (15 percent) than their non-Native peers, including White students (7 percent), African American students (11 percent), and Asian students (3 percent) (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Effects of Out-of-School Summer Residential Programs

Researchers have documented the effectiveness of university-based summer enrichment programs (Robinson et al., 2007), which enable students to explore careers; experience accelerated and advanced curriculum; experience life on a college campus; and in some cases even earn high school credits (Brody & Mills, 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius, 1998). Students also experience both short- and long-term benefits of these programs including positive peer relationships, sense of acceptance and belonging (Bloom & Dole, 2012), and increased content knowledge, motivation, self-confidence, and self-expectations after program participation (Enersen, 1993; Neber & Heller, 2002; Olszewski-Kubilius, 1998; Stake & Mares, 2005). Studies of gifted students who attended residential programs multiple times showed that these programs played an important role in shaping students' career choices (Enersen, 1996). Although programs like *A Better Chance* (Griffin, 1992), *Upward Bound* (Myers et al., 2004), *Project EXCITE* (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006), *Project HOPE* (Gentry, 2011), and *Science Bound* (Purdue University, 2011) have demonstrated positive outcomes for student participants, limited research exists concerning the effects of enrichment programs on high-ability,

underserved students from low-income families, especially Native American students, and specifically Diné students.

Summer Programs for Native American Youth

In the past 40 years, a few programs were designed to enhance gifted Native American students' potential, including the Native American Intertribal University Preparatory Summer Program (Shishkoff, 1994), Project Leadership Excellence Achievement and Performance (Montgomery, 2001), and the Ohiyesa program (Raborn, 2002). Researchers indicated that these programs had positive effects on ACT/SAT scores and on the number of students who applied and were admitted to college (Barber et al., 1999) and participants consistently earned higher grades than non-participants (Raborn, 2002). Current enrichment programs designed for high-ability Native American youth include American Indian Projects that assists American Indian students in enhancing their social skills so they can return to the Indian community in leadership roles (University of Minnesota, Duluth, 2012a) and Minnesota Indigenous Youth Freedom Project that provides free week-long leadership training programs for American Indian youth aged 13 to 17 living on and near Minnesota reservation communities (University of Minnesota, Duluth, 2012b).

Since 1977 the Gifted Education Resource Institute (GERI) at Purdue University has offered residential programs to gifted, creative, and talented students in grades 5 through 12 (GERI, 2012). Students take challenging courses not typically offered in high school, are exposed to positive academic and social experiences within a university environment, and participate in educational and social activities. With about 30 percent of its 450 annual participants receiving need-based scholarships, GERI is committed to recruiting, enrolling, and serving students from underserved populations. In 2011, 12 gifted Diné students from a public school on the Navajo Nation received scholarships to attend the summer residential program. In 2012, 2013, and 2014 this program expanded to serve on average 63 Native youth each year from five communities on three reservations with full scholarships and travel expenses.³

Methods

This qualitative study was guided by a postpositivist inquiry paradigm in which causality is viewed as a mutual-shaping process (Borland, 1990). Postpositivist researchers regard themselves as people who conduct research among people and learn with them, rather than conducting research on people; thus, they assume a learning role rather than a testing one (Ryan, 2006). Triangulation (Denzin, 1978) ensures objectivity by using multiple data sources and having multiple coding analysts. Similarly, purposive selection (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) is used to counteract potential researcher biases and enhance the validity of the findings. Additionally,

postpositivist research requires researchers to take a distanced view or overview, and this kind of objectivity requires “passion for justice and the ability to subject one’s own assumptions to scrutiny” (Ryan, 2006, p. 18). Thus, postpositivism is well-suited for this inquiry.

Research Design

The theoretical framework of the study was phenomenology, in which people’s direct experiences are captured and described, and researchers focus on exploring how humans perceive the experience, describe it, feel about it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (Patton, 2002). To gather these data, researchers must conduct in-depth interviews with people who have “lived experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Guided by a phenomenological framework, we aimed to understand the academic and affective experiences of gifted Diné students from low-income families after they participated in the GERI Summer Residential program for two weeks during the summer of 2011. The following research questions guided the study:

- (1) How do gifted Diné students from low-income families perceive their academic and social experiences after participation in Summer Residential?
- (2) How does participation in this program affect these students’ educational aspirations and career interests?

Participants

Twelve 7th through 9th grade Diné students from one school on the Navajo Nation participated in GERI Summer Residential program for two weeks during the summer of 2011. Following approved IRB protocols and after parent consent, four girls and six boys consented to follow-up interviews during 2012. All parents/guardians consented to be interviewed, with seven parents/guardians from six families participating in the interviews. All students were eligible for the federal free and reduced meals program. Scholarships provided for these students included registration, airfare, housing, and meals.

Students were identified as gifted using multiple criteria based on state achievement test scores of “exceeding” in reading or math; scores on the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (Naglieri, 1996) or Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Cognitive Abilities (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) at or above the 90th percentile, and teacher and principal recommendations (J. Castellano, personal email communication, July 11, 2012). Table 1 provides demographic information on Diné participants.

GERI Summer Residential Program

Summer Residential was held at Purdue University, and students lived in residence halls for two weeks during July 2011. To be admitted to the program, students were identified as gifted at their school, and they submitted

Table 1. Demographic information on Diné participants

| Student/ Pseudonym | Sex | Grade (2011-12) | Parent Interviewed | Parent's Profession | Parent's Education Level |
|-----------------------|-----|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sarah | F | 8 | Mother | Unemployed | Bachelor's |
| Fred | M | 7 | Father | Education assistant | Master's |
| Jacobi | M | 9 | | | |
| Jessie | F | 7 | Mother | Grade 7 teacher | Bachelor's |
| Bob | M | 7 | | | |
| Vic | M | 9 | Mother | Graduate student | Master's |
| Alex | F | 7 | Mother | Educational technician | Some college |
| Mykeow | F | 9 | Mother | Office specialist | Grade 11 |
| | | | Father | Unemployed | Some college |
| Brady | M | 8 | | | |
| Turtle | M | 8 | | | |

an essay addressing their motivation to participate in the program and two documents demonstrating excellence in their talent area (e.g., transcript, achievement or aptitude test result, recommendation letter, award, or certificate) (GERI, 2012). They enrolled in courses such as Game Design, Lego Robotics, Aerospace Engineering, Architecture and Design, Cause of Conflict, and Organic Chemistry. Cultural diversity was one highlight of the residential program as students came from 15 states and four countries. Each student was assigned a roommate and a counseling group ($n=10$) guided by a same-gender counselor for out-of-class activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted by five members of a research team who received training from an expert qualitative researcher. Researchers took field notes, and all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Student and parent interview protocols included eight questions about students' 2011 program experiences concerning the classes students took, their social interactions and the friends they made, the support they received from teachers and classmates, their favorite aspects of the program, things they found most challenging, and how attending the program has affected them. Students and their parents were interviewed separately. Interviews averaging 35 minutes were conducted with nine students and seven parents at their school in May 2012, and with one student before the program began in July 2012.

Data were analyzed using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After the authors developed 27 open codes, they gave these codes and the transcripts to 11 graduate students to review and categorize. The result was seven axial categories such as positive academic experiences, social interactions, and challenges met. These were refined to five codes and two graduate students familiar with advanced qualitative research reviewed two sample cases of typed transcripts and these codes. Each reviewer

independently analyzed the five axial codes using an inductive process by which data emerged that fitted an existing category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The reviewers had 85% agreement in identification of major themes, with disagreement regarding word choice for labeling themes discussed until consensus was reached. In all, the data underwent analysis four times.

Parents' responses were also analyzed to provide data triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Thus multiple sources of information were used to capture different perspectives, increase trustworthiness, and reduce intrinsic bias of the single-method, homogeneous-participant study. Although the parents did not attend the program, their second-hand perceptions confirmed, refuted, or added information concerning their children's program experiences.

After developing the final themes, the authors reviewed the transcripts again and conducted a content analysis by coding each interview by theme as they appeared, which resulted in a frequency count for each theme and each participant, documenting the prevalence of each theme in the data, with theme 1 most frequently mentioned, followed by themes 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Role of the Researchers

The first author is a doctoral candidate focusing on gifted education. She became interested in Native American populations when she visited the Navajo Nation in spring 2011, returning in 2012 and 2013. Originally from China, she found a connection to the Diné people not only in physical appearances, but also to the values respected by their culture such as cooperation over competition, patience, and humility (Montgomery, 1989; Sisk, 1989) because these values are shared by Chinese cultures. She designed the study, developed student and parent interview protocols, conducted 50 percent of the interviews, analyzed the data, and wrote the findings. As an "outsider," she began the study from an exploratory perspective, not constrained by predetermined mindset or preconceived hypotheses. She asked the participants to be honest in their responses. Interviews were conducted after students had been selected for 2012 participation, enabling them to answer without concern about whether their responses would affect their program participation.

The second author serves as major advisor for the first author and has mentored her in the development of this study and manuscript, coauthoring and guiding the research. She also serves as the principal investigator of the IRB protocol, as well as for the grant that funds Native students' attendance at Summer Residential Programs.

Results

Thematic Findings

Data analysis revealed five major themes regarding students' program experiences. Theme 1, *positive social interactions*, was described by 17 out of 17 participants, with 14 mentioning it more than once. Theme 2, *life-changing*

experience, was described by 15 out of 17 participants. Theme 3, *students were motivated*, was expressed by 15 out of 17 participants. Theme 4, *positive academic experiences*, was expressed by 13 out of the 17 participants. Theme 5, *students met challenges*, was mentioned by all participants.

Theme 1: Students Experienced Positive Social Interactions with Peers from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds and Support from Peers and Teachers. Students described making new friends from culturally diverse backgrounds, meeting friendly people, and having social and emotional support from teachers and classmates throughout the program. Nine of the 10 students mentioned that making new friends was a program highlight. When asked what he liked the best about the program, Brady (all names are pseudonyms) said, "meeting various people around the world" (interview, 5/11/2012). On the last day students hugged each other and said goodbye with tears. Three of 10 students mentioned that leaving friends they made was the most difficult part of the program. Additionally, the means and standard deviation of the student responses to an interview question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being 'a lot', how much support did your teachers and classmates give you at the program?" were calculated for teacher support ($n=10$, $M=8.50$, $SD=1.86$) and for classmate support ($n=10$, $M=8.00$, $SD=1.67$).

Cultural diversity was one feature of the program, and most students made friends with peers from other cultures. Turtle mentioned, "I have some Korean friends and Indian friends and Colombian [friends]" (interview, 7/3/2012). Alex explained, "I have friends from Chicago, New York, South Korea, and Colombia" and "she [Bunny] was from Korea, and she taught me how to speak in Korean" (interview, 5/10/2012). Vic said that these friends helped him realize that "...we are all the same, like we are all considered smart back at our own schools" (interview, 5/11/2012). Opportunities for interacting with teenagers from a variety of cultural backgrounds influence students' cross-race sociability and friendship (e.g., Hallinan & Williams, 1989) and such friendships may also have special significance for adolescents (Hébert, 2000).

Students also helped each other when having difficulties in the classes. Bob explained, "We are doing Origami, and when I fell behind once, they stopped and they helped me catch back up" (interview, 5/11/2012). Mykeow, the only girl in *Game Development*, said, "All other dudes tried to help me when I can't figure out something...they let me voice my ideas and everything" (interview, 5/11/2012). It is important that Mykeow's male classmates gave her say, as literature suggested that gifted girls in STEM areas may lose confidence in their own opinions and fail to assert themselves in class (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Mykeow's classmates helped her build her self-confidence by providing her with assistance and by encouraging her freedom of expression.

Students indicated that they received support from teachers in the classes. Turtle mentioned, "Everything that they [teachers] said was positive,

and it really made me feel good with that...When we were doing a project, then they really supported us to do better and make it bigger” (interview, 7/3/2012). Mykeow also described how supportive her teacher was:

She would kind of encourage me to stick to what I’m good with...Since we were the first Navajos who’s there, each of the teachers, they would like to let me stand up and tell them about my traditions... and how we Navajos see different conflicts in point of views. (interview, 5/11/2012)

Emotional and academic support from teachers is important for gifted adolescents and may help them form positive self-concepts (e.g., Rinn, Reynolds, & McQueen, 2011). Particularly, guidance from teachers may help gifted girls recognize their talents, and see how these talents can be used to fulfill values (Kerr & Robinson Kurpius, 2004). Conversations with caring adults are special to gifted students when they can share their feelings about their own giftedness (Enersen, 1993).

Theme 2: The Program Was a Life-changing Experience. Students explained that their lives were affected or changed by attending the program. Eight of the 10 students mentioned that the program was life changing, and all seven parents/guardians had similar comments. The program helped these high-ability Diné students realize that they have peers with whom they can intellectually and socially interact — students who live off the reservation and who value education as they do. Attending the program inspired them to reach higher concerning their educational and career paths. The cultural diversity they experienced during the program helped them deepen their understanding, value, and respect for different cultures. Five of the 10 students expressed interest in attending the host university.

The program provided students with opportunities to experience life on a university campus. Jacobi said, “[I was able to] know how college life is. It did make me try what college is really going to be” (interview, 5/11/2012). Fred’s father confirmed his son’s learning, “One of the most important [things] for me is the fact that he now better understands what university life is like” (interview, 5/14/2012). The program also changed students’ perspectives about their educational and career paths. Vic said, “I got more into architecture and it helped me choose what I want to pursue as a career” (interview, 5/11/2012). Alex explained:

Now I really worked hard at school to get another opportunity to go somewhere like this again...Before I went to Purdue, I just wanted to basically get an education, but after [studying at] Purdue, I’m starting to really look at what I want, what exactly I want, and what schools offer it. (interview, 5/10/2012)

Attending the program made Alex re-examine her potential and her educational aspirations. The program also provided students with opportunities to interact with their intellectual peers who value education as they do. When asked whether the program changed Vic in any way, Vic’s mother said, “I

think in terms of academics, I think he was able to see a large group of students who valued education in the same way he did” (interview, 5/14/2012). Finding and relating to intellectual peers is important for enriched communication and understanding (Altman, 1983), and this can be difficult for rural gifted students, making a summer program experience like this one meaningful.

With regard to life lessons, Turtle realized the importance of working hard in everything he does: “It really got me to go out somewhere, and to be aware when you work hard, then you get rewarded big” (interview, 7/3/2012). Jessie learned independence during the program: “It made me a little bit more responsible when I came back. Just being more independent in doing my work” (interview, 5/10/2012). Parents also had similar comments, Alex’s mother said, “I think it kind of made her a little bit richer and being able to deal with being away from home” (interview, 5/14/2012). Vic’s mother added, “Do you know that there’s a world beyond out the reservation boundary? There’s different races [sic] of people that come from different states, that come from different countries” (interview, 5/14/2012).

Theme 3: Students Were Motivated by the Program and Excited to Attend Next Summer. When asked why they chose certain courses at the program, students provided revealing responses. Turtle and Jessie selected courses based on their interests, and they were eager to learn new knowledge. Turtle chose *Lego Robotics* because “I like building things, and I like all robots. I’d like to make sure of how you got to build Lego robot and you are able to program it on computer” (interview, 7/3/2012). Jessie who took *Architecture and Design* and *Organic Chemistry* said:

For architecture, I wanted to learn about the different structures of building, how they were built and in what ways they were made to deal with the weather; for chemistry, just to learn about like the different things that make that periodic table and how things are made to do different things. (interview, 5/10/2012)

Other students selected courses to help them develop their career aspirations. Alex said she chose *Game Design* because, “I want to know how to design in case I want to go into game designing” (interview, 5/10/2012). Sarah who took *Aerospace Engineering* had a similar motivation, “I was really excited when I found they have aerospace engineering, only because I would like to have that as my career” (interview, 5/11/2012).

Seven of the 10 students who returned to the program in 2012 expressed their excitement about attending. As Mykeow’s mother explained, “I guess it was good because she’s all excited about going back again this year” (interview, 5/14/2012). That they found the program motivating and wanted to return underscores the positive experiences that these participants had during their two weeks in 2011.

Theme 4: Students Had Positive Academic Experiences. Students described positive academic experiences, and their parents/guardians had

similar comments regarding their children's experiences. They described engaging in enjoyable learning experiences; learning advanced content; collaborating with classmates and helping each other; and not wanting to leave.

Thirteen of 17 participants interviewed shared a variety of positive academic experiences. Generally, students enjoyed the classes and learned new, advanced content. Jessie, who took Architecture Design, said, "We learned about the different types of buildings. We had to make a structure with marshmallows...They [the teachers] were giving us different ideas of how we could set it up, and how the structure might look" (interview, 5/10/2012). It seemed that students enjoyed learning new and interesting things from the courses they chose. Parents/guardians also commented that their children engaged in the courses. Fred's father said:

[teachers] made the activities really exciting and different. They made it open from a different point of view but wouldn't be presented over here [on the reservation]. It was a lot of fun...He had different activities rather than to sit down and lecture. (interview, 5/14/2012)

These students found the learning activities engaging and they described learning new knowledge from their academic experiences to their parents. As revealed by theme 3, these students were motivated by a deep desire to learn during the program. Thus, the program met the academic needs of these gifted students, providing educational experiences that helped them achieve academic and personal self-realization (Enersen, 1993).

Theme 5: Students Met Challenges that Helped Them Better Understand the World. Students described the most difficult times for them during the program as leaving the reservation and family, being homesick, being secluded, adapting to the humid weather and the culturally different environment, and experiencing academic barriers. Eight out of the 10 student participants had never traveled by airplane and four had never traveled away from the reservation; therefore, it was not surprising that eight of the 10 students mentioned that they were not accustomed to the humid weather. Sarah mentioned, "It's different, usually I'm like around my family and finally I got to leave" (interview, 5/10/2012). When asked what was the most difficult for him, Bob also said, "that I had to be away from my family" (interview, 5/10/2012). Being away from family and familiar surroundings may lead to homesickness; as Alex said, "I kind of had a homesickness during the first three days..." (interview, 5/10/2012), something her mother confirmed. However, Sarah and Alex adjusted to the new learning and social environment and enjoyed the program experiences as evidenced by their other responses.

Some students found the content of their classes difficult. These students did not have opportunities and resources to learn advanced science content at their school, as Jessie's mother explained, "I don't think that

middle schools here has a variety; so here, it's just like general science course" (interview, 5/14/2012). Brady recalled, "The class of the electronics was difficult...I didn't know really what to do to put electronics together" (interview, 5/11/2012). Alex also said she found her computer class challenging. However, all of these students successfully completed the courses and learned things as described in theme 4. Therefore, the difficulties they encountered were not necessarily negative experiences. By adapting to the new environment, students learned new things and established friendships.

Negative Comments. Some students described negative experiences they had during the program. For example, Jacobi and Vic rated the support they received from teachers and students at only 5 of a possible 10 points. Vic and Brady also expressed that they did not receive any support from teachers or classmates. Jacobi explained his rating of 5: "I really hadn't wished to go over there, it's like they pretty much made me go" (interview, 5/11/2012).

Jacobi did not make friends during the program, he said, "I was mainly secluded there, but I made some friends [from the reservation]" (interview, 5/11/2012). When asked what made him feel secluded, Jacobi said, "I think it's because I really don't know many people, and the group I was assigned with weren't really my friends, just one of them" (interview, 5/11/2012). Although Brady established friendships, he felt that neither the friends he made at the program nor the program itself affected him at all. Bob also said that attending the program had not affected his life.

It is notable that all aforementioned negative comments came from male participants (i.e., Jacobi, Bob, Brady, and Vic), suggesting that these boys may have had more negative social experiences than their female counterparts. Unfortunately, research that addresses the developmental issues facing gifted male students is limited (Hébert, Pagnani, & Hammond, 2009). School personnel did not allow Bob and Brady to participate in 2012 because of some problems they had at school. This decision may have affected the tone of their responses and their attitudes toward the program. Since these male participants were reticent during the interviews, another explanation may be that gifted male adolescents are less verbal than their female counterparts (e.g., Norman et al., 1999; Reis & Callahan, 1989).

Jacobi's answer about being "forced" to participate may exemplify what Kerr and Cohn (2001) concluded: Some American Indian boys did not want to take advantages of educational opportunities for scholarships because these options may threaten their connection to their land and the people they love. In addition, alienation intensifies when a gifted boy does not wish to be part of a community and adolescence often increases a sense of isolation (Kerr & Cohn, 2001). A lack of connection or belonging within the program off the reservation could also explain why Jacobi felt secluded most of time. It seemed that these gifted boys were disengaged from the program, and therefore did not welcome opportunities and social involvement within the program like other students did.

Additional Learning

Educational Goals and Career Aspirations. All 10 student participants had the short-term educational goal of attending college. Additionally, eight of 10 students had long-term career aspiration such as being an astronaut, a lawyer, or a construction builder. For example, Sarah chose Aerospace Engineering because, as her mother explained, “She wants to be the first Native American [astronaut]” (interview, 5/14/2012). Bob mentioned, “I would like to become a construction worker...I really like the houses” (interview, 5/11/2012). Mykoew had a variety of interests including astronomy and physics, but she wanted to be a lawyer. These are gifted youth who have ambitious educational aspirations for the future, and they need opportunities can help them achieve their goals.

Cultural Understanding. When asked what else they wanted us as outsiders to understand, participants mentioned that more Native American cultural understanding is needed. For example, Alex mentioned, “Just to learn about our culture more, and get a better understanding about who we are and all that” (interview, 5/10/2012). She further explained, “Non-Native American people, most of them don’t know the importance of it [ceremonies and rituals], and that we have a lot of theories, and ways of life that we have” (interview, 5/10/2012).

Fred’s father believed that non-Native American people might still have misunderstanding about Native American children, thinking that Navajo people were living in a place that afforded no privacy; therefore, Navajo culture should be addressed in the study to eliminate such potential misunderstanding. Alex suggested that visitors “take tours around the reservation” (interview, 5/10/2012), which our research team did, but she hoped that researchers could take more tours to understand more about their culture. Participants believed that it was necessary for us as non-Native outsiders to understand their culture; only based on our in-depth understanding could we conduct quality educational research that would benefit high-potential and gifted Diné youth.

Discussion

The findings of this exploratory study revealed that this university-based, residential enrichment program was generally positive for the gifted Diné students. With meaningful, authentic talent development experiences in a multicultural environment, these students experienced more than an increase in self-esteem. Attendance seemed to benefit their intellectual and social emotional development. These students considered the experience a life-changing one that reshaped their visions with regard to academics and life. Their positive experiences and social interactions indicate that they enjoyed and gained new perspectives in the program. It is noteworthy that although these interviews were conducted in May and July 2012 — nearly one year after students’ participation in 2011 — students still clearly remembered

many details regarding their academic and social experiences. This may mean that the effects of the program are long lasting.

The results of this study replicated several findings from previous studies. First, our results support previous findings that students experience positive peer relationships (Bloom & Dole, 2012), gain content knowledge (Enersen, 1993), and have increased interest in subjects (Olszewski-Kubilius, 1998) after program participation. Second, when exposed to areas of personal interest in enrichment programs, high-ability students from low-income families have positive academic experiences and experience social support in enrichment programs (Miller & Gentry, 2010). Third, our study confirms that gifted Native American students from low-income families can gain academic and social support from their teachers and peers when participating in residential enrichment programs (Raborn, 2002). Since there are no recent empirical studies on the effects of summer enrichment programs on Diné or Native American students in general, our study not only confirms previous findings, but also extends research by adding Diné students' first-hand perceptions of the enrichment program experiences. These Diné students made new friends from diverse cultural backgrounds and were supported academically and socially by their teachers and peers during the program. It is notable that gifted male Diné students seemed to have more negative experiences than their female counterparts, a finding that warrants further investigation.

Talent among gifted Native American students often goes unrecognized without support and encouragement from educators, resulting in their underrepresentation and under-identification in gifted and talented programs (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The students in this study have big dreams, and they deserve opportunities to participate in summer programs and other enrichment programs that can help them shape their aspirations and futures.

Limitations

These results are drawn from one summer residential program and one sample of students from the same school on one reservation. Other summer residential programs may have different criteria for student participation. However, the intent of this qualitative study is to inform rather than to generalize; therefore, we provided a rich description to inform the readers, and left applicability and usefulness of the information to the readers' judgment. These students reported generally positive experiences in the program, and it is possible that they offered positive responses, saying what they thought the researcher wanted to hear rather than what they really thought. Finally, we approached this study as cultural outsiders, and in doing so, we listened, learned, and put findings into a culturally relevant context.

Conclusion

This study adds to the limited literature regarding gifted Native students' experiences and perceptions of summer enrichment programs and how such

programs served a sample of Diné youth. It confirms previous findings that summer residential programs can facilitate academic and social-emotional development among the study participants. The findings of this study provide a foundation for future research on gifted Native American students, particularly gifted Diné students. Finally, this work can provide information to educators who work with Native American students concerning enrichment and intervention programs and how such programs can help address the academic and social-emotional needs of their students.

Scholarships enabled gifted Diné students to enroll in courses that interested them at the program, and these students engaged successfully in advanced content together with their gifted peers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we conclude that, if given the opportunity and financial support to participate in a university-based residential program designed for gifted youth, gifted Diné students from low-income families will experience academic benefits, enjoy positive interactions, learn new knowledge, appreciate cultural diversity, and be exposed to new perspectives that help them envision their future education and careers.

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Notes

¹Diné is the term Navajo people use to refer to themselves, and is used throughout this article.

²As a common metric for all U. S. states and selected urban districts, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment of educational progress in the U. S. See <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/> for a NAEP overview.

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