Honoring Indigenous Worldview: Cultural (Un)Responsiveness in Gifted Education

Vicki Boley

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Abstract
Many working understandings of giftedness exist within dominating Western frameworks, gatekeeping gifted education from students who do not “fit” inside such frameworks (Owens et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). As a result, K-12 Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students are underrepresented in gifted education programs (Sternberg et al., 2021) and overrepresented in special education programs (NCLD, 2023). When considering Indigenous students in particular, Western orientations surrounding giftedness perpetuate assimilation, dominance, and continued colonization (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Gentry & Gray, 2021a). Leveraging Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening as conceptual frameworks, this interpretive phenomenological research study involved conversations with 14 Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates, representing a variety of tribal, band, clan, and regional affiliations across the United States, toward examining the intersection of Indigenous worldview, giftedness as a cultural phenomenon, and culturally responsive gifted education.

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Honoring Indigenous Worldview: Cultural (Un)Responsiveness in Gifted Education

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Vicki Boley
June 2024
Advisor: Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein
Abstract

Many working understandings of giftedness exist within dominating Western frameworks, gatekeeping gifted education from students who do not “fit” inside such frameworks (Owens et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). As a result, K-12 Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students are underrepresented in gifted education programs (Sternberg et al., 2021) and overrepresented in special education programs (NCLD, 2023). When considering Indigenous students in particular, Western orientations surrounding giftedness perpetuate assimilation, dominance, and continued colonization (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Gentry & Gray, 2021a).

Leveraging Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening as conceptual frameworks, this interpretive phenomenological research study involved conversations with 14 Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates, representing a variety of tribal, band, clan, and regional affiliations across the United States, toward examining the intersection of Indigenous worldview, giftedness as a cultural phenomenon, and culturally responsive gifted education.

Researcher Note. From a good heart (personal communication, Steinhauer, 2024) and critical awareness (Freire, 1970), I seek to navigate the DreamSpace (Hersey, 2022) surrounding culturally responsive gifted education. As a White, non-Indigenous educator and researcher, I acknowledge that this study is but a thread in the tapestry of time, in the
woven fabric of the threads who came before me. This tapestry is ever evolving, held taut by radical imagination and a deep desire to honor liberating ways of knowing, being, and doing in the classroom and beyond (hooks, 1994). The problem at the heart of my research has invited me “to listen with the conscious knowledge of how colonial relations of power operate” and to recognize “how [Western] subjects can be active agents in repositioning [themselves] within that schema” (McGloin, 2015, p. 276). By accepting this invitation, I recognize myself as an active agent. As Gentry et al. (2021) assert, “inequity can only be solved by acknowledging it exists” (p. 156).
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To my husband Vik, I find in you a constant place of unconditional love, encouragement, humor, and friendship. Bless the cosmos for allowing our paths to cross. Your belief in me never wavers. I love you, sugar. Samantha and Alyssa, the bond we share is an endless well of magic from which I draw. Our sisterhood sustains me. I am so grateful for you both, always. To my parents Rachel and Victor, you are my perpetual pillars of support. Thank you for instilling in me a love of learning and persevering. You are my heart and home. I love you lots and lots and lots. To Jasween and Muktesh, thank you for nourishing me with numerous words of support and plates of food. Your pride in me makes me shine. To my ancestors, thank you for whispering to me across time and space when I call on you. I hope I make you proud. To my Lovie and Goose (cats), thank you for the hours of cuddles while I wrote this dissertation; your time on Earth is finite, and I will forever treasure those moments.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Giftedness is often associated with a person who demonstrates, or has the potential for demonstrating, an exceptionally high level of performance in one or more areas of human endeavor (Sousa, 2009). The purpose of gifted education is not only to identify gifted students but to ensure they receive appropriate support for their complex cognitive, affective, and behavioral needs toward the goal of developing their unique gifts and talents (Delisle & Galbraith, 2015; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). However, many understandings of giftedness exist within dominating Western frameworks, which not only gatekeep gifted education from many non-Western-oriented students (Owens et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2020) but systematically exclude them (Patel, 2016). This interpretive phenomenological research study explored how non-Western worldview, specifically an Indigenous worldview, may inform culturally responsive gifted education practices.

Chapter one defines the nuanced definition of terms used throughout the study, establishes the context surrounding the research topic, as well as describes the threefold nature of the research problem and corresponding research purpose and questions. Additionally, this chapter presents two conceptual frameworks to frame the study:

Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening.

Definition of Terms

It is essential that, from the very start, the reader clearly understands how specific terminology is used in this introductory chapter and subsequent chapters. Throughout
research and practice across fields of education, the following terms may have varied meanings; however, for the purpose of this study, these terms are defined as follows:

**Culturally responsive gifted education**

The particular practices and theories used in the cognitive and affective education of children identified with advanced learning capabilities (Delisle, 2019; Delisle & Galbraith, 2015; Hines et al., 2016; Johnsen, 2011), which are anchored to 1) a mindset that respects and honors students’ individuality as well as their cultures, experiences, and histories; 2) approaches that include students’ cultures, experiences, and histories in both curriculum and instruction; 3) a commitment to continuing to learn about students’ cultures, experiences, and histories; a set of dispositions including a) engaging in critical self-reflection about one’s values, biases, strengths, and limitations, b) valuing language and culture in both word and deed, c) insisting on high-quality work from all students, d) affirming students’ identities while also expanding their world, e) honoring families, and f) exemplifying a commitment to life-long learning (Nieto, 2016).

**Gifted**

Although having numerous complex definitions, *gifted* is defined here in reference to an individual who demonstrates, or has the potential for demonstrating, an exceptionally high level of performance in one or more areas of human endeavor (Sousa, 2009).

**Identification**

The practices and procedures used to identify children for gifted education programming (Johnsen, 2018; NAGC, n.d.a).
Indigenous

In alignment with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), *Indigenous* is recognized as a term in reference to the over 370 million Indigenous peoples worldwide across 70 different countries; while there is no universal definition of *Indigenous* in relation to peoples, the “modern understanding” includes the following defining characteristics: individual self-identification as Indigenous as accepted by the community; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic, or political systems; distinct language, culture, and beliefs; non-dominant groups in society (i.e. lack of political, social, or economic power); and the resolve to maintain and reproduce ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations, 2007). It is essential to recognize that within this study, *Indigenous* refers to and includes Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, who hold space in what is called The United States of America. It is recognized that these groups have preferred terms that refer to their tribal, clan, and band affiliations or regional locations (Aguilar et al., 2021). Additionally, it is recognized that the term *Indigenous* is also used to identify other groups around the world, such as the Māori, Inuit, and Aboriginal Australians (Aguilar et al., 2021).

Programming

A continuum of services that address the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of gifted learners, which: a) includes the components, options, and strategies that will be implemented by the administrative unit (AU) and schools to appropriately address the educational needs of gifted students; b) matches the academic strengths and interests of
the gifted student; c) addresses the affective needs according to individual student profiles (Colorado Department of Education, 2020; Speirs-Neumeister & Burney, 2019).

**Underrepresentation**

Representation of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students in gifted programs is a critical issue in the field of gifted education (Hodges & Gentry, 2021). A school district’s identified gifted population should be demographically similar to its general population; however, students who are Black, Latinx, or Native American are both currently and historically underrepresented in gifted programs (Hodges & Gentry, 2021). Scholars have stated that causes for underidentification are due to inherent biases in testing, cultural bias toward underrepresented groups, lack of education resources, or issues stemming from academic achievement (Hodges & Gentry 2021).

**Western**

The mainstream Eurocentric traditions and definitions of cultural heritage, history, values, language, and beliefs are used in reference to the dominant culture (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Huaman et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2018)

**Worldview**

A “general philosophical orientation about the world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 5).

**Gifted Education**

Before addressing the research problem regarding Western orientations surrounding giftedness, it is crucial to consider various existing theoretical conceptions of giftedness and definitions of giftedness in practice. A rationale for gifted education, particularly with respect to gifted students’ characteristics and learning needs, is also considered. Additionally, the following section will briefly present how giftedness is
often identified and programmed with services in K-12 settings across the United States, as well as the underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students in gifted programs.

**Theoretical Conceptions of Giftedness**

There are many theoretical conceptions of giftedness (NAGC, n.d.b). Some of the most prominent in the field include Francoys Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent and Joseph Renzulli’s Three Ring Model of Giftedness (NAGC, n.d.b). Other theories prominent in the field include Robert Sternberg’s Theory of Successful Intelligence and Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (NAGC, n.d.b).

**The Differentiated Model of Giftedness.** In the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, Gagné (1985) proposes a clear distinction between gifted and talent. Gagné suggests that the term giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities (called aptitudes or gifts) in at least one ability domain to a degree that places a child among the top 10% of their similarly-aged peers. In this regard, the term talent designates the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places a child’s achievement within the upper 10% of age-peers who are active in that field or fields. Specifically, Gagné’s model presents five aptitude domains: intellectual, creative, socioaffective, sensorimotor, and “others” (e.g., extrasensory perceptions). Gagné believed these natural abilities, which have a clear genetic substratum, can be observed in every task children are confronted with during their schooling.
**Three Ring Model of Giftedness.** Renzulli (1978) theorized that gifted behavior occurs when there is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. These three clusters of human traits are all interconnected, with no one single human trait acting as a marker of giftedness. Renzulli suggested that gifted and talented children are those who possess or are capable of developing this composite of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. To achieve their full potential, Renzulli also suggested that gifted students require challenges above and beyond those offered in the regular classroom setting.

**Theory of Successful Intelligence.** Sternberg (1980; 1999) suggests that, unlike a traditional view of intelligence that comprises a single general ability, the augmented Theory of Successful Intelligence is more complex. Successful intelligence is defined as one’s ability to set and accomplish personally meaningful goals in one’s life, given one’s cultural context. As such, a successfully intelligent person accomplishes such goals by understanding their strengths and weaknesses, capitalizing on the strengths, and correcting and/or compensating for the weaknesses. Sternberg describes the strengths and weaknesses in terms of four skills: creative, analytical, practical, and wisdom-based. In particular, the individual needs to be creative to generate novel and useful ideas, analytical to ascertain that the ideas are good ones, practical to apply those ideas and convince others to see their value, and wise to ensure the implementation of the ideas will help ensure a common good through the mediation of positive, ethical principles.

**Theory of Multiple Intelligences.** Gardner (1983) suggests that traditional psychometric views of intelligence are too limited. Rather, individuals possess eight
relatively autonomous intelligences. Gardner posited that individuals draw on these intelligences, individually and corporately, to create products and solve problems that are relevant to the societies in which they live. The eight identified intelligences include linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1999). Gardner’s theory represents a departure from traditional conceptions of intelligence first formulated in the early 20th century. Conceptualizing intelligence in multiples rather than singular forms the primary distinction between Multiple Intelligence Theory and the conception of intelligence that often dominates Western psychological theory and common discourse (Davis et al., 2011).

**Definitions of Giftedness in Practice**

Many definitions of giftedness exist, although none are universally agreed upon (Kennedy, 2012). Some definitions of giftedness focus on the psychological aspects of giftedness. One such definition that is often recognized in the gifted education community comes from the Columbus Group (1991 as cited in Silverman, 1994), which defines giftedness as:

Asynchronous development in which cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modification in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (para. 1)

Other definitions of giftedness focus on abilities related to giftedness in the context of K-12 education. For instance, through the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students
Education Act (1987 as cited in Kennedy, 2012), the federal government currently defines gifted students as:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (para. 1)

Similarly, the National Association for Gifted Education (NAGC, n.d.a) defines giftedness as:

Those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (Parentheses used in original text, para. 1)

Most states across the U.S. have their own definition of giftedness for program and funding purposes, many of which emphasize cognitive assessment measures (Hafenstein et al., 2022; Sternberg et al., 2021). However, such definitions can be quite varied, with some states that do not have a definition at all (Hafenstein et al., 2002; Lockhart et al., 2021), rendering gifted identification procedures oftentimes inconsistent across states. Giftedness is a complex, dynamic phenomenon (Sousa, 2009). For the purpose of this research study, giftedness will be defined as an individual who demonstrates, or has the potential to demonstrate, an exceptionally high level of performance in one or more areas of human endeavor (Sousa, 2009).

**Rationale for Gifted Education**

In their review of gifted individuals who went on to become eminent, Goertzel and Hansen (2004) note that nearly all of their subjects immensely disliked school (for most, gifted education simply did not exist), explicitly noting feelings of alienation,
boredom, and frustration with public education. For instance, Pablo Picasso “stubbornly refused to do anything but paint,” Albert Einstein disliked any “artificial show of knowledge or learning of facts that cluttered the mind,” and Gertrude Stein refused to take standardized exams (pp. 259-263). Like any other student with atypical learning needs, students performing at advanced levels have certain learning characteristics and require accommodations to make their learning meaningful and engaging (Delisle, 2019; Cotabish et al., 2016).

**Gifted Characteristics.** Gifted students are complex (Delisle, 2019). Educators may find themselves with certain classroom students who are a step ahead, who never stop talking, who persistently ask questions, who get lost in their own creative worlds, who seem “too emotional” and reactive, who have perfectionist tendencies, who maintain a voracious love of reading, and/or who seem obstinate but very capable (Delisle & Galbraith, 2015). Many educators may also not realize these are considered gifted characteristics (Delisle & Galbraith, 2015). Specifically, commonly identified gifted characteristics may include: the ability to comprehend material several grade levels above age peers; emotional depth and sensitivity at a young age; strong sense of curiosity; enthusiasm about unique interests and topics; quirky or mature sense of humor for one’s age; creative problem solving and imaginative expression; the ability to absorb and remember information quickly with few repetitions needed; self-awareness, social-awareness, and an awareness of global issues; a need for precision and perfection (Davidson Institute, 2023).

**Gifted Cognitive and Affective Needs.** Gifted students often have cognitive and affective learning needs that differ from those of their atypical peers. Asynchrony,
intensity, and moral sensitivity are frequently inherent in the gifted experience (Cross, 2018; Neihart et al., 2016; Silverman, 1994). Asynchronous development can often be the catalyst for certain behavioral dualities and overexcitabilities, rendering gifted students especially in need of special programming and services that support them cognitively and affectively (Cross, 2018; Delisle & Galbraith, 2015; Neihart et al., 2016). Without support, such needs, particularly in gifted adolescents, may result in a higher risk of suicide than their typically developing peers (Cross, 2018; Neihart et al., 2016). Gifted education not only provides both cognitive and affective support for overall development, but it also provides a space for students to develop their abilities with similar-ability peers (Cross, 2018; Delisle & Galbraith, 2015).

**Gifted Identification.** Throughout the United States, policies by state vary in their assessments for gifted identification and programming (Lockhart et al., 2021). Assessments include the methods, tools, and data collected as a body of evidence (BOE) for use in identification and programming and generally include both quantitative (i.e., cognitive test scores) and qualitative (i.e., student work samples) data (CDE, 2021). While some of the data in a BOE can be used to meet the criteria for gifted identification, other data or information may be used to build a learner profile to develop appropriate programming and service options. Additionally, the BOE for some students may not lead to a formal gifted identification. Still, data may demonstrate the student should be included in a “talent pool” to foster strengths over time toward potential identification (CDE, 2021). As part of the BOE, many states utilize an assessment process involving a cognitive measure in the form of a standardized, nationally-normed test, such as the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), and generally identify in the areas of general
intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative thinking, leadership, or the arts (e.g., visual, performing, music, dance) (Hafenstein et al., 2022; Lockhart et al., 2021).

**Gifted Programming and Services.** After a student has been officially identified as gifted, programming and services are coordinated. Based on a student’s identified area(s) of giftedness and/or talent, programming should be aligned with the student’s assessment data and individualized learning plan (e.g., Advanced Learning Plan, Service Plan, Written Education Plan, etc.), which may include specific teaching and learning strategies as well as evidence-based interventions (e.g., acceleration, cluster grouping, concurrent enrollment, differentiated instruction) (Hafenstein et al., 2022). Programming may be delivered in various ways to support cognitive and affective learning goals (e.g., general education classroom, resource location, small instructional group, pullout programs, social skills training, early college, career planning, mentorships, advanced placement courses, etc.).

**Underrepresentation.** While gifted education within the U.S. ideally practices the broad and inclusive identification and programming strategies described in the section above, the reality is that it often prioritizes narrow, non-comprehensive cognitive measures and supports, dismisses student strengths that cannot be identified with IQ tests, and devalues non-Western conceptions of intelligence (Sternberg et al., 2021). Ford and Grantham (2003) assert that:

At no time during its history has the field of gifted education been able to boast having a representative number of minority students in its programs. Solutions have varied, but outcomes have been the same – minority students continue to be underrepresented. (p. 224)
Specifically, the underrepresentation of BIPOC students plagues gifted K-12 programming throughout the United States, with underrepresentation in gifted education programs ranging from 63%-74% (Black), 59%-72% (Native Hawaiian), 53%-66% (Hispanic), and 48%-63% (American Indian, Alaska Native) (Rinn et al., 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). Such statistics “are a sad commentary on the equity in national identification of gifted students” and demonstrate a de facto segregation (Sternberg et al., 2021, p. 236).

**Researcher’s Personal Context**

When the Daisy (pseudonym) siblings, two Diné (Navajo) students, began learning Spanish in my 8th grade classroom, they were both observant, reflective, and engaged. As time and rapport throughout the school year developed, I found them both to be incredibly adept in creating visual representations of their linguistic learning, sharply witty in their approach to humor, partial to using lateral thinking toward applying language use distinctions, articulate in both thought and deed, as well as perceptive in who they chose, and kept long-term, as friends. The Daisy siblings, in many areas, should have been identified as gifted and talented; however, they never were, nor did any kind of appropriate district programming exist to develop their unique gifts and talents. Instead, the district gifted programming prioritized specific academic aptitude in math and reading, with only acceleration options available. I often wonder where the Daisy siblings are today and how gifted identification and programming could have impacted their learning journeys – would it have nurtured their abilities holistically and responsively, or would it have just pushed them further into an assimilationist space better designed for their gifted White counterparts?
Research Problem

The field of gifted education has a history rooted in White, Western traditions and definitions of cultural heritage, history, values, language, and beliefs (Owens et al., 2018). At the beginning of the 20th century, giftedness was conceptualized as high intellectual functioning, often aligning with eugenicist Lewis Terman’s revision of the intelligence test published by French scholars Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon (Brookwood, 2016). Terman asserted that intelligence tests would be used to further the agenda of race hygiene, eliminate degeneracy, and prove non-White races possessed limited intelligence, rendering the foundation for many gifted identification procedures and corresponding programming not only Westernized but racist and elitist (Brookwood, 2016; Sternberg et al., 2021). When considering Indigenous students in particular, Western traditions and definitions often perpetuate Western assimilation, dominance, and continued colonization (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), leaving many Indigenous gifted students, such as the Daisy siblings, across the United States under identified, overlooked, underserved, and, ultimately, *systematically oppressed* (Patel, 2016) in gifted education programs (Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Gentry & Gray, 2021b; Sternberg et al., 2021). Moreover, Native American and Alaska Native children are overrepresented in special education programs, which causes both short-term and long-term harm (NCLD, 2023).

As such, the research problem is threefold. Westernized traditions and definitions (described above) perpetuate 1) inequity in both theory and practice (Owens et al., 2018); 2) gifted identification and programming that appeals to predominantly White, middle-class students (Hines et al., 2016); and 3) Western approaches (i.e., positionality) toward
cultural responsiveness (Sternberg et al., 2021). In some cases across the United States, this threefold problem results in the elimination of gifted programming entirely in the name of education equity, preventing brilliant, talented members of diverse cultural groups from being discovered, nurtured, and valued in ways that align with their own worldviews rather than dominating, Western worldviews (Silverman & Davis, 2021; Sternberg et al., 2021).

**Research Problem 1: Westernized Definitions of Giftedness Perpetuate Inequity in Both Theory and Practice**

The definition of giftedness that schools and districts operate under directly impacts how students are identified for gifted education programming (Sternberg et al., 2021). Callahan et al. (2012) explain that the definitions of giftedness that many states across the United States utilize are historically, and often currently, characterized around Lewis Terman’s work in the study of gifted children as well as his revision of the intelligence test, “often referred to as the IQ definition of giftedness” (p. 15). Subsequently, many educators often misunderstand the dualities of gifted behaviors, overlook how certain diverse barriers may conceal latent ability, and frequently fail to recognize demonstrations of potential gifted traits, aptitudes, and behaviors such as humor, creativity, leadership, reasoning, and problem-solving as characteristics of giftedness that may be revealed in positive or negative ways (Hines, 2017).
Research Problem 2: Westernized Definitions of Giftedness Perpetuate Gifted Identification and Programming That Appeals to Predominantly White, Middle-Class Students

Many gifted K-12 identification practices and gifted education programs are systematically designed around Westernized educational philosophies that inherently promote a monocultural narrative surrounding notions of intelligence (Owens et al., 2018). Often, K-12 gifted programs boast inclusive, dynamic gifted education philosophies, but their actual day-to-day programming practices appeal to White, Western, middle-class students (Hines et al., 2016). Oftentimes, educators instinctively leverage gifted identification procedures to reaffirm the Western values inherent in the school system, to which they (the educators) have committed their own abilities (Castellano, 2002, p. 97). Consequently, gifted identification and programming tend to promote a “one-size-fits-all paradigm” (Salazar, 2013, p. 124), resulting in the underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students in gifted K-12 programming throughout the United States (Rinn et al., 2020). As mentioned previously, at no point in its history has the field of gifted education had a representative number of minority students in its programs (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Research Problem 3: Westernized Definitions of Giftedness Perpetuate Western Approaches to Cultural Responsiveness

Many K-12 standards, policies, and legislation reflect a Western paradigm; gifted education is no different (Owens et al., 2018). Four Arrows (2020) asserts that Western-created problems tend to rely on Western amelioration approaches to address those very problems, often with little-to-no success. Such an issue may be the result of “assumptions
buried deep into cultural routines [that] create bias against those who hold any
epistemology that diverges from the mainstream perspective” (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010, p. 69). More than just a gap, there is a trend in the literature in which giftedness, as it relates to Indigenous students, is often examined and told from a Western positionality.


> Bringing diverse groups of people together when members of one group have wielded power over members of another group, without giving explicit attention to changing the imbalance of power and status, will not resolve conflict…The fact of the matter is that the education they [historically oppressed minorities] receive from the oppressor only reinforces their oppression. (p. 39 as cited in Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010, p. 69)

As such, it is imperative that culturally responsive practices are informed by those they are intended to serve, not just simply from a Western positionality (Aguilar et al., 2021; Gentry & Gray, 2021b).

**Significance of Problem**

Western traditions and definitions regarding giftedness (Owens et al., 2018) often perpetuate Western assimilation, dominance, and continued colonization (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Many Indigenous gifted students across the United States are severely underrepresented and underserved in gifted education programs (Gentry et al., 2014; Gentry & Gray, 2021b). To identify gifted potential equitably, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, which exist at the intersection of the child and their sociocultural context, must be considered (Sternberg, 2007). The field of gifted education cannot effectively address problems concerning inequity (problem 1) or Western-oriented
gifted identification and programming (problem 2) by implementing culturally responsive practices primarily from Western positionality (problem 3). Indigenous Worldview, in particular, may lend toward decentering Westernized narratives surrounding giftedness, decolonizing gifted programming and identification procedures, centering attention on non-Western definitions of giftedness as valuable, as well as acknowledging the cultural dimensions of giftedness toward more culturally responsive approaches to gifted education in both theory and practice.

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

Acknowledging that it is through sociocultural context that the phenomenon of giftedness is recognized, acknowledged, defined, and nurtured (Herring, 1996; Munro, 2011; Ngara, 2006; Peterson, 1999; Sternberg, 2007), the purpose of this qualitative interpretive phenomenological study is to examine how Indigenous worldview can inform culturally responsive gifted education. The main research question this study sought to address was – In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education? Research study sub-questions included:

1. How does [Indigenous participant] perceive giftedness?
2. How does [Indigenous participant] nurture giftedness?
3. How does understanding giftedness within Indigenous worldview:
   a. Expand Western understandings of giftedness?
   b. Inform culturally responsive gifted education practices?

**Indigenous and Western Worldviews**

The term *worldview* could be described as “a general philosophical orientation about the world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 5). The terms *Indigenous* and *Western*
are used here to distinguish one tradition from the other. Indigenous thought is not homogenous and encompasses a range of differing philosophical positions within it; however, *Indigenous worldview* broadly acknowledges the many shared commonalities and the diversity of Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2020). While Western thought also encapsulates numerous philosophical positions, it does come from a Western intellectual tradition arising from Western culture (Kovach, 2020). As such, differentiating between Indigenous and Western traditions is not meant to create a “this or that” polarizing dichotomy; rather, it is simply to recognize the identity of each and to offset the assimilating tendency of Eurocentrism (Kovach, 2020). When considering Indigenous and Western worldviews, the following excerpt from Lopez’s (2020) novel *Horizon* poignantly exemplifies the differences between the two:

> When I was young and just beginning to travel with [Indigenous people], I imagined that they saw more and heard more than I did, that they were overall simply more aware than I was…If my companions and I, for example, hiking the taiga encountered a grizzly bear feeding on a caribou carcass, I would tend to focus almost entirely on the bear. My companions would focus on the part of the world which, at that moment, the bear was only a fragment…They would repeatedly situate the smaller thing within the larger thing, back and forth. As they noticed trace odors in the air or listened for birdsong or the sound of brittle brush rattling, they in effect extended the moment of encounter with the bear backward and forward in time. Their framework for the phenomenon, one that I might later shorten to just “meeting the bear,” was more voluminous than mine; and where my temporal boundaries for the event would normally consist of little more than the moments of the encounter with the bear, theirs included the time before we arrived, as well as the time after we left. For me, the bear was a noun, the subject of a sentence; for them, it was a verb, the gerund *bearing*. (pp. 167-168)

While not all Indigenous-identifying individuals may operate within an Indigenous worldview, Kovach (2021) further explains that the “two cultural paradigms [Indigenous and Western] approach knowledge creation, production, and dissemination
in differing ways. Certainly, they intersect, but they are each distinctive knowledge paradigms” (p. 30). Similarly, Huaman and colleagues (2019) explicitly note the balance between Indigenous worldview and Western worldview “is precarious, and generations of oppressive educational policies and practices have wrought damage in Indigenous communities, making schooling a contentious process as an instrument of coloniality” (p. 3). Western worldview tends to leverage education toward separation and assimilation, where knowledge is compartmentalized apart from the nuanced relationships that define human existence (Huaman et al., 2019). In many regards, Indigenous worldview and Western worldview manifest in contrasting ways (Table 1).

Understanding and honoring non-Western worldviews thus becomes an essential part of culturally responsive practices in gifted education, particularly concerning gifted identification and programming (Sternberg et al., 2021). Specifically, when a gifted student and gifted education practitioner and/or researcher operate under differing worldviews, there may exist a detrimental mismatch in both expectations and beliefs surrounding identification and corresponding programming (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Kawagley, 2006; Munro, 2011).

Table 1

Contrasting Worldviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Worldview</th>
<th>Western Worldview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-hierarchical</td>
<td>Rigid hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on community welfare</td>
<td>Focus on self-and personal gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth and all systems as living and loving</td>
<td>Earth as an unloving “it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inseparability of head and heart</td>
<td>More head than heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible boundaries and interconnected systems</td>
<td>Rigid boundaries and fragmented systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular use of alternative consciousness</td>
<td>Unfamiliarity with alternative consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on holistic interconnectedness</td>
<td>Disregard for holistic interconnectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time as cyclical</td>
<td>Time as linear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19
Learning as experiential and collaborative  
Conflict resolution as a return to community  
Nonlinear, lateral thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning as didactic</th>
<th>Conflict mitigated via revenge or punishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linear thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Worldview Manifestations chart by Four Arrows (2020)

**Conceptual Frameworks: Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening**

The conceptual frameworks of *Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening* are used to frame this study. In tandem, these two conceptual frameworks are inherently well-suited to address the culturally *un*responsive conditions surrounding Westernized gifted education practices (Johnson-Bailey, 2012; McGloin, 2015). By deeply listening to the voices of individuals of non-Western positionalities, stakeholders in the field of gifted education may address questions such as “what position informs gifted education and what position is omitted?” as well as “what happens when diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness decenter Western ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education?” (adapted from Johnson-Bailey, 2012, p. 261).

Furthermore, these two conceptual frameworks encourage “listen[ing] with the conscious knowledge of how colonial relations of power operate and how [non-Indigenous] subjects can be active agents in re-positioning [themselves] within that schema” (McGloin, 2015, p. 276). For instance, while Westernized positionality toward gifted education tends to lean more individualist, with students being singled out, so to speak, for gifted programming, Indigenous positionality often emphasizes connectedness and community (Cajete, 2000).

**Listening to the Voices of Non-Western Positionalities**

The Pedagogy of Listening first emerged from Reggio Emilia’s approach to early children’s education through careful listening, which gave rise to a learning methodology
(Rinaldi, 2006). It is often used in the co-creation of knowledge and meaning (Smith-Gilman, 2018) as well as “to reconstruct education at the levels of axiology, epistemology, and methodology” (Hua, 2012, p. 67). That is, the act of listening is an evolving process whereby stakeholders listen and attend to multiple perspectives and positionalities, in which various interpretations of what is valuable and what counts as knowledge are honored (Rinaldi, 2006; Smith-Gilman, 2018). Additionally, hooks (2010) reminds us that “a powerful way we connect with a diverse world is by listening to the different stories we are told,” particularly with respect to having conversations about worldviews (p. 53). Specifically, hooks (2010) asserts that “alternative stories will and do find a voice in the counter-narratives of subordinated people and their allies from the dominant [Western] group” (p. 46). Freire (2001), too, notes the need for dialogic pedagogy, especially in colonial contexts. The Pedagogy of Listening is one such dialogic pedagogy, as it inherently encompasses positionality and permits a sharing, re-visioning, and enlargement of learner narratives concerning the world, thus allowing longstanding (often Western) narratives to begin to transform while simultaneously expanding current understandings of what giftedness is conceptually (Charaniya, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2009).

Moreover, the Pedagogy of Listening requires a process that acknowledges coloniality and the evolution of Indigenous worldview over time (Huaman et al., 2019). When used in the context of Indigenous worldview, The Pedagogy of Listening shifts positionality, in which Western listeners must consider their complicity in colonial practices and the possibility of the inability to deeply hear what is being said (McGloin, 2015). McGloin (2015) explains that an inability to hear deeply equates not to an actual
physical inability to hear but to the failure “to listen with the conscious knowledge of
how colonial relations of power [Western worldview] operate and how [non-Indigenous]
subjects can be active agents in re-positioning [themselves] within that schema” (p. 276).
Overall, such conceptual frameworks lend toward decentering Westernized narratives
surrounding giftedness toward exploring more culturally responsive gifted education
practices.

Chapter Summary

This introduction chapter examined a threefold research problem: Westernized
definitions of giftedness perpetuate 1) inequity in both theory and practice, 2) gifted
identification and programming that appeals to predominantly white, middle-class
students, and 3) Western approaches to cultural responsiveness. Subsequently, Native
American gifted students remain a significantly underrepresented population within
gifted education across the United States (Hodges et al., 2018). Framed by the conceptual
frameworks of Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening, this study aimed to listen to
the voices of Indigenous positionalities surrounding the phenomenon of giftedness.
Specifically, Indigenous Worldview may lend toward not only decentering Western ways
of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education but using
culturally responsive practices informed by those they are intended to serve. In chapter
two, the researcher systematically reviewed the literature regarding the
underrepresentation of Indigenous students in gifted education, Indigenous conceptions
of giftedness, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and culturally responsive gifted
education.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The previous chapter presented the various research problems resulting from dominating Western orientations in the field of gifted education (Owens et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2020). When considering Indigenous students in particular, such Western orientations perpetuate assimilation, dominance, and continued colonization (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Additionally, chapter one presented Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening as the conceptual frameworks used to ground this qualitative phenomenological study. This review examined previous and current literature on how many Westernized frameworks, anchored to Western worldview, still dominate the field, particularly regarding how giftedness is conceptualized, identified, and nurtured (Brookwood, 2016; Cross, 2021; Hodges et al., 2018; hooks, 2003; Owens et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2020; Silverman & Davis, 2021).

Previous Literature Reviews

Within the last decade, one meta-analysis (Gentry et al., 2014) regarding giftedness in Indigenous contexts analyzed a previous literature review (Gentry & Fugate, 2012) on gifted Native American students. The meta-analysis (Gentry et al., 2014) specifically examined generalizations and assumptions concerning Native American students within gifted education research. Additionally, there were two more recent meta-analyses regarding underrepresented populations of gifted students, including Indigenous students; one meta-analysis (Hodges et al., 2018) focused on current gifted identification
procedures, and the other (Sternberg et al., 2021) examined the biased legacy of gifted education.

In their analysis, Gentry et al. (2014) note that not only is there limited research on Native American gifted students, but the research that does exist tends to make assumptions and generalizations. The researchers found that much of the literature concerning Native American gifted students was primarily dated and frequently generic, with one-third of the empirical literature not identifying the tribal affiliation of their sample. Specifically, Gentry et al. (2014) identified literature-based assumptions and generalizations surrounding Native American students’ talent development, culture and traditions, cognitive learning styles, and communication. These findings were reviewed by educators and tribal members of three Native American communities (i.e., Diné, Lakota, and Ojibwe) for relevance and accuracy, in which the communities highlighted the need for more cultural understanding between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous educators.

In their large meta-analysis on gifted and talented identification practices in the United States, Hodges et al. (2018) sought to examine the underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students in gifted programs as related to traditional methods of identification (i.e., IQ and standardized achievement tests) and nontraditional methods (i.e., portfolio of artifacts). This meta-analysis included 54 studies with 85 effect sizes representing 191,287,563 students. In the analysis, Native American students, in particular, were found to be underrepresented in 43 states. At the conclusion of the meta-analysis, Hodges et al. (2018) calculated risk ratios for nontraditional methods of identification (0.34 risk ratio) as well as traditional methods (0.27 risk ratio), noting that
both these risk ratios constitute “de facto segregation within public schools” (Hopkins & Garret 2010 as cited in Hodges et al., 2018). Hodges et al. (2018) explain that while nontraditional identification methods help identify more underrepresented students as gifted, the meta-analysis results demonstrate that better methods are still needed to address the issues of inequity in gifted education.

In their meta-analysis, Sternberg et al. (2021) explicitly acknowledge the injustice of structural and systemic racism in the field of gifted education, historically and currently. The researchers examined seminal historical figures who shaped the field, paying particular attention to their (the historical figures’) theories and measures of intelligence, including Sir Francis Galton, Lewis Terman, Leta Hollingworth, Anne Roe, Julian Stanley, and Alfred Binet. Throughout the examination, Sternberg et al. (2021) conclude with a countering of 10 identified assumptions, as follows: 1) identification of gifted students must not be limited to narrow cognitive measures; 2) assessments of intelligence must be comprehensive; 3) it is exceedingly difficult to separate genetic and environmental effects; 4) early environmental effects are problematical for early identification; 5) children who grow up in harsh environment are not wholly at a disadvantage; they have strengths that IQ tests do not measure; 6) it is useful to distinguish between individuals who are transactionally gifted and those who are transformationally gifted; 7) individual differences must be considered in real-world outcomes; 8) nonverbal tests have challenges and must be used and interpreted in responsible ways; 9) different cultures view intelligence in different ways and this affects test performance; 10) the primary approaches to gifted education services are ineffective for students who face the most daunting challenges.
A common conclusion among the aforementioned researchers (Gentry et al., 2014; Hodges et al., 2018; Sternberg et al., 2021) was a call on future researchers to engage with the voices of underrepresented populations, such as Indigenous communities, to inform issues of inequity in gifted education. Heeding this call, my review of the literature aimed to shift away from Western positionality by exploring the role of Indigenous worldview in culturally responsive gifted education; I aimed to approach this shift in positionality through the literature review inclusion criteria, which is designed to pay particular attention to Indigenous voices, histories, narratives, and participation as well as explicitly acknowledge tribal, group, band, and/or regional affiliation, which is often overlooked (Gentry et al., 2014).

Current Literature Review Purpose

In alignment with the conceptual frameworks of Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening, this literature review aimed to examine the intersection of Indigenous worldview, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and culturally responsive gifted education. The literature review was also guided by the research question: In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education? To address this question, it was tempting to begin with an investigation into the literature on culturally responsive gifted education practices. However, a desired outcome of this literature review is understanding culturally responsive gifted education practices informed by the underrepresented population (in this case, Indigenous) such practices are intended to serve.

It was essential to begin the literature review by examining giftedness within the context of Indigenous worldview. Accordingly, this literature review used a backward
design approach (Jensen et al., 2017; Wyatt, 2021) to guide, organize, and analyze emergent themes (Figure 1). A backward design approach, often used as an instructional design strategy, was particularly helpful in ensuring that Indigenous voices, and subsequently Indigenous positionality, stayed centered throughout the literature review methods. The three categories of the backward design approach (e.g., Indigenous Worldview, Cultural Dimensions of Giftedness, and Culturally Responsive Gifted Education) were explicitly used to craft the inclusion criteria, as explained in the next section.

**Figure 1**

*Literature Review: Backward Design Approach*

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**Literature Review Method**

**Inclusion Criteria**

To conduct this literature review, I completed an electronic database search, a hand search, and an ancestral review. It was crucial to cast a broad research inclusion net
for domestic (United States) and international studies regarding Indigenous students and giftedness. The reason for this broad research inclusion net is threefold: 1) the research on Indigeneity and giftedness is extremely limited; 2) while my potential research study focused on Native American K-12 students within the United States, the Indigenous experience is not limited to the United States; and 3) a history of forced assimilation in the education system in the United States and internationally (e.g., Canada, Australia) calls on researchers to honor and include a variety of Indigenous contexts. Accordingly, the included research articles met the following criteria:

1) The study examined giftedness within Indigenous worldview.
   a. The study involved works (e.g., histories, narratives, stories, visuals, metaphors, philosophical reflections, or interpretive styles) created or informed by Indigenous participants.

2) The study examined the cultural dimensions of giftedness.
   a. The study examined Indigenous conceptions of giftedness.

3) The study examined culturally responsive practices in gifted education.
   a. The study involved Indigenous participants and gifted education.
      i. The study examined implications regarding Indigenous participants and gifted education.
      ii. The study explicitly noted the tribal, group, band, or regional affiliation of Indigenous participants.

4) The study focused primarily on K-12 school settings.

5) The study was peer-reviewed and published in English.
Electronic Database Search

Academic Search Complete and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) were used to identify relevant articles during the electronic database search. The search of the electronic databases included the years through and including 1990 to 2022 using the following search terms: (“Indigenous” OR “Native American” OR “American Indian” OR “Alaskan Native” OR “Hawaiian Native” OR “Indigenous worldview”) and (“gifted*” OR “gifted* and talent*” OR “gifted students” OR “gifted* child*” OR “gifted* education”) and (“cultur* responsiv*” OR “cultur* responsiv* K-12 practices”). The search of both databases yielded 212 articles, 178 of which were excluded based on abstract review or article duplication. With the remaining 34 articles, a full-text review was conducted. After the full-text review, 14 of the articles were eliminated based on the following elements that did not align with the inclusion criteria: a) the study did not specify the tribal, band, and/or regional affiliation of participants but treated all Indigenous participants as one homogenous population; b) the study did not involve works (e.g., histories, narratives, stories, conceptual writings, visuals, metaphors, interpretive styles) created or informed by Indigenous participants; c) the study involved Indigenous participants, but did not seek Indigenous conceptions of giftedness as informed by Indigenous participants; d) the study did not examine the overall topic within K-12 settings or contexts that could inform K-12 settings. A total of 20 studies met the inclusion criteria during the electronic database search.

Hand Search and Ancestral Review

Following the electronic database search, a hand search was conducted on three relevant journals, the most common of the 20 identified articles: Journal for the
Education of the Gifted, Journal of American Indian Education, and Gifted Child Quarterly. The hand search included articles through and including the years 2019-2022. One additional article was found (Gentry & Gray, 2021a) in the Journal of American Indian Education. An ancestral review of relevant syntheses and meta-analyses (Gentry et al., 2014; Hodges et al., 2018; Sternberg et al., 2021) was also conducted, including the years 1990-2022. One additional article was found (Robbins, 1991). In total, 22 articles met the criteria for inclusion in the literature review (Carter, 2021; Christensen, 1991; de Alencar et al., 2016; Gentry et al., 2021; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Gibson, 1998; Harslett, 1996; Hartley, 1991; Heiser, 2018; Herring, 1996; Koukkanen, 2005; LaBatte, 1991; Lara-Cooper, 2014; Miller, 2005; Montgomery, 1990; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Robbins, 1991; Romero, 1994; Tonemah, 1991a; Tonemah, 1991b; Williamson, 2014).

**Literature Review Results**

Combined, the 22 research article studies included 1,106 Indigenous participants representing a combined total of 59 domestic (United States) and international tribal, band, community, or regional affiliations. The 1,106 participants included Indigenous tribal community members \( n = 689 \), including parents, educators \( n = 180 \), and students \( n = 237 \) in grades K-12. Of the studies, 13 were focused domestically (Christensen, 1991; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Gentry et al., 2021; Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; LaBatte, 1991; Lara-Cooper, 2014; Montgomery, 1990; Robins, 1991; Romero, 1994; Tonemah, 1991a; Tonemah, 1991b) and nine were focused internationally (Carter, 2021; de Alencar, 2016; Gibson, 1998; Harslett, 1996; Koukkanen, 2005; Miller, 2005; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Williamson, 2014). Eleven articles examined gifted

Of the 22 article studies, 12 were traditional qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research studies involving Indigenous participants (Carter, 2021; Gibson, 1998; Harslett, 1996; Hartley, 1991; Heiser, 2018; Lara-Cooper, 2014; Miller, 2005; Montgomery, 1990; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Robbins, 1991; Romero, 1994), three were descriptive studies involving the analysis of gifted identification measures and/or programming as related to Indigenous K-12 students (Gentry et al., 2021; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Tonemah, 1991a), and seven reflected philosophical works on existing gifted education research as described or informed by an Indigenous individual(s) (Christensen, 1991; de Alencar et al., 2016; Herring, 1996; Koukkanen, 2005; LaBatte, 1991; Tonemah, 1991b; Williamson, 2014). The 22 research articles were analyzed for themes. Three major themes emerged across the literature: 1) giftedness is a cultural phenomenon, 2) the purpose for identifying giftedness is bound to the cultural context, and 3) there is a glaring need to address Indigenous student missingness in gifted education programming, which is the result of Western-oriented gifted identification processes acting as a hidden curriculum.
Theme 1: Giftedness is a Cultural Phenomenon

The literature confirms that giftedness within Indigenous worldview differs in many ways from Western understandings of giftedness. While one Indigenous group is not representative of all Indigenous groups, such research findings certainly put into perspective how giftedness is conceptualized outside of Western worldview, particularly in regard to understanding giftedness as a cultural phenomenon.

Indigenous conceptions of giftedness. Table 2 examines how giftedness is conceptualized based on the 11 studies that explicitly examined Indigenous conceptions of giftedness. The findings (see Table 2) demonstrate how there are some similarities between gifted characteristics identified within Western contexts (as described in chapter one) and Indigenous contexts, such as the ability to absorb and remember information quickly, creative problem-solving, and aptitude for self and social awareness (Davidson Institute, 2023). Additionally, there is some overlap between Western (also described in chapter one) and Indigenous approaches to gifted identification, specifically in the areas of leadership, the visual and performing arts, and general intellectual ability (Hafenstein et al., 2022; Lockhart et al., 2021).

However, the findings also suggest that the aptitudes, attributes, and characteristics associated with giftedness are culturally embedded (Christensen, 1991; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Gentry et al., 2021; Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; Lara-Cooper, 2014). Indigenous communities often differ from Western communities in how giftedness is defined, recognized, valued, and nurtured (Carter, 2021; de Alencar et al., 2016; Gibson, 1998; Harslett, 1996; Hartley, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; LaBatte, 1991; Miller, 2005; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Romero, 1994). Specifically, gifted
identification within Indigenous worldview extends to spiritual intelligence, including engaging in practices related to dreaming and storytelling; naturalistic and land-based intelligence and aptitude, including physical ability and bravery pertaining to hunting, planting, and harvesting; as well as and cultural intelligence, including language revitalization and maintenance (Carter, 2021; de Alencar et al., 2016; Harslett, 1996; Hartley, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; Miller, 2005; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Lara-Cooper, 2014; Romero, 1994; Heiser, 2018).

As such, within Indigenous contexts, the gifted areas of leadership, the visual and performing arts, and intellectual ability are intrinsically expressed through communal values and kinship (Carter, 2021), communication toward the goal of unifying others toward a more significant purpose (Miller, 2005), goodness and kindness toward others (de Alencar et al., 2016), carefully reasoned understanding of right and wrong (Miller, 2005), the ability to interact with Western society while staying in touch with cultural roots (Miller, 2005), ability to handle real-life problems with wit and foresight (Lara-Cooper, 2014; Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007), and being spiritually skilled in helping to fulfill community roles and traditions (Heiser, 2018).

Table 2

*Indigenous Conceptions of Giftedness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11 Studies</th>
<th>Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>Indigenous Conceptions of Giftedness</th>
<th>Outlook on Giftedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carter (2021)</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</td>
<td>Naturalistic and spiritual intelligence/ Leadership expressed through communal values and kinship/ Communication skills/ Motivation to achieve</td>
<td>It is seen as inappropriate to show excellence and aspiration in a manner that promotes individualism and to be involved in opportunities inaccessible to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all. Giftedness is something that is both learned and innate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Region/Community</th>
<th>Key Attributes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>de Alencar et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Marubo, Indigenous to Brazilian Amazon</td>
<td>Physical strength and abilities related to hunting, planting, and harvesting/ Wisdom based on experience and communication with ancestors/ Ability to solve problems in a creative or unconventional way/ Musical and dance abilities/ Goodness and kindness toward people/ Ability to listen and interpret nature’s voice (e.g., birds, river, trees, and wind)</td>
<td>The solidarity, sharing, and distribution of wealth resulting from gifts and talents are emphasized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harslett (1996)</td>
<td>Aboriginal communities speaking Wongutha, Intjib, and Wajarri languages</td>
<td>Clever in word and deed/ To have a clever head and be a smart thinker</td>
<td>Giftedness is considered to be something that is both environmental and the possession of exceptional natural abilities, and should be possessed with humility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartley (1991)</td>
<td>Diné (Navajo Reservation, Arizona)</td>
<td>Excellent oral memory/ Problem solves using traditional approaches (e.g., singing, consulting with elders, etc.)/ Deeply reflective and observant/ Multilingual</td>
<td>There is no term for or similar to gifted in the Navajo language; abilities are to serve the community and greater good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koukkonen (2005)</td>
<td>Sami (Indigenous people of Sápmi, spanning central Norway and Sweden through northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula of Russia)</td>
<td>Language ability, considered the strongest marker of “Saminess” (p. 23)/ Land-based spirituality and wisdom/ Sharing one’s Attāldat (skill) with community and the natural environment</td>
<td>Skills should be supported and developed, especially in relation to livelihoods, such as reindeer herding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Giftedness Characteristics</td>
<td>Additional Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller (2005)</td>
<td>Cook Islands Maori speaking Aitutaki, Tokoroa, Rarotonga</td>
<td>Good memory and communication skills, especially to bring the community together with a unified purpose. Carefully reasoned understanding of right and wrong. Skill in traditional performing arts. Ability to know and share Cook Island culture to others. Leadership and ability to move between mainstream society while staying in touch with cultural roots.</td>
<td>Giftedness should serve a communal purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngara &amp; Porath (2007, extension of 2006 study)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara-Cooper (2014)</td>
<td>Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk (Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation, California)</td>
<td>The human way (k’winya’nya:nma:awhiniw)/ Knowledge and skills (rieko)/ Respect (luoro)/ Comprehension of how to handle real-life problems (winjo).</td>
<td>Giftedness is characterized by living in balance and harmony with the world by having honor and respect for community members, the environment, self, ancestors, and creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romero (1994)</td>
<td>Keresan Pueblo (New Mexico)</td>
<td>Giftedness is intrinsically linked with cultural values in four domains: The humanistic or affective domain/the linguistic domain. The knowledge domain, a reflection of ingenuity, abundant cultural knowledge, and both long-term and short-term memory of custom.</td>
<td>Giftedness is viewed as a global human quality encompassed by all individuals and manifested through one’s contribution to the well-being of the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
application/ The domain of creativity, associated with psychomotor abilities, literally referring to the notable ability of creating with one’s hands

| Heiser (2018) | Nêhiyaw (Cree near Saskatchewan, Canada) | To be spiritually skilled in helping fulfill community roles (manacitowin)/ To be skilled in creating relationships with others (okiskinamahasowin)/ To be skilled in traditional cultural customs and practices, particularly storytelling, dreams, and visions | Within the culture, there are many forms of giftedness and many ways to be gifted; in fact, it is viewed that everyone has gifts, and these gifts have purpose and are important within the community. |
Theme 2: The Purpose for Identifying Giftedness is Bound to Cultural Context

The literature also suggested that within Indigenous worldview, the purpose of identifying giftedness often differs from Western worldview purposes for identification. For instance, Western approaches to gifted education tend to function within an individualistic orientation, singling students out, so to speak, for individualized approaches to identification and programming (Owens et al., 2018). The differences in the purpose for gifted identification within Indigenous contexts were most notable with respect to the role of community/collectivism as well as the holistic nature of learning and being within Indigenous worldview.

The role of community/collectivism. Within Indigenous worldview, possessing unique and special abilities or talents in specific areas is often only meaningful if applied and utilized to benefit others (Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; Peterson, 1999; Romero, 2014). Throughout the 11 studies that explicitly examined Indigenous conceptions of giftedness, each one found a collectivist orientation with respect to Indigenous participants’ outlook on giftedness (see Table 2). A common theme across all studies found that it is inappropriate to show excellence and aspiration in a manner that promotes individualism and/or to be involved in opportunities that are inaccessible to all (Carter, 2021). Gifted individuals are expected to embrace their abilities with humility (Harslett, 1996) and should leverage such abilities to serve a larger communal purpose (Koukkanen, 2005; Miller, 2005) or share any wealth resulting from such abilities in the spirit of community and solidarity (de Alencar et al., 2016).
Moreover, the findings (see Table 2) suggest that within Indigenous communities, abilities, traits, and talents are not highlighted for distinction to highlight one individual over another (Christensen, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; Tonemah, 1991a; Romero, 2014). In Harslett’s (1996) study, an Indigenous participant explained, “Aboriginal people do value and admire giftedness, but you must be humble about your gift. Aboriginal people do not label people. You are all the same. You just develop, and you will be respected because you have talent” (p. 102). Similarly, in their study, Nygara and Porath (2007) note that “Ndebele wisdom says ‘Ukuzitshaya isifuba ngesipho singenyulwa’ (If you brag about your gift, you will lose it’)” (p. 204). Rather, giftedness is recognized through contribution to the community’s well-being (Lara-Cooper, 2014; Miller, 2005; Romero, 2014; Robbins, 1991).

The holistic nature of learning and being. The terms gifted, education, science, and art do not exist in many Indigenous languages (Hartley, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; Romero, 1994). Within Indigenous worldview, these concepts are often integrated, holistic, and inter-connected and are simply considered k’winya’nya:nma-awhiniw (Hoopa, Yurok, Yaruk), the human way (Lara-Cooper, 2014). Specifically, giftedness is characterized by living in balance and harmony with the world through honor and respect for community members, the environment, self, ancestors, and creation (Lara-Cooper, 2014). Moreover, many Indigenous communities believe giftedness to be a global human quality (Romero, 1994), in which everyone has gifts that serve a purpose and are essential within the community (Heiser, 2018). A participant in Lara-Cooper’s (2014) explains that:
You have to know respect... culture... language... where you come from... everything that I have been taught I want to pass it down to my children... There is no number one or number two. I can’t say that language is more important than basket making. I can’t say that fishing is more important than jumping in the middle [a ceremonial dance movement] because everything has its own place. (p. 49)

However, the scholarship on Indigenous peoples in educational contexts is often deeply steeped in colonization and frequently assumes a Western perspective (Williamson, 2014; Gentry et al., 2021a; Tonemah, 1991a; Tonemah, 1991b). More specifically, Western scientific thought tends to privilege linear, individualist approaches to learning to the detriment of Indigenous approaches to learning and being (de Alencar et al., 2016). A holistic approach that includes the academic, social, cultural, spiritual, and physical elements of learning in tandem with knowing local Indigenous cultures, experiences, and histories is inherent to Indigenous worldview (Tonemah, 1991b).

**Theme 3: A Need to Address Indigenous Student Missingness**

*Missingness* is defined as students who could and should have been identified as gifted to receive specialized programming based on the percentages identified in each state (Gentry & Gray, 2021a). This theme was especially evident with respect to gifted identification acting as a hidden curriculum in K-12 gifted education programs.

*Gifted identification as a hidden curriculum.* The hidden curriculum that results in Indigenous gifted student *missingness* can be described as the Western-oriented “norms” within gifted education theory and practice. Specifically, a significant barrier to Indigenous participation in gifted K-12 programs is the racially, ethnically, and culturally biased identification procedures, which ultimately perpetuate such a hidden curriculum (Gentry et al., 2021; Gibson, 1998; Montgomery, 1990; Tonemah, 1991b). In their
research with the Indigenous Sami people of Sápmi, spanning central Norway and Sweden through northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula of Russia, Koukkanen (2005) explains that:

What is also needed in Samiland is a stronger awareness of the hidden curriculum and the effects of the colonial educational system – an understanding how historically, education has been a means for the governments to mold the colonized into roles serving the interests of the colonizer. (p. 22)

Furthermore, such a hidden curriculum often promotes a superficial view of Indigenous cultures as fixed in their beliefs and customs, which causes educators and researchers alike to focus on doing culturally responsive practices as opposed to being culturally responsive (Aguilar et al., 2021). For instance, of the 23 studies examined in this systematic literature review, eight approached researching gifted education in the context of Indigenous communities using pre-established Western theories and/or philosophies surrounding giftedness, including Garner’s Theory of Intelligence (Carter, 2021; Hartley, 1991; Heiser, 2018), Renzulli’s Three Ring Model (Heiser, 2018), Gagnés Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Harslett, 1996), and Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence (Ngara, 2006; Ngara and Porath, 2007), as well as assessments, such as the Torrance’s Test of Creativity (LaBatte, 1991) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scales (Montgomery, 1990). While these are significant and well-respected theories, philosophies, and assessments within the field of gifted education – and while theories such as Garner’s and Sternberg’s provide substantial scope for broadening definitions of giftedness to accommodate and acknowledge diverse views – they ultimately function most often within a Western orientation.
Moreover, Munro (2011) reminds us that Western approaches, often grounded in Western theories and philosophies, used to identify middle-class White students as gifted may be less effective for gifted students from Black, Latinx, and Indigenous backgrounds for several reasons. Specifically, these students may be 1) unaccustomed to answering questions simply to show knowledge; instead, they display their knowledge in response to authentic problems or issues; 2) perform poorly on paper-and-pencil tasks conducted in artificial settings; 3) perform poorly on culturally loaded tests, particularly those structured in a culture other than their own; 4) have learning and/or cognitive styles that are different from White students; and 5) have test anxiety surrounding stereotype threat (Munro, 2011). Without a critique of colonial processes and an understanding of the subtle ways in which colonialism and hegemony continue to operate, there is a danger of uncritically subscribing to the idea of schooling according to Western orientations, in which gifted identification becomes a uniquely dangerous hidden curriculum (Koukkanen, 2005).

As such, critical perspectives on Western orientations in gifted education not only lend toward addressing Indigenous student *missingness* in gifted education programs but validate cultural differences, assert cultural congruence of educational practices toward increasing student success in school, and push back against Western structures that tend to exclude the distinctive cultural habitus and capital of many students (Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; Peterson, 1999; Tonemah, 1991a; Tonemah, 1991b). Moreover, honoring Indigenous Worldview in gifted education inherently invites Indigenous students to reclaim and cultivate values of holistic being while simultaneously navigating

Discussion of Literature Review

Summary of Findings

My primary goal for this literature review was to use a backward design approach (see Figure 1) to examine the intersection of culturally responsive gifted education practices, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and Indigenous worldview. For many Indigenous individuals, giftedness reaches far beyond a definition, a screening process, or an identification procedure; it reaches into historical values, traditions, languages, and lifestyles of a culturally diverse group of people who are unlike most of the Western population in many respects (Romero, 1994). Rather than focusing on refining methods for identifying students for existing gifted programs, Indigenous worldview may inform a reexamination of culturally responsive gifted education in both theory and practice (Christensen, 1991; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Peterson, 1999).

Limitations and Future Research

Although this literature review sought to examine Indigenous worldview in the context of gifted education, limitations remain. This potential study intends to focus on Indigenous worldview and gifted education within the United States (U.S.); however, only 14 domestic (United States) articles fit the literature review inclusion criteria. While previous literature cautioned against taking a homogenous perspective of Indigenous communities (Gentry et al., 2014), the need to include domestic and international studies involving Indigenous worldview and giftedness across tribal affiliations may still perpetuate a generalized, homogenous view of Indigenous populations. Additionally,
much of the domestic literature concerning Indigenous conceptions of giftedness as well as culturally responsive gifted education practices for Indigenous students transpired in the early-to-mid ‘90s (Christensen, 1991; Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; LaBatte, 1991; Montgomery, 1990; Peterson, 1999; Robins, 1991; Romero, 1994; Tonemah, 1991a; Tonemah, 1991b). However, this dated and very limited research renders current research efforts regarding Indigenous worldview and cultural responsivity in U.S. gifted education all the more imperative.

**Chapter Summary**

Within the conceptual frameworks of *Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening*, this systematic literature review used a backward design to examine the intersection of Indigenous worldview, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and culturally responsive gifted education. Moreover, the inclusion criteria for this review of literature were explicitly designed to highlight Indigenous research study participants’ voices, histories, and narratives, as well as expressly acknowledge tribal, group, band, and/or regional affiliation, which is often overlooked (Gentry et al., 2014). Overall, 23 research studies met the inclusion criteria, of which only 11 explicitly examined Indigenous conceptions of giftedness. Three major themes emerged across the literature review studies, including 1) giftedness is a cultural phenomenon, 2) the purpose for identifying giftedness is bound to cultural context, and 3) a need to address Indigenous student missingness. Furthermore, much of the research was quite dated and very limited, which makes this research study on Indigenous worldview and cultural responsivity in U.S. gifted education a critical one.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The previous chapter established that it is through sociocultural context that the phenomenon of giftedness is recognized, acknowledged, defined, and nurtured (Herring, 1996; Munro, 2011; Ngara, 2006; Peterson, 1999; Sternberg, 2007). As described in chapter one, this study aimed to examine how Indigenous worldview may inform culturally responsive gifted education, in which the phenomenon of giftedness within the context of Indigenous worldview was deeply explored. As such, interpretive phenomenology, which focuses on how a particular phenomenon has been understood from the perspective of specific people in a certain context (Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018), was well-suited to the purpose of this study. This chapter presents the research setting and questions, participant selection criteria and procedures, research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Additionally, ethical considerations are discussed.

Research Context

Many K-12 gifted education practices are designed around Westernized educational philosophies that inherently promote a monocultural narrative surrounding notions of intelligence (Owens et al., 2018). The definitions of giftedness utilized throughout much of the United States are characterized by Lewis Terman’s problematic, racist work with intelligence testing (Callahan et al., 2012; Gentry et al., 2021). In reaction, many educators may instinctively leverage gifted identification
procedures to reaffirm the Western values inherent in the school system (Castellano, 2002, p. 97). Consequently, and somewhat ironically, gifted education practices tend to promote a “one-size-fits-all paradigm” (Salazar, 2013, p. 124), resulting in the underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students in gifted K-12 programming throughout the United States (Rinn et al., 2020).

Ultimately, cultural responsiveness surrounding giftedness tends to be examined from a Western positionality rather than the positionality of those the culturally responsive practices are intended to serve (Aguilar et al., 2021; Gentry & Gray, 2021b). Such an issue may be the result of assumptions buried deep into cultural routines that create bias against those who hold any epistemology that diverges from the mainstream perspective (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010, p. 69), which leaves numerous Indigenous gifted students across the United States severely underrepresented and underserved in gifted education programs (Gentry et al., 2014; Gentry & Gray, 2021b). As such, the research problem this study sought to address is threefold: Westernized definitions of giftedness perpetuate 1) inequity in both theory and practice, 2) gifted identification and programming that appeals to predominantly White, middle-class students, and 3) Western approaches to cultural responsiveness.

**Research Questions**

In alignment with the research problems, the main research question explored in this study was – In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education? The sub-questions included:

1. How does [Indigenous participant] perceive giftedness?
2. How does [Indigenous participant] nurture giftedness?
3. How does understanding giftedness within Indigenous worldview:
   a. Expand Western understandings of giftedness?
   b. Inform culturally responsive gifted education practices?

**Participant Context**

There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States (Bureau of Indian Education [BIE], n.d.). More than 200 tribes do not have federal recognition (O’Neill, 2021). As of 2022, there are 324 federally recognized Native American reservations in the United States (OMH, n.d.). The 2020 Census revealed that 87 percent of those who identify as American Indian (AI) or Alaska Native (AN) live outside of tribal land areas (OMH, n.d.). Approximately 13 percent of individuals identifying as AI or AN live on reservations or other trust lands. Reservation and trust lands are managed by an AI or AN tribe under the United States Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (OMH, n.d.). Centuries of assimilationist and relocation policies have created a landscape in which approximately 93 percent of Native students attend public schools. In comparison, most of the remaining seven percent attend schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and/or Native nations (RedCorn, 2020). Moreover, “while Native nations are politically sovereign and have certain inherent rights, their systems of education are entangled in state and federal bureaucracies” (RedCorn, 2020, p. 498).

Gentry and Gray (2021) point out that the majority of Native youth in K-12 schools, particularly in public schools, experience a sense of invisibility, which is “born from a lack of knowledge, compassion, empathy, and sensitivity to their concerns by teachers, curricula writers, program developers, and the dominant culture” (p. 118). The
individuals who often dominate K-12 educational professions (e.g., teachers, curricula writers, and program developers) are usually of the dominant culture and/or have been oriented into the dominant culture (Battiste, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). In the United States, fewer than two percent of teachers are either AI or AN, Pacific Islander, or of two or more races, while approximately 70 percent of teachers are White (Schaeffer, 2021). In reaction, “the habits of our educational systems are heavily dependent on professional skill sets developed through work experience and training in systems built around settler-colonial worldviews – not those of Native nations” (RedCorn, 2020, p. 499).

**Indigenous Knowledge Holders**

Many Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of advocacy efforts that impact the lives and educational wellbeing of Indigenous youths (United Nations, 2021). The Friends Committee on National Legislation (2016) posits that one of the priorities for Native American Advocacy is investing in Native youth, explaining that many tribes are working to heighten young Native Americans’ sense of purpose, cultural understanding, community belonging, and quality of education. There is an evident need to honor that Indigenous communities know what is best for Indigenous children (Gray & Gray, 2023). Specifically, Indigenous educators, researchers, and advocates are among the most critical access points in influencing the intellectual growth of their peoples (Gray & Gray, 2023), as these individuals are often active in their community cultural systems and are likely to “know how to truly center educational systems around local values and worldviews” (RedCorn, 2020, p. 502).
Participant Selection Procedures

In seeking to engage with Indigenous knowledge holders, participants in this study included Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates who work directly with, in, or for Indigenous communities toward improving the educational experiences for Native American students. Selected participants met the following participant inclusion criteria: a) *Educators* included Indigenous individuals who actively work as teachers, administrators, specialists, or directors in the K-12 education system with Indigenous student populations; b) *Researchers* included Indigenous individuals who actively work as researchers with or on topics related to K-12 Indigenous student populations; and c) *Advocates* included Indigenous individuals who actively work in an advocacy capacity for culturally appropriate (e.g., revitalizing, responsive, sustaining) education for K-12 Indigenous student populations. Participants’ roles (educator, researcher, advocate) often intersected (i.e., an Indigenous K-12 educator may have also identified as an Indigenous K-12 advocate, etc.). This study sought a national perspective as the underrepresentation of Indigenous students in gifted programming is a national problem (Gentry & Gray, 2021; Hodge et al., 2018). Participants thus represented numerous tribal, band, clan, and regional affiliations across the United States (see Figure 2). Participants were given a $100 digital Visa gift card for their participation in the study, funded by the Marcia Gentry Scholar Award and the University of Denver Education Dissertation Fellowship Award, which I received in the Spring of 2023.
Participant Recruitment

In alignment with seeking a national perspective of Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates, I first emailed the study introduction and invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A) to the research coordinator at the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), which is made up of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates from across the United States (NIEA, 2022). The NIEA is the only *national* organization advocating for improved educational opportunities to enable all Native students to thrive in the classroom and beyond (NIEA, 2022). Founded in 1969 by Native educators, the NIEA works to “equip all advocates with the knowledge and tools needed to support Native students in reaching their full potential” (NIEA, 2022, para 2). The NIEA connects tribal leaders, educators, and experts nationwide to provide innovative and culture-based
resources and services to ensure that Native students have the support necessary to thrive in the classroom and beyond (NIEA, 2022).

Upon IRB approval of the study, I reached out to the research coordinator for the NIEA with the IRB-approved study introduction and email invitation. The NIEA researcher coordinator responded and requested a meeting outside of a formal interview to ask questions and gather more information on the purpose and intention of this study. The meeting between the coordinator and myself lasted approximately an hour and a half. It involved a very open, honest, and meaningful conversation about where the participation “ask” was coming from and my role concerning the larger Native American/Indigenous community and K-12 education, including thoughts surrounding transparency, vulnerability, and allyship. The meeting concluded with the research coordinator requesting a copy of the study’s University of Denver IRB approval and acting as a bridge person (Belone et al., 2016) by sharing the study information and invitation to participate with the board of NIEA representatives, which included numerous Indigenous individuals who all met the participant inclusion criteria. The NIEA research coordinator acting as a bridge person and sharing this study with the NIEA board of representatives was instrumental in successful participant recruitment for this study.

Upon the NIEA research coordinator sharing the study information and invitation, the snowball sampling technique began. Interested individuals who met the participant inclusion criteria (described in the participant selection procedures section above) self-selected into the study as well as shared the study invitation information within their personal and/or professional networks. When potential participants reached out with
interest, I was very quick to follow up, with multiple follow up emails if needed. To collect a diverse representation of Indigenous worldviews surrounding giftedness while simultaneously avoiding a homogenous view of Indigenous participants (Gentry et al., 2014), specific tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations and corresponding findings of each participant were explicitly acknowledged and considered throughout the entirety of the research process, as indicated in the data collection and analysis sections. In total, 14 participants engaged with this research study, which is described in detail in the data collection section below. All 14 participants self-selected into this study, having heard about it from others through the snowball sampling process. All participants met the participant inclusion criteria, and none had to be excluded during the data collection timeframe. This is likely due to the intentionality of the snowball sampling starting point, which began with NIEA Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates, respectively.

**Rationale for Interpretive Phenomenology**

This study aimed to examine how Indigenous worldview may inform culturally responsive gifted education, in which the phenomenon of giftedness within the context of Indigenous worldview was deeply explored. Interpretive phenomenology involves understanding how a phenomenon within a particular context is understood (Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) and emphasizes the interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon (rather than only describing it). Additionally, interpretive phenomenology acknowledges that phenomena are always situated in a historical, cultural, and social context (Smith & Nizza, 2021), rendering it a well-suited methodology for the nature of this study. Moreover, phenomenology involves a research
design grounded in philosophy and psychology, in which the researcher explores the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as richly and deeply described by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The type of problem best suited for phenomenological research is one in which it is essential to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) also note that it is crucial to understand such shared experiences “in order to develop practices or policies” as well as “to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 79), two aspects critical to the field of gifted education and the authentic use of culturally responsive practices.

While phenomenological research approaches have been found to prioritize a deep understanding of diverse cultural nuances and subjective meanings, which often inherently fosters cultural sensitivity in the research process compared to more rigid and predefined methodologies (Kazanjian & Rutledge, 2020), it should be noted that an Indigenous research methodology would have been the most appropriate approach for a study such as this. For a research methodology to be correctly identified as an Indigenous methodology, it must be anchored in the Indigenous epistemology, theory, ethics, story, and community (Cajete, 2000; Kovach, 2021; Steinhauer, 2002). As a non-Indigenous individual who worked as the sole researcher on this study, it would have been inappropriate and potentially extractive for me to use an Indigenous research methodology (Kovach, 2021).

However, Nêhiyaw (Cree) researcher, scholar, and methodologist Kovach (2021) urges non-Indigenous researchers to challenge Western-oriented skepticism regarding Indigenous research approaches. She asserts that “the choosing of a [research paradigm]
is a political act” (Kovach, 2009, p. 53), and the choice to [align with] an Indigenous methodology “[is] an exercise of power” (Brayboy, 2018: p. xi). Conducting research, interpreting findings, and presenting those findings inherently involves a power dynamic that must be challenged (Kovach, 2021). Kovach calls on non-Indigenous researchers to embrace alternative methodological perspectives and resist Western gazes. Recognizing the significance of this call, I sought to align this study, to the best and extent of my ability, with Kovach’s suggested approach to Indigenous research methodology, the Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin research protocols. Moreover, Kovach (2021) posits that the interpretative dimension of research is a critical part of bridging understandings, noting:

All qualitative methodologies, even those with an empirical approach, are interpretative to some degree. I also conclude that Indigenous methodologies are interpretative. The interpretative nature of qualitative methodologies and Indigenous methodologies offers a bridge for understanding… [through] interpretative, relational meaning making, qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies can find a bridge or crosswalk… the interpretative nature of understanding fastens itself to the most intimate aspects of our experience, connecting us enough to find both foe and brethren. The pace between these two places is deeply political, where representation, method, and meaning vie to be heard, to be understood. (pp. 31-32)

With this mode of thought and alignment, interpretive phenomenology was selected as the methodology for this study.

Indigenous Research Methodology Alignment

If one aims to delve into Indigenous cultural knowledges from the perspective of Indigenous people, using a research methodology entirely founded in Western intellectual thought is a methodological conundrum (Kovach, 2021). Accordingly, I aimed to align all research study protocols with the Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin (Nêhiyaw knowledges) research framework developed by Kovach (see Table 3). This alignment is explicitly
explained throughout the following sections. In pursuit of methodological alignment with Indigenous research principles, it is imperative to acknowledge the nuanced diversity of Indigenous methodologies. I recognize that my engagement was an attempt at alignment rather than the direct use of an Indigenous research methodology. Like many approaches to Indigenous research methodologies, Kovach’s approach involves honoring community and cultural protocols, values, and needs as an integral part of research and emphasizes common principles of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility. While various approaches to Indigenous research methodologies exist, I chose Kovach’s research protocol framework to emphasize collaborative and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge, mainly through decolonizing ethics (Kovach, 2021).

Table 3

Attempted Alignment with Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin (Cree) Research Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin Research Protocols</th>
<th>Study Research Protocols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Backward design literature review, beginning with Indigenous worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Data collection protocol piloted with and reviewed by Indigenous field experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Amendment to IRB to apply field expert feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Decolonizing ethics</td>
<td>II. Decolonizing ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Critical reflexivity journal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Researcher in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Researcher preparation involving cultural protocols</td>
<td>IV. Researcher preparation involving cultural protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Cultural protocol: Positionality (conceptual framework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Cultural protocol: Pedagogy of Listening (conceptual framework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Researcher preparation involving a standardized qualitative research design</td>
<td>V. Researcher preparation involving standardized qualitative research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Interpretative phenomenology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Meaning making of knowledges gathered</td>
<td>VI. Meaning making of knowledges gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indigenous Epistemology: Indigenous Worldview

As described in chapter one, Indigenous worldview is deeply rooted in the diverse cultures of Native communities, which encompass a rich tapestry of unique identities, practices, and belief systems grounded in individual tribal, band, and clan affiliations (Four Arrows, 2020; Kovach, 2021). Indigenous worldview is often characterized by a holistic understanding of knowledge creation, production, and dissemination, emphasizing interconnectedness and harmony with the natural world (Cajete, 2000; Kovach, 2021). In many ways, Indigenous worldview starkly contrasts Western paradigms, which tend to compartmentalize knowledge and approach education from an individualistic standpoint. While perspectives grounded in Indigenous worldview share overarching themes of interconnectedness, community, and spirituality, the nuances and specific practices differ across tribes, bands, and clans, reinforcing the importance of respecting the unique identity of each Indigenous community. In the context of K-12 education research, recognizing and prioritizing Indigenous worldviews means embracing this diversity and understanding the specific cultural contexts that shape the educational experiences of Indigenous students (Battiste, 2013). Various strategies were used throughout the study to center Indigenous worldview, including a backward design
literature review approach, piloting the data collection protocol with Indigenous K-12 field experts identified in the review of literature, as well as an IRB amendment to apply said field expert feedback to the overall research study protocols.

**Backward Design Literature Review.** As noted in chapter two, the literature review adopted a backward design approach, aligning with the conceptual frameworks of *Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening*. The overarching goal was to explore the intersection of Indigenous worldview, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and culturally responsive gifted education. The deliberate choice to begin the literature review with an investigation into giftedness within the context of Indigenous worldview reflected the central research question: In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education? Rather than starting the review with literature on culturally responsive gifted education practices for Indigenous students, the review began with Indigenous worldview literature first. Inspired by backward design principles outlined by Jensen and colleagues (2017) and Wyatt (2021), this strategic approach ensured a focus on Indigenous voices and positionality throughout the literature review process. This intentional structure guided the literature review process and aligned with the broader research objective of understanding culturally responsive gifted education practices as informed by the unique perspectives of Indigenous populations.

**Piloting Data Collection Protocol with Indigenous Field Experts.** To ensure the continued centrality of Indigenous voices in this research, the data collection protocol was piloted with and reviewed by Indigenous field experts. Specifically, the protocol was piloted with Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer (member of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation and professor in the Department of Educational Policy at the University of Alberta) and Dr.
Don Trent Jacobs "Four Arrows" (professor in the School of Leadership Studies at Field Graduate University and former Dean of Education at Oglala Lakota College), as well as reviewed by Dr. Alex RedCorn (member of the Osage Nation, professor of Educational Leadership, and coordinator of Indigenous Partnerships at Kansas State University) and Dr. Anne Gray (Educational Assessment Specialist at New Mexico Tech and prominent gifted education researcher regarding Native American and Alaska Native students).

Dr. Steinhauer’s view and work (2002) on Indigenous research methodology was especially helpful, in which her feedback included the importance of a) considering “classroom as ceremony”; b) demonstrating a commitment to the work (Indigenous research), including critical consciousness and quite teachings (i.e., when an Indigenous person corrects you regarding an aspect of their culture and how you integrate that correction into your teaching and research practice); c) a responsibility to the work and to portray it correctly; and d) acting with a good heart in all aspects. Specifically, Dr. Steinhauer noted:

And now that you’ve started this work, you have a responsibility and a commitment to it, and a commitment is to get it right. And right doesn’t mean right in the way that we experience it in the English language. You know, an elder once said to me, ‘You’re never going to do it wrong if you do it with a good heart. If you come with good intentions, if you do this work from a good space, you’re never going to get it wrong’. Because even if it’s wrong in the way that we would see it, while you didn’t do this and this and this…if you didn’t follow the right protocol… it’s not wrong, because you will never be reprimanded for it. You might get a quiet teaching about it and next time [you will know what to do].

The feedback from Four Arrows was constructive in further contextualizing his work (2020) on Indigenous and Western worldview manifestations. His feedback included critical considerations, including a) avoiding viewing Indigenous worldview and Western worldview through a strictly dualist lens and staying open to a critically
conscious balance (i.e., a balance that acknowledges the destructive impact of colonization) between the two; b) providing space for individuals to consider their tribal affiliation(s), personal worldview, and Indigenous worldview; and c) rethinking how the word hope was being used in the final interview conversation prompt (e.g., What is a hope you have Native K-12 gifted students?), in which he explained, “I believe in a definition of hope that would be very different from one that relates to outcomes.”

Dr. RedCorn’s feedback was insightful, as it helped me deeply understand his work (2020) on the cultural systems of knowledge and knowledge holders, which was used to help create the research study participant selection criteria. Dr. RedCorn’s feedback highlighted how best to interact and engage with Indigenous participants, particularly regarding a) existing relationships I have (and ended up making post-research) with Indigenous communities and how those relationships will be tended to after the research is over; b) how the research will inform practice and what is ultimately done with the research; c) the impact of assimilationist education on participant responses, noting that some participants may not know traditional languages or feel comfortable sharing knowledges related to closed practices, both of which were true in various participant interviews.

Lastly, the data collection protocol was reviewed by Dr. Anne Gray. While Dr. Gray is a non-Indigenous educator and researcher, her children are Native American, and she worked closely with gifted education field expert Dr. Marcia Gentry (in memoriam) on topics related to gifted education and Native student missingness (Gentry & Gray, 2021a), as exemplified in chapter two. Dr. Gray’s feedback included a) considering how the word gifted was being used in the research study due to its highly interpretative nature
in both theory and practice; b) taking steps to avoid a homogeneous view of Native populations when referring to the concept of Indigenous worldview; c) pushing back on colonial structures where the researcher is the *known norm* and the researched are the *unknown other* through providing more information on myself, who I am, and where I am coming from.

*Amendment to IRB to Apply Field Expert Feedback.* Based on the pilot and review feedback from the field experts described above, I revised the data collection protocol and submitted an IRB amendment in July 2023. The interview conversation prompt regarding giftedness within tribal affiliation(s) was also revised to include “Indigenous Worldview” so that the participants could expand responses as they saw fit in connection to their tribal affiliation(s). Additionally, Four Arrows and Dr. RedCorn noted the need to integrate relevance/reciprocity regarding the interview questions; specifically, the last interview question initially prompted the interviewee to consider a hope they have for gifted K-12 Indigenous students. Four Arrows explained how I used the word *hope* related to outcomes, which was not how he viewed *hope*. This prompted me to consider how I defined hope within the question/prompt, particularly in regard to Duncan Andrade’s (2009) piece on *critical hope* vs. *hokey hope*. In doing so, I revised the last question to invite participants to share thoughts on how findings from the study might be implemented in practice relevant to their teaching and learning community. Additionally, Dr. Gray cautioned me about using the term “gifted” in the interview questions, as many definitions exist within the field of gifted education, as noted in chapter one.
As advised by the chair of my committee, I used the word “gifted/giftedness” as a research reference point, in which findings can be affirming or non-affirming; however, before the content prompts in the interview protocol, I explicitly added the definition of giftedness described in chapter one (Sousa, 2009), so that participants were clear on the definition of giftedness I was using. Additionally, Dr. Gray noted the importance of opening the interview protocol by identifying who I am and my positionality, particularly to counter colonial research structures. As such, in the introduction, I moved the content about myself, explicitly noting that I am a non-Indigenous educator/researcher and providing context about who I am and how the study came to be.

**Decolonizing Ethics: Critical Reflexivity Journal**

**Researcher in Context.** As described in previous sections, this research study utilized a qualitative research design, interpretive phenomenology. However, Kovach (2021) posits that “no matter how simpatico the Western research design, a methodology couched in a Western conceptual framing [will] result in a Western gaze on the analysis” (p. 50). An important part of the researcher in the context of interpretative phenomenology has to do with the interpretive role the researcher plays. Bush and colleagues (2019) note that “critical aspects of the researcher’s interpretation include the researcher’s bias, background, and position within the research topic and process, requiring one to be diligently reflective” (p. 4). As a non-Indigenous researcher, I acknowledge my privilege as a White, middle-class human and understand that building community toward true diversity, equity, and inclusion “requires vigilant awareness of the work [I] must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads [me] to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (hooks, 2003, p. 36). Throughout the
research process, I aimed to interpret the meaning and concurrently engage in critical reflection to decolonize my Western gaze as an educator and researcher.

Smith et al. (2009) note that beyond simply bracketing, reflective and cyclical practices are inherent parts of interpretive phenomenology. Accordingly, during this research study, I used a critical reflexivity journal framed by the conceptual frameworks of Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening. Kovach (2021) explains that reflexivity is a term often utilized within various qualitative research approaches to reference the relational dimension of research. Kovach further explains that reflexivity involves the researcher’s self-reflection in meaning-making, which aligns with the interpretive nature of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). More specifically, in anti-oppressive research approaches, this process of researcher self-reflection is described as critical reflexivity, which “purposefully gives space for the political examination of location and privilege” (Herising, 2005, p. 136 as cited in Kovach, 2021, p. 33). Kovach (2021) asserts that an indicator of a relational approach in Indigenous methodologies can be found within process and product and that the researcher must be able to identify both (process and product) in the method.

The use of a critical reflexivity research journal helped to support maintaining an anti-oppressive and asset-based orientation during the interpretative analysis processes, allowing me “the opportunity to be honest about [my] perspectives as [a researcher] and illustrating how [such a] perspective impacts the methods chosen” (p. 44). Additionally, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) explain that “IPA researchers attempt to understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of the subject, although recognizing this is never completely possible, and through interpretive activity make meaning comprehensible” (p. 2).
Through this attempt to interpret meaning, engaging in the phenomenological research process can become a profoundly transformative experience for the researcher. van Manen (1990) explains that “phenomenological research is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, and increased thoughtfulness” (p. 163, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). I engaged in this critical reflexivity research journal to be clear about my positionality that guides my inquiry and overall interpretation of data, which further lent toward decolonizing and transforming my Western gaze in gifted education. The critical reflexivity journal process is discussed in detail in chapter six.

**Researcher Preparation: Cultural Protocols**

As described in chapter one, the conceptual frameworks *Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening* are the conceptual frameworks that framed this research study. These two frameworks also served as crucial cultural protocols when conducting this research, as both embody fundamental tenets that prioritize cultural responsiveness and foster a respectful and inclusive research approach. Positionality as a cultural protocol involved critically examining power dynamics inherent in research design, methodology, and relationships (Johnson-Bailey, 2012; McGloin, 2015). Moreover, positionality as a cultural protocol underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity, advocating for honoring Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and traditions while keeping my Western research gaze in check.

Concurrently, the Pedagogy of Listening ensured that all components of the research design were rooted in active and critically conscious listening (Freire, 2001; Rinaldi, 2006; Smith-Gilman, 2018). This involved attentively listening to the narratives,
perspectives, experiences, ideas, and feedback shared by Indigenous participants without imposing preconceived notions or biases. As hooks (2010) reminds us, “a powerful way we connect with a diverse world is by listening to the different stories we are told” (p. 53). Moreover, the Pedagogy of Listening encouraged a dialogic approach (Freire, 2001), promoting open and reciprocal communication between the participants and myself, with an acknowledgment of the co-creation of knowledge through shared dialogue. Furthermore, it recognized the existence of multiple truths and perspectives (McGloin, 2015). In tandem, these frameworks acted as the cultural protocols used to center Indigenous voices throughout the research process (Charaniya, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2009).

Researcher Preparation: Standardized Qualitative Research Design

Interpretive phenomenology, grounded in Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), is a methodological approach in qualitative psychology that seeks to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009), in this case, giftedness as understood within Indigenous worldview. This form of phenomenology is sometimes further classified as existential or hermeneutic (Bush et al., 2019). Seminal (IPA) researchers and theorists Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) explain that IPA is a participant-oriented research approach that seeks to be both respectful and sensitive to the lived experiences of research participants.

As noted in chapter two, previous literature cautions against taking a homogenous perspective of Indigenous communities (Gentry et al., 2014), especially in research projects, such as this one, that involve Indigenous participants from different tribal and/or
regional affiliations. By design, IPA allows multiple individuals who experience a similar phenomenon to describe their lived experiences in a way they see fit without distortion. Smith et al. (2009) further explain that IPA aims to examine the details of a lived experience in a way that enables that experience to be expressed on its own terms rather than according to a predefined category, allowing for convergences and divergences within the lived experiences to be explored. As such, while all participants were Indigenous, IPA recognized that each individual had different lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of giftedness that were uniquely bound to their specific tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In a phenomenological study, it is recommended that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study first sought to conduct phenomenological semi-structured interviews with a minimum of 10 Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates from various tribal and/or regional affiliations. However, the snowball sampling process proved very effective, in which the intended 10 participant goal mark was met in the first two months of data collection. Gentry and colleagues (2014) strongly suggest oversampling Native American research study participants to support revitalization and cultural maintenance. As such, an Internal Review Board (IRB) amendment was submitted in November of 2023 to increase the number of participants from 10 to 10-15. Communication and consent protocols (Appendices A, B, C) were sent to all snowball participants.

Semi-structured, conversational 45–60-minute interviews were conducted with a total of 14 Indigenous educators, researchers, and/or advocates from tribal, band, clan, or
regional affiliations across the United States (see Figure 2), with two participants belonging to two more affiliations (see Table 4). Every participant identified as an advocate in addition to their professional role. Every participant who identified as a researcher also had K-12 classroom teaching experience at some point during their professional careers, with said experiences ranging from reservation schools to urban public schools. Twelve participants identified as women, and two participants identified as men. Three participants identified as elders or moving into an elder role within their respective Native communities. The interview protocol involved seven research-based conversation prompts (Appendix D). To avoid a homogeneous view of participants’ Indigeneity, participant tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliation was explicitly and intentionally collected before interviews and integrated into the conversation prompts and the data analysis process. Informed verbal consent (Appendix C) was “collected” in the first few moments of every interview recording. Participants could use a pseudonym or their real name, and all collected data was de-identified accordingly. Four participants chose to use a pseudonym. Participants are presented in tables in the order of conducted interviews.

Table 4

*Participant Affiliations and Roles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tribal, Band, Clan, and/or Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>K-12 Indigenous Educator, Researcher, and/or Advocate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC</td>
<td>Educator, Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Educator, Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Tamaya Pueblo, NM</td>
<td>Educator, Researcher,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that while phenomenological data collection procedures typically involve interviewing participants, they may also involve varied data sources, such as poems, observations, music, documents, and art forms. Similarly, Nêhiyaw (Cree) researcher and scholar Kovach (2021) explains that a “conversational method” to conduct data collection is most appropriate when working with Indigenous individuals and communities and should inherently include elements of storytelling, dialogue, and reflection (p. 56). Kovach explained that this process involves “participating in the participants’ stories” (p. 56). In alignment with the conceptual framework of Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening, the interview protocol (see
Appendix D) was intentionally designed around conversation prompts that encourage participants to share stories and ask questions.

In further alignment with listening to understand how Indigenous worldview may inform culturally responsive gifted education, participants were invited to share diverse forms of representation (e.g., drawings, music, poems, metaphors, stories, etc.) in addition to or in place of traditional conversation responses. Additionally, toward surrendering control surrounding research approaches grounded in Western worldview, such as didactic learning (vs. collaborative learning), time as linear (vs. time as cyclical), linear thinking (vs. lateral thinking), and rigid boundaries and hierarchies (vs. flexible boundaries), the interview protocol conversation prompts were provided to participants before their scheduled interviews. Every participant noted, without prompting, that they appreciated receiving the prompts beforehand, as it allowed them to reflect on the content and feel more at ease with it.

**Meaning Making of Knowledges Gathered**

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.* Collected data was analyzed according to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The main goal of IPA is to give full appreciation to each participant’s account (case), which involves beginning with a case-by-case analysis before considering analyses across cases (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This case-by-case approach was imperative toward avoiding a homogenous view of participants and recognizing the diverse tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations of participants involved in this study. Throughout the IPA process, data is collected and interpreted by the researcher regarding participants making sense of a phenomenon under investigation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Specifically, IPA aims to reveal the meanings
and implications of the phenomenon under investigation based on the interpretation of the participants’ narratives and the researcher’s reflexivity (Smith and Nizza, 2021), in this case critical reflexivity (since I am a non-Indigenous and White, Western-oriented researcher).

Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012) assert that IPA “provides a set of flexible guidelines which can be adapted by individual researchers” and thus should “not be treated as a recipe” (p. 6). Rather, “researcher[s] [are] advised to be flexible and creative in [their] thinking” (p. 6). For this reason, I chose to embed the IPA process into the data collection protocol, in which certain conversation prompts corresponded to specific research questions and thus codes for thematic analysis of interpretations (Table 5). Interpreting and analyzing the data within the context of IPA was a very iterative process (Bush et al., 2019), often described as a double hermeneutic or dual interpretation process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Thus, the IPA process is mirrored through the organization of this dissertation, in which chapter four provides case-by-case (i.e., participant-by-participant) findings and corresponding interpretations, and chapter five reflects a collective analysis across findings/interpretations and corresponding implications for practice.

Specifically, I engaged in six analysis steps recommended by seminal IPA researchers Smith and Nizza (2021): 1) reading transcribed interviews and taking exploratory notes participant-by-participant; 2) formulating individual participant experiential statements (i.e., significant statements) from the original transcript; 3) finding connections and clustering experiential statements; 4) compiling a table of personal experiential themes and corresponding interpretations (and inviting participants to review and modify the
interpretations as needed); 5) analysis of emergent themes across all cases (i.e., participant accounts); and 6) reporting the collective analysis of findings across participants and corresponding implications for practice. Two critical aspects of the IPA process are that multiple representations of human experience exist (Kafle, 2011), and that researchers cannot remove themselves from the phenomena they are studying (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Sloan & Browe, 2014). For this reason, IPA recognizes that complete bracketing, particularly in steps one through four of the data analysis process described above, is impossible.

In steps one through three, I sought to remain as bracketed from the research as possible; however, in steps four through six, I acted explicitly as the interpreter. All steps involved frequent reflection through the use of a critical reflexivity journal (see chapter 6). Upon completion of individual case (i.e., participant) interpretation of responses, participants were invited to review the themes and reported essence for accuracy, if they wished, to ensure that there were no potential misinterpretations or harm in overall interpretations and analyses reported. Six out of the fourteen participants responded to invitations to review the analyses with either complete approvals or requests for slights modifications. Modifications included changes in word choice or adding additional thoughts. Additionally, it is recognized that despite the decolonizing ethics (Kovach, 2021) used throughout this study, the residue of a Western orientation, on part of the researcher and phenomenon under investigation (i.e., giftedness), still tends to center Western thought and theory as a normative frame of reference for interpretations, analyses, and implications for practice, underscoring the need for honoring worldviews beyond Western worldview.
Table 5

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Data Collection Protocol*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant:</th>
<th>Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Tribal Affiliation(s):</th>
<th>State:</th>
<th>Role:</th>
</tr>
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**Research Question:** In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Prompts</th>
<th>Thematic Context for Analysis</th>
<th>Experiential Statements from Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Analysis</th>
<th>Emergent Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You mentioned that you are [tribe]. What’s something about your tribal culture you wish others knew more about?</td>
<td>Role as Indigenous K-12 Educator, researcher, and/or advocate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You mentioned that you are [role] for [entity name] – can you tell me more about your role and what inspires your work?</td>
<td>Tribal culture details</td>
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<tr>
<td>In your experience, how is giftedness expressed in your tribal community/Indigenous worldview?</td>
<td>Expression of giftedness in tribal community/Indigenous worldview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probe abilities (i.e., what abilities are associated with giftedness? Are there domains of ability?)</td>
<td>Abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probe characteristics (i.e., what are gifted individuals like? How would you describe them?)</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
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<td>How does [Indigenous participant/group] perceive giftedness?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does [Indigenous participant/group] perceive giftedness?</td>
<td>In your experience, how is giftedness nurtured within your tribal</td>
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<tr>
<th>nurture giftedness?</th>
<th>community/Indigenous worldview?</th>
<th>within tribal community/Indigenous worldview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probe support (i.e., can you give an example of what supporting giftedness looks, sounds, or feels like? What does it not look, sound, or feel like?)</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Purpose for support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probe purpose (i.e., what is often the intended outcome of supporting these gifted abilities?)</td>
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<tr>
<th>How does understanding giftedness within Indigenous worldview?</th>
<th>Within the context of your tribal community/Indigenous worldview, is there a word or phrase used to describe gifted individuals?</th>
<th>Word or phrase used to describe gifted individuals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand Western understandings of giftedness?</td>
<td>Probe conceptualization (i.e., why this word/phrase? If no word/phrase, how come?)</td>
<td>Conceptualization</td>
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<tr>
<th>Inform culturally responsive gifted education practices?</th>
<th>If you are willing, can you share some form of representation (song, artwork, poem, book, video, research, metaphor, etc.) that you feel represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview?</th>
<th>Form of representation that represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview</th>
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<tr>
<th>Lastly, how would you like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to your teaching and learning community?</th>
<th>View on use of study findings implemented in practice relevant to tribal/Indigenous world view teaching and learning community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probe (i.e., how should K-12 practice consider giftedness? What is a hope you have for K-12 Indigenous gifted students?)</td>
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*Note. Adapted from Smith and Nizza (2021)*
Giving Back

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

In the last interview conversation prompt, participants were asked – how would you like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to your teaching and learning community? In doing so, I sought to recognize the importance of honoring Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and experiences by actively involving and listening to (i.e., *The Pedagogy of Listening*) participant desires, hopes, and ideas on how best to apply research findings to real-world contexts (Steinhauer, 2002). Moreover, this step lent toward the commitment to ensure that the research outcomes were not only valuable to the academic community, but also to the Indigenous participants and their communities. In essence, this approach recognized the expertise and agency of Indigenous educators, researchers, and advocates, inviting them to contribute to shaping the practical applications of the research. Moreover, I found that this dimension of reciprocity contributed to building a stronger sense of ethos, particularly on an educator-to-educator level, and trust between the participants and myself, in which interview conversations were open, honest, and personable.

Ethical Considerations

Kovach (2021) reminds us that “Indigenous research is embedded within a colonial history in which Indigenous peoples and culture have suffered” (p. 32). Research within Western worldview has a long history of conducting research *on* versus *with* Indigenous communities, resulting in research practices that are harmful, extractive, and dehumanizing (Kovach, 2021). Furthermore, the research that often influences and shapes K-12 policy and practices impacting Indigenous communities tends to emerge
from knowledges not of Indigenous culture and context (Kovach, 2020). Trauma
surrounding trust, particularly with contract signing and data sovereignty, remains an
issue in modern research practices (Ball & Janyst, 2008). Ferreira and Grendon (2011)
explain:

Imagine paper and pen wielding scientists approaching a community of people
who through the course of post-contact history have been subjected to similar
paper and pen fanfares associated with treaties, lost land, relocations, reserves,
boarding schools, foster homes, loss of language and culture, litigation, and
sovereignty, etc. (p. 161)

Subsequently, non-Indigenous researchers must take intentional steps in regard to
negotiating research agreements with Indigenous peoples in a responsive way (Ball &
Janyst, 2008). One such way is verbal consent, which is becoming a more widely
accepted alternative to signed consent with research involving Indigenous peoples, who
have experienced a long history of severe deception and misappropriation of their
signatures in dealings with Western institutions (Ball & Janyst, 2008). Under the 2018
Common Rule, Internal Review Board (IRB) approval of a waiver of written
documentation for informed consent may be granted for projects that include participants
who are members of a cultural group in which signing forms is not a normal/acceptable
practice, in which participants are allowed to ask questions and be provided with a copy
of the informed consent information sheet about the study without obtaining their
signature or mark. This research study aimed to allow Indigenous participants to give
verbal consent (see Appendix C), which was “collected” in the first few moments of
interview recordings. Additionally, participants were all adults who were 18-years or
older and had the opportunity to review the study findings for interpretative accuracy.
Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the research setting and questions, potential participants, the proposed research design, and various methodological and ethical considerations. Toward the goal of centering the voices of Indigenous K-12 cultural system of knowledge keepers (RedCorn, 2020), this study sought to involve Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates working directly with, in, and for Indigenous communities across a variety of tribal, band, and/or regional affiliations as research participants. Through an interpretive phenomenological design, this study explored how a given person, in a given context, experiences giftedness within Indigenous worldview. The following chapter will analyze Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) findings.
Chapter Four: Findings and Interpretations

Grounded in the conceptual frameworks of *Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening*, this interpretive phenomenological research study explored the complex intersection of Indigenous worldview, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and the implementation of culturally responsive gifted education. The conceptual frameworks ensured “listen[ing] with the conscious knowledge of how colonial relations of power operate and how [non-Indigenous] subjects can be active agents in re-positioning [themselves] within that schema” (McGloon, 2015, p. 276). This chapter examines the findings from conversational interviews with Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates. Findings reflect a total of 14 Indigenous educators, researchers, and/or advocates from numerous tribal, band, clan, or regional affiliation across the United States. Every participant identified as an advocate in addition to their professional role. Every participant who identified as a researcher also had K-12 classroom teaching experience at some point during their professional careers, with experiences ranging from reservation schools to urban public schools. Twelve participants identified as women and two participants identified as men. Three participants identified as elders or transitioning into an elder role within their respective Native communities.

In alignment with the tenets of Kovach’s (2021) Nêhiyaw research framework as well as the principles of the double hermeneutic process required of Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Nizza, 2021), this chapter provides a detailed review of findings participant-by-participant, delving into the unique narratives, perspectives, and experiences of each individual within the context of their identified tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliation. Not only did this process lend toward avoiding a homogenous view of Indigenous participants, but it also emphasized critical listening (Freire, 1970; McGloin, 2015) to the voices of Indigenous participants, in which the findings here provide insight into the complexities inherent to the phenomenon of giftedness within each participant’s individual Indigenous worldview. Findings are reported here in the order of interviews conducted.

In doing so, this chapter provides nuanced insights into the intricacies of giftedness within the unique context of each of the study’s 14 participants. Kovach (2021) reminds us that “the interpretive nature of qualitative methodologies and Indigenous methodologies offers a bridge for understanding” (p. 31). Accordingly, the extensive quotations, presented in italics, are followed by interpretative analyses designed to contextualize the findings concerning each individual participant. All participants were invited to review the following interpretations for accuracy, and six responded to do so. As readers progress through this chapter, it is crucial to approach the length and depth of the content with an understanding that it is purposefully constructed to honor the complexities of participants’ perspectives. While this may challenge certain Westernized structural expectations of conciseness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), Kovach’s (2021) call for the recognition of diverse structures within research should guide readers to sit in any discomfort with the extended length of the findings reported and interpreted here, acknowledging the value in the deep exploration of Indigenous perspectives related to the
realm of gifted education. Chapter five provides a *collective* analysis across participants and corresponding implications for culturally responsive gifted education practices as informed by Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates.

**Samantha**

**An Introduction to Samantha**

Samantha is an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina. She serves as a K-6 special education teacher and K-2 English language arts teacher at a dual language (Cherokee and English) school. She is also pursuing teaching licensure for dual-language and English as a Second Language (ESL). Samantha is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. Throughout her responses to the opening conversation prompts (e.g., What’s something about your tribal culture you wish others knew more about? Can you tell me more about your role and what inspires your work?), a major component Samantha described as both related to her tribal culture and her inspiration for her work as an educator was the role of the Cherokee language. Two major themes arose related to the role of the Cherokee language, including 1) the complex cultural intelligence required of learning, teaching, and using the language and the resulting connection to one’s heritage; and 2) the way in which the Cherokee language is tied to one’s cultural identity and approach to community contributions.

**Complex Cultural Intelligence and Connection to Heritage**

In response to being asked what she wished others knew more about her tribal culture, Samantha explained: *The complexity of the language, [the] Cherokee language, is so hard. For the word ‘play’, we have one word in English - play. But if I were talking about ‘I’m playing’, ‘he’s playing, ‘she’s playing’ like just all the different tenses...one
The root word could have 20 something words branch out of that. So, it’s just very complex... Samantha’s response emphasized the unique cognitive skills required to navigate a language with such complexity. In many Indigenous contexts, the ability to navigate and learn one’s Native language are valued and recognized as part of the broader spectrum of giftedness, reflecting the individual’s ability to excel in a culturally linguistic domain. Proficiency in a complex language like Cherokee is not just a skill, but a manifestation of a deep understanding and connection to the cultural and linguistic roots of the community, which plays a role in motivating Samantha’s work as an educator.

**Cultural Identity and Community Contribution**

Samantha also described how her tribal community played a large role in shaping both her personal and professional life journeys, noting the way the two often intersected through community events. She explained: ...in 2005, I won the title of Miss Cherokee... we have to do traditional wear, have a traditional talent, and [engage] in public speaking... with that title, I had to attend local events. Like powwows... and the one that had the most impact on my life was the language symposium that we held in the summertime. I had to attend different stations. One of the stations talked about how many fluent speakers we had left... that session hit me the hardest because they talked about losing fluent speakers and how there are only 400 or so [fluent speakers] left. And at that time, it was like a gut punch because that just felt like such a little number. But fast track, and now we’re at 162 speakers left. And during that same conversation, they talked about the Academy and wanting to start a Cherokee language immersion school for toddlers. And that just immediately sparked my interest... And I said, I want to teach there. And I
called my mom and was like, I’m changing my major...so I switched my major from nursing and Spanish to elementary education with a focus on Cherokee studies.

Native community events, such as the Miss Cherokee pageant, created platforms for individuals like Samantha to connect with her heritage, fostering a sense of responsibility and inspiration to contribute meaningfully. Samantha’s tribal community provided a nurturing environment that supported her tribal identity, celebrated cultural values, and inspired her to give back as an educator. The community’s active involvement in cultural preservation efforts and its encouragement of Samantha’s career highlight the symbiotic relationship between individuals and their communities in preserving and maintaining tribal identity.

**Expression of Giftedness**

After the opening questions, participants were then asked about gifted education related content. When asked how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and/or Indigenous worldview, Samantha explained: *When I was in elementary school, they had a gifted and talented program, and it was basically where you just did an IQ test...and then you would go to a computer lab and play Oregon Trail until it was time to go back to your other classes...to me at that time it was kind of just a way to get out of doing work that they felt was below my ability level, but they didn’t really push for me to do more...now they are honing in on kids’ talents, like with woodcarving or beadwork or basketry...in our school system arts are held in a high regard.*

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

Samantha’s response to how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and Indigenous worldview began with what she herself experienced with gifted education as a
student in the school system, noting the way in which the process was very limited and narrow (relying on IQ testing) and lacked meaning (mentioning how students spent a lot of time working on needless assignments, such as playing Oregon Trail). In thinking about giftedness now, as both an educator and Indigenous person, she noted the role of honoring children’s talents, particularly in traditional Native arts, like woodcarving, beadwork, and basketry. From these responses, numerous, nuanced themes emerged, including the roles of a) a holistic view of intelligence, b) cultural relevance and native identity building, c) community and active skill development, and d) high regard for cultural arts.

**Holistic View of Intelligence**

Samantha’s description of the traditional arts, such as woodcarving, beadwork, and basketry, as domains of giftedness reflects a broader and more holistic view of intelligence within Indigenous worldview. Moreover, unlike the conventional, Western IQ test approach, Samantha’s response places emphasis on recognizing and nurturing talents in various domains, including those deeply rooted in cultural traditions. The shift from IQ tests to valuing traditional arts signifies a move toward cultural relevance.

**Cultural Relevance and Native Identity Building**

Samantha’s response suggests that nurturing giftedness within an Indigenous context involves recognizing and celebrating skills that are meaningful and culturally significant, promoting a sense of pride and connection to heritage. Focusing on woodcarving, beadwork, and basketry as domains of giftedness not only acknowledges individual talents but also contributes to the community and Native identity building.
Community and Active Skill Development

Samantha’s response suggests that giftedness is nurtured within the context of community values, and the emphasis on traditional arts fosters a sense of belonging and shared cultural identity. The mention of supporting children’s talents suggests a proactive approach to skill development. Instead of simply providing an escape from regular classes, there is an effort to actively nurture and develop the skills and talents of individuals, aligning with the Indigenous perspective of guiding and supporting the growth of the whole person.

High Regard for Cultural Arts

Samantha notes the importance placed on traditional arts within the school system, indicating that these forms of expression are held in high regard. This requires a cultural shift where the educational system recognizes and respects the significance of Indigenous art forms, contributing to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Samantha expressed that within her tribal community, giftedness is often nurtured through acts that maintain and revitalize traditional practices. She explained: I mentioned our fair, kind of like how we do the Miss Cherokee pageant. Well, within that we have an exhibit hall where people showcase their sewing, beadwork, baskets, quilts, just any kind of media you can think of...even foods like canning or baking and, annually, showcases all the talents people have. Then the last few years, they’ve started a fashion show, so to speak...that showcases all local artists who sew and do clothing. Just this past weekend, they had two nights of having people rap and do rock and roll, jazz, all different mediums of music in the Cherokee language...you know about the Trail of Tears and
colonization...that’s part of why our language is struggling. Our people weren’t allowed to do the talents that were passed down from generation to generation. Now, we’re reclaiming more than just language. We’re reclaiming those crafts, those trades...reclaiming even the presence [of those things] makes a big difference in the revitalization of the language, too, because people feel more Cherokee by partaking in different trades or crafts.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Samantha emphasized nurturing giftedness in her tribal community through traditional practices, exemplified by events that often showcase various talents, such as the Miss Cherokee Pageant, including sewing, beadwork, and music in the Cherokee language. In this regard, the cultural maintenance and revitalization efforts extend beyond language to encompass crafts and trades, fostering a sense of Cherokee identity. The interconnectedness of arts and language is evident in initiatives, such as the fashion show featuring local artists who sew and create clothing. This multifaceted approach reflects a modern and resilient expression of Cherokee culture, reclaiming not only the language but also traditional crafts, trades, and their cultural significance. As such, themes that emerged from this response included a) cultural maintenance and revitalization, b) the interconnectedness of arts and language, c) expression of identity and resilience, and d) multidimensional and modern expression of the Cherokee culture.

Cultural Maintenance and Revitalization

Support for talent development is often grounded in cultural maintenance and revitalization, suggesting that reclaiming lost history is a form of healing. Samantha’s emphasis on events like the fair, Miss Cherokee pageant, and the exhibit hall reflects a
commitment to cultural revitalization. In this regard, giftedness is nurtured through the promotion and celebration of traditional arts, crafts, and language, contributing to the preservation and resurgence of cultural practices.

**Interconnectedness of Arts and Language**

The integration of various art forms, including sewing, beadwork, music, and traditional crafts, demonstrates an interconnectedness of arts and language within Indigenous worldview. Accordingly, giftedness is not limited to one specific domain but is recognized and nurtured across a spectrum of creative expressions that contribute to cultural identity and language revitalization. Moreover, giftedness is not only recognized at an individual level but is woven into the fabric of community events, reinforcing the communal aspect of Indigenous culture.

**Expression of Identity and Resilience**

Samantha's response suggests that support for giftedness is bound to reclaiming Cherokee crafts, trades, and language, which is also presented as an act of resilience and healing from historical oppression and suppression, such as the Trail of Tears and colonization. Thus, giftedness is nurtured by empowering Native children to reclaim and express their cultural identity through traditional practices, contributing to a sense of pride and resilience. The inclusion of a fashion show and diverse music genres performed in the Cherokee language highlights a multidimensional approach to cultural expression.

**Multidimensional and Modern Expression**

Perhaps most importantly, Samantha's response suggests that giftedness within Indigenous worldview is not confined to traditional forms but extends to contemporary and evolving artistic expressions, showcasing the dynamic nature of Indigenous culture.
The Cherokee language and the resurgence of traditional crafts is intertwined with broader efforts to reclaim and preserve cultural practices, strengthening the link between language and cultural expressions.

Conceptualization of Giftedness

When asked if there was a word or phrase used to describe gifted individuals within her tribal community, Samantha explained: *I’ve heard this word used – ‘usgwanigt’i. Some people use it positively, as in some people are magical, different, just something you can’t really explain. And some people use it like ‘oh, she so usgwanigt.’ Like, she’s different, not a good different. So that’s the first word that came to my mind. And the word ‘asmadi’, which is very smart. And that’s almost like an anglicized word for smart. But those are the top two words that come to mind.*

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

In her response, Samantha discussed the terms used to describe gifted individuals in her tribal community, highlighting the term *usgwanigt*, which carries both positive and negative connotations, depending on the context. She also introduced the word *asmadi*, denoting its meaning of “very smart” with a positive and straightforward connotation similar to the anglicized term smart. The acknowledgment that *asmadi* is somewhat anglicized indicates a dynamic interaction between the Cherokee language and external (and often colonizing) influences. Accordingly, two themes emerge from her response regarding the way in which giftedness may be conceptualized, including 1) as having magical and unexplainable qualities and 2) as acknowledging diverse connotations of the gifted experience.
Magical and Unexplainable Qualities

Samantha suggested the word *usgwanigti*, which she explained often encompasses a belief in qualities that are magical or unexplainable. This aligns with Indigenous worldviews that often acknowledge and value aspects of the extraordinary or unique in individuals. Moreover, giftedness is not solely about cognitive abilities, but may encompass qualities that transcend conventional understanding.

Diverse Connotations of Giftedness

Samantha noted that the term *usgwanigti* has both positive and negative connotations, suggesting that within the Cherokee Indigenous worldview, the concept of giftedness is multifaceted. Giftedness is not perceived as a universally positive trait, but rather, it carries a spectrum of meanings that can include both magical and challenging aspects.

Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

Samantha selected the way in which the students in her school not only practice and engage in traditional, cultural songs, but sing popular, mainstream songs as well in the Cherokee language, explaining that her school has done cover songs in the language *(Cherokee)* like the song from Beaches. As such, Samantha selected the act of singing modern songs in the Cherokee language as the form of representations that represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview.

Analysis of Form of Representation

Cultural and Linguistic Intelligence

In Samantha’s selection of cover songs performed in the Cherokee language as a form of giftedness, it is evident that language proficiency is not merely a skill but an
embodiment of cultural and linguistic intelligence. Within the Indigenous context, the revitalization of a complex language like Cherokee is viewed as a manifestation of a profound understanding and connection to the community’s cultural heritage, aligning with the belief that preserving and revitalizing language is integral to the giftedness and healing of Indigenous communities.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

When asked how she’d like to see findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to her teaching and learning community, Samantha explained: *Well, you’re on track, if you’re looking outside of basic academics...if you’re looking at the artwork and different mediums...I think you’re headed in the right direction. And I think just educating people who do work in Indigenous communities...cultural sensitivity awareness training...that’s something a lot of schools could do... find some representation from the [nearby or local] tribe to provide you with that information...because I think a lot times schools have good intentions on trying to represent Native students, but what they really want to see is someone who is one of them describing these things...a lot of times when I was growing up, it was assumed all Native Americans lived in teepees. So in their history books, they’re taught one kind of Native American...I appreciate when people have the willingness to educate themselves to understand something instead of just saying ‘oh well, I didn’t know’ and just leaving it at that...I think that’s a good practice to have... to be willing to be educated on something you’re unsure of...I feel like there’s always been kind of a stigma that we’re [Native peoples] not as smart...that they’re [Native students] probably behind...just don’t always assume that they’re not gifted. And gifted for them can look different than Western*
representations of gifted. Gifted could be wood carving. It could be music. It could be language. There are so many things people could be gifted with…to get away from thinking you can only be gifted this [one] way. We do have a lot of brilliant kids.

**Analysis of Participant-Informed Implications for Practice**

In response to how she would like to see findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to her teaching and learning community, Samantha underscored the importance of recognizing a holistic representation of giftedness beyond basic academics. She emphasized the need for cultural sensitivity awareness training in schools and suggested involving representatives from local tribes for accurate information. Themes that emerged from her response included a) holistic representation of giftedness, b) cultural humility/willingness to learn, and c) promoting positive narratives.

**Holistic Representation of Giftedness**

Samantha’s response emphasized the importance of recognizing giftedness beyond basic academics, including various mediums such as artwork and cultural practices. A holistic understanding of giftedness that embraces diverse talents and skills inherent in Indigenous communities is thus critical.

**Cultural Humility/Willingness to Learn**

Samantha noted that she values the willingness to educate oneself and urges individuals to seek understanding rather than accepting stereotypes or misconceptions. It is not enough to be culturally responsive, one must also have cultural humility, staying open and curious to do better when knowing better. She advocates for more representation of Native students in educational settings. She stresses the importance of
having individuals from local tribes providing information, as it ensures accurate representation and understanding of the cultural context.

Promoting Positive Narratives

Samantha also expressed a desire for positive narratives surrounding Native students, emphasizing their brilliance and giftedness in various domains. The call for more representation serves as a means to counter negative stereotypes and promote a more accurate and positive view of Native students.

Christopher

An Introduction to Christopher

Christopher is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, or the Sicangu Lakota, located in South Dakota. He is the executive director of the Oceti Sakowin Education Consortium (OSEC). Christopher also serves as the provost and head of school of a grades 6-12 Lakota girls’ school on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Additionally, Christopher has experience serving as a gifted and talented teacher and coordinator throughout the majority of his career. He is an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. Themes that emerged from his response to the opening conversation prompts included the need for a) recognition, visibility, and continuous advocacy, b) a shift in educational perspectives to an asset-orientation, and c) intergenerational knowledge and reclamation efforts.

Recognition, Visibility, and Continuous Advocacy

When asked what about his tribal culture he wished others knew more about, Christopher explained: *I wish they knew, not everything, but that we’re a people. We all have our unique ways, but people don’t seem to care. That we’re there [exist], that we’re*
not invisible. The best example I can tell you is that years ago...all my children went to tribal schools...they all participated in a dance organization on the reservation. Once a month, they went to a different school to have a powwow and sometimes it’s a competitive powwow, other times it’s social dancing. But all schools, kindergarten through 12th grade, all go to one school once a month, and we were at this school on kind of a border town on the eastern edge of Pine Ridge...and we were there...and they fed everybody supper...and there was this old White lady who came and sat down with us and said ‘can I join you?’ and I said ‘sure’ and she said ‘this is so beautiful...how long have you people been doing this?’ and so we said ‘how old are you?’ and she said, ‘I’m 90’. We said, ‘where do you live?’ and she said, ‘I live right outside of town here. I’ve lived there my whole life.’ And she wanted to know how long we have done powwows...how long we have danced...and it’s just like we’re not there...it’s like we have to continuously prove ourselves, otherwise we don’t matter to people...I’m 73 years old and I’m still telling people that we still live here. And everything we do, it’s like we have to be the ones to initiate this stuff [advocacy].

Within his response, Christopher expressed a deep desire for others to acknowledge the existence and uniqueness of his tribal culture. He emphasized the need for people, particularly Western-oriented people, to care and recognize that Indigenous people are present and visible in the larger societal context. Moreover, his sharing of a lived experience highlights the way in which continuous advocacy plays a role in Native visibility. Despite being engaged in cultural activities, Christopher emphasized the persistent effort required to make their presence known and appreciated. In doing so, he underscored the ongoing challenges of overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions about
various Indigenous traditions, where the burden often falls on the Indigenous individuals to educate others.

Shifting Educational Perspectives

In reflecting on his professional background and inspiration for his work, Christopher explained that he started out as a classroom teacher...and what we were taught was to go into a classroom, find out how bad everyone was and fix them. And I didn’t see children like that. I didn’t see my children like that. So, I was going to quit. But then the Bureau of Indian Education had one checkmark on their forms for their students, and it said, ‘this child is gifted’ and all you had to do was check mark it, and then you got money [funding] for it. So, I started looking into gifted and talented...so I went back to school and took summer courses and got my endorsement in K-12 gifted education. What I discovered was you just see everything good in children, and then you just build on it...and you don’t worry about the ‘bad’ stuff...you build on what they’re good at and everything just falls into place after that. Especially with Native children...the one thing about state gifted and talented is that you have to score high on an IQ or high in academics and nothing else...and if you don’t know how to take those tests and score high, you can’t get into the program. Once you get in there [the gifted program] then they look at the art side of it. And I think that’s why a lot of Native children are not identified [as gifted]...when I was looking for leaders, I would go in a classroom and ask the teacher ‘who are your hell raisers’ and they’d say ‘why?’ and I said ‘I’m looking for leaders’ and you gave them [the hell raisers] any leadership assessment they’d score almost too high on it. But we’ve been so colonized, so Westernized in our thinking, that even many of our own people don’t believe our children can be gifted. Because they
embrace that way of teaching [Westernized]... to me, it comes down to a control issue. Because if you don’t have control in that classroom, an administrator will say you’re not a good teacher. But that has nothing to do with it, you know? It’s just what are those children good at, and how do you keep that going?

Christopher explained how he began his career as a classroom teacher and the efforts he made in shifting his perspective away from a deficit-based approach, often inherent to Westernized education practices. He rejected the idea of identifying and fixing what is perceived as “bad” and instead adopted an approach that focuses on recognizing and building upon children’s strengths. The advocacy for gifted education thus becomes a means of redirecting attention from conventional measures to a more holistic understanding of children’s abilities. Chris highlighted, in particular, the role of IQ tests and academic performance, noting that this narrow focus often overlooks the talents and potential of Native children, contributing to the underrepresentation of Native students in gifted programs. Christopher also challenged conventional notions of leadership assessment by seeking out “hell raisers” in classrooms. This unconventional approach recognizes leadership potential in students who may be considered disruptive or challenging by mainstream standards, highlighting the need for alternative perspectives on giftedness. Moreover, Christopher pointed to the impact of colonization and Westernized thinking on educational beliefs within Indigenous communities. There is an acknowledgment that even some within the Native community may not believe in the giftedness of Native children, due to the influence of Western educational paradigms. He mentioned the issue of control in education, suggesting that the emphasis on control is not necessarily indicative of effective teaching. He advocates for recognizing and
nurturing children’s strengths rather than focusing solely on maintaining control in the classroom.

**Intergenerational Knowledge and Reclamation**

Christopher further contextualized his lived experiences as a Native K-12 gifted educator by sharing the following story: *at the behest of the board chair, I started a treaty class... I brought all these 7th and 8th graders in... and they said ‘what are we doing here’ and I said ‘we’re going to start a treaty class,’ so I turned my back on them to erase the board, and took out the 1868 treaty and started writing names from the treaty. And they were all raising hell behind me and, you know, being really loud. And as I got further down writing names, they got quieter and quieter. And when I got all the names, I turned around and they all started saying ‘that’s my great, great, great grandpa. My mom told me this, my grandma told me this’ and they knew more about those treaties than most of the teachers in that school. I always tell people, you know, that people who go to public schools only have to know two things [math and reading]. And our children and tribal schools have to learn five things. If you’re in a tribal school, you have to learn math, [you have to learn] reading, [you have to] re-learn your language, [you have to] re-learn your culture, and learn about the other tribes and nations.*

From this sharing, it is clear that Christopher’s students’ ability to share information about their ancestors based on oral tradition points to the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Indigenous orientation tends to facilitate a learning environment where students draw on family narratives, preserving and passing down cultural and historical information. Moreover, the comparison between public schools and tribal schools highlights the broader curriculum requirements in the latter. In addition
to traditional subjects like math and reading, tribal school students are expected to re-learn their language, re-learn their culture, and acquire knowledge about other tribes and nations. This reflects a holistic approach to education that goes beyond academic subjects to encompass cultural identity and intertribal understanding, something all students and teachers outside of Native communities should acknowledge. Additionally, the reference to re-learning language and culture suggests a deliberate effort to reclaim and revitalize cultural and linguistic practices. This aligns with many broader Indigenous educational goals of preserving and revitalizing languages and cultural traditions that were impacted by destructive and oppressive historical policies and practices.

**Expression of Giftedness**

When asked how giftedness is expressed within his tribal culture and/or Indigenous worldview, Christopher explained: *we [Sicangu Lakota] don’t think in our mind of a definition of a gifted person. It [giftedness] includes everybody...the BIE falls back onto what the state does... academics and IQ before you can do anything else...they put all these restrictions on all these areas [of giftedness]. But IQ and academics are easy to identify. We need to find assessments that fit our children [Native] and not try to fit our children into these assessments, but people don’t ask us.*

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

Christopher expressed that within his Sicangu Lakota worldview, giftedness includes everyone. He noted that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) often prioritizes academics and IQ, emphasizing the need for assessments that align with Native children’s abilities and a collaborative approach that involves the community’s perspective. Themes emerging from this response include the need for a) inclusive
conceptualizations of giftedness and b) culturally relevant identification criteria grounded in Indigenous expertise.

**Inclusive Conceptualization of Giftedness**

Christopher expressed that, based on his lived experiences in his tribal community, a Lakota perspective does not define giftedness in a narrow or exclusive way. Instead, they emphasize that giftedness includes everybody, suggesting a more inclusive and community-oriented understanding of exceptional abilities. Additionally, there is a critique of the academic and IQ-based definition of giftedness, particularly as imposed by external entities such as the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Christopher highlights that focusing solely on academics and IQ tests does not align with the Lakota conceptualization of giftedness. The notion that assessments need to fit Native children implies a recognition of a potential cultural mismatch between standardized assessments and the diverse talents and ways of thinking within the Lakota community.

**Culturally Relevant Identification Criteria Grounded in Indigenous Expertise**

Christopher advocates for finding assessments that fit Native children rather than trying to fit them into existing assessments. This indicates a desire for culturally relevant and contextually appropriate measures of giftedness that align with Lakota values, perspectives, and talents. His statement ‘but people don’t ask us’ underscores the importance of community input and collaboration in understanding giftedness. It suggests a lack of consultation with the Lakota community in the development of programs related to gifted education, which would go beyond traditional measures and encompasses a range of abilities and skills valued within Indigenous culture.
Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Christopher expressed that within his tribal community, giftedness is often nurtured through relationships, asset-orientations, and holistic recognition and support of giftedness. He explained: 

...when we hear the word gifted, we relate it to a classroom and what the state says about being gifted, and that’s high IQ and high academics...and a lot of times it’s hard to put into words. I’m good at getting parents to talk about their children...they [parents] could go on for hours and hours and hours about their children...that they see that [giftedness in their children], and they nurture it....there is always someone in their relationship [lives] that nurtures them...to do good. How people see us...they don’t make an effort to find out about us...they have their own [preconceptions]. They don’t ask. And they’re surprised when we show how good we are at things...if you’re going to be dealing with gifted children, you have to realize there’s no box. You have to go way, way beyond what you know yourself to realize who they are.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Within his response, Christopher noted the common association of giftedness with high IQ and academics, highlighting the need to go beyond preconceptions and make an effort to understand and support gifted children in diverse ways. Christopher described how giftedness is perceived in his tribal community, emphasizing the importance of relationships, asset-oriented perspectives, and holistic support for nurturing giftedness.

Relational Nurturing

Christopher’s response suggested that the concept of giftedness is intimately tied to relationships, especially within families. He emphasized that parents and parental figures play a crucial role in recognizing and nurturing the gifts of their children. The
theme of relational nurturing suggests a communal and familial approach to fostering talents. Similar to his other responses, he challenged the conventional understanding of giftedness tied to high IQ and academics. Instead, the emphasis is on recognizing and nurturing abilities that may be challenging to articulate but are nonetheless valued within the community. This points to a broader, community-specific conceptualization of giftedness.

**A Need for Asset-Based Orientations**

Christopher’s response also highlighted the challenge of dealing with external perceptions and misunderstandings about the Lakota community. There is an acknowledgment that outsiders often fail to make an effort to understand the community’s values and talents, relying on preconceptions. This theme underscores the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity in the nurturing of giftedness, particularly for Western-oriented educators seeking to support Native students. This also highlights the need for an open-minded and flexible approach that goes beyond conventional definitions of giftedness. The nurturing process requires educators and community members to recognize and appreciate diverse talents that may not fit within traditional Western frameworks.

**Holistic Gifted Recognition and Support**

Christopher also suggested that dealing with gifted children requires individuals to reach beyond their own knowledge and understanding. Cultural competence and a willingness to understand the unique characteristics and values of the Lakota community are essential for effective nurturing of giftedness. The concept of going “way, way beyond” implies a holistic approach to nurturing giftedness and indicates genuineness of
the humility required of educators to meet the needs of all students. It involves recognizing and supporting the entirety of a child’s identity, talents, and potential, rather than focusing solely on academic achievements or standardized measures.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

When asked if there was a word or phrase used to describe gifted individuals within his tribal community, Christopher leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully explained:…*there’s a word that we use at the end [of sentence] when we’re talking about somebody that’s good at something or the best at something and that’s ‘wopika’.…so someone who beads moccasins, you would say [that] in our language and then say wopika - they’re the best at beading. And it is called whatever their gift is and wopika...and it isn’t paraded around, you don’t have a list or an assessment, everyone just knows that person is good at that...so you would just know who those people were, and you could just go to them when you needed that.*

**Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness**

Christopher explained that in his tribal community, the term *wopika* is used at the end of a sentence to describe someone who is exceptionally skilled or the best at a particular talent. This word is added to denote expertise in a specific craft or skill, such as beading moccasins. The gifted individuals are recognized organically within the community, without the need for formal lists or assessments, creating a natural and communal acknowledgment of their talents. Themes that emerged from this response included a) the way in which giftedness is embedded into everyday life, b) the absence of formal hierarchies, and c) the role of implicit knowledge.
**Giftedness is Embedded into Everyday Life**

Christopher explained that the use of *wopika* is integrated into everyday language, reinforcing the idea that the recognition of giftedness is a natural and inherent part of communication. This integration into language further emphasizes the cultural significance of acknowledging and appreciating individual talents. Furthermore, the mention of recognizing individuals for their specific gifts, such as beading, indicates a personalized and contextual approach to identifying and celebrating giftedness. It is not a generic label but rather a recognition of one’s unique contributions.

**Absence of Formal Hierarchies**

Christopher’s response also suggested an absence of formal hierarchies or structured assessments in identifying gifted individuals. Giftedness is not determined by an external authority but is organically woven into the fabric of community needs, interactions, and awareness. This finding implies that a more community-driven approach to identifying and fostering giftedness may be a valuable consideration in educational and support systems, challenging external authority-driven models.

**Implicit Knowledge**

Similar to the way in which there tends to be an absence of formal hierarchies, the concept of everyone simply knowing who is gifted at what suggests an implicit form of knowledge transmission within the community. Gifted individuals are identified through shared experiences, interactions, and the collective memory of the community. There is an emphasis on practical skills, such as beading moccasins, which highlights a functional aspect of giftedness. Gifted individuals are recognized for their contributions to the community, contributing to its both cultural and practical needs.
Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

Christopher, without hesitation, selected the written works of Ella Deloria as a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, asking: *Have you ever heard of the book Water Lily, by Ella Deloria? She was a linguist in her time, and there’s another one that she wrote called Speaking of Indians. Those will give you good insight into some of the things I’m talking about…she has a way of putting that together.*

Analysis of Form of Representation

**Insightful Representation and Perspective**

Christopher’s choice of representation by a linguist underscores the interconnectedness of language and culture within the Indigenous worldview. Language is not just a means of communication but a vessel for preserving cultural nuances, histories, and ways of thinking. In this regard, the mention of Ella Deloria having “a way of putting that [giftedness within Lakota worldview] together” implies that her work provides an insightful representation and perspective on Indigenous life and culture. Giftedness is expressed through the ability to offer unique insights and perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of Indigenous experiences.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

In considering how he would like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to his teaching and learning community, Christopher shared a compelling anecdote regarding how research findings involving the Lakota people have been misrepresented in the past. He explained the way in which *iktomi* stories had been shared with researchers and anthropologists, noting: *They told *iktomi* stories to anthropologists who are seen in the Western world as very intelligent…they left with*
these stories and said 'this is how these people think...this is what they need to be taught...but these iktomi stories are the same story every year...but depending on where you’re at in your life, there are things added to it... so they tell it to children one way, to toddlers another way, but by the time you’re an adult, they teach you a bunch of philosophical things about your life, about your people. But people only see one story...somebody did research and found this out and put it in a book...that’s what I don’t want this [research study] to be...so something like that...don’t be a savior.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Christopher expressed a desire for the findings of the study to be implemented in a way that avoids a simplified or one-dimensional interpretation, drawing parallels to how iktomi stories were shared with anthropologists in the past. He emphasized the danger of reducing complex cultural narratives to a single perspective and warned against adopting a savior mentality. In doing so, Christopher suggested a nuanced and respectful approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of Indigenous knowledge and experiences through honoring the complexity of such Indigenous knowledge. This involves intentionally avoiding appropriation, simplification, and a savior mentality, as well as holistic and lifelong learning.

Complexity of Indigenous Knowledge

Christopher highlighted the complexity of Indigenous knowledge, using the example of iktomi stories. Such stories are not static, but evolve over time (much like giftedness), imparting different teachings depending on the audience’s age and life stages, suggesting a richness and depth of Indigenous knowledge systems.
Intentionally Resisting Appropriation, Simplification, and a Savior Mentality

Christopher also expressed a concern about the way in which researchers in the past have simplified Indigenous knowledge shared, such as iktomi stories, and presented them in a way that fit their preconceived notions. He warned against a similar simplification or appropriation of the research findings. This theme emphasizes the importance of avoiding reductionist approaches and respecting the nuanced nature of Indigenous knowledge. Moreover, Christopher explicitly stated, “don’t be a savior,” emphasizing the need to avoid paternalistic attitudes in research and practice. This theme reflects a desire for collaborative and respectful engagement rather than an approach that positions external entities as saviors or experts. His stance suggests a desire for the empowerment and agency of Indigenous communities in interpreting and sharing their own narratives and the critical importance of listening to such narratives.

Holistic and Lifelong Learning

Overall, Christopher’s sharing of the way iktomi stories teach philosophical concepts throughout one’s life underscores the theme of holistic and lifelong learning within Indigenous cultures. This perspective suggests that research findings should acknowledge and respect the lifelong and multifaceted nature of Indigenous knowledge transmission, particularly as such knowledges are revitalized, maintained, and sustained currently and into the future within K-12 contexts and beyond.

Lynn

An Introduction to Lynn

Lynn belongs to multiple tribal affiliations, including the Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, and Shawnee. She works in a research and evaluation capacity for a
prominent Native education advocacy organization, in which she is part of evaluating research-based education resources for educators, community members, and students. She also works in a variety of Native advocacy capacities outside her official professional role and is currently pursuing her doctorate in social justice education, education policy, and Indigenous education. Lynn is an Indigenous K-12 educator, researcher, and advocate. Themes that emerged from Lynn’s responses to the opening conversation prompts included a) recognition of diversity within tribal communities, b) Indigenous voice and choice in K-12 contexts and beyond, as well as c) the need for critical examination of current education policies.

Diversity among Native Communities

When asked what about her tribal culture she wished others knew more about, Lynn explained: *One thing I wish folks knew is that a lot of my generation and younger are inter-tribal, interracial, have diverse identities, and self-identities…*I think folks think that we have a pan-Indigenous identity, and we don't. So, I think that's one thing that people need to know is we're not a generalized population. We're very distinct in our tribal nations. Each nation has their own governing structure as their own sovereign nation. And so, we represent these multiple tribal nations and communities…they're all very distinct in that way.

Lynn noted that each nation has its own governing structure and functions as a sovereign entity, emphasizing the need to move beyond a generalized, homogenous understanding of Indigenous populations and recognize the autonomy and uniqueness of each tribal nation with its specific cultural practices, governance systems, and community structures. Tribal communities are not monolithic but are characterized by diversity,
individuality, and distinct identities within the broader framework of tribal nations.
Understanding these nuances is crucial for fostering accurate and respectful interactions with Indigenous communities.

**Indigenous Voice and Choice**

Reflecting on her professional role and inspiration for her work, Lynn described:

*I’m a researcher and evaluator for educational policy and education research…they’ve [organization] had consulting firms that used to do internal evaluations, but they created a permanent role and it was really to do evaluations from an Indigenous perspective and evaluating the effectiveness of the work of the organization and how it delivers different resources and programs and information to our stakeholders as well as…uplift and center Indigenous research…and start using our own data sources… in our policy work, there’s obviously national databases…but when we think about Indigenous research, it’s in juxtaposition of what those national databases are and the history of those national databases…so really my position is creating a research department for [organization].*

Lynn’s role as a researcher and evaluator is distinctly centered on Indigenous perspectives. This aspect of her professional role emphasizes the importance of evaluating educational policy and research initiatives from within an Indigenous framework. This approach involves uplifting Indigenous research methodologies and utilizing community-specific data sources, thereby prioritizing the unique needs and contexts of Indigenous communities. By working to use Indigenous data sources and methodologies, Lynn suggested shifting away from reliance on external national databases, acknowledging the historical context and limitations of such data in representing Indigenous experiences.
Critical Examination of Educational Policies

Lynn’s responses also pointed to the way in which a critical examination of national databases and the historical context of these databases has implications for educational policies. K-12 institutions should approach policy development and implementation with a critical lens, considering how policies may impact Indigenous students and communities. Policies should be informed by an understanding of the historical complexities and cultural nuances associated with Indigenous education, which requires educators and policymakers alike to be familiar with Indigenous narratives, both historical and modern.

Expression of Giftedness

When asked how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and/or Indigenous worldview, Lynn explained: ...without sharing too much, because I think we do have definitions in our language about giftedness, but that really goes into the deep-rooted identities within our communities that aren’t necessarily shared outside of our communities...well, specifically my Pueblo community, it’s not necessarily shared. So, I will try to share or demonstrate things that I can that are appropriate for the public...off the top of my head, we have potters, we have singers, dancers. We have folks that can cook or farm...those are all forms of giftedness or knowledge that occur within my Pueblo community. And they all take different skill sets and characteristics and abilities. And not just that...for instance, like a potter, to know the stories of the clay, to know the relationship to the clay, of the designs, having care for that type of knowledge....so the concept of giftedness can really go into some deep cultural knowledge that can’t always
be shared outside of our communities [Native/Indigenous]. And I think that’s where it becomes really difficult to share and express giftedness outside of our communities.

Lynn further described the way in which giftedness is not only expressed within her community, but the reciprocal nature of those expressions and how they are often honed throughout one’s life. She explained: 

...even when I say farmers [as an example of giftedness] they have to have reciprocal relationships with the land...and now...in the time of the climate crisis, they are knowledgeable about how the climate is having an impact on crops...of course they’re trying to think through solutions or what do these seasons look like when they shift...they’re paying close attention and observing...to how plant relatives are responding to what is happening in the environment around us...and that takes a lifelong journey of becoming a farmer, working the land and understanding what has happened in the past...and not only that, but it’s a form of storytelling and sharing stories with farmers of what they’ve done within their fields or what they’re noticing...so I think those are forms of giftedness...so basically any form of giftedness in our community requires a lot of patience, a lot of care, and a lot of reciprocity of building out relationships in regard to whatever skillset you’re developing...but again, it’s not in isolation...it’s among the community. So, you’re not building that skill set in a silo. You’re building that skill set within a community.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

In Lynn’s explanation of expressions of giftedness within her tribal culture, she emphasized the deep-rooted identities embedded in her community, in which sharing knowledges with those outside the community is not appropriate. She described the way expressions of giftedness, though, often include activities like pottery, singing, dancing,
cooking, and farming, each requiring distinct skill sets. Major themes to emerge from her response included a) a holistic and community-centric understanding of giftedness, b) the role of cultural knowledge and identity as related to giftedness, c) the inherently of reciprocity and relationships within expressions of giftedness, and d) patience, care, and lifelong learning as parts of the gifted experience.

**Holistic and Community-Centric Giftedness**

Lynn’s response suggested that the concept of giftedness within her tribal communities often extends beyond individual skills to encompass a holistic approach that involves the entire community. Giftedness is viewed as a collective effort, with individuals contributing their unique skills and knowledge within the context of the community. This theme emphasizes the interconnectedness of skills and the communal nature of developing and expressing giftedness.

**Cultural Knowledge and Identity**

Lynn also highlighted the way in which the definitions of giftedness within her language are deeply rooted in the cultural identities of the community. These definitions may involve profound cultural knowledge that is not easily or appropriately shared outside of the community. Giftedness is intertwined with cultural practices, such as pottery, singing, dancing, farming, and language, and often involves knowing the stories, relationships, and histories associated with these practices. Thus, cultural richness is embedded in the expression of giftedness.

**Reciprocity and Relationships**

Furthermore, Lynn emphasized the importance of reciprocity and relationships, using farming as an example. She noted the way farmers must not only maintain
reciprocal relationships with the land, but understand the narratives – past, present, and future – surrounding what the environment needs. This theme suggests that giftedness involves not only skill development but also a commitment to sustainable and lifelong learning practices. The ability to observe, adapt, and share stories with the community becomes integral to expressing giftedness in this context.

**Patience, Care, and Lifelong Learning**

Overall, Lynn described giftedness within the tribal community as requiring a significant investment of time and effort. Individuals need patience, care, and a commitment to lifelong learning to develop their skills. Whether it’s pottery, farming, drumming, or language, the process of expressing one’s gifts is characterized by dedication as well as a sense of responsibility and community. There is value placed on the journey of skill development and the ongoing cultivation of knowledge within the community. This contrasts with many Western approaches to learning and education, which often prioritize the end of the learning journey in some tangible way (i.e., degree, certificate, award, etc.) that is meant to highlight oneself rather than the way the learning contributes to a community.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In thinking about how giftedness is nurtured within her tribal community, Lynn explained: ...so there’s this really amazing article by Dr. Romero...she published it in the early 1990s, and she talks about giftedness and nurturing [giftedness] in terms of our families, like within our community itself. The things that I spoke to in the previous question [on how giftedness is expressed], you see those characteristics in children...like it could come at an early age [the skill/ability] when a young child is able to show that
passion, that skill set, that interest in the different knowledge systems within our community...a lot of those children turn into adults who are able to cultivate it at a very high level...and then there are some folks that arrive at it in different forms of their life...and it’s not that they’re not gifted...it just comes to them in a different form of their life...and they either acknowledge it and really hone in on that or sometimes they don’t always have the capacity to really give it the time to develop because there’s so many external factors that kind of hinder our ability to focus on what is considered gifted in our communities...but I think that’s also the beauty of it...is that everyone has multiple angles or levels that they’re coming to any type of craft or skill set or gifted talent...so there’s a thing of having to need each other...like no one is going to be an expert in anything...we don’t describe ourselves in that form...because the reality is that we’re always growing and learning from each other...and so learning in community in terms of learning is something we think about.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

When discussing how giftedness is nurtured within her tribal community, Lynn referred to an article by Dr. Romero from early 1990 (Romero, 1994), highlighting the importance of familial and community support in cultivating giftedness. Lynn expressed that individuals may develop giftedness at different stages of life, emphasizing the diverse paths people take in acknowledging and honing their talents. Themes to emerge from Lynn’s response regarding how giftedness is often nurtured within her tribal community involved a) the role of early recognition and passion, b) acknowledging different paths to giftedness, and c) understanding the capacity to develop the importance of community learning.
Early Recognition and Passion

Lynn noted that giftedness is often recognized and nurtured from an early age within her tribal community. She described how children may display passion, skill sets, and interests in various knowledge systems. This early recognition serves as a foundation for the cultivation of giftedness, allowing individuals to lean into their passions with the support of their community.

Different Paths to Giftedness

Lynn explained that individuals may arrive at giftedness at different stages of their lives. It is acknowledged that the development of giftedness is not uniform, and people may discover their talents and passions at various points in their life journey. This theme emphasizes the flexibility and diversity in the paths individuals take to recognize and nurture their gifted talents. Similarly, Lynn also acknowledged external factors that can often impact an individual’s capacity to fully develop their giftedness. Historical factors, including the legacy of colonization and systemic oppression of Indigenous peoples, contribute to external influences that may hinder individuals’ ability to cultivate their talents in a way that aligns with their Native identity, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these broader factors.

Capacity to Develop and Community Learning

Overall, Lynn emphasized the beauty of everyone approaching crafts, skill sets, or gifted talents from multiple angles and levels. The community is described as a place where individuals learn from each other, and there is a mutual need for collaboration. This theme highlights the communal nature of learning and the understanding that no one is considered an expert in isolation. The community provides a supportive environment
for individuals to grow, learn, and share their talents toward a balanced, meaningful human experience.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

*Well, our language is not written, it’s oral,* Lynn explained, when asked if there was a word or phrase within her tribal culture used to describe gifted individuals. She went on to say: *I would say there’s something to describe an action...there’s a kinship system in the way knowledge is shared within our communities...and without going too much into deep-rooted details, we’re not learning talents in isolation...we’re not growing in isolation...the folks that are considered gifted are not gifted in isolation...they are part of communities and sub communities within our nation...this is a really hard question for me...it’s a hard question because it’s like problem solving, right? It’s like seeking advice and problem solving...for example, anytime you are seeking advice as a person or trying to come up with a solution to any kind of thing within your life, our initial response is to go to our parents...and I will say there are no children who don’t have parents in our community...we may not have our biological parents, but we have what we consider traditional parents within our community...for example, when my grandmother passed, her children, my mom and my aunties and uncles were gifted to her younger sister...so you’re constantly having someone above you to care for you and guide you...and if your parents don’t have the advice or knowledge to guide you in whatever thing you are seeking, they go to their parents...and then it goes into the clan systems and so on and so on...so it’s not having a word...but having a description of a system of how advice or knowledge is transferred from generation to generation...no one knows everything within our community...we are all children belonging to each other within our*
community...children need to be loved and guided...my great aunt just turned 100 and she’s still being cared for by someone within our community.

Lynn also mentioned that in connection to knowledge sharing, there’s a word I’m comfortable with sharing...my mom always tells me, shani-shanite, and there’s not really a spelling for that...it’s just a phrase that can have multiple meanings... it can have a meaning of ‘be careful’, it can mean ‘gentleness’, it can mean ‘well-being’, it can mean, you know, sending good thoughts. It has multiple meanings...and that phrase comes to mind...when she says it to me, she’s saying, you know, because of the role that I have...I’m a first generation college graduate...so my mom always tells me, be gentle with the way you move in this world...you have a lot of depth of knowledge...but that knowledge has to be used in a very careful and caring manner...like, be gentle with yourself, be gentle how you move, be gentle with others...it’s always an action...our language moves in verbs...so I’m telling you this [her mother] to move about your work in a good way...to remember that and move in that direction.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Lynn reminded readers that her tribal language is oral, not written, and that certain words, phrases, and understandings are part of a closed practice. She shared that a kinship system and a communal approach to knowledge sharing within their community is often emphasized, where advice and knowledge are transferred through generations, involving parents, traditional parents, and clan systems. Additionally, Lynn shared the phrase shani-shanite, which encapsulates multiple meanings such as care, gentleness, and well-being. This phrase, used often by her mother, signifies the importance of moving in the world and sharing one’s knowledge and gifts with care. Two major themes to emerge
from Lynn’s response included 1) a community oriented conception of giftedness, and 2) a caring, action-oriented conception of giftedness.

**Community Oriented Conceptions of Giftedness**

Lynn explained the way in which giftedness is conceptualized within a community-centric framework, emphasizing that individuals are not gifted in isolation. Lynn goes on to describe a kinship system and a complex network of relationships within the community, where knowledge and advice are transferred from generation to generation. The communal nature of knowledge sharing and the reliance on familial and clan systems highlight a collective approach to defining and cultivating giftedness within the community, lending a deeper look into the purpose of giftedness within Indigenous worldview – to give back to the community in some way.

**Caring, Action Orientated Conceptions of Giftedness**

Lynn also underscored the oral nature of her community’s language. She described the language as being rich in verbs and actions. The phrase *shani-shanite* is provided as an example, conveying multiple meanings related to being careful, gentle, promoting well-being, and sending positive thoughts. This theme emphasizes that conceptualizing giftedness is often embedded in actions and the way individuals move – emotionally, socially, and physically – within the community and beyond. The use of verbs suggests that giftedness is also not static but involves active and intentional engagement with one’s knowledge and role within the community and in the world, particularly as one interacts with others. This theme highlights the nurturing aspect of giftedness, where individuals are guided to use their knowledge in a careful and caring
manner. The phrase suggests that giftedness involves not only the possession of knowledge but also the responsible and considerate application of that knowledge.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

When invited to share a form of representation that she thinks represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Lynn responded:...a scholar I really enjoy reading is Dr. Henry Suina...he wrote a beautiful piece about when he went to school and the whole research is around him being a child...growing up with his grandparents and speaking the language and being around elders...then he had to go to the day school that was built in their community and he talks about how everything he knew as a child was considered bad, like his language, the way he looked, his clothes...and for me, when I read stories like that, it’s very powerful to share his narrative and in such an eloquent way...and I admire...that he is very rooted in his pueblo and he is always constantly sharing his knowledge...and to me...I think of him as such a gifted person in that way...because I’m a younger scholar, so I look to folks like him who provide kind of like a path or guided of ‘how do we do this?’, like, how do we continue to work in education and research and really prescriptive institutions and spaces...while we continue being who we are, you know? And I think he and other folks have demonstrated that we are so capable...we’re capable of maneuvering like that...and I think we provide models for our young folks on what that looks like...it’s not always easy...but I think we provide lived experience models for our children...and as the world becomes more globalized, I see that it’s becoming more difficult for our young folks to make sense of what is happening...how they balance that with who they are...how they balance that with the different knowledges that exist within our community.
Analysis of Form of Representation

Lynn cited Dr. Henry Suina as a representation of giftedness within the Indigenous worldview, appreciating his narrative that reflects the challenges he faced encountering discrimination when attending day school. Lynn noted seeing him as a gifted individual who provides a guiding path for younger scholars like herself, demonstrating how to navigate educational and research spaces while preserving cultural identity. She emphasized the importance of such lived experience models for Indigenous youth facing the complexities of a globalized world. Two themes to emerged from her selection of representation, including 1) the importance of native narratives and modeling, and 2) cultural continuity.

Native Narratives and Modeling

The power of Dr. Suina’s narrative lies in its ability to convey emotions, cultural nuances, and the transformative impact (both negative and positive) of educational experiences. Furthermore, Lynn highlighted Dr. Suina as a role model, describing his ability to navigate prescriptive institutions, maintain rootedness in his pueblo, and share his knowledge, perhaps exemplifying the *shani-shanite* notion of moving carefully and thoughtfully through the world. In doing so, he is a model for young scholars looking to do the same. This theme emphasizes the importance of having real-life Native role models who demonstrate how to navigate the challenges of Western education and research while staying true to one’s cultural identity. Role modeling as a form of representation suggests that seeing individuals successfully embody both cultural identity and academic/professional pursuits serves as a powerful example for younger generations.
Cultural Continuity

Lynn discussed the challenges faced by younger generations in making sense of a globalized world while balancing their cultural identity and community knowledge. The representation chosen, Dr. Suina’s narrative, serves to bridge this gap and provide a model for navigating the complexities of cultural continuity in a globalized context. This theme underscores the importance of representation in guiding young individuals on how to reconcile their cultural identity with the evolving global landscape, suggesting that narratives of individuals who have successfully navigated this balance can serve as valuable guides in establishing cultural continuity.

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

When asked how she’d like to see the findings implemented in practice, Lynn kept her response transparent and compelling, noting how the act of Native healing is often a precursor to visioning and dreaming: I think what’s hard for me about this question, and I’m going to be a little bit frank, is that...everybody wants solutions from Native folks, but nobody realizes that healing, processing, and dreaming have to take place within that community before Native folks can provide any type of solutions. Another thing is that folks have to be ready...like, institutions have to be ready to shift policies. You can’t go into Native communities and say ‘well we want all this from you but we’re not sure if it’s going to shift the policy or not’...because that is very frustrating and is something that is always happening.

She went to address the connection between visioning and dreaming with implementing those visions and dreams in practice, particularly as they relate to real, actionable policy changes: It’s one thing for us to vision and dream and that’s an
amazing thing…but the reality is when we’re visioning and we’re dreaming, what is that
going to be like? What is that reality going to be in terms of how the district is going to
incorporate that visioning or dreaming into their assessments for giftedness…so I think a
lot of policy changes need to take place for that even to be a reality…and I’m not trying
to boggle it down with the logistics and problematic things, but that’s a reality…I think
for me personally…it’s like we can do all the ‘feel good’ things…but it’s also
extractive…extractive of our time, our emotional labor…if the school district is not ready
to receive that information and care for it…and when I say care for it, I mean implement
it into actual practices for the school district…and there are going to be some tribal
communities who are ready…who have already done the healing work…who have
already had internal discussions…they already went through the histories of Western
education to get to where we are now and where they want to go for the future…and
they’re like ‘okay, this is how we’re going to incorporate our tribal identity into
assessments…into definitions or policies that are going to guide our school’, but not all
tribes are going to be ready for that…I think we have to go to ‘how is federal policy, state
policy, district policy going to make space for Indigenous people to show up and share
who they are? Because the questions you asked today, depending on who you talk to, are
very intimate…and there’s always going to be this hesitancy, like this is very intimate to
me and my community, how much do I want to share? Because it’s been asked of us so
much…it’s very difficult to be open.

Lynn also provided contextualized examples of her lived experiences with dealing
with deficit-oriented policies and practices, particularly with school assessment protocols,
explaining: When I was a practitioner, I used to sit in on IEP [Individualized Education
Planning] meetings and
Plan] meetings with families and students...and IEPs are such a power dynamic because you have one focus of education, of knowledge from a very Western lens and then you have the family coming in...and the assessment they are going over doesn’t acknowledge the knowledge the family has or the child has from that community...it’s just a very deficit-based model...and there’s very little room for the family or student to show who they are in that meeting...and [if anything] it’s a side note...so if we’re coming into these spaces as a side note, why would we want to put more effort into that? ...so I think that’s the hard part for me...ideally, I’d like to see that be lesser...like 50% of an intake or assessment ...so that would be my goal, my dream...and again, not all tribes, not all communities are going to want to [participate]...we do our own observations...family and community observations preparing for the next level of different life things within their communities...and I don’t know if it’s always going to be appropriate to turn that into any form of an assessment. And that’s the hard part...that’s the hard part of our education...Indigenous education is very fluid and very distinct to who we are as Indigenous people and how we live our lives and how we observe the world and how we observe relationships...and then we have over here these forms and these processes and these policies...and even though we want to validate this [Indigenous knowledges], it’s always going to be valid to us...that’s not a question...but the thing is, over here is questioning the validity of our knowledge [Western practices]...we want to demonstrate that this [Indigenous practice(s)] have so much depth to it, but we’re not trying to institutionalize oral based knowledge...we’re not trying to institutionalize ancestral knowledge...we’re not trying to institutionalize that...so that’s tricky. Because here [in Western society] they want the chart, they want the data, this is not for that...we have to
be transparent...and every tribal community is going to be very different...so it’s like ‘how do you strengthen the systems of each distinctive community?’...like, think locally, act globally...so it’s localizing education...and this could be not just for Indigenous folks.

Lynn provided insight into potential approaches to implementation of findings, concluding with a perspective from her grandfather: One of the distinct ways I’ve seen [transparency and integration] is in Maui [where] I’ve had the opportunity to travel...and visit multiple immersion schools...where state standardized assessments are a reality, but it’s not their focus....their focus has been language...has been culture...has been preparing their children to live on their island and work with globalization but also be grounded in who they are...they are constantly advocating...so I guess I want to live in the dream and the manifesting how we can do this [Indigenous approaches to gifted education]....there’s a lot of healing that needs to take place coinciding with how we implement these things into K-12 practices. And who’s going to do the mobilizing, right? Because we have the teachers. We have the policy people. We have the researchers. Like we are going to need someone. And I guess that goes back to my earlier description of not everyone having [all the knowledge]. Not everyone being the sole gifted person. Right? Or not everyone being an expert. And I guess that's where I really see you're always going to need help. You're always going to need other folks. Like it's going to take all of us and figuring out how do we implement this? My grandpa used to tell us that we don’t throw our people away. And he used to say that in our language...And to me, what he was saying was, we’re all part of this community...gifted, special needs, LGBTQ, woman, man...we’re all part of this community, and no one’s greater than the other
because we all need each other...you’re always going to need each other...it’s okay to need people.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Throughout her response, Lynn emphasized the need for Native healing, processing, and dreaming within communities before expecting solutions, highlighting the frustration when institutions are not ready to shift policies and underlining the importance of readiness. She addressed the connection among visioning, dreaming, and policy changes and the overall mismatch between honoring Indigenous knowledges and deficit-orientations. Powerful themes to emerge from her response included a) healing as a necessary prerequisite, b) navigating the tension between vision and reality, c) asset-based approaches, and d) inclusivity and interdependence.

Healing as a Prerequisite

Lynn emphasized the importance of healing, processing, and dreaming within Native communities before expecting solutions or collaborating on solutions. This theme underscores the need for cultural and community-centered approaches that prioritize the well-being of Indigenous individuals first and foremost. It implies that any implementation of findings should be preceded by acknowledgment, space, and support for the healing processes within each community.

Navigating the Tension Between Vision and Reality

While acknowledging the importance of visioning and dreaming, Lynn raised questions about the implementation of these dreams within the constraints of existing Western policies and systems. This theme emphasizes the tension between aspirational goals and the realities of educational policies and practices. It suggests the need for a
pragmatic approach that navigates the complexities of translating visions into actionable changes. Institutions need to be genuinely open to shifting policies if they are to truly engage with Native communities. There is a call for a proactive stance from educational institutions, acknowledging that readiness and policy shifts are crucial for meaningful engagement. Extractive practices that demand input from Native communities without a commitment to policy changes only further hurt the learning experiences of Indigenous children.

**Asset-based Approaches**

Lynn noted concerns regarding prevailing deficit-based models of assessment, particularly within the context of Individualized Education Plans (IEP). There is a notable call for a paradigm shift in assessments, urging for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and community observations and say-so in understanding children holistically. Doing so requires a departure from rigid assessment paradigms towards more fluid, holistic models that align with the dynamic, holistic nature of Indigenous education. Institutionalizing Native knowledge is not appropriate or responsive and, in some instances, might contribute to existing negative assimilation practices. This calls on educators to consider alternative ways to not just integrate Indigenous knowledge when making educational decisions for students, but to consider how to prioritize it, perhaps even outside of certain Westernized practices/protocols.

**Inclusivity and Interdependence**

Lynn shared a profound cultural principle passed down by her grandfather, emphasizing that no one should be thrown away, and all members of the community are interconnected. This theme promotes inclusivity and interdependence, emphasizing that
the implementation of findings should recognize and honor the diversity within Indigenous communities. It suggests that an inclusive approach is essential for building a supportive and collaborative educational environment, in which students’ unique identities and self-orientations are all needed to create a community of learning and growing. Lynn emphasized the need for transparency in navigating the intersection of Indigenous and Western educational paradigms. She acknowledged that the two worldviews have different expectations, and finding solutions requires openness about intentions, goals, and challenges. Moreover, she reiterates the diversity among tribal communities, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. Each community has its distinct systems, and efforts should be directed at strengthening these individualized systems rather than imposing a uniform solution.

Dezi

Introduction to Dezi

Dezi is a citizen of the Diné (Navajo) Nation. She is the educator initiative manager for a prominent Native education advocacy organization. She has experience in both elementary and secondary settings as a special education teacher. She is also currently pursuing an education doctorate. Dezi is an Indigenous K-12 educator, researcher, and advocate. Themes that emerged from Dezi’s responses to the opening conversation prompts included a) the complexity of Native culture and social issues, b) education as a tool for Westernization and colonization, historically and currently, and c) the impact of Native representation in education.

Complexity of Native Culture and Social Issues
When describing her tribal culture, Dezi explained: *I am part of the Navajo Nation, the Diné...there’s so much about our culture that I wish others knew about...one of my big things is just the social inequities that are within the education system, general lifestyle situations, the misunderstanding of generations trauma and the impact that has had on our communities and our peoples...stereotypes...blood quantum...the concept of blood quantum and how it has been used as a tool to try to divide our people and even our own people have used it in ways that divide ourselves...there’s just so much that’s out there...like, if you could just tap into this it would make sense or if you could understand this part of who we are, it would eliminate this stereotype...and all you need is the information that’s ‘here’ kind of thing...but it gets hard to pinpoint a start to it all...you can start at any point in our story and it’s all connected...so it’s hard to find just one or two things to share because there’s so much to choose from."

Throughout her response, Dezi emphasized the richness and complexity of Navajo culture, expressing a desire for others to understand the multifaceted nature of the community. The mention of social inequalities, generational trauma, stereotypes, and the divisive impact of the concept of blood quantum highlights the interconnected challenges faced by the Navajo Nation. She underscores the difficulty of pinpointing specific issues due to the intricate interplay of historical, cultural, and social factors. A deeper understanding of Navajo culture, history, and contemporary challenges may help to dispel stereotypes and foster a more nuanced perception. Access to accurate information about the Navajo Nation could lead to greater comprehension and appreciation, challenging preconceived notions and promoting a more informed dialogue. Dezi’s
response, overall, reinforced the interconnectedness of Navajo history and the importance of recognizing this interconnectedness to gain a holistic understanding.

**Education as a Tool for Westernization and Colonization**

When describing her professional role and what inspires her work, Dezi expressed: *I got into education after my bachelor’s degree. I graduated in Spanish literature with a minor in English literature. I was a substitute teacher for a year...and that’s when the American Indian Teacher training program opened up with Dr. Bryan Bray boy at the University of Utah. I got my master’s degree in mild-moderate special education, I went back to the reservation...I taught for a year there...I ended up getting married and moving to Alaska. I taught special education in Alaska for a year, and from there I moved back down to Utah. And I have been an adjunct instructor since 2001...my true passion is with Native American education, so I start with the [Native education organization] in May, and this is my dream job...it’s the best feeling in the world...at the end of the day I feel like I invested in the world and in the most appropriate way that fits my skills and abilities and talents...*

Dezi also described the way in which the impact of colonization severely impacted, and continues to impact, Native student education, explaining that: *Several years ago, when I was at the University of Utah, this one lady said to me that the most destructive thing for our [Native] communities was Christianity...and at the time...it was, like, shocking to hear her say something that bold...since then, the more I look into or learn, the more I study...the biggest impact on our communities has been education...education and Christianity...the combo of the two has had the most drastic impacts on our communities...because they could fight us, they could cripple us, they*
could starve us, they could give us blankets [with smallpox]...but it wasn’t until they start taking our kids away from us and putting them in their own education system that were bent on assimilation that the real ripple effect of impact occurred, because, despite the other challenges the federal government placed on us, we still overcame them ... we were able to adapt, but the education system hit us the hardest and we’re still, of course, adapting and changing our ways to accommodate for that impact on who we are. Here, Dezi emphasized the profound impact of education, particularly the assimilation-focused Westernized education system, on Native communities. Historical trauma resulting from the forced assimilation policies and the removal of Native children from their families has left a lasting ripple effect that can still be seen and felt today.

**Impact of Native Representation in Education**

Dezi also posited that the biggest impact that we can make, in my opinion, is in the education system...education is not new to us, right? Westernized education is new to us. And that’s where our kids are: Westernized institutions. And in order for us to find safe spaces for them, we have to work within the Westernized institutions with Westernized tools...like degrees and PhDs and positions and the system...so just empowering our educators who are in these spaces, that’s my passion now. Even if you get one Native teacher in front of students in their whole educational career, that’s going to make a difference....so my position and role is to recruit, train, and retain native educators, and to just be able to support them and empower them to be teachers that they can be for our students so that impact has a trickle effect into generations.

Thus, Dezi’s passion lies in Native American education, driven by empowering Native educators within Westernized institutions can be a catalyst for positive change.
Her focus is on recruiting, training, and retaining Native educators to make a lasting impact on Native students and communities. Her response emphasized the transformative potential of having even one Native teacher throughout a student’s educational journey. The focus on recruiting, training, and retaining Native educators aims to create a ripple effect, perhaps a counter ripper effect to colonization, influencing generations by instilling cultural understanding and representation within the education system toward creating safe and meaningful learning spaces for Native children.

Expression of Giftedness

Before Dezi described how giftedness is expressed in her tribal culture, she reminded me that: *Our [Diné] tribal communities have existed since time immemorial…and when I try to explain to people the concept of history and U.S. history, it’s just a chapter in our story of our book, right? We have so many chapters that came before it, so many chapters that will come after it…and this amount of time that we’ve had to deal with colonization is just one chapter…we cannot forget all the chapters that came before that…and I like to go back to the idea that we’ve had complex education systems for millennia, and the focus on it was on surviving and the continuation of culture and traditions and cultural knowledges and communities…it always goes back to communities and the continuation of our communities, whether those are urban, on the rez, rural – wherever they are.*

She went on to explain that: *So in my mind, the concept of giftedness is the ability to be able to use the resources that you have within your realm of life and knowledge, which would include culture, songs, dance, family, people, the land…and to be able to use all the resources that you have around you for the continuation and support of our*
native communities in whatever way that looks like. So, are we supporting our elders? Are we supporting our children? Are we supporting families or marriages or health or education, so being able to use our resources in the best way we can...but in Western knowledge, people who are gifted...it’s almost like the Western system of knowledge is easier and more natural for them. In my opinion, that general Western concept of giftedness, right? That knowledge is tested in a Western way, it’s supported in a Western way, and then the following resources that they give these students who are then qualified as gifted are a continuation of the Western educational experience. Whereas in our communities, you’re not tested, nobody is tested for anything. Those skills come naturally in the settings that they’re in...everybody comes to the table with different gifts and talents. In Native communities, I feel like that concept of exceptional is not as glamorized or rewarded as it is in Western education systems...we value all gifts and talents, we value average, we find value in people who are below average because everybody comes to the table with different talents and gifts and their ability to use them to support the community is what makes them valuable and helpful and useful.

Dezi also shared an example from her lived experience as an educator, explaining:

One of my favorite concepts is the idea that if you only have 40% to give in a day and you give 40%, that’s 100%...and within our communities and the histories that we have, it’s difficult to say like, oh well, this student is not gifted because they’re not performing the way that they think...well they’re showing up with the 40% that they have. One of my fourth graders was hospitalized for failure to thrive when she was an infant and for her to come back from that...she had no control over that situation...it was entirely her parents, and even then, her parents were dealing with their own traumas and their own
experiences from their own childhoods and abuse in the boarding school system...but all of those things that came down to it, and she showed up in my class with a smile on her face and an eagerness to learn and care for me as an individual and a person. And those three characteristics, in my opinion, are more gifted than somebody who gets a million on the ACT. She showed up. She cared. She was happy. She was eager to just be in the classroom. And that’s a gift.... for them [students] to show up in whatever way that they can with what they have is special.

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

Dezi began her response by contextualizing the concept of giftedness within her tribal community, emphasizing the enduring existence of these communities since time immemorial and the complex education systems focused on survival, culture, and community continuity. She explained that giftedness in her community is the ability to utilize resources like culture, songs, dance, family, and the land for the support and continuation of Native communities, contrasting this with the Western education system’s more narrow view of giftedness. In doing so, three major themes emerged from her response, including a) a holistic view of giftedness, b) the value of diverse talents, and c) resilience and persistence as a gift.

**Holistic View of Giftedness**

Dezi emphasized a holistic perspective on giftedness within her tribal community and worldview. Giftedness is seen as the ability to utilize various resources within one’s life and knowledge, encompassing cultural elements such as songs, dance, family, and the land. The focus is on using these resources to support and continue Native communities in diverse ways, including elder support, family, health, and education.
Value of Diverse Talents

Dezi also contrasted the Western concept of giftedness, explaining that it’s often associated with standardized testing and a specific educational framework. She explained that in many Native communities, exceptionality is not glamorized to the same extent as it might be in Western society. Instead, there is an appreciation for the diversity of talents individuals bring to the community. Overall, the ability to use one’s talents to support the community is what holds value.

Resilience and Persistence as a Gift

Dezi also shared a poignant example of a student of hers who faced significant challenges but demonstrated resilience by showing up in the classroom with a positive attitude and eagerness to learn. Dezi’s narrative emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing these qualities as significant gifts, challenging conventional Western notions of giftedness that may not fully capture the diverse strengths and contributions individuals bring to the educational setting. In this context, the emphasis shifts from a narrow focus on academic achievement to a broader acknowledgment of the unique and invaluable qualities that contribute to a positive and enriching learning environment for all.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

When asked to share how her tribal culture often nurtures expressions of giftedness, Dezi explained: This is one of the things I struggle with because I feel like when we put our Native educators into PWI [predominantly White Institutions] education programs, they’re taught the Westernized concept of teaching...they’re taught how to give tests to students...so it’s like this process of colonization continues within education
programs. Then, we produce Native educators who are perpetuating colonized Western knowledge. So, I feel like a lot of our Native educators don’t always have those opportunities to take a step back and call it [education] what it is, right? I have an MEd and am working on an EdD, but all the information and content that I have been provided has been to reinforce and support Westernized education as a colonization tool…step back from that and move forward saying from this point [onward], I hope to choose culturally revitalizing and sustaining pedagogies that will assist my students. And what does that look like in the classroom? So being able to take a step back and say, ‘this is the system that I’m working with, that I’m required [to do] in order to keep my teaching license or in order to be part of the system, this is what I’m working with…let’s go about it a different way. What does it look like in a different way? Can you show me what your skills and talents are in a way that may fit within the system or may not?’…so being able to look at the ways we accept performance, and maybe not even measure performance, just accept performance and count it as acceptable.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Within her response, Dezi reflected on the challenges faced by Native educators within Westernized education preparation programs, expressing concern that these programs often perpetuate colonized knowledge and teaching methods. Despite holding advanced degrees in education, she acknowledged the pervasive influence of Western concepts in her training, highlighting the need for all educators to step back, recognize the system’s limitations, and choose pedagogies that revitalize and sustain Indigenous culture. Thus, a) top-down assimilation practices, b) culturally revitalizing pedagogies,
and c) expanding conceptualizations and value of performance emerged as prominent themes.

**Top-Down Assimilation Practices**

In her response, Dezi drew attention to the perpetuation of colonial ideologies within Native educators’ experiences in predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and education programs, particularly teacher preparation programs. This results in many Native educators and White educators alike who may be trained in Westernized concepts of teaching, reinforcing the existing colonial structure system that not only does not align with many Indigenous ways of being, but further assimilates Native students (and educators). In this regard, the theme of top-down assimilation practices may be considered a branch of Westernized education being used as a tool for colonization, a theme that emerged in Dezi’s response to the opening conversation prompts.

**Culturally Revitalizing Pedagogies**

Dezi advocated for a shift in perspective among all educators. Instead of unconsciously perpetuating Westernized education as a tool of colonization, there is a call to consciously choose culturally revitalizing and sustaining pedagogies. This involves taking a step back (involving critical reflection), reassessing the existing system, and determining how educators can honor Indigenous ways of teaching that align with cultural values and knowledge systems.

**Expanding Conceptualizations and Value of Performance**

Moreover, Dezi emphasized the need for educators to critically examine the ways performance is accepted and measured. There’s a call to move away from rigid performance metrics and focus on accepting diverse forms of performance. This suggests
a shift towards a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach where educators can recognize and value a broader range of skills and talents that may not align with traditional Western performance standards. Such an approach underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift in how performance is evaluated, signaling a move towards a more inclusive and culturally responsive education system, which would require a re-envisioning of schools toward prioritizing authentic recognition of diverse skills and talents and fostering an environment where students are valued for their strengths and contributions.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

In regard to a word or phrase used to describe giftedness within her tribal culture, Dezi explained: *I feel like it’s not so much a word…it’s more of a concept…and it means ‘I belong to the holy people’ and it’s a view of the idea that we belong to something bigger than ourselves and more sacred than ourselves…that we belong to holy people…it’s not necessarily like this person gets this title and this person gets that title and this person gets it because they have done certain things to deserve it. It’s a general view of who we are as a people, that we individually and as a whole belong to the holy people…and in my mind when I think of gifted, it’s not picking out certain performances or certain people, it’s a view and a perspective that we as a people are something special…and if I were to think of it [giftedness] in that type of Indigenous worldview, that’s how I would explain or describe it more so than anything else.*

**Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness**

In her response, Dezi explained that the concept of giftedness within her tribal culture involves more of a holistic view than a specific word, emphasizing the idea that
individuals, both individually and collectively, belong to something sacred and greater than themselves. The main theme to emerge from this response was the way in which giftedness is a collective, sacred experience.

**Giftedness as a Collective, Sacred Experience**

Dezi’s response suggested a holistic view of giftedness, where the entire community is regarded as belonging to the holy people, emphasizing a shared identity that is more profound and meaningful than individual accomplishments. The term “I belong to the holy people” underscores a deep connection to sacred elements within Dezi’s Indigenous worldview. Giftedness is not solely about individual merit but is intertwined with a spiritual and sacred understanding. Giftedness, in this context, is associated with the uniqueness and specialness of the community as a whole. It is not about singling out specific individuals for certain achievements but recognizing the inherent special qualities of the entire community, contributing to a shared identity tied to the human experience.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

When asked about a form of representation that represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Dezi asked back – Can I share a story? I have an older sister who qualified as gifted, and she is ridiculously intelligent, and she has always been this fascinating role model for me…and in elementary school [she] was tested and qualified as gifted. So, when I got into fourth grade, they pulled me from the class to do the same gifted test, and we got the test results back and they were like ‘no, she doesn’t qualify for gifted services’ and it was shocking to me…and it’s kind of always been this thing where it’s like, ‘oh, I’m not gifted, I’m not my sister, I’m not as smart as her, and I’m not as
amazing as her’ kind of thing. And I have three sisters, and each one of them is
individually incredibly intelligent and beautiful in their own ways…my gift and my skill
and my talent or my representation of my gift was my persistence and my ability to take
my ‘less gifted’ mind and still be able to invest in myself and invest in my own knowledge
and relationships with people in a way that I would be able to be in a position where I
can still create change, and I can be able to invest more in the education system to
improve it for our communities and for Indigenous populations…and it was not because I
had a crazy [good] GPA or ACT score or phenomenal gifted ability…it’s just been my
persistence and ability to just keep going and keep working at something that wasn’t
natural to me…because with her, it came natural, it was easier, and she is still that
way…like it’ still easier for her, we’re both doing an EdD program together and the
ability to pull things together and make things work are amazing and incredible…and I
just look at her with so much ‘ah’ because she does it so well…but we still end up in
similar places investing in ways that fulfill us in ways that will make a positive
impact…our gifts have been a lifetime of overcoming and investing and trying to just keep
doing what we know is right in our hearts in whatever way that means.

**Analysis of Form of Representation**

Despite not meeting conventional, Western criteria for giftedness, Dezi
emphasized her unique gifts of persistence, investment in self-improvement, and
dedication to creating positive, proactive change in the education system for Indigenous
communities. Her narrative highlights the belief in the value of personal qualities and
commitment over traditional measures of giftedness, in which giftedness as intrinsically
tied to a learning and contributing journey emerged as a theme.
Giftedness as Intrinsically Tied to a Learning and Contributing Journey

Dezi challenged the conventional notion of giftedness, emphasizing that intelligence and gifts manifest in diverse ways. Rather than relying solely on standardized testing or traditional academic measures, she recognized the unique qualities and strengths each individual possesses, including persistence, investment in self-improvement, and the ability to create positive change within the community. She acknowledged each of her sisters for their unique intelligence and beauty, emphasizing a collective understanding of excellence, where each individual contributes in their own way toward a greater good. The emphasis is not solely on individual achievements but on the combined strengths and qualities of the family and community as family. Moreover, Dezi highlighted the value of persistence and overcoming challenges. Rather than focusing on innate abilities, her narrative suggested the importance of resilience and the ability to navigate through difficulties. This perspective aligns with a broader Indigenous worldview that values the journey and the process of growth over fixed, predetermined notions of giftedness.

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

When asked how she would like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice, Dezi explained: *So much attention is placed on the extreme ends of the spectrum. Our students who are so below average, they get this intense effort from us to ‘bring them up’, right? And then we get this maybe not as intense, but this special attention on the other end of the spectrum for our gifted students, and they have more autonomy and responsibility and projects and special access to different learning opportunities. And on the other end of the spectrum, it’s so strict and formulated...and*
then we have this massive amount of student who are average and are rarely celebrated...they meet our standards, whatever those standards are...enough that we can ignore them...they fit the norm, so they’re ‘good’...the whole concept of the way we define gifted students...I just don’t like the concept of gifted students... I don’t like the definition of gifted students in Western education...I don’t like what it measures... I don’t like the fact that they are comparing students to other students...that certain learning styles match and fit the Westernized system and therefore celebrated whereas other learning styles are tolerated, and then other styles are wrong. I don’t like that gifted puts our students into these categories. All students are labeled in a way that doesn’t actually celebrate the gifts and talents they’re bringing into the setting...specifically with gifted Native students, they’re going to be talented and creative in so many different ways that won’t match the system...and not every teacher will notice it or recognize it, so I would love for that to change with everyone...with any teacher who serves Native students, they have to see those gifted abilities without being drilled or trained on the psychological tests that will produce the results they’re hoping for...they have to be able to recognize it...and that needs to be redefined and re-envisioned and all the different varying skills and abilities need to be celebrated in whatever way they can... at least accepted...that should be, like, the bare minimum.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Dezi expressed dissatisfaction with the education system’s focus on extreme ends of the academic spectrum, with intense efforts for below-average students and special attention for gifted ones, leaving average students overlooked. In doing so, she emphasized the need for a paradigm shift where all students, especially Native students,
have their diverse talents and abilities recognized, celebrated, and, at the very least, accepted without rigid categorization. Thus, rejection of categorical definitions of ability emerged as a major theme within her response.

**Rejection of Categorical Definitions of Ability**

Dezi pushed back against the conventional, categorical definitions of giftedness prevalent in Western education. She expressed dissatisfaction with the current system that classifies students as either below average, average, or gifted. The participant advocates for a more inclusive and holistic approach that recognizes and celebrates the diverse gifts and talents of all students, without imposing rigid categories. Accordingly, Dezi emphasized the need for a shift in perspective to recognize and celebrate the talents of students across the spectrum. She advocates for an approach that values and acknowledges the unique gifts and abilities of every student, especially Native students who may possess talents not easily recognized within the current system. Doing so requires challenging the reliance on standardized testing for identifying giftedness, particularly for Native students. Dezi calls for a more nuanced and culturally responsive approach, where teachers can recognize and appreciate the diverse talents of Native students without solely relying on achievement tests.

**Carmelita**

**An Introduction to Carmelita**

Carmelita is a member of the Lipan Band of Apache of Southwest Texas. Carmelita holds a PhD and is a professor at a university, supervising four individual grants that support Native scholarship. Prior, she was the teacher education chair for a Tribal College, and before that she was a secondary science teacher in a high school that
had has a 99 percent Native student enrollment. Carmelita is an Indigenous K-12 advocate. Themes that emerged from Carmelita’s responses to the opening conversation prompts included a) recognizing the long-term impact and continuity in Native education as well as b) recognizing challenges and opportunities in education regarding Native students.

Long-term Impact and Continuity in Native Education

In considering what she wished others knew more about related to her tribal culture, Carmelita explained: *I've been working in Indian education for my entire career. I used to be a classroom science teacher in a high school that was on the periphery of the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, which is on the northern border of North Dakota. I worked from high school into the tribal college and then into a university setting. And in each of those iterations, I've been able to see the progression of pursuit of education from, you know, junior high on. And one of my doctoral candidates today is actually a student who I had in junior high, and then I had her in high school, and then I had her at the tribal college as a bachelor-degree seeking student, and then at the university in her master's. And she's now getting ready to defend her doctorate in October. So, it's interesting to watch young Native children in the instance in which I was involved have some kind of self-efficacy about what education might be or could lead to... I have been able to be a part of the opportunity to watch that in certain students. And it's been really fulfilling.*

Carmelita’s professional journey spans various levels of education, from high school to tribal college and university settings. Such a background suggests a long-term commitment to and involvement in Native education. The continuity in her work,
highlighted by the mention of a doctoral candidate who has been with her since junior high school, reflects a dedication to supporting and witnessing the progression of Native students throughout their educational journeys. This theme underscores the significance of building lasting connections and making a sustained impact on students’ lives. Her response also highlighted the positive impact that supportive and continuous educational experiences can have on students’ confidence, aspirations, and success.

**Recognizing the Challenges as Opportunities**

Carmelita passionately explained the inspiration for her professional work, noting:

> What inspires me is to see how overwhelmed they are at the fact that they did it! For whatever reason, you know, they don’t necessarily feel like they can do it, and I always feel like absolutely they can…and I think if you could talk to any of the students who I’ve had over the years, they might say in common, ‘well, she just never gives up’, and I’m just like a persistent thing…and I think a lot of times Native scholars, when they stop for a semester or more, then they have this whole emotional thing that’s wrapped up in their idea that they can’t do it…so I ask for them – are you ready to come back? In working with non-Native students at the same time, I noticed that what our Native students go through to earn a degree, whether it’s a bachelor’s or a doctorate, is vastly different than what the non-native scholars go through, mostly because of the way in which they’re supported and received. So, it’s much easier if there happens to be a Native person in that institution of higher ed who sees them…because [then] they see themselves.

The theme of persistence and belief in student potential underscores Carmelita’s commitment to supporting Native students who might doubt their abilities. The phrase ‘she just never gives up’ suggests that her unwavering support and encouragement
contribute to motivating students to persist in their academic journeys. This theme emphasizes the importance of fostering resilience and confidence in Native students. The comparison between Native and non-Native students and the acknowledgment of the different experiences they go through highlight the need for tailored support systems for Native students, including representation and understanding within higher education institutions. This theme emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness and support for Native students in their pursuit of education.

Expression of Giftedness

In considering how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture, Carmelita posited: *Well, giftedness within the tribal community that I’m from is rooted deeply in the traditions of that tribe. In other words, being able to be present in ceremony, to be able to share that culture with our children. In other words, the next group. While these ceremonies have been passed down over millennia, there's been a gap in which those ceremonies were not being practiced. And so now that rebirth of it and having families engaged in that is considered to be part of the gift. The other part of the gift is having members of my tribal community in particular, which my mother and myself, my sisters, we’re all members of that tribe and have been the voice of tribal sovereignty. When I say tribal sovereignty, I'm talking about the repatriation of education. So that's a very unique kind of perspective, because when we think of repatriation, we think of all kinds of things. But never really repatriation of education. So, if you think about the gifts of education and the gifts of children involved in education, those particular gifts were pretty much stripped from native people through assimilation and all kinds of things. And so, we're in an age now where our young scholars, our young Native advocates, if you will, are*
saying we're taking back our education, we're repatriating it. And that is considered a huge turn, a huge shift in worldview for Indigenous people across the country and even further, the idea that their ways of thinking, their ways of learning, their ways of understanding nature and the world around them are valid. They're not just some kind of mumbo jumbo, you know, it's for real. And so, I think that today, among Native communities in general, giftedness is seen as being an advocate for education in the Native perspective.

She went on to explain further, noting the way in which expressions of giftedness, across many of the Native Nations she works with, is almost inextricably bound to Native education and advocacy: And so, I would say that's true for our tribe. And I would say that would be true certainly for many of the tribes that I work with. You know, I work with Crow Nation, Northern Cheyenne, Ojibwe, Lakota, the Standing Rock Sioux Nation...I mean, I'm working with tribes across a pretty big swath of Indian country, even out in Navajo [Nation]. And those communities are seeing giftedness as being a staunch supporter for [Native] education, repatriation, education, sovereignty.

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

Carmelita highlighted that within her tribal community, giftedness is deeply rooted in traditions, emphasizing the significance of being present in ceremonies and passing down cultural knowledge to the next generation. She explained that the revival of ceremonies, which were interrupted for a period by colonization, and the active engagement of families in these practices are considered gifts. Thus, a major theme to emerge from her response is the role of cultural revitalization and advocacy for education.
Cultural Revitalization and Advocacy for Education

Carmelita emphasized that giftedness within her tribal community is deeply rooted in traditions and cultural practices, in which she noted that gifted individuals are those who actively participate in and contribute to passing down cultural knowledge to the next generation. A crucial aspect of this giftedness is the advocacy for education and tribal sovereignty, particularly in the repatriation of education. The theme of cultural revitalization and advocacy reflects an intentional shift away from Western approaches to being, with young scholars actively reclaiming and repatriating their education as a form of gift to their communities. The idea that giftedness involves being an advocate for education within the Native perspective underscores the importance of supporting and reclaiming Indigenous ways of thinking, learning, and understanding. This theme reflects a shared commitment among diverse Native communities to uphold their cultural values and assert sovereignty in the realm of education.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Carmelita also reflected on how expressions of giftedness are nurtured within her tribal culture and personal Indigenous worldview, explaining: Well, for many native children, they're not necessarily in an environment where they can express their giftedness...many of our Native children are within urban environments...so the children within the urban environment kind of fade into the background of not necessarily being seen or heard...the more Native influence you have in education – administrators, teachers, special education – the more that they are from that community and recognize that those children are unique, the more you have those children able to access gifted and talented programming. Parents have a huge influence on how Native children, and all
children, are able to access those programming opportunities. If you have a school system where there are native teachers who are connected to that community, they see those children and they act on them. They make overtures to bring them into gifted programming that they will flourish in. That's unique, right? And nothing against those teachers [non-Native teachers in public schools], but that dynamic makes a huge difference in who has an opportunity to access that programming.

Carmelita addressed the challenges faced by Native children in expressing their giftedness in urban environments, where they may fade into the background, often called missingness (Gentry & Gray, 2021a). She emphasized the importance of Native influence in education, stating that having administrators, teachers, and special education staff from the Native community increases the recognition of unique talents in Native children, facilitating their access to gifted and talented programming. Two major themes emerged from her response, including 1) advocacy for Native children across learning contexts (reservation schools, rural schools, urban schools, etc.), and 2) educator and parent impact.

**Advocacy for the Native Children Across Learning Contexts**

Carmelita highlighted the challenge many Native children face, especially those in urban environments, where they may not have the opportunity to express their giftedness in ways that will be recognized by educators who are non-Native. The theme of recognition and advocacy across learning contexts suggests that being seen and heard is crucial for nurturing giftedness in Native children, especially when they are within environments where systematic structures fade them into the background.
Educator and Parent Impact

Carmelita also strongly emphasized the role of Native influence in education, including administrators, teachers, special education professionals, and parents. The unique impact of Native educators within school systems is emphasized. Native teachers, connected to the community, are more likely to recognize and act on the potential of Native children for gifted programming. The theme highlights the importance of having educators who understand the cultural context and needs of Native students, as they can actively facilitate their participation in appropriate educational opportunities. This theme underscores the importance of representation and cultural understanding in educational settings. Moreover, Carmelita highlighted parents/guardians as a significant influence on how Native children, and all children, access programming opportunities for the gifted, reiterating the way in which parents often play a crucial role in advocating for their children’s participation in gifted programming.

Conceptualization of Giftedness

When asked if there was perhaps a word or phrase within her tribal culture used to describe gifted individuals, Carmelita responded: I don’t know that we have a word or phrase...there are ways in which children are seen as being a gift in general, regardless if it’s academic or cultural...they dance, they sing, they create art...those types of things are considered keys parts of what Native people consider to be gifts...dancing, singing, participating in ceremony and creating art, sharing, being a good purveyor of the environment......when they think about a child who has these qualities...who might be seen as special...the way in which they engage with other members of their community is kind of unique because they're not necessarily seeking affirmation. When I was working
with students, I saw when there was a curiosity that they wanted furthered by engaging with me one on one. You know, they would come and see me just on their own. I wouldn't call them. There was no assignment. There was nothing to turn in. They would just come in and talk about different things that they were seeing...and being involved with them on a personal basis...I knew their families, I knew what was going on at home...and being able to help them navigate [school, learning, home life]...those are key moments in my career where I really recognize children as being gifted in resilience...and that within Indian education is key, that a student might express themselves in a way that exhibits resilience, tenacity.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Carmelita explained that she wasn’t aware of a specific word or phrase in her tribal culture to describe gifted individuals but highlighted how children are generally considered gifts, whether academically or culturally. She noted that activities like dancing, singing, creating art, and participating in ceremonies are viewed as gifts in Native culture and emphasized that the unique qualities of a child, such as curiosity and engagement, are recognized with attaching formal affirmation. Two themes emerged from her response, including 1) a holistic understanding of gifts, and 2) resilience and personal engagement.

Holistic Understanding of Gifts

Carmelita highlighted a holistic understanding of gifts within her tribal culture. Specifically, children are seen as gifts in general, encompassing both academic and cultural aspects. Activities such as dancing, singing, participating in ceremonies, creating art, and being environmentally conscious are considered key parts of giftedness.
theme reflects a broad perspective that extends beyond academic achievements to include various forms of expression and contributions to the community. The conceptualization of gifts encompasses a wide range of talents and qualities valued within the cultural context.

**Resilience and Personal Engagement**

She also emphasized that when thinking about a child with special qualities, the way they [the child] engage with the community is often unique. The theme of resilience and personal engagement emerges as she described instances where students exhibited curiosity and sought personal interactions without external prompts. The recognition of resilience and tenacity as key components of giftedness underscores a cultural perspective that values not only academic achievements but also personal qualities that contribute to a student’s ability to navigate challenges. This theme reflects a more nuanced and holistic view of giftedness within the context of Indigenous approaches to education.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

When considering a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Carmelita centered her response on the role of educators, particularly educators of color, and those who have the capacity to recognize the wholeness of the children in their care, explaining: *A Native teacher is good for all students...just the way a Black teacher is good for all students...a Hispanic teacher is good for all students...because it allows those students, whether they are of the same ethnic background or not, it allows them to see the beauty of diversity...the other part of it is the teachers’ perspective...for the teacher to be able to understand differences in students*
and being able to identify those sparks…that should allow that student to express themselves more fully. Whether it’s in a gifted and talented program or whether it’s a way in which they provide an assessment….is everything paper and pencil? Or can the student draw a picture, create a video, sing a song, create a poem that brings forth all the necessary standards and the bells and whistles that convey to the teacher that this student knows something...understands this concept?

**Analysis of Form of Representation**

Carmelita emphasized the importance of educators, especially those from diverse backgrounds, in fostering an appreciation for diversity among students. She highlighted the role of teachers in understanding and recognizing the unique qualities of each student, allowing them to express themselves fully, whether through traditional assessments or alternative creative methods like drawing, creating videos, singing, or writing poems. As such, a major theme to emerge from her response is the capacity of educators to recognize diverse forms of gifted expression.

**Capacity to Recognize Diverse Forms of Gifted Expression**

Carmelita emphasized the vital role of teachers in recognizing and understanding the differences among students, highlighting the need to identify each child’s unique sparks of talent or interest. This theme implies that the inability to do so may stem from a lack in the teachers’ capacity, often influenced by Western approaches to teaching and learning, to perceive and appreciate diverse forms of gifted expression rather than from the child. The acknowledgment of alternative modes of expression, such as drawing, creating videos, singing songs, or crafting poems, signifies a shift towards a more inclusive approach to assessing students’ understanding and knowledge. This emphasis
reiterates the importance of enabling students to express themselves fully, aligning with their distinct abilities and cultural backgrounds.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

After reflecting on how she would like to see any finding from this study implemented in practice, Carmelita thoughtfully replied: *Teachers are involved with so much more than education today. I think to report these findings, it's important for teachers to understand that gifted and talented [Native children] express themselves in very unique ways based on where that child has been. But to be able to see where that child can go is the real joy of teaching, at least it was for me...to be able to have a teacher put all those kinds of implicit biases back, back, back, leave it in the car if you can, and just come to class with that [clean] slate that says I'm open and willing to see what my students can bring me today.*

**Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

Within her response, Carmelita emphasized the importance of teachers recognizing the unique ways gifted Native children express themselves, rooted in their individual experiences. She posited that the joy of teaching lay in the ability to see the potential of each child, urging teachers to approach their roles with an open mind, free from implicit biases, and ready to appreciate the diverse contributions students could bring to the classroom. Two themes emerged from her response, including 1) the recognition of unique expression of giftedness, and 2) openness and humility toward addressing implicit bias.
Recognition of Unique Expressions of Giftedness

Carmelita urges teachers to understand that gifted and talented students express themselves in unique ways, shaped by their individual experiences and backgrounds. This theme encourages a departure from one-size-fits-all approaches (often associated with Western approaches to education) and recognizes the diverse forms of gifted expression. Recognizing and appreciating the uniqueness of each student’s abilities aligns with a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to education. Teachers, according to this theme, should be attuned to the varied ways in which giftedness manifests itself in different individuals. In order to do so, teachers must approach their role with openness and a willingness to see the potential in every student.

Openness and Humility Toward Addressing Implicit Bias

Carmelita emphasized that the joy of teaching lies in being able to see where each child can go within their educational journey. This theme underscores the importance of educators setting aside implicit biases and approaching each student with an open mind, allowing them to discover and nurture their unique potential. The call to leave implicit biases behind emphasizes creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where every student feels valued and has the opportunity to express their unique giftedness without preconceived notions or limitations.

Aldean

Introduction to Aldean

Aldean is an enrolled member of the Crow tribe in the state of Montana. She worked as an educator in K-12 for 14 years before moving on to higher education, where she teaches finance and business courses. She is currently pursuing a doctorate and
conducting a study on financial literacy. She is an Indigenous K-12 advocate. Themes that emerged from Aldean’s response during the opening conversation prompts included a) the importance of the preservation of Native culture, and b) the critical role of community engagement and education.

**Preservation of Native Culture**

When invited to share something she wished others knew more about regarding her tribal culture, Aldean noted: *I’ve practically lived my entire life on the reservation... [a big part of] our culture is that we still speak our language, but the percentage has gone down. For example, my kids speak some Crow, and their kids do know words and will say words here and there, but they’re not fluent. I feel like our culture is very rich and there’s a lot of practices, some that they’re trying to bring back so that the younger generation can learn and understand and participate.* Aldean’s response emphasized the importance of preserving her Indigenous culture, especially the Crow language and traditional practices. She acknowledged the challenges faced by younger generations in maintaining fluency in the language but expresses a commitment to revitalizing cultural practices. This theme suggests a deep sense of cultural identity and a desire to ensure the transmission of cultural knowledge to future generations.

**Community Engagement and Education**

In reflecting on her professional background and inspiration for her work, Aldean explained: *I worked in K-12 for 14 years before I moved on to higher education. I work in finance and teach a business class...usually business writing or introduction to business. I also help teach a women’s fitness class. We have an Indian club on campus, so I try to help them in any way I can...I’m going after my doctorate and my study is on financial*
literacy. Aldean’s professional background in education highlights a strong commitment to community engagement and education. She is actively involved in teaching business classes and engaging with the learning community at large, demonstrating a holistic approach to education that goes beyond traditional academic subjects. Additionally, her involvement with the Indian club on campus reflects a commitment to supporting Indigenous students and fostering a sense of community within the educational institution.

**Expression of Giftedness**

When asked how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and/or Indigenous worldview, Aldea thoughtfully expressed: *So when I was looking at the word giftedness, [that] was the first time I [had] heard of [that] word...and my mind was just kind of going...but the individual who came to me, and I’m going to have to go back in history, is our chief Plenty Coups, where he had a vision that he knew the buffalo were going to go away...he knew that the White settlers were going to be coming in, and so he had to help his people make that transition into the White world...and so he led by example. And when I think about that, it must of been hard...he was the first one to build a house, which today is a state park...he asked for that lumber, so that his people could build homes...he also had his own trading post and he sold stuff and even did his own accounting...and I did get to see some of the accounting, how he did it...so people who came [to him], he drew their face, then he wrote down and drew pictures of what they took...if it was a chicken, he drew a chicken, if it was a bag of flour, he drew that. And I thought wow, so I saw that as giftedness and how now, coming to our present day, how...*
we use his quote about education to pursue education and to help our people with education. And so that's one of the gifted traits I've seen.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

In her response, Aldean noted that this is the first time she has been introduced to the word giftedness (in English), explaining that the first expression of giftedness that came to mind related to Chief Plenty Coups, who demonstrated visionary leadership in anticipating challenges and leading his tribe through a transition into the changing world. Major themes to emerge from her response included 1) leadership and adaptability as well as 2) cultural wisdom and practical skills.

Leadership and Adaptability

Aldean’s sharing of the story of Chief Plenty Coups illustrates a theme of visionary leadership and adaptability within the Crow community. Chief Plenty Coups demonstrated a unique form of giftedness through his vision of the future, anticipating the challenges his people would face with the arrival of White settlers, and proactively leading them through the transition. His ability to build shelter, establish a trading post, and engage in unique accounting approaches reflects a multifaceted form of giftedness that goes beyond traditional definitions. This response suggests an emphasis on adaptability and forward-thinking leadership is a prominent theme in expressing giftedness within the Crow community.

Cultural Wisdom and Practical Skills

Aldean also highlighted Chief Plenty Coups’ giftedness in preserving and utilizing cultural wisdom. The chief’s method of accounting, which involved drawing faces and pictorial representations of traded items, reflects a unique blend of cultural
knowledge and practical skills. This theme suggests that within the Crow community, giftedness is not solely confined to academic pursuits but is also manifested in practical, hands-on abilities that contribute to the well-being and sustainability of the community.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In thinking about how giftedness is nurtured within her tribal community, Aldean utilized a metaphor of a ball, explaining: *To me, the way I see it, it’s like a ball...and this ball is being handed over, so that what they [elders] have, what they’ve learned, what they’ve experienced is being handed over to us, so we can continue what they’ve learned and what they were taught, so that we can teach our young generation now. I feel that it’s important to learn not only education, but what your culture is because that’s our identity, and it’s important to have our identity kept alive. One of the important things we have is our clan system, and that’s one of the things that has been instilled in me, so I’ve tried my best to instill that into my children and grandchildren.*

**Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In her response, Aldean emphasized the generational approach to nurturing and caring for knowledge and knowledge systems. Subsequently, the themes of 1) intergenerational transmission of knowledge and 2) cultural identity and ways of being emerged from her response.

**Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge**

The metaphor of a ball being handed over signifies a theme of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and wisdom. Giftedness, in this context, is not only about individual abilities but also about the continuity of learning and passing down valuable experiences from one generation to the next. The emphasis on the importance of learning
both formal education and cultural identity suggests a holistic approach to nurturing giftedness, recognizing the interconnectedness of academic knowledge and cultural heritage.

**Cultural Identity and Ways of Being**

Aldean also emphasized the significance of cultural identity, particularly through the clan system. The theme of nurturing giftedness within the Crow community involves instilling cultural values and traditions, such as the clan system, into younger generations. By doing so, there is a deliberate effort to keep the community’s identity alive. This theme suggests that within the Crow community, nurturing giftedness involves not only academic or practical skills but also a deep connection to and understanding of cultural values, which are passed down through the generations.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

Aldean explained that, when thinking about a word or phrase used in her tribal culture to refer to individuals who may be gifted, *the word that comes to me is ‘akbaawaaliliia’, and the translation is an adviser, one who gives advice. And I always tell my kids that I’m going to be one of the akbaawaaliliia. You may think some of the things I say may be harsh, but later in life, as you grow up, you’re going to understand and know what I’m talking about because that’s how I am with my grandparents…when they sat me down and the things they’ve told me, I see it, and I use it, and I apply it to myself.*

**Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness**

Aldean posited that the first word/concept that came to mind when thinking about giftedness was the Crow word used for an adviser. Her response goes on to exemplify the
ways in which the role of an advisor is embedded in interactions with younger
generations, particularly toward applying cultural knowledge. Themes to emerge from
her response included 1) wisdom and guidance as gifted traits and 2) cultural continuity
through generations.

Wisdom and Guidance as Gifted Traits

The word *akbaawaaliliia*, translated as an adviser or one who gives advice,
suggests that within the Crow community, giftedness may be conceptualized as
possessing wisdom and the ability to provide guidance. The role of an adviser involves
sharing insights and advice that may be perceived as harsh initially but are appreciated
later in life. This theme highlights the importance of not only possessing knowledge but
also being able to share it in a way that benefits and guides others, contributing to their
personal and communal development.

Cultural Continuity Through Generations

Furthermore, Aldean’s sharing of her relationship with her grandparents and the
way they imparted wisdom and advice reflects a theme of cultural continuity through
generations. This suggests that giftedness in the Crow community is not only about
individual talents but also about the transmission of cultural knowledge and values from
older generations to younger ones. The concept of being an *akbaawaaliliia* implies a
responsibility to pass down not just advice but the cultural richness embedded in the
advice, ensuring that the community’s values and wisdom endure.

Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

When invited to share a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous
worldview, Aldean exclaimed: *So, right off the bat, two books come to mind…* and those
books are [about] Plenty Coups and Pretty Shield, their books...and each time [I read them] I learn something new...and so a lot of stuff that I’ve shared are coming from those books, and how they shared their life experiences and pass them on and what the younger generation followed to learn.

**Analysis of Form of Representation**

In alignment with her previous responses, Aldean selected the stories of two prominent individuals within her tribal culture’s history, including Chief Plenty Coups and medicine woman Pretty Shield. Two themes to emerge from this response included a) the role of oral tradition and storytelling, and b) intergenerational knowledge transfer.

**Oral Tradition and Storytelling**

Aldean chose books by/about Plenty Coups and Pretty Shield, which serve as a form of representation for giftedness within her Indigenous worldview. The act of sharing life experiences and passing them on to the younger generations is indicative of the importance of oral tradition and storytelling within Indigenous cultures. Giftedness is represented not only through individual achievements but also through the narratives and wisdom shared in the lived experiences captured in books such as those she has selected. The choice of books as a medium of representation underscores the significance of storytelling as a means of preserving cultural knowledge and passing down the experiences of gifted individuals.

**Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer**

Aldean’s mention of learning something new each time she reads the books of Plenty Coups and Pretty Shield reflects the theme of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Giftedness, in this context, is not isolated to the achievements of a single
generation but is a continuum passed down through stories and experiences. The representation of giftedness involves the ongoing process of learning, sharing, and passing on knowledge from one generation to the next, emphasizing the interconnectedness of past, present, and future within her tribal culture.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

When considering how she would like to see findings from this study used in practice, Aldean explained: *So in preschool, kindergarten, first grade, that age area where a lot of learning starts, there are some schools that teach in the Crow language, so I think that is something I’d like to see...having classrooms where everything is taught in Crow...and those teachers are amazing! I feel like I made a good choice by participating in this [study], so that what we have, what we know, can be shared amongst the other Indigenous people out there.*

**Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

In her response, Aldean highlighted the role of teaching the Crow language as well as her hope for this information to be shared not only with others, but other Indigenous peoples. Two themes emerged from this answer, including 1) the role of cultural and linguistic preservation in education and 2) knowledge sharing across contexts.

**Cultural and Linguistic Preservation in Education**

Aldean expressed a desire to see the findings applied in practice through classrooms that inherently incorporate the teaching of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, particularly in the early education years. This theme highlights the importance of cultural and linguistic preservation within the educational system. By incorporating the
Crow language into the curriculum, especially during the foundational years of learning, there is an emphasis on maintaining and revitalizing Indigenous languages. This approach aligns with the broader goal of preserving cultural identity and ensuring that younger generations have a strong foundation in their native language.

**Knowledge Sharing Across Contexts**

Aldean articulated the idea that participating in the research study helps to allow for the sharing of knowledge among Indigenous communities. This theme reflects a broader aspiration for the findings to be disseminated and utilized beyond the immediate context. It suggests a commitment to contributing to the well-being of other Indigenous communities by sharing insights, experiences, and effective educational practices that can positively impact the educational outcomes and cultural preservation efforts of diverse Indigenous groups.

**Jo**

**An Introduction to Jo**

Jo is a citizen of the Diné (Navajo) Nation. She is a first-grade teacher, off reservation, with an extensive professional background in Autism. She identified as both an educator and advocate. The themes that emerged from Jo’s responses to the opening conversation prompts included a) cultural diversity and distinction among Native communities, b) spirituality, work, and education as core values, and c) the interconnectedness of family and education.

**Cultural Diversity and Distinction Among Native Communities**

When asked the opening prompt regarding what she wished others knew more about her tribal culture, Jo poignantly responded: *I grew up in a small town in Utah*
where there were very few minorities. And so, I feel like the majority of my life has been
telling people who I am and what that is. I’m Navajo, and there are around 529
recognized tribes in the United States, and that’s only the [federally] recognized
ones…and so the biggest thing I guess I want you to know about Natives in general is
that we are not all one. We have our own language. We have our own ways of
community, our own ways of style and dress, our own ways of [dictating] what’s valuable
and what isn’t valuable. And when it comes to Navajos in general, I think spirituality is
up there for one. And the idea of physical work, and that work also goes into mental work
and spiritual work as well…work is more mental and spiritual and physical, it’s not just
one thing.

Jo emphasized the diversity among Native tribes, highlighting that there are
around 529 federally recognized tribes in the United States, each with its own language,
community practices, style, and values, which does not count the number of tribes not
federally recognized. This theme underscores the importance of recognizing and
respecting the unique cultural identities of different Native tribes, challenging stereotypes
that may portray them as a homogenous group. By sharing this perspective, Jo
contributes to a broader understanding of the rich tapestry of Native cultures and
communities.

**Spirituality, Work, and Education as Core Values**

After reflecting for a few moments on her professional background and
inspiration for work, Jo explained: *I became an educator for a lot of reasons, but the very
first one is that when I was in school, I was in school for a lot of years, and I was a psych
major for a while and that put me in youth correction for a lot of years. All those years in
youth correction, I realized by the time they get into the system, the system is kind of broken...there’s not a lot of hope once you get into that system, because it’s hard for a system to replicate a family...and I took a break to have kids, and when I went back, I realized what kids need is someone stable in their life. I immediately thought of elementary school because maybe elementary school can teach them writing and arithmetic, but also what a healthy community is like...so that’s what led me to education, trying to build a healthy community. And part of a healthy community is also educating...I always tell my students to be good community members, and that’s ultimately what I want to do as well teach writing and reading and all those things.

Within Jo’s description of Navajo culture, several core values emerge. Spirituality is highlighted as a crucial aspect of Navajo life. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the concept of work, which encompasses mental, spiritual, and physical aspects. The idea that work is not just a singular activity but involves a holistic approach grounded in one’s community. Jo's decision to become an educator is thus driven by her desire to contribute to building a healthy, vital community. Education is viewed as a means not only to teach academic skills but also to instill a sense of community and stability in the lives of young individuals. This theme reflects a) the interconnectedness of education, b) community building, and c) holistic well-being within Navajo perspectives.

**Interconnectedness of Family and Education**

Jo’s professional background in youth correction informs her understanding of the challenges faced by young individuals within oppressive, systemic systems. She recognizes the limitations of the system in replicating a family structure and the lack of hope once individuals enter the system. This theme underscores Jo's awareness of
systemic issues and her commitment to addressing them by providing stability and
guidance to young people through education. It highlights her belief in the transformative
power of education in creating positive outcomes for individuals who may have
encountered challenges within the youth correction system.

Expression of Giftedness

In terms of how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and/or Indigenous
worldview, Jo captivatingly articulated: *There’s an idea in my culture called ‘hozho’,
which means to walk in beauty or to walk in balance, and, as it’s been described to me, I
need to say that because Navajo nation is huge, so hozho has been explained to me within
my family as you have to work on areas in yourself to be hozho, to have that balance. And
there is also a leaning towards the idea of people having natural gifts. So, you can be
working on hozho, but if you excel in spirituality, then they’re going to nurture that
spirituality in you. You still need to work on everything, but you’re going to have extra if
you excel in, like, rug making - then they’re going to make sure you’re put in a place
where you’re being immersed in that. So, the idea as a whole in the community is that
you need to work best to help your community. You need to work on hozho in yourself,
but if you also have an area you’re good at, they’re going to put you in that area because
it will help the community thrive as well.*

Jo went on to further contextualize her thinking about giftedness within
Indigenous worldview, particularly as it relates to seeing and conceptualizing individual
roles within one’s community. She explained: *So, I was thinking about giftedness, and I
just kept thinking of actually your definition of giftedness, which is about excelling in one
or more areas…but when I was doing my autism studies, I came across a study that said*
people came to study the Navajo Nation because we didn’t have any autistic kids, and as they continued to study, they realized that we did have autistic kids, but we didn’t see a problem with them because a lot of times they would find what the child could do and then they would exist in the community doing that...they have been built into the community where they’re valued for the thing they can do and people take care of them within that. So, a lot of times we’ll see in education where you take those who aren’t in the norm and put them separate, whereas not in our culture, they’re allowed to exist as they are without any label...and so we do have autism within our culture, but it wasn’t something to alert people to as something was wrong...they’re just part of the community...they exist as valuable members.

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

Jo related the expression of giftedness in her tribal culture through the concept of *hozho*, emphasizing the importance of achieving balance and working on oneself. She highlighted the idea that natural gifts are nurtured within the community, where individuals are encouraged to excel in specific areas that contribute to the community’s well-being. Jo further contextualized this perspective by discussing the acceptance and integration of individuals with unique abilities, such as those with autism, into the community without labeling them as separate or problematic. Major themes to emerge from her response thus included 1) *hozho* and well-roundedness, 2) community contribution as a gift and the importance of “giving” you gift to others, and 3) valuing contributions over social norms.
Hozho and Well-Roundedness

Jo introduced the concept of hozho, which means walking in beauty or balance. This theme emphasizes the importance of well-roundedness in Navajo culture. Hozho involves working on various aspects of oneself, including physical work, spirituality, and service to the community. Jo explained that it is the idea that individuals need to cultivate balance in these areas to be successful. This holistic approach to personal development aligns with the notion that being gifted includes excelling in multiple facets of life, contributing to the overall well-being of oneself and the community.

Community Contribution as a Gift

Within her community, Jo suggested that there is a recognition of individual gifts and natural talents. This theme highlights that while individuals are encouraged to work on all aspects of hozho, there is also a focus on nurturing and supporting specific strengths or talents. If someone excels in a particular area, the community will ensure that they are immersed in that field in tandem with developing a sense of hozho. The overarching goal is not just personal success but contributing to the community's thriving by utilizing and valuing each person's unique abilities.

Valuing Contributions Over Norms

Jo contrasted the Navajo approach to understanding autism with Western educational approaches as an example in thinking about phenomena like giftedness. She explained that oftentimes in Navajo culture, individuals with autism are integrated into the community, and their unique abilities are valued. This theme underscores the cultural perspective of accepting and appreciating differences without labeling or segregating individuals. The community allows individuals to exist as they are, recognizing their
intrinsic value and contributions. This stands in contrast to educational practices that may separate those who deviate from the norm, highlighting the Navajo approach of embracing diversity within the community. Moreover, Jo’s discussion of autistic individuals within the Navajo community reflects a theme of valuing contributions over conformity to norms. She expressed that in Navajo culture, individuals are not judged by how well they fit into a predetermined norm but by their unique abilities and contributions. This perspective challenges the conventional definition of giftedness that often revolves around excelling in predetermined areas and highlights the importance of recognizing and nurturing diverse talents within the community.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In considering how her tribal community approaches nurturing giftedness, Jo thoughtfully explained: *It really relies on being in a community. You’re not just going to have your mom and dad see how you’re growing up, but the community is going to see how you’re interacting with everybody and what you’re doing. Now, the idea of who Navajos is changing because that’s what happens when you get conquered by a nation. And so now I see a big shift…like with my parents, they wanted me to be raised off the reservation...we’re still close, we’re five hours away...but they felt like we had more opportunities to integrate and that we needed that in order to be successful, only because they were the ones that were really persecuted and pushed down for knowing their language and being who they were. So, a lot of my generation and my kids’ generation are really doing what they can to hold on to their tribal ways. I see a lot from people having like two selves - one self when how you act when you’re on the reservation and the another self when within the community that you’re in, and I know that’s been*
suggested as code-switching, and that makes sense...and so what I’m saying altogether is the idea of hozho, but we need to find a way to do that within a 9-to-5 society...if I want a community for my kids, I need to build one on my own for them to be nurtured in that community...and so now we’re trying to figure out what that looks like and how that’s going to work and how you can be supported in that way without living in a [Native] family community.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Jo’s response suggested that the expression of giftedness within the Navajo culture is intricately tied to the community, where individuals are observed and nurtured by the larger collective. However, she noted that the changing dynamics and external influences, including the impact of conquest, have led to a shift in the perception of Navajo identity. Jo highlighted the challenge of maintaining tribal ways within a 9-to-5 society, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive community for her children that aligns with their cultural values. Two important themes emerged from her response, including 1) the role of community involvement and observation, and 2) cultural identity and maintenance.

Community Involvement and Observation

Jo emphasized the role of the community in nurturing giftedness. Giftedness is not solely recognized by immediate family members but is observed and acknowledged by the broader community. This theme highlights the interconnectedness of individual development with the communal context. The community’s involvement in assessing how individuals interact and contribute thus underscores the communal nature of recognizing and nurturing gifted traits.
Cultural Identity and Maintenance

Jo’s response also points to the evolving identity of her community in response to historical challenges such as colonization and assimilation. Jo describes a shift in the perception of who Navajo people are, suggesting that the nurturing of giftedness is influenced by the dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and the Western 9-to-5 society. Individuals may engage in code-switching, adapting their behavior based on the context, reflecting the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural identity in a changing world. Accordingly, Jo expressed a desire to build a community for her children that fosters the nurturing of their cultural identity and values. This theme reflects the proactive approach of creating and protecting spaces where Navajo traditions and ways of life can be preserved and nurtured. The idea of building a community outside the traditional family structure emphasizes the importance of intentional efforts to create environments that support the development of giftedness within the context of cultural values.

Conceptualization of Giftedness

When asked if there is a word or phrase used within her tribal culture to describe gifted individuals, Jo explained: There’s not a specific phrase other than your ability to strive for hozho. And you live [it] in life, you know that is a constant. It’s not like oh, you’ve reached it and you’re done. It’s a constant, depending on what’s going on in your life. And depending on what your situation is, it has to change as well. But hozho is the ideal. It’s what you’re striving for. You’re not ever there. You know in Christianity they’ll say oh you’re saved, like past tense. It’s [hozho] is a constant reflective thing that you need to continue to do.
Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

In her response, Jo explained that there is not a specific word or phrase she knows of to describe gifted individuals within her tribal community, but the concept of striving for hozho is central. Doing so represents the constant pursuit of balance and harmony in life, requiring ongoing reflection and adaptation based on one’s circumstances. It contrasts with the notion of a fixed achievement, emphasizing the continuous nature of the journey towards living in accordance with this ideal. The main theme to emerge from her response is that hozho is an action, not an adjective, suggesting that it is important to understand giftedness as an action, not a description.

Hozho as An Action, Not an Adjective

Hozho is not considered a static achievement but an ongoing and dynamic ideal. It is a constant striving for balance and harmony in one's life. The emphasis on the constant nature of hozho reflects a worldview that acknowledges life's ever-changing circumstances and the need for ongoing reflection and adaptation. Unlike some conceptualizations of achievement that tend to be final or static (i.e., a degree, award, certificate, etc.) or salvation in other belief systems, hozho is portrayed as a continuous and reflective process, aligning with the Navajo perspective that acknowledges life’s complexities and the need for perpetual effort in maintaining balance.

Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

In alignment with her responses to previous prompts, Jo emphasized the way acts of striving for hozho are in-of-themselves form a form of giftedness: They say, if someone is in that balance, you can see it in their eyes. And those areas are work, like physical work, spirituality, service to your community, and prayer. So, you get the idea
that there has to be a well-roundedness. The idea is that to be successful, you need to have hozho.

Analysis of Form of Representation

Acts that Embody Hozho

Jo explains that hozho is not a singular achievement but an ongoing process, reflecting a dynamic understanding of success. The interconnectedness of physical work, spirituality, and community service underscores the importance of addressing multiple facets of life toward striving for true harmony. Hozho as a form of representation suggested the importance of striving for balance as a continuous and evolving journey rather than a static destination. It reinforces the notion that success is intertwined with maintaining harmony in various aspects of life, highlighting the interconnectedness of individual well-being with community and spiritual dimensions.

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

After considering how she would like to see findings from this study implemented in practice, Jo explained: I live in Utah and it’s very low diversity, depending on geographical area, and I find a lot of what I need to do any time there’s any brown kid, they could be Asian, Hispanic, Native... a lot of it is just understanding that people could be seeing things from a different way...and like you mentioned that a lot of your Navajo students learned the language [Spanish] fast...I wouldn’t ever just say oh Navajos are good at Spanish, I would say oh, because their language is built in the same way sentence-structure wise, it lends themselves easier [to learning the language]. But you wouldn’t know that unless you knew a little bit about the culture. And so, what I hope is by your study is that you’re helping teach people a little bit about a culture that they
don’t know about…people just think of us in the past, and we’re very much here in the present, and we very much are helping build a future. So, by just opening up the idea of information is going to help people understand, because they just don’t know ... so [they] can learn to be conscious of others and learn to broaden [their] worldview. So hopefully by doing this, it will help broaden people’s perspective, because if you learn about one culture that’s different, then it opens you up to other cultures as well. And if you can see value in that, then it opens up your worldview to value humans altogether.

**Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

Jo expressed the importance of understanding different perspectives when encountering individuals from diverse backgrounds, including Native, Asian, and Hispanic communities, especially in areas with minimal diversity. She went to highlight the significance of cultural awareness in interpreting behaviors and abilities, citing an example of Navajo students excelling in Spanish due to similarities in sentence structure. She hopes that the study contributes to teaching people about cultures beyond their familiarity, dispelling misconceptions about Native communities and fostering a broader worldview. Accordingly, three major themes emerged from her response, including 1) cultural understanding and perspective, 2) native culture and modernity, and 3) broadening perspectives and worldviews.

**Cultural Understanding and Perspective**

Jo emphasized the importance of understanding that people may see things differently based on their cultural backgrounds. She acknowledged the value of recognizing cultural nuances, such as the sentence structure similarities between Navajo and Spanish, and how this understanding can contribute to more effective communication.
and learning in the classroom when interacting with students of a different background than the teacher. The theme highlights the importance of cultural awareness in fostering a more inclusive and informed environment.

**Native Culture and Modernity**

Jo expressed the hope that this study will challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Native cultures, particularly the tendency to view Indigenous peoples solely through a historical lens. By providing information and insights into the present and future contributions of Indigenous communities, the study aims to dispel misconceptions and promote a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Native cultures. This theme underscores the importance of breaking down stereotypes to foster a more inclusive and respectful approach to diverse cultures.

**Broadening Perspectives and Worldview**

Perhaps the most powerful theme emerged from the last sentence in Jo’s response, where she states, “if you learn about one culture that’s different, then it opens you up to other cultures as well. And if you can see value in that, then it opens up your worldview to value humans altogether.” This statement encapsulates a powerful call to action, emphasizing the transformative potential of cultural learning. It suggests that by gaining insights into different worldviews, individuals can develop a broader perspective that extends beyond cultural boundaries. The ultimate goal is to cultivate a worldview that values the diversity of humanity as a whole. This theme reflects a profound aspiration for the study’s impact on individuals’ attitudes, fostering greater understanding, empathy, and appreciation for the richness of the human experience.
Pamela

An Introduction to Pamela

Pamela is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. She holds a doctorate and currently serves as a director of research for a national institute. She has nearly 30 years of experience in education, research, and evaluation. She also has experience serving as the supervisor for a teacher preparation program. She is both an Indigenous K-12 researcher and advocate. A major theme that emerged from Pamela’s responses to the opening conversation prompts was the role of shared Indigenous experiences.

Shared Indigenous Experiences

After reflecting on her tribal culture and professional background, Pamela explained: I am an enrolled member of the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina. That is not a federally recognized tribe, we’re part of the larger of state recognized tribes and have been for years. So yeah, what I would want others to know is that there is a large contingent, and we’re not the only state recognized tribe. And where Indigeneity comes from and how it plays out is often very similar [across] with different [Native] people…obviously reservation versus urban…there’s some different parts there…but I think the Indigenous piece, at least from most of the kids I’ve talked with, are pretty similar and where they come from…just in general to being Native. At the current time, I have been the director of research and evaluation at a company for 7 years…I taught school and my father… I wanted to be a studio musician and he [her father] was like, ‘why don’t you get an education degree while you’re going?’ - So, I taught school for a
while, I taught university, but I enjoyed the research aspect of things, so I went back and got my PhD and yeah, so now I’m the director of research.

Pamela highlighted her enrollment in the Lumbee tribe, noting that it is not federally recognized but state-recognized, and points out that there are other state-recognized tribes. This theme underscores the diversity within Indigenous communities, acknowledging the existence and significance of non-federally recognized tribes that may not receive the same level of visibility. Additionally, Pamela emphasized the role of shared Indigenous experiences, suggesting that despite differences such as reservation versus urban living, there are commonalities in the experiences of Native individuals. This theme encourages a broader understanding of Indigenous identity and challenges stereotypes that may arise from a narrow perspective of what it means to be Native. Her response underscores the importance of recognizing and respecting the diversity within Indigenous communities, both in terms of tribal recognition and shared cultural experiences, contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Indigenous identities.

Expression of Giftedness

When asked how giftedness may be expressed within her tribal community and/or Indigenous worldview, Pamela expressed: *For me, and I hate to speak for my whole community, but I’ll speak for the people that I know of within my community and how I see it [giftedness] played out...there’s a bit of giftedness in every child, it’s just figuring out what that gift is and nurturing that piece and moving with it. From my upbringing and my observing of what happens within our community, and I’ve had this discussion often with folks, there are a lot of what we would consider gifted kids in the school system*
that fail and that fall through and trying to figure out what those characteristics are. I think a lot of how it manifests...oftentimes, we tend to try to have strong self-confidence, we’re kind of taught to be strong, and sometimes what happens with that is they [students] withdrawal if it’s not accepted [their gifted manifestations] or they act out. We’ve always been taught that we all have gifts and that’s what we nurture and that’s what makes us confident in who we are. We grow with those pieces musically and mathematically – those were mine, so that’s what I still continue to do. And whether it’s a gift or not, I don’t know, but that’s what I was told...so, I think that sometimes those kids that start moving in a direction of where they feel their gifts are, and they’re not nurtured or worse, it’s cut off. I think that’s where they tend to have some problems...if it’s an antsy child, you know, get them out dancing, put them in regalia and let them dance it out. If it's a really quiet person, they're probably going to sit and be your storytellers at some point in time. They're going to sit with the elders and they're just going to take it all in. They're going to capture everything that's happening around them and they'll be able to, you know, be your knowledge keepers later on. So yeah, I think it's more about embracing and helping kids embrace who they are and how they are moving forward. I do like your definition [of giftedness]. I was afraid the definition was going to come along with a, you know, a level of IQ...it’s about figuring out what to do with them [gifts] and how to make sure they [students] have what they need to be successful.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

Pamela expressed that giftedness is often seen as existing in every child within her tribal community. She emphasized the importance of recognizing diverse manifestations of giftedness, whether in self-confidence, musical, or mathematical
abilities. She suggested that nurturing these gifts is crucial for building confidence and success and advocated for embracing and supporting children in their unique paths, without relying solely on traditional definitions related IQ. Accordingly, three major themes emerged from her response, including 1) inherent giftedness within all children, 2) cultural manifestations of giftedness, and 3) empowerment through embracing gifts.

**Inherent Giftedness within All Children**

Pamela emphasized that within her cultural community, every child is recognized as having gifts. This theme underscores the notion that giftedness is not limited to a select few but is considered a universal attribute that can be found in various forms within every child. The emphasis on recognizing and nurturing these individual gifts reflects an asset-based orientation toward education and an inclusive approach to understanding the potential within every child.

**Cultural Manifestations of Giftedness**

Pamela also provided examples of how giftedness may manifest in children within the context of her cultural practices. The expression of giftedness is observed in various ways, such as through strong self-confidence, musical and mathematical abilities, dancing, storytelling, and knowledge-keeping. This theme highlights the diversity of gifted manifestations and emphasizes the importance of embracing and nurturing these unique qualities within the cultural context of the Native cultures.

**Empowerment through Embracing Gifts**

Pamela suggested that the Lumbee approach to recognizing and supporting giftedness often involves empowering children to embrace their unique gifts and move forward confidently. This theme emphasizes the cultural value placed on helping children
recognize and utilize their strengths. The notion that problems may arise when a child’s gifts are not nurtured or are discouraged highlights the significance of providing a supportive environment that fosters the development of each child’s potential.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In alignment with her response regarding expressions of giftedness within her tribal culture, Pamela explained the way in which giftedness is often nurtured, noting:

*For the most part, again, folks like to see what the gifts are. And whenever you’re introduced, you’re almost introduced that way – like, he’s really smart, or you know, he’s really good at making or he can sing, or he can run so fast. So, it’s nurtured by the story that goes along with you as people introduce you, as your family introduces you, and as you’re known in your community for something. And pretty much everybody has something, if it's no more than just the one who makes everybody laugh or want to talk...it's your role and your place within a community which then makes the community whole because you have a responsibility and a part to play within that, to keep, you know, to keep it together.*

**Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

Pamela expressed that individuals in her community are often recognized and introduced based on their unique gifts, whether it be intelligence, craftsmanship, singing, or physical abilities. This recognition is often intricately tied to one’s identity within the communication, often manifesting as an identity story that develops as the individual, and their role in their community, does. Such roles contribute to the cohesion of the community, with each person having a responsibility to play in maintaining its unity and
wholeness. Thus, a major theme to emerge from Pamela’s response is the role of individual gifts as community contributions and responsibility.

**Individual Gifts as Community Contributions and Responsibility**

Pamela emphasized that based on her lived experiences as a member of the Lumbee community, individuals are often introduced and recognized based on their unique gifts and talents. This theme underscores the idea that the nurturing of giftedness is intricately connected to the individual’s role within the community. The recognition and celebration of each person’s distinct abilities contribute to the community’s wholeness, reinforcing the notion that everyone plays a part in maintaining the community’s cohesion and vitality. Moreover, this theme also highlights the idea that every individual has a role and responsibility within the community, and these roles collectively contribute to the community’s well-being. The nurturing of giftedness is framed within the context of fulfilling one’s responsibilities and playing a vital part in the collective life of the community.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

When asked if there was a word or phrase used within her tribal community to describe gifted individuals, Pamela explained: *I don’t think so, no. We don’t have a known language, it’s gone. So, there’s no particular word that would fit in there…but then I also don’t know that we label…so just getting rid of the labels altogether is a better way of doing it…sometimes they’re called older than their years or wise…or they’re really good at ‘blank’. But not a word [for gifted].*
Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Pamela shared that, because of colonization, her tribe no longer has an existing language. She expressed that the act of labeling itself is outside the cultural context of her tribe, noting that it is not an appropriate way of recognizing giftedness. Humanizing recognition, versus labeling, emerged as the central theme in her response.

Humanizing Recognition

Within the Lumbee tribe, Pamela explained that there is often an avoidance of specific labels. In reaction, the conceptualization of a phenomenon such as giftedness is characterized by descriptive recognition, such as being “older than their years” or “wise” or excelling in a particular skill. This theme highlights a cultural approach that values the individual’s qualities without necessarily relying on formal labels. The focus is on acknowledging and appreciating the unique attributes and abilities of each person rather than categorizing them under a specific term, emphasizing the individual’s qualities and contributions rather than relying on formal labels that may not align with the cultural context.

Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

When invited to share a form of representation that she feels represents giftedness within her tribe’s worldview, Pamela explained: *If we’re talking gifted outside of an education system, because I can kind of get into my Westernized world of what that is too, but outside of that, it is just recognizing that everyone has a gift, everyone has something to do in a community. They all have a role. And for everybody to be successful, it’s to perfect that role, to grow into that role...so it would have to be something around the connectedness, the nurturing of everything to grow together.*
Analysis of Form of Representation

In expressing a representation of giftedness within her tribal worldview, Pamela emphasized that, beyond the Westernized concept, it involves recognizing that everyone possesses a unique gift and plays a crucial role in the community. She stressed the importance of perfecting and growing into these roles for collective success. A holistic, action-oriented understanding of giftedness thus emerged as the core theme in her response.

Holistic, Action-Oriented Understanding of Giftedness

As noted in sections above, Pamela consistently expressed that everyone possesses a gift and has a unique role within her community. Giftedness is not confined to specific individuals but is extended to encompass the entire community, emphasizing the importance of each person’s role in contributing to the collective growth and success. Giftedness is not seen as a fixed or inherent trait possessed by certain individuals. It is dynamic and actively involves individuals engaging in roles and actions within their community. The emphasis is on recognizing and nurturing the unique strengths and talents of each individual, but the key aspect is the ongoing process of using these gifts to contribute to the community. It is not about having a predetermined or static label of being gifted, but instead involves actively living out one’s role, growing into that role, and contributing to the collective well-being of the community. The action-oriented nature of this perspective implies that giftedness is a verb – something that individuals do and engage in, rather than a static quality or label that they possess. It aligns with a holistic and communal understanding of giftedness where individuals continuously
contribute to the interconnected growth and success of the community through their actions and roles.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

After reflecting on how she would like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice, Pamela explained: *I mean everyone has [something] they can be really good [at], and it’s about helping [them] figure out what that is to build their confidence, so everything can grow, and they can learn in the classroom, if the whole of who they are is where it needs to be. So, trying to figure out what that is as a teacher and not assuming because they are of color that they don’t learn. I made decent grades, so they said ‘you did pretty good for an Indian kid’ in school and there were only three of us...so recognizing what their [students’] gifts are and working with them and in that manner...and that goes for any kid, whether they’re Native or not. If they’re shy, don’t say ‘speak up, speak up’, maybe they’re not going to speak up. Maybe stop and listen. And be a bit more patient...I think just getting rid of labels in general and nurturing the positives in people, so they become strong in who they are, and help them build the rest of that out, when they have a sense of self-confidence that they can stand on their own...that is where I would start. The other is to pay attention to the different types of giftedness that are out there...it’s just figuring out who they are [students] and how they learn best...I find it an intriguing dissertation...I’m like that you’re taking this on and trying to bring it to a forefront and yeah, maybe we can help people be more comfortable in their skin and grow into whatever they’re supposed to be.*
Analysis of Participant-Informed Implications for Practice

In envisioning the practical implementation of findings from the study, Pamela emphasized the importance of recognizing and nurturing students’ unique strengths to build their confidence and create a conducive learning environment. She advocated for teachers to avoid making assumptions, often founded in deficit-based orientations, based on students’ ethnicity. Pamela underscored the need to eliminate labels, urging patience and listening to students, fostering a positive environment that allows individuals to develop a sense of self-confidence. Two major themes emerged from Pamela’s response, including 1) observant and patient recognition of diverse talents, and 2) developing gifts through empowerment.

**Observant and Patient Recognition of Diverse Talents**

Pamela emphasized the importance of recognizing and nurturing the diverse gifts of students, regardless of their cultural background. This theme underscores the need for educators to move away from assumptions based on race or ethnicity and to focus on understanding students’ unique strengths. She advocated for a personalized and patient approach, urging teachers to identify and support students in developing their confidence and abilities. This theme aligns with a call to eliminate labels and instead foster an asset-orientation and inclusive learning environment that values the individual qualities of each student.

**Developing Gifts through Empowerment**

Pamela highlighted the significance of building students’ self-confidence and helping them develop a strong sense of self. The theme suggests that by recognizing and nurturing the positives in students, educators can contribute to their overall well-being.
and empower them to stand confidently on their own. This empowerment is seen as a foundational step for students to engage effectively in the learning process. Her emphasis on fostering a sense of self-confidence as the starting point aligns with a holistic approach to education that considers the emotional and psychological well-being of students, particularly as related to their cultural contexts.

Annette

An Introduction to Annette

Annette is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe (Chippewa) in North Dakota. She is the Native American Center Director for a university, in which she recruits and retains Indigenous students. Additionally, she advocates for her students as they move through higher education spaces. She is an Indigenous K-12 advocate. Throughout her responses to the opening conversation prompts, two major themes emerged: 1) diverse ancestry and cultural intersectionality, and 2) advocacy and support for native students.

Diverse Ancestry and Cultural Intersectionality

In response to what she wished others knew more about in regard to her culture, Annette explained: I am an enrolled member, or a citizen, of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. We are federally recognized as the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. My ancestors are Ojibwe and French, there was a mixture of the French and Cree up in Canada before the border, the 48th parallel, so our people traveled back and forth across that border, so my tribe that I’m enrolled in is Turtle Mountain. My ancestry is French and Indigenous. Annette’s description of her tribal affiliation highlights the rich diversity within Indigenous communities. With a blend of Ojibwe and French ancestry, she
emphasized the historical interactions and mixtures that occurred, particularly before the establishment of borders. This theme underscores the importance of recognizing the complexity and cultural intersectionality within Indigenous identities, challenging monolithic perceptions.

**Advocacy and Support for Native Students**

Annette also reflected on her professional role, explaining: *I have two degrees...my undergraduate is in elementary education and my master’s is in management. My position that I have been in since 2011 is as the Native American Center director. My job is to recruit, retain, and graduate Indigenous students. Beyond that, I advocate for them. I also act as a liaison between the tribes and the campus. I am also involved in doing some Indigenous programming for the campus and community.*

Annette’s professional role as the director of the Native American Center is centered on advocacy for Indigenous students. The theme of advocacy and support is prominent, encompassing tasks such as recruiting, retaining, and ensuring the graduation of Indigenous students. Her role extends beyond academic support to include liaising between tribes and the campus, emphasizing the importance of holistic support for Indigenous students in both their academic and broader community contexts.

**Expression of Giftedness**

When asked how giftedness is expressed within her tribal community, Annette noted: *I think giftedness, as far as Indigenous people are concerned, is not so much expressed as it’s seen. In Indigenous culture, we are taught to have humility and to be modest. So, to talk about oneself is a little tough, to brag about oneself is almost not heard of. So, if I have a gift and am exhibiting that [gift], it’s not important for people to*
see what I’m doing, more so that people recognize what I’m doing. And you hear it a lot, I hear it a lot, with individuals, especially elderly people. They will say oh, that individual is gifted in whatever...I do know as far as the community is concerned, there is such a thing as standing. There is an expectation that you are going to have a positive standing within the community, that you are going to have positive interactions...that you are going to contribute to the overall goodness of the community. And your standing means you have to be able to stand on your own, you have a skill, use it. And there’s a purpose...you have a purpose in life. Your purpose is to be the best you.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

Within her response, Annette highlighted that giftedness is not so much explicitly expressed as it is recognized by others within the community, particularly by elders. Annette also suggested that giftedness is bound to one’s standing in the community, which is intricately tied to gifting one’s gift, so to speak, to the overall goodness of the community. Two prominent themes emerged from her response, including 1) recognition of giftedness through action and contribution, and 2) intergenerational recognition.

Recognition through Action and Contribution

Annette’s response emphasized the way in which individuals often embody their gifts without the need for self-promotion or boasting. The cultural teaching to be humble aligns with the idea that recognition comes not from personal proclamation but from others acknowledging and appreciating one’s contributions. Annette also highlighted the importance of community contribution and maintaining a positive standing within the community. Gifted individuals are expected to use their skills and talents to contribute positively to the overall well-being of the community. The theme of positive standing...
implies not only having individual gifts but also actively utilizing them for the betterment of the community. There is a sense of purpose and responsibility associated with giftedness, emphasizing the interconnectedness between individual abilities and communal prosperity.

**Intergenerational Recognition**

Annette explained that acknowledgment of giftedness often comes from elders within the community who observe and identify the gifts of others. This theme underscores the intergenerational aspect of recognizing and appreciating giftedness, with the wisdom of elders playing a crucial role in affirming the value of individual contributions. The interplay between elders and the recognition of giftedness suggests a communal approach to personal development. It implies that the transmission of knowledge and the identification of gifts are communal responsibilities, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals within the community. The elders, acting as cultural custodians, ensure that the legacy of recognizing and appreciating the gifts of those within the community is passed down through generations, fostering a sense of continuity and cohesion.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

When asked how giftedness is nurtured within her tribal community, Annette expounded: *You know, there’s a lot of differences in Indigenous communities...there are a few things I realized after I left the reservation. Let’s just talk about two spirited people, for example, the LGBTQ community...I didn’t know they were treated differently until I left the reservation, because we actually think of them as being gifted of some sort because they have an understanding of two genders, two ways of being...to nurture that*
is pretty cool and it’s expected. And not only with stuff like that, let’s say people with disabilities; they’re nurtured for the ability they have, not the abilities they don’t have...so when you’re talking about nurture...maybe nature is an expectation and nurture is a recognition.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

In her response, Annette highlighted the asset-oriented perspective within her community, noting that nurturing in this context involves expecting and recognizing innate qualities, where nature tends to set certain expectations and nurture involves acknowledging and supporting those expectations. This approach emphasizes a broader and more inclusive understanding of giftedness, extending beyond conventional norms and embracing the diverse gifts present within the community. Accordingly, the core theme to emerge from her response was the act of nurturing through an asset-orientation.

Nurturing through an Asset-Orientation

Annette highlighted a cultural approach that is inclusive and affirming, particularly evident in her sharing of two-spirited individuals. The theme of nurturing revolves around recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives, ways of knowing and being, and abilities of individuals, rather than focusing on societal expectations or limitations. This perspective fosters an environment where diversity is genuinely affirmed, and individuals are nurtured for their inherent gifts and understanding, creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere. This theme involves an interplay between nature and nurture, in which Annette suggested that while there may be certain expectations (nature) associated with individuals, nurturing involves the recognition of unique abilities and perspectives. This theme implies that within the tribal community, there is an expectation
that individuals will contribute based on their inherent qualities, and the nurturing process involves acknowledging and affirming those qualities, regardless of societal norms or external expectations.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

In considering a word or phrase used within her tribal culture to describe gifted individuals, Annette articulately explained: *I don’t know if there’s a word or phrase because everything is intergenerationally connected. There’s a connection with earth, there is a connection with the sky, with people. There’s always a connection. So maybe a standing…I keep going back to that, to community standing. Your contributions as an individual in the community should be something that’s positive and not negative…whatever your gift is becomes the contribution for the good of the whole. Then the intergenerational connections, and inter-species connection, even, because we have connection with animals. They appear to us when we need them. There are lessons in the Indigenous way, this is what we were taught. My grandma would say, ‘when you’re thinking really heavily about somebody, they’re going to appear to you in some way or another.’ She would say, ‘if you’re struggling with something, think about it or pray on it and ask for guidance, because you’ll get some guidance.’ You just have to be aware. And I’m a true believer in that today, and we always think seven generations ahead, everything you do today, you have to think about seven generations ahead because it will affect them. So, we think about children as being sacred in a way because when they are born and they have that soft spot on top of their head, we were told that is there so that the spirits can still come and bring those gifts and those lessons to that baby. And then that’s why we say that children have more of a connection to the spirit world. Babies will
see spirits where we won’t see spirits. Animals will appear to babies in a different way that they'll appear to us. Animals are spirits sometimes, so yeah. Our children and the generations represent those gifts as well.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

In contemplating a word or phrase used within her tribal culture to describe gifted individuals, Annette emphasized the interconnectedness inherent in many Indigenous perspectives. She suggested the concept of community standing, where an individual’s contributions are viewed positively and contribute to the well-being of the whole community. Annette emphasized the significance of intergenerational and inter-species connections, highlighting the teachings about the relationship with animals and the guidance received through spiritual awareness. Two major themes surfaced in her response, including 1) community standing and positive contributions, and 2) connections that transcend time and species.

Community Standing and Positive Contributions

This theme centers around the conceptualization of giftedness through one’s community standing and contributions. Annette emphasized that an individual’s gifts are linked to their positive contributions within the community. The focus is not solely on personal achievements but on how one’s abilities and gifts contribute to the overall well-being of the community. This theme underscores the interconnectedness between individual talents and their impact on the collective.

Connections that Transcend Time and Species

Annette highlighted the interconnectedness with the earth, sky, people, and even animals. The concept of gifts extends beyond human interactions to include relationships
with the natural world. The recognition of animals as spirits and their appearances as lessons contributes to a holistic understanding of giftedness that transcends human-centric perspectives. Moreover, the sacredness of children and the consideration of seven generations ahead represent a distinctive theme in the conceptualization of giftedness. Annette explains how children, with their soft spot symbolizing a connection to the spirit world, are viewed as having a heightened connection to spiritual entities. The belief that children represent gifts from the spirit world and that their actions impact future generations reflects a forward-looking perspective that considers the long-term impact of individual actions.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

When considering a representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Annette thoughtfully explained: *There are lots of things out there. Any genre of art or expression you have that representation. For me, I would think about the medicines. We have sacred medicines that represent the religious, the prayer, the clarification, the smudging…if you look at it, it has four quadrants, because we always think about the four directions…each of the quadrants represents a different medicine, which are sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco. So, when I think about it in a metaphoric way, that’s what comes to mind as far as gifts. Like if I’m going to gift someone something, it’s going to be one of those medicines…so gifts, I think, come in different forms…giftedness.*

**Analysis of Form of Representation**

In her response, Annette drew a connection to sacred medicines, which she explained symbolize religious practices, prayer, clarification, and smudging. She emphasized that giftedness manifests in various forms, such as the symbolic significance
of sacred medicines and the diverse expressions found in different genres of art or
creative endeavors. Metaphorical interpretations of giftedness thus emerged as the core
theme.

**Metaphorical Interpretations of Giftedness**

The use of sacred medicines—sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco—as
representations of gifts introduces a theme of symbolism and metaphor in the
conceptualization of giftedness. Anette indicated that she associates the medicines with
various aspects such as religious practices, prayer, clarification, and smudging. The
metaphorical connection between the medicines and gifts suggests that giftedness is
perceived not only in tangible or concrete forms but also in symbolic and meaningful
expressions. This theme highlights the richness of Indigenous perspectives on gifts and
giftedness, where the significance goes beyond the surface to encompass deeper spiritual
and cultural dimensions.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

In response to being asked how she would like to see any findings from this study
used in practice, Annette suggested: *The number one thing is, and I’ve always said this, is
I don’t like standardized anything...we tend to teach everybody as a whole, a big bag of
oranges or apples, like everybody is the same. But we can’t do that...everybody has a
creation story, and everyone has a migration story, and your migration story is the life
you live. So, for me, if any of this research comes out, to teach the individual, not just
check the box off, but to find out what is the best way for this person to learn. I call it
cross-curriculum, but using art. You can teach math using art, you can teach science
using art...so if anything, find out how to do that so an individual is not put into a box*
and then expected to find their way out. I do some training with people, and there’s a
story I talk about, the upstream/downstream theory…and say I have a team of people and
we’re working next to this river, and somebody notices that someone has fallen in the
river and can’t get out…so my team creates a chain of people, and we work together as a
team to pull. And all of a sudden there’s another person and another person in the river
and then another. So, you’re pulling these people out of the river…and my team is getting
tired until somebody says, let’s go upstream and find out why they’re falling in. So,
instead of falling, instead of letting them fall in, keep them from falling in [in the first
place] …there is so much potential and I’m so tired of people saying ‘these kids
nowadays’, well we raised them. So, if we really want people to be successful individuals,
we need to give them what they need…and they’re going to tell you if you listen. But if
you don’t listen, you’ll never know. And again, I’d just like to reiterate that everybody
has a creation story and a migration story and, in some cases, a survival story. So,
depending on where they’re at, meet them there.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

In her response, Annette poignantly advocated against standardized approaches in
education, emphasizing instead the power and place of cross-curricular methods. Annette
urged a shift from a one-size-fits-all mentality to understanding how each person learns
best, ensuring they are not confined to predetermined boxes. She shared the
upstream/downstream theory, stressing the importance of addressing the root causes of
challenges rather than just reacting to immediate issues. Two major themes emerged from
this response, including 1) the power and value of cross-curricular and arts-based
education, and 2) critically conscious (Freire, 1970) education.
Cross-Curricular and Arts Based Education

Annette emphasized the need to move away from standardized approaches to culturally responsive educational methods. She advocated for recognizing and understanding the unique creation stories, migration stories, and, in some cases, survival stories of individuals within Indigenous communities. This theme underscores the importance of tailoring education to the specific needs, strengths, and cultural backgrounds of students. Toward doing so, Annette suggested using art as a tool to teach various subjects, such as math and science. This approach aligns with Indigenous perspectives that recognize the interconnectedness of knowledge and emphasizes the value of integrating different disciplines. By incorporating art into education, Annette advocated for a holistic and creative learning experience that engages students and allows for a more meaningful, culturally responsive learning where gifts and talents are more likely to organically manifest.

Critically Conscious Education

Annette shared the upstream/downstream theory to highlight the importance of critically conscious approaches in education. Rather than reacting to challenges downstream, she encourages going upstream to address the root causes and prevent issues from arising in the first place. This theme underscores the need to understand and address the underlying factors that impact students' learning experiences. It emphasizes proactive measures that consider the social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which students live. The upstream approach involves examining the underlying factors contributing to challenges within the education system. Instead of solely addressing surface-level issues, it seeks to understand and identify the systemic barriers, biases, and cultural
insensitivities that impact students’ learning experiences. By focusing on prevention and understanding the reasons behind challenges, Annette advocated for a more comprehensive and effective educational approach.

Jane

An Introduction to Jane

Jane is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation as well as Choctaw of Oklahoma. She is the Indian Education director for a school district and previously served as a reading teacher in Arizona on the Navajo reservation. Additionally, she serves as a general board member for a prominent Native K-12 education advocacy organization. She is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. Within her responses to the opening questions, the themes of 1) cultural identity and heritage and 2) generational legacies (and gifts) and continued impact both emerged.

Cultural Identity and Heritage Preservation

After reflecting on what she wished others knew more about her tribal culture, Jane explained: One thing about my tribal culture is that we were one of the largest tribes in North America, so when you look at it that way and now see that our numbers are barely growing back up to 3,000, when at one point in the 1800’s we were at 10,000, and we were from North Dakota, all the way down to Nebraska, all the way over to Colorado. And so, I wish people [knew] that because you’d never know now because we’re such a small tribe. And I wish people knew that there’s a huge difference between all the bands within our tribe. So, we have four. I’m Skidi. We’re more closely related to Arikara and Wichita…so yeah, just to know that and just that a lot of our traditional clothing, especially out in the Southwest, have always regarded it as powwow clothing, but we’re
in that group of people that that’s just what we look like. And we do have origin stories of the war dance.

A prominent theme in Jane’s response is her emphasis on the cultural identity and heritage of her tribal community. She highlighted the historical significance of her tribe, its vast territorial presence in the past, and the subsequent decline in population due to colonization. Jane expressed a desire for people to be aware of the diversity within her tribe and the distinctions between its different bands. Additionally, she touches upon the misperception of traditional clothing as exclusively related to powwows, stressing that these elements are an inherent part of her community’s identity.

Generational Legacies (and Gifts) and Continued Impact

When asked about her professional background and the inspiration for her work, Jane posited: I am currently the Indian education director for [a school] district. And my driving force really as a teacher, I was a teacher for 8 years, and my driving force into education is that everyone in my family is an educator…and that kind of goes back to my grandfather…his Pawnee name is Shield Chief, and so most of my cousins are in positions where we want to protect people. And education is kind of a way for myself to ensure that Indigenous kids are being taken care of in the educational setting, because we know that the longstanding trauma is not great…and that is really my driving force, especially in the position I’m in is how can we get more culture into our schools that’s going to help them with testing out of the English language learner program, which in Arizona Navajos are the second highest rate of ELL students. And I don’t believe they are truly ELL, but that’s a whole different conversation. But my driving force is my family.
and knowing that I can have a positive impact on students and moving our students in a better direction in the future.

Within her response, Jane also highlighted the intergenerational legacy within her family, where many members are educators with a shared commitment to protecting and supporting others. Her grandfather’s Pawnee name, Shield Chief, reflects a tradition of guardianship and protection. Jane sees her role in education as a means to positively impact students, particularly Indigenous children, and guide them towards a better future. The focus is not only on individual success but on contributing to the collective well-being and advancement of the community, which aligns with Jane's role as the Indian education director and her commitment to ensuring the well-being of Indigenous children within the educational system. Her family’s tradition of education, rooted in a desire to protect others, influences her career choices. Jane discusses the impact of longstanding trauma on Indigenous communities, particularly in the educational setting. Her driving force is to incorporate more cultural elements into the curriculum to address the trauma and enhance the educational experience, especially for Indigenous students dealing with English language learner programs.

Expression of Giftedness

In considering how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture and/or Indigenous worldview, Jane expressed: Off the top of my head, just thinking in Indigenous contexts, I had a student who was labeled as special education, but he knew every single one of his ceremonial songs, he knew how to run a ceremony, he had all of this other knowledge. If you asked him to build something, he could build it just like that. You could ask him to do anything hands on, and he could do it quickly. It didn’t always
translate academically, but having the skills to help culturally, I feel like was very gifted, because there were a lot of students who could do all these things academically, but it didn’t relate back at all culturally.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

Jane’s response revealed a discrepancy between academic labels and the diverse expression of giftedness within her tribal culture. She shared an example of a student labeled as a special education student, who excelled in ceremonial knowledge, hands-on skills, and cultural practices. This highlights the limitations of academic assessments in capturing the multifaceted nature of giftedness within Indigenous contexts, where cultural proficiency and practical skills hold significant value beyond traditional academic measurements. Thus, two core themes emerged from her response, including 1) cultural intelligence and 2) cultural relevance in assessing giftedness.

Cultural Intelligence

A powerful theme in Jane’s response is the recognition of giftedness beyond traditional academic measures within her tribal community. She highlighted a student who, despite being labeled as a special education student, possessed a wealth of cultural knowledge and practical skills related to ceremonial songs and hands-on activities. Jane suggested that these non-academic abilities, rooted in cultural competence and traditional knowledge, are a form of giftedness, particularly within the Indigenous contexts. This theme underscores the importance of acknowledging diverse expressions of intelligence and talents that may not align with Westernized academic standards and values.
Cultural Relevance in Assessing Giftedness

Jane also pointed to the way cultural skills and knowledge should be considered as valuable indicators of giftedness. Jane contrasts the student’s proficiency in cultural practices with conventional academic success, emphasizing that the ability to contribute meaningfully to cultural practices as a form of giftedness. This theme encourages a broader and more culturally sensitive perspective in assessing and recognizing the talents and abilities of individuals, challenging the conventional, oftentimes Westernized, understanding of giftedness that may prioritize academic and static (i.e., degree, certificate, etc.) achievements.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Within her tribal community, Jane expressed that giftedness is often nurtured through a strength-based, community-oriented approach, explaining: 

Looking specifically at Pawnee Nation and how we do things or how I’ve been viewing things, it’s like we kind of hone in on those strengths. So, my family is known for being in education, most of my cousins are educators. And then there’s the Echohawk family, who are known for their political work. And then there’s other families who are known for their art, like textiles, beadwork, paintings, and things like that…to me, I feel like when our communities know we’re good at something, they’re really good at honing in on that…so maybe someone has a spiritual gift of knowing, so then that person in invited in spaces for those time [ceremonial]. And I think that traditionally, a lot of our communities do those things without realizing they are…I know that out here in Navajo Nation area, people do the same. If they know someone who is good at silver work, they call on them to come in and they lift people up based on the skills they have and not the skills they don’t have.
Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

In regard to approaches to nurturing giftedness, Jane emphasized that families are often recognized and celebrated for their strengths. This approach involves communities actively acknowledging and uplifting individuals based on their known skills, creating a supportive environment that values and amplifies the diverse gifts within the community. Two themes emerged from her response, including 1) strength-based development and 2) community recognition and support.

**Strength-based Development**

Jane’s response emphasized identifying and nurturing the strengths and talents within her tribal community. She described how different families in the Pawnee Nation are known for specific strengths, such as education (like her and her family), political work, or artistic endeavors like textiles and beadwork. This theme underscores the community's practice of recognizing and celebrating individual and familial/intergenerational gifts, creating an environment where talents are acknowledged, valued, and cultivated. By focusing on strengths, the community actively contributes to the development and nurturing of giftedness within its members.

**Community Recognition and Support**

Jane also highlighted the community’s active role in recognizing and utilizing diverse gifts. Jane mentioned instances where individuals with specific skills, such as spiritual knowledge or artistic abilities, are invited to contribute to community activities and ceremonies. This reflects a communal understanding of the value of various talents and a close knowing of one another, with the community actively seeking out individuals with specific gifts for relevant occasions. The theme suggests that the community plays a
supportive role in uplifting and empowering individuals based on their unique skills and contributions, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

When asked if there was a word or phrase within her tribal context used to describe gifted individuals, Jane expressed: *I’m just barely learning my language, but one word that sticks out off the top of my head is ‘resaru’, which means chief…and just looking at those different chief names, it goes off of what they brought to the community…so Shield Chief or Hawk Chief…our naming system in general. For instance, my sister just got her Pawnee name, which means Coyote Woman, like she's a trickster. My sister loves to laugh, she loves to joke, she kind of just does her own thing, like a coyote, you never know where they’re going to show up, and she’s definitely like that. So, I would say maybe not so much a word, but how we name people and identify people in our community.*

**Analysis of Conceptualization of Giftedness**

In her response, Jane emphasized that the names given to individuals serve as vivid descriptors, capturing the essence of their personalities and gifts within the community. Two major themes became apparent in her thoughtful response, including 1) giftedness and identity and 2) cultural context of giftedness.

**Giftedness and Identity**

A prominent theme in Jane’s response is the conceptualization of giftedness within her tribal community through the naming system. She highlighted how individuals are named based on their characteristics or contributions to the community. The example of names like Shield Chief and Hawk Chief reflects a connection between an individual's
name and the qualities they bring to the community. This theme suggests that the community’s conceptualization of giftedness is intertwined with individual identity, and names serve as a way to signify and celebrate specific attributes or roles within the community.

**Cultural Context of Giftedness**

Another theme is the acknowledgment that the tribal community's understanding of giftedness is embedded in cultural context and individual traits. Jane provided an example of her sister receiving a Pawnee name, Coyote Woman, which reflects her sister’s playful and unpredictable nature, akin to the characteristics of a coyote. This theme emphasizes that giftedness is not solely defined by traditional academic measures but is deeply rooted in the cultural context and the unique qualities individuals bring to the community. Naming individuals based on their traits reflects a nuanced and culturally specific conceptualization of giftedness within the tribal community.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

With very little hesitation, Jane selected Brummett Echohawk and his work as a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview. She explained: *The first person I can think of is Brummett Echohawk, he did a lot of artwork. He became an author...and he wrote about his time in WWII and the way he wrote it gives you a completely different idea [and perspective] of the actual history that went on there that we’re not reporting on in schools. So that’s probably the best form of representation, because I think we romanticize anyone’s involvement in WWII or anything historically. Americans are very good at romanticizing it [history], but I think Indigenous perspectives on it are always like the whole picture.*
Analysis of Form of Representation

Jane’s choice of gifted representation highlighted the importance of diverse voices and perspectives in shaping a more complete understanding of history and gifted contributions within Indigenous communities. From her response, one major theme emerged – holistic representations as related to Indigenous perspectives.

Holistic Representations and Indigenous Perspectives

A central theme in Jane’s response was the idea that representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview is effectively conveyed through art and literature, particularly exemplified by individuals like Brummett Echohawk. Jane emphasized the way in which Echohawk’s artwork and writings provide a more complete, holistic perspective on historical events, such as World War II, challenging the mainstream narrative. Through artistic expression and literature, individuals like Echohawk contribute to a broader and more accurate representation that goes beyond the romanticized versions often presented in mainstream education. The emphasis is on challenging stereotypes and presenting a perspective that encompasses the complexities of historical events, enriching the broader understanding of Indigenous experiences and contributions.

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

After considering how she would like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice, Jane poignantly and passionately explained: *I would really hope that this research could show that Indigenous students are gifted. Like you mentioned, they are overrepresented in special education, specifically Native boys. At least that’s what I’ve found in my district. And a lot of times it’s not because they lack knowledge,*
it’s because they lack Western educational knowledge. And I would like for this to kind of
guide people into looking at the whole picture of Indigenous students...having a
framework for them [teachers] to identify the giftedness in them [Native students] and
maybe even if part of your research is giving strategies on how to do that. That would be
great, because there are so many Native students that I’ve taught over the last 8 years
who are in high school now and their teachers are like ‘oh, I didn’t know that kid did
this, or I didn’t know this kid could do this’ and like, well, did you tap into that? Have
you ventured into [genuinely] knowing the student and understanding where they’re
coming from before you make these preconceived notions?

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Jane expressed a strong desire for the research findings to highlight the giftedness
of Indigenous students, particularly addressing the issue of overrepresentation in special
education. She emphasized that this overrepresentation is often linked to a lack of
Western educational knowledge rather than a lack of overall knowledge. Three prominent
themes emerged from her response, including 1) identifying strengths as gifts, 2)
comprehensive understanding of students, and 3) cultural competence.

Identifying Strengths as Gifts

Jane expressed a desire for the study’s findings to challenge and redefine the
perception of giftedness. She emphasized the overrepresentation of Native boys in special
education and suggests that this may be due to a lack of alignment with Western
educational knowledge rather than a lack of overall intelligence. Jane hoped that the
research can provide a framework for educators to identify the giftedness in Indigenous
students, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and tapping into their strengths
This theme highlights the need for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to identifying and nurturing giftedness in Indigenous students.

**Comprehensive Understanding of Students**

Jane also expressed a desire for the research findings to guide educators in looking at the whole picture of Indigenous students, encouraging them to go beyond preconceived notions. She suggested that teachers need to genuinely know and understand their students, tapping into their abilities and potential. This theme emphasizes the importance of teacher engagement, cultural awareness, and a proactive approach to uncovering and supporting the unique strengths and talents of Indigenous students. Jane suggests that providing strategies for teachers to do so could be an essential part of the implementation of the research findings.

**Cultural Competence**

Jane hoped that the research could act as a guide for educators by providing frameworks to recognize giftedness in Indigenous students within their cultural context. This theme underscores the need for strategies that align with Indigenous worldviews and ways of learning. It implies a shift from a one-size-fits-all approach to education to a more culturally responsive and individualized method, allowing educators to better understand and nurture the giftedness of Indigenous students.

**Alex**

**An Introduction to Alex**

Alex is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (Ojibwe) in North Dakota. He serves as an Ojibwe language educator and prominent advocate of Native language reclamation. He is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and
advocate. Throughout his heartfelt, compelling responses to the opening conversation prompts, one major theme and one branching theme emerged, including 1) cultural resilience, healing, and bearing modern witness, and 2) the interconnectedness of language and identity.

**Cultural Resilience, Healing, and Bearing Modern Witness**

In regard to his tribal culture and inspiration for his professional work, Alex explained: *My tribal affiliation is the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. We’re in north central North Dakota, right next to Canada. I teach Native language, specifically the Ojibwe language, which is part of our Chippewa language...and I also teach at the local tribal high school, and I’m the advisor for Gifted and Talented Drum and Dance, [which] is like an Indigenous part of the overall gifted and talented [program], which includes math, leadership, English, music, and performing arts. We’re part of the performing arts, but with a kind of Indigenous nuance...what inspires my work? It started when I was a little boy, about seven or eight years old, and I heard my grandparents talking Indian, and I didn’t know what they were saying. But they were laughing, and it sounded so beautiful. It was like a river. I always wondered why they didn’t always talk Indian. So, I was going to ask my grandma to teach me - ‘I want to sound like that’ - but I asked her first, ‘why don’t you always talk Indian?’, and she got angry. It scared me because I had never seen my grandma angry before. She said, ‘when I was a little girl and went to the Indian school, we used to get lickins [beatings] for talking Indian. That’s what she told me. So, I knew she was not going to teach me. And I couldn’t understand why people would give a little girl lickins. So, I started to hate...I hated that, what they did to grandma. She was the sunshine of my childhood, everything else was black and...*
dark and scary, and my grandma was sunshine. I started to hate White people, for what they did to my grandma, for what they did to me. Because I knew she wasn’t going to teach me now. It brought back bad memories. So, I told myself, someday I’m going to talk Indian, and no one is going to stop me, and that’s what I do today! I teach Indian language. And it’s so bizarre in a way, and sometimes I tell my students, my grandma went to school, and she got lickins for what I’m hired to teach you right now…years ago, I knew this would be my life’s work.

Alex’s response reflects the historical trauma experienced by his grandmother, who faced punishment for speaking her native language in an Indian boarding school. Despite the adversity and pain associated with that period, Alex has embraced his cultural identity and is committed to preserving and teaching the Ojibwe language. His professional work can be seen as an act of cultural resilience and a form of healing from the wounds inflicted on his family and community in the past. Moreover, Alex’s grandmother’s experience illustrates the generational impact of cultural oppression. The trauma endured by previous generations has influenced Alex’s worldview and motivations. His commitment to teaching the Ojibwe language may be considered a form of bearing modern witness to the historical injustices faced by his grandmother, and others like her, and a determination to ensure that future generations can embrace and celebrate their cultural heritage without fear.

Interconnectedness of Language and Identity

Alex’s narrative also highlights the deep connection between language and identity. His response suggested that language is not just a means of communication but is intricately tied to a sense of beauty, familial connection, and cultural heritage. This
theme underscores the importance of language as a vessel for preserving and passing on cultural identity and relationships. By teaching the Ojibwe language, Alex is not only preserving his culture but actively working to bear modern witness to the historical injustices, ensuring that the language thrives despite past attempts to suppress it.

Expression of Giftedness

In considering how giftedness is expressed within his tribal community and/or Indigenous worldview, Alex thoughtfully responded: So, they say in our culture, everyone has a reason for living; we are all sent here for a reason. That means from the Creator, for a reason to walk this earth. Some call that a vision, our life’s vision. That’s why we used to go on vision quests long ago… we used to encourage young people, before they were adolescents, to go on their vision quests, so that way they would connect with the creator and find out what we’re sent here to do. So that’s their giftedness.

‘Miinigoowizi’, which means innately gifted by the Creator. So, this is something that the creator has instilled in each and every one of us. Whatever it may be because it’s different for everyone. And that’s what the creator made, and we call it his garden because it’s not just people. It’s also the animals, the plants, the birds…everybody has a Creator given gift and purpose, and all that put together is the Creator’s garden. And it’s not something that’s done just at the beginning of time, it’s ongoing every second, into the future, it’s ongoing creation…creation is life itself. So, in an Indigenous sense, everyone is gifted, so that’s how we would define that. And we know that everyone is gifted, but not in the Western sense…these gifts wouldn’t be recognized…because the Western culture looks for certain things as gifted…what they perceive as gifted…but in the Indigenous way, everyone is gifted.
Alex further contextualized gifted expressions, particularly related to an asset-orientation, explaining that: *And if we aren’t able to see that giftedness, it’s not because it’s not there, it’s because we are lacking ourselves, and we need to learn. We might have to go on a vision quest ourselves to know why we are blinded and not able to see the beauty, the gift in every person. It reminds me of something we do in my class that I learned from my elders. In a Western culture classroom, it’s a Western education system design, and when someone comes in late to a class, they’re usually embarrassed, punished, and shamed by the teacher. And of course, that’s Western culture – you’re late, you did something bad. What I learned from my Indigenous elders and in ceremony throughout my life is that when somebody comes in the classroom [late], we say ‘I’m glad to see you’, because that person just brought in extra power, extra gifts, into the circle. And we’re working as a unit, we’re working as one in that circle. And when they come in, we’re strengthened by that...the intention is different...that’s why I think in the Western culture, the intention of giftedness is to set someone aside and above everyone else...in Indigenous culture, giftedness is the acknowledgement of someone’s sacredness, but it’s all equal...it acknowledges that each individual has a gift, a God-given purpose that everyone else benefits from.*

**Analysis of Expression of Giftedness**

In articulating how giftedness is expressed within his tribal community, Alex described the belief that everyone has a Creator-given purpose. He emphasized that this giftedness is ongoing and diverse, encompassing not only humans but also animals, plants, and the entire natural world, forming the Creator’s garden. Alex contrasts the Western perception of giftedness, which often looks for specific traits, with the
Indigenous perspective that recognizes and values the unique gifts of every individual.

Two major themes emerged from his response, including 1) creator-given, holistic gifts and 2) the educational value in community wholeness.

**Creator-given and Holistic Gifts**

In his response, Alex emphasized that giftedness within his tribal community is often expressed through the belief that everyone has a unique purpose given by the Creator. He shared the word ‘miinigoowizi’, meaning innately gifted by the Creator, emphasizing that each individual possesses a special gift that contributes to the Creator’s ongoing garden – encompassing people, animals, plants, and birds. This perspective contrasts with many Western notions of giftedness and acknowledges the diversity of gifts in every person.

**Educational Value in Community Wholeness**

Alex also highlighted the holistic and equal nature of gifts within his tribal community. He explained that the recognition of giftedness is not intended to set someone above others. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of each individual’s sacredness and their unique contribution to the community. The tribal perspective values the equality of gifts, emphasizing that every person's purpose benefits the collective. This stands in contrast to Western cultural norms, where giftedness may be perceived as setting individuals apart from others. Additionally, Alex’s response illustrates how cultural practices and values are integrated into education within the tribal community. The example of welcoming a latecomer in the classroom with positivity and gratitude, acknowledging the additional power and sense of community wholeness based on gifts they bring, which reflects a cultural shift from many Western educational norms. This
theme emphasizes the importance of honoring Indigenous perspectives in educational practices.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

When invited to share how his tribal culture nurtures giftedness, Alex expressed: *I’m not sure. You know, our community is pretty diverse. I guess I would have to say, from my perspective, which is from a traditional [Ojibwe] perspective...I can’t speak for my whole community...giftedness is supported with love. And that starts from the minute a baby is born. We know they come from the Creator, to come into this life, to live a human experience. So, when a baby is born, we give them a spiritual name. And that right there supports them right off the bat. As soon as they come into this world, they get a spiritual name, usually from a grandpa or grandmother. Those were the ones a long time ago that would give the names...through colonization, many people lost that...so now people are getting their names in their 40s or 50s...and how someone is gifted to give names is different for each individual. So that’s one way, our traditional names.*

Alex went on to explain that, in addition to love, his community recognizes the sacredness and purpose in everyone, noting: *We [also] recognize that there’s a sacredness and purpose in everyone. So, we support each other through the names and also the clans, where our spirits come from...our clans come through our father’s side, so those people also help us. And then we have our sacred ceremonies, some are rites of passage that we implore our young people to do, and we support them with that, we’re there with them...we take time to go sit with them...so it’s through ceremonies, it’s through love, and through supporting one another unconditionally... and its [support] goes through our whole life, it’s like the seasons...spring is our childhood, summer is...*
adolescence, fall is adulthood, and winter is elder[hood]...so we support each other through unconditional love, like the Creator has for us...and that’s why he sent us here, to learn about this unconditional love...because unconditional love pulls everybody together, everybody together working as one unit, and that’s the Creator’s garden and that is life itself in a natural, healthy, sustaining, eternal way. The other way [Western] identifies and separates...it creates competition...so when you teach from childhood that you have to teach to improve, then you are competing all your life, and when you’re competing all your life, you never feel safe...you create contention, stress...no...that isn’t how it’s done [education] in an Indigenous sense.

Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Alex shared that his community nurtures giftedness through love, beginning with the giving of a spiritual name to a baby as soon as they are born. This practice, though impacted by colonization, remains a significant way of supporting individuals. Additionally, he noted that the community recognizes the sacredness and purpose in everyone, providing support through clans, rites of passage ceremonies, and unconditional love, which often contrasts with Western society’s conditional approaches (i.e., be “good” and earn “good” grades, etc.). Accordingly, three themes emerged from his response, including 1) cultural foundations and spiritual connection, 2) interconnectedness and unconditional support, and 3) holistic, lifelong learning.

Cultural Foundations and Spiritual Connection

Throughout Alex’s response, there was a strong emphasis on cultural foundations and spiritual connection as integral to nurturing giftedness. The practice of giving babies a spiritual name from their grandparents is highlighted as a significant tradition. This
cultural initiation into life not only reflects a deep connection with spirituality but also sets the tone for the individual's sense of purpose and identity. The naming ceremony becomes a form of support that extends throughout a person’s life, emphasizing the sacredness and purpose that each individual holds within the community.

**Interconnectedness and Unconditional Support**

Alex also emphasized the interconnectedness and unconditional support within the tribal community. He explained that everyone is recognized for their sacredness and purpose. The support system extends beyond names to clans, where spiritual connections are traced through one's father's side. Additionally, ceremonies, especially rites of passage for the youth, serve as crucial moments for communal support. The notion of supporting each other unconditionally, mirroring the Creator’s unconditional love, is portrayed as a lifelong journey. This theme stands in contrast to Western educational norms, which often foster competition and stress rather than unity and support.

**Holistic, Lifelong Learning**

Alex also drew parallels between life’s seasons and the stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood. The tribal community supports individuals through each stage with unconditional love, again mirroring the Creator’s intent for humanity to learn about this love. In this regard, many Indigenous approaches to education often inherently value a natural, healthy, sustaining, and eternal way of life. Education is seen as a lifelong process that goes beyond the competitive and stressful nature often associated with Western education structures.
Conceptualization of Giftedness

As mentioned in the section on the expression of giftedness, Alex shared that giftedness is described in Ojibwe, [as] ‘miinigoowizi’. Which means he or she is gifted...Ojibwe language is gender neutral, the ‘zi’ means from the Creator, innately. So that’s how we say gifted. It’s a sentence all by itself. I think that kind of reminds me how in Westernized ways, it [gifted identification] kind of puts someone separate and above...like they have something [a noun]. They have something that no one else or very little people have...when you have something, you possess something...but miinigoowizi, the Ojibwe language is like three quarters verbs, when we see somebody and say miinigoowizi, they are not seen as someone who has something...they have a talent, and they do something that everyone else benefits from.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Alex explained that in Ojibwe, giftedness is described as miinigoowizi. He highlighted that the ‘zi’ in miinigoowizi means “from the Creator, innately,” emphasizing that the term in-of-itself a sentence. Two themes emerged from his response, including 1) the verb-centric and dynamic nature of giftedness, and 2) the community-centric and beneficial nature of giftedness.

Verb-centric and Dynamic Nature of Giftedness

Alex explained that the Ojibwe word for giftedness, miinigoowizi, reflects a verbal and dynamic conceptualization. He went on to explain that the crucial linguistic element is the suffix “zi,” which means “from the Creator, innately.” This suffix implies an inherent, dynamic quality to giftedness. In this regard, giftedness is not a static possession (noun) that sets someone apart, but rather an ongoing process or action (verb).
When someone is described as miinigoowizi, it signifies not ownership of a specific trait but engagement in an activity or talent that benefits the community. This conceptualization contrasts with Westernized ways that tend to view giftedness as a possession, potentially leading to separation or elitism.

**Community-Centric and Beneficial Nature of Giftedness**

Alex’s response also suggested a community-centric and beneficial aspect of giftedness. He explained that when someone is identified as miinigoowizi, it emphasizes their contribution and the positive impact they have on the community. The emphasis is on doing something that benefits everyone, highlighting a collective and shared understanding of giftedness. Alex suggested that this stands in contrast to Western perspectives, which might focus on individual possession and uniqueness, potentially leading to a sense of exclusivity. Such an Indigenous conceptualization reinforces a sense of interconnectedness and shared growth through the utilization of one’s talents or gifts for the greater good.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

When invited to share a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Alex shared: *So, there’s this chief in our culture, he’s passed now, he’s a chief in history...his name was Poundmaker...he was a person that was given a spiritual gift, and he would make a corral...and he had a song...and when he sang the song, the buffalo would come into the corral to feed the people...and that song was passed down, and although I’ve never been to this place, there’s a reserve in Canada called Poundmaker, just because a lot of our ancestors have crossed back and forth around the border before there was a border, we have this connectedness to this song...and now we*
use it in the Sundance, which is the Lakota version of that ceremony. We call it the
Thirsty Dance in Ojibwe. But most people know it as the Sundance [sings the song aloud
to demonstrate what it sounds like]. So we sing this song to call in the buffalo, and I think
this song would show the giftedness when we sing this song...and the buffalo spirit
comes...so yeah, I think that’s a very fitting song to represent, to epitomize the sense of
giftedness of this late chief...and there were two of them, the grandfather passed it down
to his grandson, and he was known by the same name, Poundmaker...giving gifts in a
spiritual way.

Analysis of Form of Representation

Alex shared the story, and sang the song, of Chief Poundmaker, who possessed a
spiritual gift, demonstrated through a song that would summon buffalo into a corral to
provide sustenance for the people. This giftedness was passed down from the grandfather
to the grandson, emphasizing the intergenerational aspect of spiritual gifts. Two powerful
themes emerged from his selected form of representation, including 1) the spiritual
dimension of giftedness, and 2) intergenerational connection and continuity.

Spiritual Dimension of Giftedness

A prominent theme within Alex’s response was the intertwining of spiritual
connection and giftedness. Alex recounted the story of Chief Poundmaker, who was
bestowed with a spiritual gift – a song that could summon the buffalo to feed the people.
The representation of giftedness here is deeply rooted in the spiritual realm, emphasizing
a connection between individuals and the spiritual dimensions of their culture. The song
serves as a conduit for this spiritual gift, showcasing how giftedness in the Indigenous
worldview often transcends the material and is inherently tied to the sacred and the
communal. The buffalo, as a spiritual manifestation, becomes a tangible expression of this connection, highlighting the holistic nature of giftedness within Alex’s tribal culture.

**Intergenerational Connection and Continuity**

In his response, Alex also pointed to the interconnectedness and the continuity of giftedness across generations. The passing down of the song from Chief Poundmaker to his grandson reflects a sense of ancestral continuity. The legacy of the spiritual gift is carried forward through generations, underscoring the idea that giftedness is not only an individual attribute but also a communal and familial inheritance. This theme reinforces the notion that giftedness within the Indigenous worldview is not isolated but exists within a web of relationships, connecting past and present, and suggesting a responsibility to preserve and pass on these spiritual gifts for the benefit of the community.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

When asked how he would like to see findings from this study implemented in practice, Alex insightfully responded: *Well really, they’d have to redo the whole American education system, it’s still a colonial design. The whole education system is a colonial design that is creating more havoc in the world instead of good. And who knows that [better] than the Indigenous people? Everyone who doesn’t know Indigenous ways doesn't [realize] that, so they’re just doing what they’re told. So, they’re just being colonized, in a sense, all over again. And this whole system needs to be redone in a loving way…it’s not a loving way right now…it’s all meant on capitalism, how they define success. It’s power and finance…it’s creating conflict and chaos in the world,*
instead of teaching unity and unconditional love. So, in an Indigenous sense, that is success.

Alex further elucidated his response, articulating the way in which his hopes for the findings are grounded in a healthy way of living, explaining: *What I hope to get out of these findings is that we have to quit conditioning our kids with fear...and what we call ‘mino bimaadiziwin’, a healthy life with nature, not the owners of nature, but as part of the Creator’s garden that have a responsibility to all other living things. We need to implement Indigenous ways of learning, and being, and living in all the world’s schools... mino bimaadiziwin literally means a good life...but not in a Western [sense]...a good life in the Western world, you’d be on yachts, you’d have jets, you’d have servants, you’d be a superstar. In an Indigenous sense, it’s a balanced life, living in unity with nature, which is the Creator’s garden, which is life itself, this is life itself as we speak and it’s going on into the future and continuously into the eternal future...you can even call it a scientific truth and how it’s advancing into quantum physics and is relating and correlating with Indigenous concepts...that is all we need...we don’t need to be rich, that’s actually a sickness...we honor humility in that sense, relating in a spiritual way, a good, unconditional, loving way with the universe, then we get a long, happy life. And we transcend our next life.... could improve our next life, depending on how much we learn, what the Creator sent us here to learn.*

Throughout most of the interview with Alex, he spoke in Ojibwe and then translated his responses to English, ebbing and flowing like a tide between the two languages. As such, he concluded the interview with a final thought regarding how he would like to see findings implemented, highlighting the role of Indigenous languages in
healing minds and hearts: *I didn’t want to talk about Indian ways in English [during the interview for the study] [because] it doesn’t do it justice. English doesn’t have the words Ojibwe has…It’s a different world, in Ojibwe. And I know all Indigenous languages have that because I have Lakota friends, people who speak Cree, and it’s the same way. And that’s where we need to get our Indigenous people to [engage] with this language. Because when we’re thinking in English, our thoughts are colonized. The only way to heal this is through our Indigenous language…we have to get our language back so we can heal our minds and our hearts, and we’ll be able to help the other people that came here…what we call the visitors.*

**Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

Alex expressed a profound desire for a transformation of the education system, which functions on a colonial design often causing more havoc than harmony. He advocated for a loving approach rooted in Indigenous ways that emphasized unity, unconditional (vs. conditional) love, and a balanced life in harmony with nature as true success. Three themes emerged from his response, including 1) transformation of the education system, 2) connection with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and 3) the healing power of Indigenous languages.

**Transformation of the Education System**

Alex’s response highlighted a profound call for a radical transformation of the education system, characterized by its colonial design. He envisions a shift towards a more balanced, meaningful, and sustainable human experience, critiquing the existing system for perpetuating fear, capitalism, and a distorted view of success. His vision for the reimagined education system centers on instilling values of unity, unconditional love,
and a holistic understanding of success that aligns with Indigenous perspectives. The goal is to create an educational environment that fosters a deeper connection with oneself, the community, and the natural world, promoting a more harmonious and loving human experience. This theme emphasizes the need for a fundamental shift in educational paradigms to nurture well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to both society and the broader global community.

**Connection with Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being**

Another significant component of Alex’s response was the emphasis on reconnecting with Indigenous ways of life, which involves a profound understanding of *mino bimaadiziwin*, or a good life. Alex contrasted the Western notion of success, often associated with material wealth and power, with the Indigenous perspective, which values a balanced life in unity with nature. He advocates for a shift towards humility, a spiritual connection with the universe, and an appreciation for life as an integral part of the Creator’s garden. This theme reflects a broader call for societies to reevaluate their priorities, moving away from the pursuit of wealth as a measure of success and towards a more sustainable, harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

**Healing Power of Indigenous Languages**

A critical theme that emerged in Alex’s final sharing was the significance of revitalizing Indigenous languages. Alex expressed the limitations of English in capturing the depth and nuances of Indigenous worldviews. He argues that thinking in English leads to colonized thoughts, and the only way to heal is through the Indigenous languages. The revitalization of these languages is seen not only as a linguistic endeavor but as a crucial aspect of healing minds and hearts. It is portrayed as a pathway to
reclaiming cultural identity, fostering a deeper understanding of Indigenous concepts, and ultimately aiding in the healing of individuals and communities. This theme emphasizes the importance of language as a key element in preserving and revitalizing Indigenous cultures.

**Kani**

**An Introduction to Kani**

Kani is a part of the Iñupiaq community in Alaska. She is an educator and curriculum developer, creating Native-centered curricula and resources in both local and national contexts. She is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. Two major themes emerged from Kani’s insightful and inspirational responses to the opening conversation prompts, including 1) the inherent resourcefulness, ingenuity, and strength of her tribal culture, and 2) cultural preservations through passions and skills.

**Inherent Resourcefulness, Ingenuity, and Strength**

In reflecting on what she wished others knew more about her tribal culture, Kani explained: *I am Iñupiaq, which is also sometimes recognized as Inuit, so that’s my tribal affiliation, so Alaska Native. Thinking about my tribal culture, one thing that I wish people understood about my community and my culture is that we’re really resourceful people to live in the Arctic. We’ve lived for thousands of years in the Arctic, so we’ve had to be creative at thriving in a polar environment. And people tend to have negative connotations of the Arctic being cold and dark and really hard to survive in, and they don’t necessarily understand all of those things that make the Arctic challenging are also a really important strength for my people because we’ve been creative problem solvers*
for thousands of years and we have worked around all of these challenges and have seen them as gifts.

A prominent theme in Kani’s response is the resourcefulness and strength inherent in Arctic Indigenous cultures, particularly the Iñupiaq community. Kani emphasized that the challenges of living in the Arctic have been turned into strengths through creative problem-solving. Instead of viewing the harsh Arctic conditions negatively, she invites a perspective shift, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of her people over thousands of years. This theme challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about the Arctic, offering a nuanced understanding of the cultural strengths derived from living in such an environment.

**Cultural Preservation through Passions and Skills**

Kani also expounded on her professional role and the inspiration for her work, explaining: *I am a Native educator. I have been in the field of education for about ten years. I started out as a K-12 music educator and really loved sharing my culture along with my love of music with my students. And I realized kind of in the process of becoming an educator and working in that field for years that I really loved storytelling, especially from my culture…and right as I was going through my MAT degree in Alaska, I was also working for a Native non-profit there and was trained as a storyteller and just really fell in love it with it. So, I kind of brought that into the field of education. And I’m not a teacher anymore, but since leaving teaching, I’ve worked for several other Native non-profits. One of them, we’re creating a Native centered curriculum that’s going to be a national resource that’s about to be released…I really, really enjoyed taking everything that I learned about storytelling and sharing and preserving my culture and being able to*
do that on a bigger scale. I recently took the leap full time into Native curriculum development for a tribal government here in Washington.

Kani’s passion for storytelling and cultural preservation emerged as a central theme in her professional journey. Starting as a music educator, she discovered her love for sharing stories from her culture and eventually transitioned into a role as a storyteller. This theme underscores the importance of narrative and oral tradition in many Indigenous cultures. Kani’s shift from teaching to working with Native non-profits on curriculum development reflects a commitment to preserving and sharing her culture on a larger scale. It highlights the overlapping layers of storytelling as a means of education, cultural transmission, and community building.

Expression of Giftedness

When asked how giftedness is often expressed within her tribal community, Kani thoughtfully responded: One thing that really comes to my mind is that, for giftedness, when I think about my tribal community, I think about how our specialties are seen in different ways and formats compared to the traditional academic and measurable skills in science or math or ELA. In my culture, it is a little less individual based and really focuses on how the specialties cultivate or help the community, so it’s really community centered and really focuses on reciprocity, which is a really important value in my culture - reciprocity being giving back to your community and being an active member of your community.

She went on to further contextualize the interconnectedness between giftedness and community, explaining: So, whenever I think of giftedness, I think about individuals serving their community. So, it’s not just a strength in a specific skill, necessarily.
Individuals in my community who are often considered gifted or talented, they’re identified for more than just one thing. So having worked in the school system, I was familiar with how that [giftedness] was being identified. And for me, that was just such a limiting worldview, because in my community, we would look at the whole person context - so what is this person able to do as far as specific skills – what is this person able to do as far as specific skills, storytelling, beading, weaving, sewing, dancing – but also what their spirituality is and what values they bring as a person. So, when I think about giftedness, I think about the whole-person approach and thinking how they have skills in a really wide variety of areas.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

Kani explained that, in her culture, special talents are often seen in relation to their impact on the community and reciprocity. Gifted individuals are recognized for serving the community, and their identification goes beyond a singular skill. Two themes emerged from her response, including 1) the community-centric and reciprocal nature of giftedness, and 2) the holistic and multifaceted view of gifted individuals.

Community-centric and Reciprocal Nature of Giftedness

Kani emphasized that the recognition of gifted individuals in her community often goes beyond Western academic and measurable skills in subjects like science or math. In her culture, giftedness is deeply intertwined with how one’s specialties contribute to and benefit the community. The focus is on reciprocity, the value of giving back to the community, and actively participating as a member. This theme challenges individualistic perspectives of giftedness prevalent in Western education systems, highlighting the
importance of considering the impact and contributions individuals make to the collective well-being of the community.

**Holistic and Multifaceted View of Gifted Individuals**

Kani explained that giftedness is not confined to a specific skill or talent but encompasses a broad spectrum of abilities, including storytelling, beading, weaving, sewing, and dancing. The whole-person approach considers not only specific skills but also spirituality and personal values. This theme challenges the limited worldview often found in mainstream educational systems, which may narrowly define giftedness based on academic or cognitive achievements. She critiques the limiting worldview she encountered in the school system, emphasizing the need to look at the whole person in the context of their cultural background. The holistic perspective in Kani’s community acknowledges and values the diverse talents and qualities individuals bring to the community, fostering a richer and more meaningful understanding of the gifted experience.

**Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness**

In considering how giftedness is nurtured within her community, Kani shared a lived experience and explained: *In my community, everybody is considered to have giftedness in specific areas, but also in who they are overall as people. So, elders tend to watch children as they grow up to see where their giftings lie. And that’s what they tend to nurture. A great example is me. When I began working for my very first Native nonprofit in Alaska, they first started training all of us young Native professionals basically in all around skills sharing about our culture, but they watched to see where we really excelled. And for me, the elders started noticing that I was really good at*
storytelling. So, they began pushing me out of my comfort zone. I did not like public speaking, and they put me in a public speaking role where I could practice storytelling. And they got to work with me, so I got to follow around an elder and kind of gradual release, just watching them do storytelling and then they would allow me to take little parts and pieces, so co-storytelling together. Just really hands-on learning experiences.

She went on to note how, with the support of elders within her community, she developed her gifts into more gifts to share with the community, noting: Through that, I was able to develop that gifting and from there, I had many other elders really start to notice when I was on stage doing the storytelling my skills and they would show me different ways to apply storytelling in different contexts above and beyond oral traditions. So, a good example is one elder knew that I was a musician and played the flute and taught me how to play a Native flute instead of just a Western flute that I had gone through the school system learning to play. And he taught me how to become a better storyteller by listening, so he would play, and I would have to listen very carefully. And I am very visual, so all my experiences as a musician involved having notes in front of me. But he was like, you’re a storyteller, this is a skill you can have, but you have to practice your listening. And so, he made me listen to him play, so that I could start to learn the way things are phrased in Native music. And my job was to echo back or copy what he was doing, and from there, I kind of started to learn the phrasing and the style of music that is more Native centered. And once I got good at that, he encouraged me to begin creating my own songs. So, I learned to tell stories, but without words, just with my instrument.
Analysis of Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

In Kani's community, everyone is considered to have giftedness in specific areas, and elders play a crucial role in identifying and nurturing these gifts. Kani shared her personal experience, highlighting how elders observed her storytelling skills and encouraged her growth. Throughout her descriptive response, three themes emerged, including 1) elder observation and recognition of gifts, 2) hands-on learning, risk-taking, and modeling, and 3) cultural context in skill development.

Elder Observation and Recognition of Gifts

A fundamental theme throughout Kani’s response was the practice of elders observing and recognizing the unique gifts and talents of individuals within the community. Kani emphasized that in her community, everyone is considered to have giftedness in specific areas, and elders play a crucial role in identifying these strengths. This theme reiterates the importance of a keen awareness within the community, especially among elders, to observe and acknowledge the inherent gifts of individuals. The nurturing process begins with a deep understanding of each person's capabilities, allowing for personalized guidance and support. This community-centric approach contrasts with more standardized and formalized methods often found in mainstream educational systems.

Hands-on Learning, Risk-taking, and Modeling

Kani’s sharing of her lived experience with her own gifts and talents highlighted a hands-on learning approach and a gradual release of responsibility in nurturing giftedness. Elders not only identified Kani’s strength in storytelling but actively engaged her in the learning process. They invited her to step out of her comfort zone, providing
opportunities for practical experience and skill development. The gradual release model, where she initially observed elders and then participated in co-storytelling, reflects an approach that recognizes the value of learning through experience and mentorship. This theme emphasizes the importance of fostering talents through direct involvement, mentorship, and the gradual transition of responsibility, allowing individuals to develop their skills in a supportive and culturally relevant context.

**Cultural Context in Skill Development**

Kani’s experience with elders not only focused on storytelling but also extended to her musical abilities. An elder recognized her skills as a musician and taught her to play a Native flute, emphasizing the cultural and traditional aspects of Native music. This theme highlights the importance of incorporating cultural elements in skill development, ensuring that the nurturing process is deeply rooted in the community’s values and practices. The integration of cultural context not only enriches the learning experience, but also provides a meaningful connection between the individual's gifts and the broader cultural heritage, so that skills and learning are not siloed to Western ways. Specifically, Kani learned the traditional flute as opposed to only the Western classical flute, expanding her musical talents across cultures and contexts. This approach contrasts with more standardized and culturally neutral approaches often found in mainstream educational settings.

**Conceptualization of Giftedness**

In reflecting on a word or phrase used within her tribal culture to describe gifted individuals, Kani explained: *There’s not any one phrase. The times that I have heard them talk about somebody having a skill, they refer to the skill...that person is a really*
good beader, they’re a master storyteller, musician, or dancer...so I tend to hear that more. And I don’t know if it’s because there’s not a single word in my language that gets to it or potentially, I may not have been familiar with that word because the language die-out as well. I don’t speak very much of my language because of the boarding school era in my area.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

In Kani’s tribal culture, she explained that there isn't a specific word or phrase to describe gifted individuals. Instead, people are recognized and acknowledged for their specific skills. Two prominent themes emerged from this response, including 1) skill/verb-centric conceptualization of giftedness, and 2) nuanced importance of language and culture.

Skill/Verb-centric Conceptualization of Giftedness

Kani explained that rather than using a single phrase or term to denote giftedness, individuals are often acknowledged and recognized for specific skills or talents they possess. This skill-centric approach aligns with a practical and observable understanding of giftedness. It emphasizes the tangible contributions individuals make to the community through their skills, highlighting the diverse talents that are valued and celebrated within the cultural context. The absence of a single word in the language may also underscore the community’s emphasis on specificity and nuance in acknowledging and appreciating different skill sets.

Nuanced Importance of Language and Culture

Kani noted the historical context of the assimilationist boarding school era that led to language decline. This theme highlights the interconnectedness of language, culture,
and the conceptualizations of certain phenomena as experienced by groups of people. The loss of Indigenous languages due to colonization has implications today for how certain concepts, including giftedness, are articulated and conveyed within the community. It emphasizes the need for cultural revitalization efforts to preserve nuanced expressions and understandings that are embedded in Indigenous languages.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

In regard to sharing a form of representation of giftedness, Kani shared a few different powerful forms, in which she explained: *I actually have a couple. I can show a piece of artwork [Figure 3]. This is from an article I wrote for one of the organizations I was serving last year. They asked us to write advocacy articles, and I was already a creative writer all my life, so I was really excited about doing this. So, I began writing an advocacy piece on positive narrative strategies for Native people. So this is a piece with a little bit of that freestyle, artistic exposé, but also some research pieces, but it just kind of goes through my experiences as a Native person feeling invisible in the school system...and there’s a lot of poetic storytelling and there’s also a picture, which I drew myself, which captures my experience on the one side, my community, my elders and also how I viewed myself, and the other side you can see how I was sometimes viewed by others or overlooked, especially in the education system.*
She went on to share another important form of representation, noting: *My next example... I have my flute with me. This is a walnut flute that my mom gave to me when I graduated with my master’s degree. I was such a classically trained musician; I hadn’t experienced music in that way [storytelling from previous response]. So, after a whole summer’s training, he kind of let me loose and said okay now go tell your stories and create songs to tell your stories. So this is a piece I wrote because I knew I was about to leave Alaska, I was going to move outside of Alaska and just wanted to capture the moment by the lake feeling excited and hopeful, the beauty of the lake, the beauty of working with him, but also a sense of longing about knowing that I was going to be leaving all this behind, and I think hear some of that captured in the music [Kani proceeds to play me a piece of the song on her flute].
Poignantly, Kani articulated the importance and rationale behind sharing various forms of giftedness within her Indigenous worldview, explaining: And the reason I wanted to show you these things is because, in my culture, a person who is gifted, you look at their whole person...and for me, I'm a storyteller, I'm a musician, I'm a visual artist, I do poetry, there's so many different layers going on. And I feel like being an educator in the past in the school system...those things are always overlooked. They tend to focus on measurable skills. And then you have people like me who have so many of these different parts and pieces and it takes some time getting to know that person and some time to see them for who they are.

Analysis of Form of Representation

Through the sharing of her own forms of representation of giftedness, Kani exemplified the way in which in her culture, recognizing a gifted person involves considering their various talents and layers, challenging the tendency to focus solely on measurable skills. From her response and selection of representations, three powerful themes emerged, including 1) holistic representation of giftedness, 2) cultural expression as a form of giftedness, and 3) de-centering measurable skills.

Holistic Representation of Giftedness

Kani’s forms of representation of giftedness, including her artwork and flute playing, illustrated the multifaceted nature of her identity and talents. In her culture, a person who is considered gifted is not defined by a single skill but is acknowledged for their diverse abilities and contributions to the community. The inclusion of storytelling, music, visual art, and poetry reflects a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of these creative expressions. This theme challenges the narrow, skill-
focused view often found in mainstream educational systems, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the entirety of an individual’s gifts and talents.

**Cultural Expression as a Form of Giftedness**

Kani’s choice of representation included artistic and creative outlets deeply rooted in her cultural identity, such as storytelling and playing the Native flute. These forms of expression not only showcase her talents but also serve as a means of cultural preservation and storytelling within her community. The emphasis on cultural elements in her creative work reflects the Indigenous worldview, where giftedness is intertwined with the ability to convey cultural narratives, experiences, and emotions through various artistic mediums. This theme underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing cultural expressions as integral components of giftedness within Indigenous perspectives.

**De-centering Measurable Skills**

Kani’s examples and commentary also touch upon the theme of challenging the overemphasis on measurable skills in traditional educational systems. She highlights her experiences in the school system, as both a student and an educator, where the focus tends to be on quantifiable and easily measurable skills. By presenting her diverse talents, she challenges this narrow perspective, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of giftedness that encompasses a range of creative and cultural expressions. This theme emphasizes the need for a shift in educational paradigms to recognize and celebrate the rich tapestry of talents that individuals like Kani bring to their communities, going beyond conventional measures of success.
Participant-Informed Use of Findings

After reflecting on how she would like to see the findings from this study implemented in practice, Kani posited: The thing that always comes to my mind is advocacy and visibility. The members of my community really struggle with being seen in the traditional [Western] school system. And there’s little literature and findings and research done about my people in a lot of different contexts. I’ve been finding that out as a curriculum developer, when I tried to do a unit on my own people, it was really hard to find accurate information online. So, I think advocacy and visibility would be my top wish for this work. And then any way that it could be used for professional development…especially programming that is centered around the 4Rs values [respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility], even in Native communities and organizations, I think sometimes we’re really used to do things in a Western method…just finding new ways and blazing new trails in ways that honor Native ways of knowing and being. I look forward to seeing the work that comes out of this [research study].

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Kani expressed a desire for the findings from this study to contribute to advocacy and visibility for her community members within the traditional Western school system, noting that she hopes the research can pave the way for new approaches that honor Native ways of knowing and being. Two major themes emerged from her response, including 1) advocacy, visibility, and cultural relevance, and 2) professional development aligned with Indigenous values.
Advocacy, Visibility, and Cultural Relevance

Kani emphasized the struggle for her community members to be seen and recognized within the conventional, Western educational framework. Kani expressed a desire for the findings to contribute to increased visibility and accurate representation of her people in educational contexts. This theme underscores the importance of addressing the gaps in literature and research about Indigenous communities, ensuring that the unique strengths, challenges, and contributions of these communities are accurately documented and acknowledged. Kani’s emphasis on cultural relevance aligns with the need for educational practices that honor Native ways of knowing and being. It calls for a paradigm shift towards inclusive and culturally responsive education that values and respects Indigenous perspectives.

Professional Development Aligned with Indigenous Values

Kani described her hope that the study findings contribute to the development of programs and initiatives that go beyond traditional Western methods and honor Native ways of knowing and being. This theme reflects a commitment to creating spaces and opportunities that recognize and integrate Indigenous cultural values into educational practices. It speaks to the need for professional development programs that are culturally sensitive, fostering an environment where Indigenous educators and learners can thrive. The call for “blazing new trails” suggests a proactive approach to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the educational landscape, moving beyond existing structures and methodologies.
Leona

An Introduction to Leona

Leona is affiliated with the Sicangu Lakota, or the Rosebud Sioux tribe, in South Dakota. She is a former grades 6-12 English language arts teacher and currently a project director for a Native community development company that seeks to provide funds to Native entrepreneurs. Leona is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. Leona is also pursuing a doctorate in education leadership and policy. Throughout her responses to the opening prompts, one core theme and two branching themes became evident, including 1) the need for cultural representation and advocacy, 2) the negative impact of federal policies and mandates, and 3) self-efficacy and access.

Need for Cultural Representation and Advocacy

In considering her tribal affiliation and inspiration for her professional work, Leona explained: My tribal affiliation is the Sicangu Lakota, or the Rosebud Sioux tribe. I’m half Lakota, half White. I grew up in Rosebud, went to school there, taught there. Now I live off reservation, but I’ve had the opportunity to work with Native students on and off the reservation in secondary education. I became interested in education while I was in high school. I feel like then, I wanted to see more language and culture represented in our schools. I was fortunate to have that at home, but I felt like I had to push to get it recognized in school. My parents did a really good job of advocating quite a bit through our local school districts. And my siblings and I picked up on that and would do the same thing in the classroom. And so, I became a teacher, and I started with the Upward Bound program after college, working with college prep and then grad school and went on to teaching. I’ve taught grades 6-12 and then some college. I’ve
taught at a couple different tribal colleges and universities and was able to teach at my old high school in Rosebud, SD, and was kind of in the same place as you – seeing a lot of strengths with students that were not being recognized in the classroom and trying to find different ways to get that into the curriculum. But because we were so pushed by federal policies like No Child Left Behind or Every Student Succeeds, all these different policies that mandated testing, the curriculum was really heavily focused on testing. And testing only certain abilities of students, who were good at taking tests. And it was hard to see students who I need could be really successful in higher education and in other fields just feel like they didn’t really have a path or that there wasn’t an entry for them. And trying to get those brought into the classroom, so that they could see different ways…and more for them [the students] to take that on and have that belief in themselves…more for the students to see that they had the potential. They just weren’t seeing themselves. They weren’t represented appropriately in the literature...we’re not appropriately represented on a national level...so to get them into some of the gifted courses, AP courses or advanced courses was really difficult to even get students to the point to where they wanted to think about applying or think about it as an option for [them].

A central theme in Leona’s narrative was the importance of cultural representation and advocacy within the education system. Growing up, she observed a lack of representation of her Native language and culture in schools. Her own experience of advocating for cultural recognition, influenced by her parents’ efforts, became a catalyst for her career in education. This theme emphasizes the critical role of advocating for the inclusion of Native languages and cultures in the curriculum to provide a more
holistic and culturally relevant education for Native students. Leona’s commitment to addressing this gap in representation reflects a broader call for cultural responsiveness and equity in education.

**Negative Impact of Federal Policies and Mandates**

Leona also noted the impact of federal policies, such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds, on the curriculum focus within Native communities. Leona highlighted the challenges imposed by mandated testing and a curriculum heavily centered on testing certain abilities. This policy-driven approach often neglects diverse strengths and talents, particularly those not easily measured by standardized tests. The resulting limitation in curriculum options, especially for gifted and advanced courses, creates barriers for students who may excel in areas not captured by conventional testing methods. This theme prompts a reflection on the consequences of standardized testing policies and the need for more inclusive approaches that recognize and nurture a broader spectrum of student abilities.

**Self-Efficacy and Access**

The theme of representation within Leona’s response also extended to the challenges faced by Native students in accessing advanced courses. Leona described the difficulty in encouraging students to consider options like gifted courses or AP (Advanced Placement) courses when they do not see themselves represented appropriately in such programs. This reflects a broader issue of underrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives and the subsequent impact on students’ aspirations and opportunities. The theme underscores the need for concerted efforts to address
representation gaps in educational materials and to create pathways for Native students to access advanced educational opportunities, fostering a belief in their own potential.

Expression of Giftedness

Reflecting on how giftedness is expressed within her tribal community, Leona highlighted the way the nurturing of gifts is often experienced within her community rather than formal school settings, explaining: *Where I grew up, there were like two different tracks of education. There’s the education that happens in the school and then there’s the education that happens outside. And outside of the school is where you will find a lot of the Lakota language and culture, and you were able to see those talents and gifts shown by children through different gatherings, like community gatherings. And I was really fortunate to be brought up in a community that was created of individuals who liked social gathering that were traditionally-based, like powwows and different events where families would get together...and you’d have families who were well known for singing, families well known for knowing different social dances that we had traditionally, and families who were known for history and telling stories, and some who were known for creating art, and some who were known for food. And it was really cool to have all of those together in one place. And so, through that, you could see the teaching and exploration. First, the exploration of the kids looking at all those domains...you know, there were all these different avenues for exploration and different pathways for learning.*

She went on to note the way in which familial support extends to other families within the community and explained: *So even if you weren’t from a particular family, there was still a close enough relationship to where if I wanted to learn how to dance, I*
could go to different relatives or different people within that community and be able to learn different things about it and have friendships with the kids, so we could all learn together. And I feel like that type of education was so different than what we had in school...it was almost like you went through these different phases and you didn’t even realize it until you were put up to be able to speak or to present or to teach or something...and they would come up and talk or they would come up and share knowledge and then they would be gifted with something...and that was like a start of the path for them to show, like, we see you’re really talented in this field...whereas in the classroom, you might see that student who is challenged in certain areas and might be put on an IEP and be considered part of special education and have that not be a part of what people traditionally consider gifted and talented. So, when I think about that, those are just two different ways of breaking that down.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

In reflecting on expression of giftedness within her tribal community and/or Indigenous worldview, Leona emphasized the distinctive educational tracks in her upbringing—formal school education and community-based learning. The latter, rich with Lakota language and culture, manifested in community gatherings such as powwows, where different families were celebrated for various talents. Three major themes surfaced in her response, including 1) holistic expression of giftedness, 2) giftedness as inherently bound to community-based learning and exploration, and 3) recognition and pathways for giftedness.
Holistic Expression of Giftedness

Leona contrasted the two different tracks of education – formal school education and education outside the school. In the community gatherings outside of school, various talents and gifts of children are showcased across different domains such as singing, dancing, storytelling, art, and culinary skills. The holistic nature of these expressions highlights a more expansive understanding of giftedness, encompassing a diverse range of skills and abilities beyond the conventional academic measures. This theme emphasizes the importance of recognizing and nurturing the multifaceted talents that individuals may possess, acknowledging the richness and value of diverse gifts within the community.

Giftedness as Inherently Bound to Community-Based Learning and Exploration

Leona described the way her community recognizes families who are known for specific skills and knowledge, creating a rich environment for children to explore different avenues. The community gatherings serve as spaces for meaningful and relevant teaching, learning, and exploration, far beyond what mainstream school often offers. The interconnectedness of families and the close relationships within the community facilitate a collaborative and supportive approach to learning. This theme contrasts with the more structured and compartmentalized nature of formal education in many schools. The community-based learning approach encourages exploration, shared knowledge, and relationships, providing a contrast to the individualized and often isolated nature of mainstream education.
Recognition and Pathways for Giftedness

Leona also touched on the process of recognition and acknowledgment within the community. Children who demonstrate talents are recognized, and the community actively supports their development in those areas. This recognition serves as a starting point for individuals to follow a path of showcasing their talents. The contrast with the school system is evident, where individuals facing challenges in certain areas may be labeled as part of special education, potentially overlooking their unique gifts. This theme emphasizes the importance of cultural understanding, positive recognition, and encouragement as essential elements in nurturing giftedness within a cultural context.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

In response to being asked about how her community approaches nurturing giftedness, Leona expressed: *So, kind of like what I was saying, when you started to notice somebody had a talent in a particular area, people who had something to offer or to share would step in as mentors and sit down and share something with that person. I don’t know if I was ever a really good teacher, but I remember one of my aunts, I saw her at a gathering, and she sat down next to me and was like ‘I always hear you’re a good teacher.’ And I don’t know where she heard that…but when you start with that, that uplifts something, right? And it gets you to be like ‘wow, that’s really cool.’ And then they share something with you. She started telling me different things and was like ‘these are different ways that we used to correct people a long time ago and these are some ways that we can do that and maybe bring them into the classroom.’ And I was like, okay, she’s telling me we need to start looking at our classroom management. We need to start looking at how we’re talking to students and start bringing in more traditional ways of*
working with young adults...and she gave me all these different phrases that they used to say to people, just really quick ways to correct them. And that always stuck with me because it made me...if this process that we’re using in our school...is it a way to correct behavior or is it really harmful? ...and just different things like that. They’ll notice, and then come to that person [to support them]. And sometimes it’s not until you get out of the [Western] education system that you realize, like, oh, I do have a gift in this area.

In describing how her community nurtures giftedness, Leona highlighted a community-driven mentorship approach. She recounted a personal experience with her aunt, who uplifted her by acknowledging her teaching abilities and then shared traditional methods of correction and guidance. Three themes became evident throughout her response, including 1) mentorship and intergenerational learning, 2) asset-oriented recognition and capacity building, and 3) decentering Western education practices.

**Mentorship and Intergenerational Learning**

Leona explained that when individuals within her community recognize a talent or gift in someone, they actively step in as mentors. This mentorship involves sharing knowledge, skills, and cultural practices with the person exhibiting talent. The example of Leona’s aunt recognizing her potential as a teacher and offering guidance illustrates how mentorship becomes a means of uplifting and supporting individuals. The intergenerational exchange of wisdom ensures the transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural practices, which could help counter many Western teaching approaches (such as classroom management, as noted in her personal sharing), emphasizing the importance of learning from elders and experienced community members.
Asset-oriented Recognition and Capacity Building

Leona’s experience with her aunt highlighted the significance of positive recognition and encouragement in nurturing giftedness. The acknowledgment of being a “good teacher” served as a positive affirmation that uplifted Leona and sparked her curiosity. The subsequent sharing of traditional ways and phrases demonstrated a constructive approach to correcting behavior and addressing challenges. This positive recognition not only boosts the individual’s confidence but also instills a sense of cultural responsibility and connection. It contrasts with many experiences within the Western education system, where individuals may not receive such personalized and culturally grounded support.

Decentering Western Education Practices

Leona’s acknowledgment that sometimes it is only after leaving the Western education system that individuals realize their gifts suggests a critical reflection on the impact of mainstream education practices. The comparison between traditional ways of correcting behavior and the potential harm in current school practices prompts a deeper examination of the values embedded in educational approaches. This theme underscores the importance of reevaluating Western educational methods and incorporating more culturally responsive and community-oriented practices that align with Indigenous ways of learning and nurturing giftedness.

Conceptualization of Giftedness

When asked if there was a word or phrase used to describe giftedness within her community, Leona reached for a nearby book and expressed: *I was going through this book, and this is one that my dad wrote on the Lakota language, and [the word]*
‘cekiciyapi’, they’re addressing each other as relatives. And so, I started thinking about that and how that term is like when you address somebody as a relative, you’re first acknowledging them. First saying hi and acknowledging them is the most important thing you can do…but then addressing someone as a relative immediately establishes a relationship and with that implies that there’s a role you have within that relationship and there’s a role that the other person has in that relationship. And with that comes responsibility. So, depending on how you address them, then there’s some sort of reciprocal exchange there.

In addition to the relational, reciprocal nature of giftedness, Leona shared: I also thought about the different stages in life, and what happens during those phases is that there’s different types of education that are brought into it. And so, each phase is acknowledged when somebody enters into that phase. Like when a young girl would enter into the phase of puberty, there were different things that happened to show her how to take care of her body and to teach her the importance of what happens during that phase in her life. And that’s when a lot of exploration of different fields in her future path could kind of be more focused, and she would be able to learn or decide…and she would stay in that phase until relatives felt like she was ready to be out on her own…so it was a really individualized type of education and it wasn’t just one teacher who was brought in…there were multiple relatives that were brought in to work with her…and it could be people of all different ages and people who she didn’t normally see, but people who are trusted by the family. And she would be given all this knowledge and taught how to apply it…so the view of education then, and there wasn’t a term for giftedness, but not everybody went through that phrase at the same time. And it was individualized, and it
wasn’t based on age and some people might stay in that phase forever and some might get through it in two months, two years...it just depended on the person. So that’s one way of looking at it, is those different phases and the support that was brought into it was all based on kinship and relationship.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Leona provided the Lakota word *cekiciyapi*, emphasizing its relational significance. Additionally, Leona highlighted the role of different life phases, acknowledging individualized learning. Two themes emerged from her response, including 1) relational acknowledgement and responsibility, and 2) phases of an education journey.

Relational Acknowledgement and Responsibility

In thinking about giftedness, Leona suggested the word *cekiciyapi*, meaning relatives, emphasizing the importance of acknowledgment and relationship-building. When someone is addressed as a relative, it goes beyond a mere greeting; it establishes a meaningful relationship with implicit roles and responsibilities. This acknowledgment creates a reciprocal exchange, fostering a sense of connection and shared responsibilities within the community. The concept of giftedness, in this context, is intricately tied to one’s role within the community and the reciprocal responsibilities that come with that role. It reflects a holistic view of individuals as interconnected with their community, emphasizing the significance of relational dynamics in understanding and nurturing giftedness.
Phases of an Education Journey

Leona explained that instead of a standardized and age-based system, the community recognizes different phases in individuals’ lives. Each phase is marked by specific events and teachings that align with the individual's developmental stage. The education provided during these phases is not confined to a single teacher; rather, multiple trusted relatives, spanning various ages, contribute to the individual's learning experience. The absence of a fixed timeline for progressing through these phases allows for a more personalized and flexible educational journey. This perspective challenges conventional notions of age-specific educational milestones and highlights the uniqueness of each person’s learning trajectory. The community’s approach to education, based on kinship and relationship, reflects a nuanced understanding of giftedness that goes beyond standardized measures and embraces the diverse talents and growth trajectories of its members.

Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation

As a form of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Leona chose to share a story grounded in a lived experience, explaining: There’s a singer that we had back in Rosebud who passed away about seven or eight years ago, and there’s a book by Seaver Young Bear, and he talks about the different ways that you participate in different gatherings. He was a powwow singer, and he has this one section in there that I've always thought was really awesome because he breaks down all the different types of singers...some were social, some were victory type songs. And then he talked about the mastery level who could sing any song, no matter what the occasion, they knew all the songs. And he talked about somebody who was at that phase, and he was like we don’t
really have anyone like that right now…but I was fortunate enough to grow up around different singers who specialized in different areas. So, this guy from back home, he was a singer. He had a beautiful voice and he knew a lot of different types of songs…and he had a grandson who was born legally blind...and as a young man, he taught him how to sing when he was just a little boy…and it was something that he recognized right away...what he saw was his memory and his sound were really enhanced, so he started teaching him different songs, and I remember I was a New Year’s powwow and this boy, he was probably like four years old, his grandpa brought him up and he was like, he’s going to sing for everybody…and I remember having him in my classroom and it was really cool because at that point, if you had looked at where he was at on that pathway, you might call a professional singer, he was already at a man at that phase and he was only 13 years old…but he knew so many songs and he knew which ones were appropriate to sing and when, and he had them in his memory to pull up old songs when needed.

She went on to describe this boy’s school experience, expressing that: But in school it was really unfortunate because of the way the teachers talked about him and the way they approached him. And I remember one teacher on our team saying, ‘what is he going to do?’ And I broke it down and explained everything, that he’s always going to have a position [in the community] because he knows all these songs, somebody is always going to be asking him to come and sing and share…and they [the teachers] just couldn’t understand that concept because it was just so far removed from the classroom, which is really unfortunate and we really lost an opportunity there to bring all of that knowledge into the curriculum. Like yeah, this student might be considered legally blind, but these are his strengths, and this is what is happening in the community...like he’s well
known all throughout Indian country, from Canada all the way through the United States, and it was just a really stark contrast from one field of education to the other.

Analysis of Form of Representation

In her selection of representation, Leona highlighted the contrast between her community’s recognition of the boy’s gifts and the lack of understanding from teachers in the school system, showcasing a missed opportunity to honor Indigenous knowledge in curriculum and instructional approaches to not only continuing fostering his talent, but to orient his learning experience as a positive one. Two themes surfaced from her response, including 1) asset-oriented, holistic recognition of giftedness, and 2) community-centric perspective.

Asset-oriented, Holistic Recognition of Giftedness

Leona’s anecdote about the young singer highlighted a holistic understanding of giftedness within her tribal community. In this context, giftedness is not narrowly defined by academic or measurable skills. Instead, it encompasses a wide range of abilities and knowledge that contribute to the well-being and cultural richness of the community. The young boy’s mastery of singing, his enhanced memory, and understanding of appropriate songs demonstrate a form of giftedness that goes beyond conventional educational parameters. The community sought to recognize and support his strengths, not what he couldn’t do as a legally blind individual. This holistic recognition acknowledges the value of cultural knowledge, memory, and skills that are essential for the community’s cultural practices and traditions. The contrast between how the student’s abilities were perceived in the community versus the school setting emphasizes the importance of
recognizing diverse forms of giftedness and the missed opportunity to integrate this valuable knowledge into the educational curriculum from an asset-orientation.

**Community-centric Perspective**

The representation of giftedness in the context of the young singer’s role in the community underscored a community-centric perspective. In many Indigenous worldviews, the community often plays a central role in acknowledging and valuing individuals’ gifts. The singer's abilities are not only recognized within the local community but extend to a broader context, emphasizing the interconnectedness of communities across contexts. The contrast between the community’s appreciation for the young singer's talents and the school's inability to comprehend or accept his potential reflects a disconnect between Western educational norms and the community-centric approach to recognizing and nurturing giftedness. The anecdote serves as a poignant example of the contrast between community understanding and school perceptions of giftedness, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach in educational settings.

**Participant-Informed Use of Findings**

When invited to share how she would like to see the findings from the study implemented in practice, Leona expressed: *I think a lot of people know that it’s one of those things that we know our [Native] students aren’t being recognized for their knowledge. But to be able to have it printed like this and to have the research out there, because we do function in such a Westernized society, that’s the first part – is to really be able to acknowledge it, and we can do that by having this research show that this is really specific to this one group and this one piece of education. I think it would be*
helpful for people to see that this is something that needs to be changed and just having ways to do it...like, what are ways that other communities are doing it that's working? What are ways that you're seeing that happen? The stuff we’re doing, we get challenged so much and so much push-back through policies and different systems that are imposed on us...so just having those models to show that this is possible would be helpful...this is so important, this work that you’re doing...so thank you for doing it.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Leona expressed the importance of the study’s findings in acknowledging the lack of recognition for Native students’ knowledge. She emphasized the significance of having the research available, emphasizing the value of the study’s work in promoting change. From her response, two major themes became evident: 1) Native visibility and recognition, and 2) Native-informed practices.

Native Visibility and Recognition

Leona emphasized the significance of having the research findings printed and acknowledged, particularly within the context of a Westernized society. The theme of validation and recognition underscores the importance of making visible the knowledge and experiences of Native students. The study serves to further showcase what Indigenous communities already know – that their students possess valuable knowledge and abilities that are often overlooked in mainstream educational systems. The act of acknowledgment through research provides a foundation for challenging existing narratives and stereotypes, contributing to a more accurate understanding of Native students’ strengths. By bringing attention to the specific challenges faced by this group,
Leona seeks to reiterate the need for change and calls for broader recognition of Indigenous knowledge within educational settings.

**Native-informed Practices**

Leona expressed the need for the research findings to offer practical strategies for change. She calls for insights into successful models from other communities, acknowledging the challenges and push-back from Western society. This theme reflects a practical orientation toward the implementation of findings. Leona is not only interested in raising awareness but also in understanding actionable steps and effective practices that can be adapted by Indigenous communities. The emphasis on sharing models and strategies aligns with the goal of creating a resource that goes beyond mere acknowledgment, providing tangible pathways for transforming educational practices to better recognize and nurture the giftedness of Native students.

**Cora**

**An Introduction to Cora**

Cora is a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation in South Dakota. She currently teaches grades 9-12 and has over 20 years of experience in education working at the elementary, middle, high school, and college levels with Native American youth and families. She is both an Indigenous K-12 educator and advocate. In her responses to the opening conversation prompts, two major themes emerged, including 1) cultural resilience, self-determination, and contribution and 2) Native identity, education, and empowerment.
Cultural Resilience, Self-Determination, and Contribution

In answering what she wished others knew more about her tribal affiliation, Cora explained: *I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation. My family and I originally come from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. And something I wished more people knew about my people, and Native people in general, is that we’re highly educated. We have our own form of tribal government, and a lot of people don’t understand that. We are sovereign nations, which means we have self-determination. We get to determine the future and what we want for our people and our citizens. But we are also under the umbrella of the federal government. And the federal government has trust responsibility to Native nations because they signed treaties with us, which means that they view us as nations. So, they actually reinforced that we are sovereign nations because they signed treaties with us…now that being said, they didn’t uphold the treaties, so there are a lot of court cases, a lot of mistreatments, and a lot of misunderstandings about us, our people.*

Cora’s emphasis on Native sovereignty revealed a critical aspect of Native American identity and governance. The discussion around treaties and the federal government’s trust responsibility brings attention to the historical injustices faced by Native nations. The fact that treaties were signed but not honored sheds light on the systemic challenges that continue to impact Native communities. The theme underscores the ongoing struggle for recognition, self-determination, and the need for broader awareness and advocacy.

Native Identity, Education, and Empowerment

When asked about her professional background and what inspires her work, Cora explained: *So currently, I’m back in education. And I say back in education because I*
have a pretty eclectic background. Professionally, I have a master’s degree in clinical counseling, and I’ve also been the director of American Student Services for [a university] for many years. I’ve been a caseworker, I’ve been a teacher, and I’m back to teaching again, back in the classroom. And so, what motivates me to do this type of work is how I can utilize any strengths and talents and gifts that I have to help my people.

Cora’s professional background reflects a strategic and adaptive approach to addressing the needs of her community. Her commitment to using her strengths and talents for the betterment of her people highlights the intersectionality of identity, education, and empowerment. This theme speaks to the importance of education as a tool for personal and collective wellbeing. This complexity calls for a more nuanced understanding of Native cultures and challenges the simplistic narratives often perpetuated in mainstream discourse.

Expression of Giftedness

Reflecting on how giftedness is expressed within her tribal culture, Cora expressed: What I can tell you is my philosophy around education and around gifted is that many students are gifted in realms of emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical...[there are] some amazing athletes [who] come from our communities. I just came back from the Lakota Nation Invitational, and this is a basketball tournament that’s been going on for about 50 years, and one of the reasons it was developed was because of the racism our athletes encountered, because they were so good...I think anything our people try we’re good at, because we’re the best at adapting...we’ve had to adapt to colonization, we’ve had to adapt to speaking different language. English was imposed upon us, boarding school was imposed upon us, moving onto reservations was imposed upon us. So, we are
amazing at adaptation. I have a son, he’s an adult now and he’s a teacher himself, but when he was in high school, middle school and high school, he had a really difficult time in the classroom…he was diagnosed as having ADD…he was a different learner, he had a different type of learning…he has almost a photographic memory, but didn’t do well in school…he used to get bad grades and he didn’t like school…and there’s a lot of students [like that], they don’t know their learning style doesn’t not fit into that [Western, systematic ways]. So, they’re labeled or feel like they’re a failure and that’s how my son felt…but my son is one of the wisest people I know…he learns in a kinetic way…and that’s a gift, right? And I think that we in this society overlook that, and we’re starting to lean more toward emotional intelligence and things like that, but that’s a gift…but that’s something that’s not often recognized in traditional [Western] school systems…but culturally, emotionally, kinetically, all of those ways of learning are, to me, gifted learners…. he [her son] teaches Lakota language now.

Analysis of Expression of Giftedness

Cora shared her thoughts on giftedness within her tribal culture, emphasizing that students possess gifts in various realms, including emotional, cultural, spiritual, and physical aspects. She highlighted the adaptability of her community, noting their ability to excel in different areas despite a history of colonization. From her response, two themes became apparent, including 1) diverse forms of giftedness and learning, and 2) resilience and adaptability as gifts.

Diverse Forms of Giftedness and Learning

Cora challenged the conventional understanding of giftedness by emphasizing that it extends beyond academic achievements. She introduced a broader perspective that
encompasses emotional, cultural, spiritual, and physical realms. This theme highlights the richness of talents and abilities within the tribal community, recognizing that giftedness can manifest in various ways beyond traditional academic metrics. Cora’s narrative regarding her own son challenges the potential pitfalls of labeling individuals based on conventional educational standards and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and nurturing different learning styles, especially within the cultural and emotional contexts of her tribal community. In doing so, Cora suggested that being a gifted learner goes beyond conforming to Western, systematic ways of education and includes alternative learning styles which may not align with mainstream educational approaches.

Resilience and Adaptability as Gifts

Cora tied the concept of giftedness to the historical and cultural context of her tribal community. She asserts that adaptation, a key skill developed in response to historical challenges like colonization and the oppression and suppression wrought by boarding schools, is a unique gift within the community. This theme underscores the resilience of the tribal community in navigating and overcoming adversities. The ability to adapt is positioned as a valuable skill, suggesting that the community’s strength lies in its capacity to respond and thrive in the face of external pressures.

Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

Cora expressed that within her tribal culture, giftedness is nurtured through the relationships and kinships within the community and explained: Pre-invasion, pre-colonization, everybody was gifted. And that was nurtured. Everybody had a gifted, and it was acknowledged and also nurtured by individuals in our society...our society in traditional times is based on kinship...and even today, a lot of our ways and a lot of
language and our culture...we have had to go back learn and relearn...and some of the
language holders and wisdom keepers taught us...and Lakota people were fortunate that
way...because a lot of other tribes now don’t have that...gifts were nurtured by family
members, kinship...the whole village...everything that we learned came from them and
came from the environment. This one elder that I used to know, he passed away several
years ago, but he used to say, ‘we were the best at reading our environment because we
lived in harmony with our environment’.

Cora went also to also explain the role of healing and recovery in her
community’s approach to nurturing, expressing: So, that was before the colonization
process, and when the colonization process happened, my mom is a survivor [of the
boarding schools], Captain Pratt is famously quote for ‘kill the Indian, save the
man’...and so that was the thought process to make us just like White people, to make us
just like the colonizer. So, we had to do a lot of recovery and are still in recovery from
that kind of intergenerational and historical trauma. So, it’s so important to have kinship
support from all of the family, from extended family and all Lakota people...even as far
back as seven generation ago...those ancestors, they thought of us, they thought seven
generations ahead...and I think that Western society, Western, thought, Western science,
they’re just now catching up to what we already knew.

Cora described how, in her tribal culture, nurturing giftedness is grounded in
kinship. She emphasized the importance of learning from family members, elders, and
the environment. She also highlighted the impact of colonization, including the boarding
school experience, on her community’s intergenerational and historical trauma. Within
her response, two themes emerged, including 1) kinship and community support, and 2) harmony and intergenerational forethought.

**Kinship and Community Support**

Cora emphasized the significance of kinship and community support in nurturing giftedness within her tribal community. She explained that pre-colonization, everyone was considered gifted, and this was acknowledged and nurtured by individuals within the society. The theme underscores the communal nature of education and support, extending beyond immediate family to include the entire village and extended family. Cora highlighted how gifts were cultivated through the guidance of language holders and wisdom keepers within the community. This traditional approach emphasizes the collective responsibility for fostering and preserving the diverse gifts present in individuals.

**Harmony and Intergenerational Forethought**

Cora described the way the Lakota people, across generations, are extraordinary in their ability to read and understand their environment, embodying a profound connection with the land and its rhythms. They thrived by interpreting nature’s cues, reflecting a deeper and more holistic form of literacy that allowed them to live in harmonious connection with their environment. However, the impact of colonization, particularly the boarding school system, disrupted these practices and imposed a process of assimilation. The theme of intergenerational and historical trauma highlights the ongoing recovery from these challenges. Cora emphasized the importance of kinship support not only from immediate family but also from extended family and the broader
Lakota community. The idea that ancestors thought seven generations ahead reflects a long-term perspective on nurturing and preserving the gifts within the community.

Conceptualization of Giftedness

In reflecting on if there is a word or phrase within her tribal culture to describe giftedness, Cora explained that giftedness can be considered a sign, mark, symbol, birthmark, miracle and includes, people who are born different, as a child who is able to speak very early, or understands concepts, abstract ideas - including environmental, relational, spiritual, scientific early...what I can tell you is that our language, and many Indigenous languages, they’re contextual languages. They’re descriptive languages. [For instance], the word for ‘children’ in Lakota is ‘wakanyeya’, and what that word describes is ‘something sacred that moves’.

Analysis of Conceptualizations of Giftedness

Cora shared that within her tribal culture, giftedness is conceptualized broadly. She also emphasized the contextual and descriptive nature of her community’s language, which lends toward understanding how giftedness is conceptually perceived. From her response, two themes surfaced: 1) diverse manifestations of giftedness, and 2) the descriptive depth of Native language.

Diverse Manifestations of Giftedness

Cora suggested that her tribal community’s perspective on giftedness often goes beyond conventional definitions. She mentioned that conceptualizing giftedness within her community can include a “sign,” “mark,” “symbol,” and “birthmark,” indicating that giftedness may be viewed as something inherent and deeply ingrained. This holistic approach suggests that being gifted is not just about cognitive abilities but is connected to
a person's identity and essence. The word “miracle” reinforces the idea that giftedness is extraordinary and perhaps even sacred. Such a perspective on giftedness emphasizes a holistic understanding and embraces a diversity of manifestations beyond the conventional measures of intelligence. It suggests that giftedness is deeply connected to the individual's identity and can be expressed in various domains, reflecting a more inclusive and culturally nuanced view of exceptional abilities.

**Descriptive Depth of Native Language**

Cora also explained that the Lakota language is incredibly descriptive and shared the Lakota word for children, *wakanyeja*, as an example, which translates to “something sacred that moves.” This theme emphasizes the intrinsic sacredness and dynamism associated with children and showcases how descriptive the language is. Thus, Cora’s response highlighted the theme of linguistic richness and cultural depth inherent in the Lakota language. She emphasized that Lakota, like many Indigenous languages, is not just a means of communication but a vessel for cultural expression.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview: Form of Representation**

In considering a form of representation of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Cora suggested that Indigenous worldview itself is a representation of giftedness. She expressed: *I think everything about Indigenous worldview is gifted. I think Indigenous worldview and philosophy is a higher level of understanding of the universe, of the earth, of the world. So, I think that in itself is gifted, because it’s a higher level of understanding and a higher level of connecting and a higher level of spirituality, and that’s a gift.*
Analysis of Form of Representation

Cora emphasized that Indigenous worldview requires a deeper level of understanding of the world and the way in which that in-of-itself is a gift. Her choice of representation suggests one concrete theme: Indigenous worldview as a gift.

Indigenous Worldview as a Gift

Cora conveyed the idea that Indigenous worldview in-of-itself is inherently gifted. She asserted that Indigenous philosophy represents a higher level of understanding of the universe, the earth, and the world. This theme suggests that Indigenous worldview, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, spirituality, and a profound understanding of the environment, is seen as a unique and valuable gift. This perspective aligns with a holistic understanding of giftedness that encompasses not only intellectual aspects but also spiritual and environmental dimensions. This perspective challenges a narrow or compartmentalized understanding of giftedness often found in the Western education system.

Participant-Informed Use of Findings

After considering how she would like to see any findings from this study used in practice, Cora explained: Most Native children I know could be gifted because they have the ability to code-switch. They have the ability to live in two worlds, the ability to walk in contemporary life while also maintaining our strong identities to our culture and to our language and to our ways, and that’s a gift...the cultural knowledge, that’s a gift and should be considered gifted. A lot of our students get identified for special education, when they’re not...there’s an overidentification of our students as special education and they’re really not. It’s that people don’t have an understanding of our history, of our
life…and it’s high time that people come to understand the atrocities that happened to our people and continue to happen to our people and that the erasure of our people is real…in a way that doesn’t further assimilate…and the issue there is that standardized tests…they’re just not culturally relevant or appropriate. They fit the standard of the person that wrote them, which is usually the White male…so those are the things that need to change as well. So, getting the knowledge out there…knowledge is power. What you’re doing is contributing to the power. So, I’m grateful for you doing this work.

Analysis of Participant-Informed Use of Findings

Cora expressed that many Native children can navigate both contemporary life and maintain a strong connection to their cultural identity, language, and traditions. She emphasized the importance of recognizing cultural knowledge as a gift and expressed concern about the overidentification of Native students as special education, attributing it to a lack of understanding of their history and experiences. From her response, three themes emerged, including 1) cultural knowledge as giftedness, 2) culturally relevant approaches to identification, and 3) advocacy and knowledge dissemination.

Cultural Knowledge as Giftedness

Cora expressed a desire for the findings to recognize and honor the cultural knowledge possessed by Native children as a form of giftedness. The ability to code-switch, navigate two worlds, and maintain strong identities to culture, language, and traditions are viewed as gifts. This theme emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and appreciating cultural competence and resilience as valuable attributes that contribute to the overall giftedness of Native children.
Culturally Relevant Approaches to Gifted Identification

Cora highlighted the issue of overidentification of Native students in special education and challenges the lack of understanding of the historical and cultural context experienced by many of these students. She emphasized the need for a more informed and culturally sensitive approach to identification processes, suggesting that misidentification may result from a lack of understanding of Native history and cultural nuances. Cora called for changes in the way assessments are designed, challenging the current norm that tends to favor standards set by the dominant culture. The theme calls for a critical examination of existing practices, with an emphasis on avoiding assimilation and erasure of Native identities.

Advocacy and Knowledge Dissemination

Cora also emphasized the power of knowledge and the importance of disseminating the knowledge to others. This theme emphasizes the importance of disseminating findings to empower educators, policymakers, and the broader public toward a deeper understanding of Native students and their lived experiences. This empowerment through knowledge is seen as a means to challenge stereotypes, address systemic issues, and contribute to more equitable educational practices.

Chapter Summary

Grounded in the conceptual frameworks of Positionality and The Pedagogy of Listening, this interpretive phenomenological research study explored the intersection of Indigenous worldview, the cultural dimensions of giftedness, and the implementation of culturally responsive gifted education. Adhering to Kovach’s (2021) research framework and the double hermeneutic process of IPA (Smith and Nizza, 2021), this chapter
carefully and intentionally examined the findings from conversational interviews with 14 Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates. Through a participant-by-participant review, the study explored the unique narratives, perspectives, and experiences within the context of each individual’s tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliation, toward avoiding a homogenous view. Emphasizing critical listening (Freire, 1970; McGloin, 2015), this chapter provided insights into the complexities of giftedness within each participant’s individual Indigenous worldview. These complexities are further examined, with corresponding implications for practice, across participants in chapter five.
Chapter Five: Collective Analysis and Implications

As described in chapter one, the underrepresentation of BIPOC students plagues gifted K-12 programming throughout the United States, with underrepresentation in gifted education programs ranging from 63%-74% (Black), 59%-72% (Native Hawaiian), 53%-66% (Hispanic), and 48%-63% (American Indian, Alaska Native) (Rinn et al., 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021). When considering Indigenous K-12 student populations in particular, Western traditions and definitions surrounding giftedness often perpetuate assimilation, continued colonization, and, ultimately, systematic oppression (Patel, 2016), to the point of Indigenous student missingness in gifted education programs (Gentry & Gray, 2021a). Thus, the research problem this interpretive phenomenological research study examined is threefold in nature. Westernized traditions and definitions of giftedness perpetuate 1) inequity in both theory and practice (Owens et al., 2018); 2) gifted identification and programming that appeals to predominantly White, middle-class students (Hines et al., 2016); and 3) Western approaches (i.e., positionality) toward cultural responsiveness (Sternberg et al., 2021). The main research question this study sought to address was – In what ways can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education?
Research study sub-questions included:

1. How does [Indigenous participant] perceive giftedness?
2. How does [Indigenous participant] nurture giftedness?
3. How does understanding giftedness within Indigenous worldview:
   a. Expand Western understandings of giftedness?
   b. Inform culturally responsive gifted education practices?

Guided by the tenets of Kovach’s (2021) Nêhiyaw research framework and the principles of the double hermeneutic process required of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith and Nizza, 2021), the previous chapter provided a detailed review of findings and corresponding interpretations participant-by-participant. Each individual’s unique narratives, perspectives, and experiences within the context of their identified tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations were explored. By deeply listening to the voices of individuals of non-Western positionalities, stakeholders in the field of gifted education are better equipped to address questions such as “What position informs gifted education and what position is omitted?” as well as “What happens when diverse ways of conceptualizing giftedness decenter Western ways of understanding, informing, and ordering the field of gifted education?” (adapted from Johnson-Bailey, 2012, p. 261).

*Positionality* and *The Pedagogy of Listening* thus functioned as the cultural protocols, in alignment with Kovach’s (2021) Nêhiyaw research framework, wherein the act of listening to multiple perspectives, positionalities, and interpretations of what counts as knowledge was honored (Rinaldi, 2006; Smith-Gilman, 2018). Accordingly, chapter five now provides a *collective* analysis of findings across participants and corresponding implications for culturally responsive gifted education practices as informed by
Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates. Toward continuing to center Indigenous worldview, participant voices are woven throughout this collective analysis.

As a reminder, the term *Indigenous* is used within this collective analysis to refer to and include Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, who hold space in what is today called The United States of America. It is recognized that these groups have preferred terms that refer to their tribal, clan, and band affiliations or regional locations (Aguilar et al., 2021). Participants included individuals from the following tribal, band, clan, and regional affiliations, as described and/or indicated by participants: Lipan Band of Apache (TX), Tamaya Pueblo (NM), Mvskoke (OK), Yuchi (OK), Shawnee (OK), Navajo (UT), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Lumbee Tribe (NC), Rosebud Sioux Tribe of Sicangu Lakota (SD), Crow (MT), Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (ND), Pawnee Nation (OK), Choctaw Nation (OK), Oglala Lakota (SD), Iñupiat Alaska Native (AK). Additionally, it is recognized that the term *Indigenous* is also used to identify other groups worldwide, such as the Māori, Inuit, and Aboriginal Australians (Aguilar et al., 2021). The term *worldview* is used here to refer to “a general philosophical orientation about the world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 5). *Indigenous* and *Western* terms are used here to distinguish one tradition from the other. Indigenous thought is not homogenous and encompasses various philosophical positions within it.

However, *Indigenous worldview* broadly acknowledges the many shared commonalities and the diversity of Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2021). All participants expressed that their sharings and ideas on giftedness within Indigenous worldview express their own lived experiences both in and related to their identified tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations and that they do not speak for the entirety of
their tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations. Additionally, it is important to recognize that despite my ongoing efforts as the researcher to decolonize and expand my worldview (see chapter 6), there are certainly perspectives and nuances overlooked here due to my non-Indigenous worldview.

**Giftedness within Indigenous Worldview**

So, how can Indigenous worldview inform culturally responsive gifted education? All 14 participants explained that, based on their experiences within their identified tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations, *everyone* is considered gifted within Indigenous worldview. In tandem with this finding, all participants also indicated that giftedness with Indigenous worldview is exclusively bound to one’s community and their role within it, often noting how elders and adults think seven generations ahead when making decisions (Aldean - Crow, Cora - Oglala Lakota). Throughout responses regarding how giftedness is expressed and nurtured (Table 6) as well as conceptualized (Table 7), giftedness is framed within the context of honoring one another’s innate sacredness (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Annette - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Cora - Oglala Lakota, Dezi - Navajo), fulfilling one’s responsibilities to the community (Aldean - Crow, Jane - Pawnee, Choctaw, Leona - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota), cultivating relationships across generations and species of living beings (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Annette - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee), as well as engaging in reciprocity with one another, the community, and the land (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Jane - Pawnee, Choctaw, Leona - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota, Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).
All these dimensions of giftedness interact and sustain one another toward the community’s collective well-being. Giftedness, in this regard, is considered through a holistic, action, and asset-based orientation. Through the interconnectedness and interdependence often associated with Indigenous worldviews, the recognition of individual gifts is integral to the overall success and vitality of the community. Moreover, the study’s findings suggest considering giftedness within Indigenous worldview goes beyond identifying potential similarities of gifted characteristics and overlap in areas of gifted identification between Indigenous worldview and Western worldview (described in chapter two). Rather, participants’ responses suggested that giftedness within Indigenous worldview is richly complex and involves nuanced conceptualizations that extend beyond Western worldview, which speaks to broader implications for the field of education overall.

Table 6

Themes Across Expressions of Giftedness and Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tribal, Band, Clan, and/or Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>Themes Across Expressions of Giftedness</th>
<th>Themes Across Approaches to Nurturing Giftedness</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC</td>
<td>Holistic View of Intelligence</td>
<td>Cultural Maintenance and Revitalization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Relevance and Native Identity Building</td>
<td>Interconnectedness of Arts and Language</td>
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<td>Community and Active Skill Development</td>
<td>Expression of Identity and Resilience</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High Regard for Cultural Arts</td>
<td>Multidimensional and Modern Expression</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Tribe/Region</th>
<th>Conceptualization</th>
<th>Giftedness and Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Inclusive Conceptualization of Giftedness</td>
<td>Relational Nurturing Asset-Based Orientations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Identification Criteria Grounded in Indigenous Expertise</td>
<td>Holistic Gifted Recognition and Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Tamaya Pueblo, NM Mvskoke, OK Yuchi, OK Shawnee, OK</td>
<td>Holistic and Community-Centric Giftedness Cultural Knowledge and Identity Reciprocity and Relationships Patience, Care, and Lifelong Learning</td>
<td>Early Recognition and Passion Different Paths to Giftedness Capacity to Develop and Community Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dezi</td>
<td>Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Holistic View of Giftedness Value of Diverse Talents Resilience and Persistence as a Gift</td>
<td>Rejection of Top-Down Assimilation Practices (branch of Westernized education being used as a tool for colonization) Culturally Revitalizing Pedagogies Expanding Conceptualizations and Value of Performance (asset-based vs. deficit-based orientation)</td>
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<td>Carmelita</td>
<td>Lipan Band of Apache, TX (southwest)</td>
<td>Cultural Revitalization and Advocacy for Education</td>
<td>Advocacy for the Native Children Across Learning Contexts (reservation schools, rural schools, urban schools, etc.) Educator and Parent Impact</td>
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<td>Aldean</td>
<td>Crow Nation, MT</td>
<td>Leadership and Adaptability Cultural Wisdom and Practical Skills</td>
<td>Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge Cultural Identity and Ways of Being (a branch of cultural maintenance)</td>
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<td>Jo</td>
<td>Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Hozho and Well-Roundedness Community Contribution as a Gift (giving your gift to others)</td>
<td>Community Involvement and Observation Cultural Identity and</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Tribe/Location</td>
<td>Valuing Contributions Over Norms</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
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<td>Lumbee Tribe, NC</td>
<td>Inherent Giftedness within All Children</td>
<td>Individual Gifts as Community Contributions and Responsibility</td>
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<td>Cultural Manifestations of Giftedness</td>
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<td>Empowerment through Embracing Gifts</td>
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<td>Nurturing through an Asset-Orientation</td>
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<td>Intergenerational Recognition</td>
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<td>Choctaw Nation, OK</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>Pawnee Nation, OK</td>
<td>Cultural Intelligence</td>
<td>Strength-based Development</td>
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<td>Choctaw Nation, OK</td>
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<td>Community Recognition and Support</td>
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<td>Cultural Relevance in Assessing Giftedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND</td>
<td>Creator-given and Holistic Gifts</td>
<td>Cultural Foundations and Spiritual Connection</td>
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<td>Educational Value in Community Wholeness</td>
<td>Interconnectedness and Unconditional Support</td>
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<td>Holistic, Lifelong Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kani</td>
<td>Iñupiat Alaska Native, AK</td>
<td>Community-centric and Reciprocal Nature of Giftedness</td>
<td>Elder Observation and Recognition of Gifts</td>
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<td>Holistic and Multifaceted View of Gifted Individuals</td>
<td>Hands-on Learning, Risk-taking, and Modeling</td>
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<td>Cultural Context in Skill Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leona</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Holistic Expression of Giftedness</td>
<td>Mentorship and Intergenerational Learning</td>
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<td>Giftedness as Inherently Bound to Community-Based Learning and Exploration</td>
<td>Asset-oriented Recognition and Capacity Building</td>
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<td>Recognition and Pathways for Giftedness</td>
<td>Decentering Western Education Practices</td>
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<td>Cora</td>
<td>Oglala Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Diverse Forms of Giftedness and Learning</td>
<td>Kinship and Community Support</td>
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<td>Resilience and Adaptability as Gifts</td>
<td>Harmony and Intergenerational Forethought</td>
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### Table 7

**Themes Across Conceptualizations of Giftedness***

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tribal, Band, Clan, and/or Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>Shared Words, Ideas, and Concepts**</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC</td>
<td>Diverse Connotations of Giftedness</td>
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<td>Magical and Unexplainable Qualities</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Now, I’ve heard this word used, usgwanigi. Some people use it positively, as in some people are, like, magical, different, just something you can’t really explain. And some people use it like ‘oh, she is so usgwanigt.’ Like, she’s different, not a good different…So that’s the first word that came to my mind. And the word asmadi, which is very smart. And that’s almost like an anglicized word for smart. But those are the top two words that come to mind.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Giftedness is Embedded into Everyday Life</td>
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<td>Absence of Formal Hierarchies</td>
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<td>Implicit Knowledge</td>
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<td>“There’s a word that we use at the end [of a sentence] when we’re talking about somebody that’s good at something or the best at something, and that’s wopika…so someone who beads moccasins, you would say that and then say wopika - they’re the best at beading. And it was called whatever their gift is and wopika…and it wasn’t paraded around. You don’t have a list or an assessment; everyone just knows that person is good at that…so you would just know who those people were, and you could just go to them when you needed that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Tamaya Pueblo, NM Mvskoke, OK Yuchi, Shawnee, OK</td>
<td>Community Oriented Conceptions of Giftedness</td>
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<td>Caring, Action Orientated</td>
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|             |                                               | “There’s a kinship system in the way knowledge is shared within our communities…a word I’m comfortable with sharing…my mom always tells me, shani-shanite… it can have a meaning of ‘be careful,’ it can mean ‘gentleness,’ it
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Conceptions of Giftedness</th>
<th>Giftedness as a Collective, Sacred Experience</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dezi Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Conceptions of Giftedness can mean ‘well-being,’ it can mean, you know, sending good thoughts…it has multiple meanings…it’s always an action…our language moves in verbs…move about your work in a good way.”</td>
<td>“...I feel like it’s not so much a word that explains one thing, it’s more of a concept…and it means ‘I belong to the holy people’ and it’s a view of the idea that we belong to something bigger than ourselves and more sacred than ourselves…that we belong to holy people…it’s not necessarily like this person gets this title and this person gets that title and this person gets it because they have done certain things to deserve it…it’s a general view of who we are as a people, that we individually and as a whole belong to the holy people…and in my mind when I think of gifted, it’s not picking out certain performances or certain people, it’s a view and a perspective of we as a people are something special…and if I were to think of it [giftedness] in that type of Indigenous worldview, that’s how I would explain or describe it more so than anything else.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmelita Lipan Band of Apache, TX (southwest)</td>
<td>Holistic Understanding of Gifts Resilience and Personal Engagement</td>
<td>“I don’t know that we have a word or phrase, you know? …There are ways in which children are seen as being a gift in general, regardless of if it’s academic or cultural…they dance, they sing, they create art…those types of things are considered key parts of what Native people consider to be gifts…dancing, singing, participating in ceremony and creating art, sharing, being a good purveyor of the environment…”</td>
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<td>Aldean Crow Nation, MT</td>
<td>Wisdom and Guidance as Gifted</td>
<td>“…the word that comes to me is akbaawaaliliia, and the translation is an akbaawaaliliia.”</td>
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<td>Traits</td>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Cultural Continuity Through Generations</td>
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<td>adviser, one who gives advice. And I always tell my kids that I’m going to be one of the <em>akbaawaliliia</em>…so you may think some of the things I say may be harsh, but later in life, as you grow up, you’re going to understand and know what I’m talking about because that’s how I am with my grandparents…when they sat me down and the things they’ve told me, I see it, and I use it, and I apply it to myself.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Jo Navajo Nation, UT</th>
<th>Hozho as An Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>“…there’s an idea in my culture called <em>hozho</em>, which means to walk in beauty or walk in balance, and, as it’s been described to me within my family, I need to say that because Navajo nation is huge, is you have to work on areas in yourself to be <em>hozho</em>, to have that balance…there’s not a specific phrase [for giftedness] other than your ability to strive for <em>hozho</em>…It’s not like oh, you’ve reached it, and you’re done. It’s a constant, depending on what's going on in your life. And depending on what your situation is, it has to change as well. But <em>hozho</em> is the ideal. It’s what you’re striving for. You’re not ever there. You know, in Christianity, they’ll say oh, you’re saved, like past tense. It’s a constant reflective thing that you need to continue to do.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Pamela Lumbee Tribe, NC</th>
<th>Humanizing Recognition of Giftedness (vs. Labeling)</th>
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<td>“...We don’t have a known language; it’s gone. So, there’s no particular Native word that would fit in there…but then I also don’t know that we label…so just getting rid of the labels altogether is a better way of doing it…sometimes they’re called older than their years, or wise…but they’re really good at blank. But not a word [for gifted].”</td>
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<th>Annette Turtle Mountain Band of</th>
<th>Community Standing and Positive Contributions</th>
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| “I don’t know if there’s a word or phrase, except I think I mentioned earlier about somebody’s standing or someone’s
| Connections that Transcend Time and Species | Contributions… because everything is intergenerationally connected. There’s a connection with earth, there is a connection with the sky, with people. There’s always a connection. So maybe a standing…I keep going back to that, to community standing. Your contributions as an individual in the community should be something positive and not negative…whatever your gift is becomes the contribution for the good of the whole.” |

| Jane Pawnee Nation, OK | Giftedness and Identity | “I’m just barely learning my language, but one word that sticks out off the top of my head is resaru, which means chief…and just looking at those different chief names, it goes off of what they brought to the community…so Shield Chief or Hawk Chief…our naming system in general. For instance, my sister just got her Pawnee name, which means Coyote Woman, like she's a trickster. My sister loves to laugh, she loves to joke, she kind of just does her own thing like a coyote. You never know where they’re going to show up, and she’s definitely like that. So, I would say maybe not so much a word, but how we name people and identify people in our community.” |

| Alex Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND | Verb-centric and Dynamic Nature of Giftedness | “…In Ojibwe, we call it miinigoowizi. Which means he or she is gifted…Ojibwe language is gender neutral…the ‘zi’ means from the Creator, innately. So that’s how we say gifted. It’s a sentence all by itself…I think that kind of reminds me how, in Westernized ways, it [gifted identification] kind of puts someone separate and above…like they have something [noun]. They have something that no one else or very little people have…when you have something, you possess something…but miinigoowizi, the...
Ojibwe language is like three quarters verbs. When we see somebody and say *miinigoowizti*, they are not seen as someone who has something…they have a talent, and they do something that everyone else benefits from.”

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<tr>
<th>Kani</th>
<th>Iñupiat Alaska Native, AK</th>
<th>Skill/Verb-centric Conceptualization of Giftedness</th>
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<td>Nuanced Importance of Language and Culture</td>
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“...There’s not any one phrase. The times that I have heard them talk about somebody having a skill, they refer to the skill…that person is a really good beader, they’re a master storyteller, musician, or dancer…so I tend to hear that more. And I don’t know if it’s because there’s not a single word in my language that gets to it or potentially I may not have been familiar with that word because the language die-out as well. I don’t speak very much of my language because of the boarding school era in my area.”

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<tr>
<th>Leona</th>
<th>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</th>
<th>Relational Acknowledgement and Responsibility</th>
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<td>Phases of an Education Journey</td>
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“...I was going through this book, and this is one that my dad wrote on the Lakota language, and *cekiciyapi*, they’re addressing each other as relatives. And so, I started thinking about that, and how that term is like when you address somebody as a relative, you’re first acknowledging them. First, saying hi and acknowledging them is the most important thing you can do…but then addressing someone as a relative immediately establishes a relationship, and with that implies that there’s a role you have within that relationship and there’s a role that the other person has in that relationship…and with that comes responsibility. So, depending on how you address them, then there’s some sort of reciprocal exchange there.”

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<th>Cora</th>
<th>Oglala Lakota, SD</th>
<th>Diverse Manifestations of Giftedness</th>
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“[Giftedness may be] …a sign, mark, symbol, birthmark, miracle and includes people who are born different, as a child who is able to speak very early, or
**Descriptive Depth of Native Language**

understands concepts, abstract ideas, including environmental, relational, spiritual, scientific early... our language, and many Indigenous languages, they’re contextual languages. They’re descriptive languages...the word for children in Lakota is *wakanyeja*, and what that word describes is ‘something sacred that moves.’"
Native communities, I feel like that concept of exceptional is not as glamorized or like rewarded as it is in Western education systems...because everybody comes to the table with different talents and gifts and their ability to use them to support the community is what makes them valuable and helpful and useful.

This powerful finding that everyone is considered gifted may be of particular interest to the field of gifted education, as considering everyone to be gifted is often a very controversial notion (Gardner, 2020; Tompson, 2010; Trépanier, 2014). Many participants’ responses (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Dezi - Navajo, Cora - Oglala Lakota, Kani - Iñupiat, Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee) revealed how any controversy surrounding the notion of everyone being gifted can be traced back to many of the foundational concepts that underpin Western society’s understanding of education – and who has a “right” to it, who it is designed for, who gets to decide how it is developed and delivered, and how such decisions can generate havoc or harmony in one’s life (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Innate to the debate over whether everyone is gifted or not is the realization that the current educational system, shaped by colonial structures and designed to function within the context of capitalism, is inherently concerned with preserving and perpetuating societal norms that support capitalism and consumerism (Battiste, 2013; Freire, 1970). Such a model of education reflects an ever-persistent banking model of education (Freire, 1970), thereby maintaining hierarchical power dynamics.

The unease, and perhaps even anger, some within the field of gifted education may feel regarding everyone being considered gifted only further lends toward underscoring the influence of cultural paradigms on the conceptualization of giftedness.
While Western education often perpetuates a divisive approach that categorizes individuals into gifted and non-gifted, Indigenous worldviews uphold a more genuinely and organically inclusive and communal understanding of intelligence. Kani (Inupiat) noted, *I was familiar with how that [giftedness] was being identified [in Western educational contexts]. And for me, that was just such a limiting worldview, because in my community, we would look at the whole-person context.* Similarly, Dezi (Navajo) explained that *the whole concept of the way we define gifted students... I don’t like the fact that they are comparing students to other students...that certain learning styles match and fit the Westernized system and, therefore, are celebrated, whereas other learning styles are tolerated, and then other styles are wrong...I don’t like that gifted puts our students into these categories.*

In contrast, giftedness within Indigenous worldview, as many participants suggested, mirrors one’s sacredness (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Annette - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Carmelita - Lipan Band of Apache, Dezi - Navajo), with Cora (Oglala Lakota) sharing the Lakota word for children – *wakanyeja* – which means “something sacred that moves,” providing further insight into the innateness of sacredness. Moreover, gifts are viewed as being expanded by the presence of other individuals and *their* gifts. Alex (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) explained, *what I learned from my Indigenous elders and in ceremonies throughout my life is that when somebody comes in the classroom [late], we say ‘I’m glad to see you’ because that person just brought in extra power, extra gifts, into the circle.* The foci within Indigenous worldview, when concerning one’s giftedness, include honoring one another’s sacredness, fulfilling one’s responsibilities, cultivating relationships across generations.
and species of living beings, and engaging in reciprocity with one another, the community, and the land. In this regard, one participant expressed that a worldview that does not inherently uphold these values is limiting, it’s [Western worldview] limiting – it’s limiting us (Kani - Iñupiat). Thus, giftedness within Indigenous worldview suggests that to not consider everyone as gifted is to limit them.

**Giftedness as a Responsibility to Community**

Within many Indigenous worldviews, giftedness is often viewed as a responsibility to one’s community (Hartley, 1999; Herring, 1996; Peterson, 1999; Romero, 2014). All participants expressed that giftedness is tightly woven into how gifts are used to contribute to the greater good of the community. Numerous participants (Leona - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota, Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Annette - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Jo - Navajo) explained that there is a sense of deep and meaningful responsibility tied to giftedness. Annette (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) expressed that, in regard to giftedness, *there is an expectation that you are going to have a positive standing within the community, that you are going to have positive interactions...that you are going to contribute to the overall goodness of the community*. Expanding existing literature, though, all participants highlighted the reciprocal nature of community responsibility, explaining that the sense of responsibility inherent to giftedness is often intricately connected to teaching and learning with and from relatives within one’s community. Thus, when gifts are shared with the community, they are simultaneously nurtured by the community. In contrast to many Western perceptions of relatives, participants expressed that relatives within Indigenous worldview include immediate, extended, communal relatives as well as human, plant,
animal, and earth relatives. In thinking about giftedness, Leona (Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota) suggested the word *cekiciyapi*, meaning relatives, emphasizing the importance of acknowledgment and relationship-building. When someone is addressed as a relative, it goes beyond a mere greeting to establish a meaningful relationship with implicit roles and responsibilities. This acknowledgment creates a reciprocal exchange, fostering a sense of connection and shared responsibilities within the community. This dimension of giftedness (responsibility) within Indigenous worldviews also speaks to the critical role of many naming systems within Indigenous communities, in which one’s name encompasses *the story that goes along with you as people introduce you, as your family introduces you, and as you're known in your community for something...it's your role and your place within a community which then makes the community whole because you have a responsibility and a part to play to keep it together* (Pamela - Lumbee Tribe).

Perhaps paralleling the tension in Western orientations surrounding everyone being gifted is whether or not we, as a society, should expect gifted individuals to contribute their gifts to society at large (Delisle & Galbraith, 2015; Gardner, 2020). Such an apprehension may reflect a deeper, transactional tension often ingrained in Western educational paradigms (Freire, 1970), wherein individuals are measured solely by the perceived utility and productivity of their gifts and talents, potentially pressuring gifted individuals to view their gifts (and thus themselves) as commodities rather than as contributors to the collective well-being. Many participants noted the element of competition and excelling at any cost (mental, in particular) associated with developing one’s gifts and talents within Western structures. Alex (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) expressed that the Western approach to giftedness often identifies and
separates…it creates competition…when you teach from childhood that you have to teach to improve, then you are competing all your life, and when you’re competing all your life, you never feel safe…you create contention, stress…no…that isn’t how it’s done [education] in an Indigenous sense.

In contrast, Indigenous communities approach the sharing of gifts with a profound sense of interconnectedness, emphasizing sustainable, loving, and balanced exchanges that are organically reciprocal in nature (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Jane - Pawnee, Choctaw, Jo - Navajo, Leona - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota). Nurturing giftedness involves unconditional (as opposed to conditional) support through unconditional love like the Creator has for us…and that’s why he sent us here, to learn about this unconditional love…because unconditional love pulls everybody together, everybody together working as one unit, and that’s the Creator’s garden and that is life itself in a natural, healthy, sustaining, eternal way (Alex - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa). Participants suggested that Indigenous perspective often contrasts the transactional model associated with many Western educational frameworks, highlighting the communal nature of talents, and reinforcing the idea that gifts are meant to enrich the lives of all, fostering a collective harmony. This approach is reciprocal, in which individuals give their gifts to the community, and the community nurtures them.

For instance, Leona (Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota) explained that...Where [she] grew up, there were two different tracks of education. There’s the education that happens in the school, and then there’s the education that happens outside. And outside of the school is where you will find a lot of the Lakota language and culture, and you were able to see those talents and gifts shown by children through
different gatherings, like community gatherings. Similar experiences regarding the community as a source of nurturement of one’s gifts are also echoed by other participants, such as Samantha (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), Christopher (Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota), Kani (Iñupiat), and Carmelita (Lipan Band of Apache). Overall, the tension around pressuring gifted individuals to contribute their gifts to society may exist due to Western society’s typical operation within a transactional framework. Conversely, this tension is notably absent in many (if not all) Indigenous communities, as their worldview often centers on a loving, balanced, and sustainable framework of learning and being.

**Giftedness/Gifted is a Verb**

Many participants expressed that within Indigenous worldview, the concept of giftedness takes on a dynamic and transformative nature, distinct from the sometimes-static perspectives prevalent in Western worldview (Alex - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee, Pamela - Lumbee Tribe). Beyond conceptualizations of giftedness as an adjective (gifted) or noun (giftedness), it is often conceptualized as a verb, representing an ongoing action and process toward a meaningful, fulfilled, happy, and healthy human experience. Throughout participant responses, giftedness was often synonymous with movement, an ever-evolving learning journey toward balance and harmony. Jo (Navajo) shared the Diné concept of *hozho*, meaning to walk in balance or to walk in beauty, emphasizing the ongoing quest for balance on physical, mental, spiritual, and social levels. Giftedness is seen as a continuous process, never static, and always in pursuit of harmony within oneself, others, and the world.
Similarly, Alex (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) explained that everybody has a Creator-given gift and purpose, and all that put together is the Creator’s garden. And it’s not something that’s done just at the beginning of time. It’s ongoing every second, into the future. It’s ongoing creation…creation is life itself. Lynn (Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee) shared a sentiment often expressed to her by her mother, noting that knowledge has to be used in a very careful and caring manner…be gentle with yourself, be gentle how you move through the world, be gentle with others. Moving through the world with care involves acknowledging how knowledge is a gift that must be applied with care and compassion.

In further articulating the verb-centric nature of giftedness within Indigenous worldview, Alex (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) expressed that in Westernized ways, it [gifted identification] kind of puts someone separate and above…like they have something [a noun]. They have something that no one else or very little people have…when you have something, you possess something…the Ojibwe language is like three quarters verbs. When we see somebody and say ‘miinigoowizi,’ they are not seen as someone who has something they have a talent, and they do something that everyone else benefits from. Lynn (Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee) also expressed the active nature of giftedness, particularly related to the movement and transference of knowledge among generations, explaining that it’s not having a word [for giftedness]…but having a description of a system of how advice or knowledge is transferred from generation to generation…no one knows everything within our community…we are all children belonging to each other within our community…children need to be loved and guided. The verb-centric nature also speaks to many Indigenous
approaches to nurturing and supporting giftedness, in which...there’s a kinship system in the way knowledge is shared within [Indigenous] communities...we’re not learning talents in isolation...we’re not growing in isolation...the folks that are considered gifted are not gifted in isolation...they are part of communities and sub communities within our nation (Lynn – Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).

Some participants also suggested that giftedness is grounded in a purposeful journey of self-discovery and personal growth, aligning oneself with one’s inherent talents and contributing to the greater good (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Pamela - Lumbee Tribe). In essence, the Indigenous perspective challenges the often static and achievement-focused nature of Western views on giftedness, proposing a holistic, action-oriented approach that values continuous movement, balance, care, and purposeful self-discovery in the pursuit of a more enriched human experience. This perspective contrasts with many Western orientations that may emphasize tangible achievements marked by concrete completion and measures of ability (i.e., degrees, awards, certificates, exam scores, etc.). Such findings align with existing literature that suggests many Indigenous orientations differ from Western orientations in regard to how giftedness is defined, recognized, valued, and nurtured (Carter, 2021; de Alencar et al., 2016; Gibson, 1998; Harslett, 1996; Hartley, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; LaBatte, 1991; Miller, 2005, Ngara, 2006; Ngara & Porath, 2007; Romero, 1994).

**Expanding and Informing Culturally Responsive Gifted Education Practices**

So, how can understanding giftedness within Indigenous worldview expand Western understandings of giftedness as well as inform culturally responsive gifted education practices? Every participant suggested that the nature of giftedness within
Indigenous worldview extends beyond a Western orientation’s capacity to completely understand it, as the colonial habits of thinking within Western thought are simply too limited. This finding is also reflected in much of the existing literature (Christensen, 1991; Gentry & Gray, 2021a; Gentry et al., 2021; Hartley, 1991; Herring, 1996; Lara-Cooper, 2014). As noted above, numerous participants noted that the definitions and conceptualizations of giftedness that originate from Western thought are often limited and limiting (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Kani - Inupiat). Conceptions of giftedness within Indigenous worldview shared by participants were rich, dynamic, holistic, and explicitly community oriented. Samantha (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) shared the Cherokee word usgwanigtì, explaining that some people use it positively...as in some people are magical, different, just something you can’t really explain. And some people use it like, ‘Oh, she's so usgwanigtì.’ Like, she’s different, not a good different. In this regard, the concept of giftedness is multifaceted. Giftedness is not perceived as a universally positive trait; instead, it carries a spectrum of meanings that can include both positive and challenging aspects.

Other participants noted that resilience and resourcefulness are areas of giftedness unique to Indigenous individuals (Carmelita – Lipan Band of Apache, Christopher – Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota, Dezi – Navajo, Kani – Inupiat). Resilience and resourcefulness are often considered inherent strengths, which Kani (Inupiat) captures in her explanation that one thing that I wish people understood about my community and my culture is that we’re really resourceful people to live in the Arctic. We’ve lived for thousands of years in the Arctic, so we’ve had to be creative at thriving in a polar environment. And people tend to have negative connotations of the Arctic being cold and
dark and really hard to survive in, and they don’t necessarily understand all of those
tings that make the Arctic challenging are also a really important strength for my
people because we’ve been creative problem solvers for thousands of years and we have
worked around all of these challenges and have seen them as gifts.

Resilience and resourcefulness as forms of giftedness extend beyond how they’re
correctualized in Western contexts, as they are also bound to acts of healing, revitalizing,
maintaining, and sustaining within one’s cultural context (Brant-Birioukov, 2021). Dezi
(Navajo) explained that the concept of giftedness is the ability to be able to use the
resources that you have within your realm of life and knowledge, which would include
culture, songs, dance, family, people, the land…and to be able to use all the resources
that you have around you for the continuation and support of our native communities in
whatever way that looks like. Aldean (Crow) expressed that, in thinking about a word or
concept or phrase for giftedness, the word that comes to me ‘akbaawaaliliia’, and the
translation is an adviser, one who gives advice, highlighting the importance of not only
possessing knowledge but also being able to share it in a way that benefits and guides
others, contributing to their personal and communal development. Being an
akbaawaaliiia implies a responsibility to pass down not just advice but the cultural
richness embedded in the advice, ensuring that the community’s values and wisdom
endure.

Numerous participants also explained that one’s gifts and talents are expressed in
humble and community-oriented ways (Alex – Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa,
Annette – Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Carmelita – Lipan Band of Apache,
Christopher – Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota). Christopher (Rosebud Sioux Tribe
Sicangu Lakota) shared that *there’s a word that we use at the end [of sentence] when we’re talking about somebody that’s good at something or the best at something, and that’s ‘wopika’...so someone who beads moccasins, you would say [that] in our language and then say wopika – they’re the best at beading. And it is called whatever their gift is and wopika...and it isn’t paraded around, you don’t have a list or an assessment, everyone just knows that person is good at that...so you would just know who those people were, and you could just go to them when you needed that.* Overall, responses from participants suggest that giftedness within Indigenous worldviews encompasses a belief in magical, relational, generational, and embodied qualities. This aligns with Indigenous worldviews that often acknowledge and value aspects of the extraordinary or unique in individuals. Moreover, giftedness is not solely about cognitive abilities but may encompass qualities that transcend conventional Western understandings.

**Intention of Gifted Identification**

In Indigenous worldview, numerous participants suggested that identifying giftedness has a distinctive purpose that contrasts with many Western intentions. Such intention is reflected in the way in which the word “gifted” does not exist in many Indigenous languages (Hartley, 1991; Koukkanen, 2005; Romero, 1994). Alex (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) succinctly captured this contrast, emphasizing that in Indigenous culture, *giftedness is the acknowledgement of someone’s sacredness, but it’s all equal...it acknowledges that each individual has a gift, a God-given purpose that everyone else benefits from.* Lynn (Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, and Shawnee) highlighted how the identification of giftedness and the development of one’s gifts is never in isolation, explaining that *any form of giftedness in our community requires a lot...*
of patience, a lot of care, and a lot of reciprocity of building our relationships in regard to whatever skillset you’re developing…but again, it’s not in isolation…it’s among the community. So, you’re not building that skill set in a silo. You’re building that skill set within a community. In essence, the Indigenous perspective on identifying giftedness is often deeply rooted in a holistic understanding of individuals as integral parts of a greater whole, fostering a sense of sacred interconnectedness and shared purpose.

Other participants explained that naming systems are inherently part of their approach to identification and nurturement, in which giftedness is supported with love. And that starts from the minute a baby is born. We know they come from the Creator to come into this life, to live a human experience. So, when a baby is born, we give them a spiritual name. And that right there supports them right off the bat (Alex – Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa). Similarly, in considering how giftedness is both conceptualized and identified, Jane (Pawnee, Choctaw) shared, one word that sticks out off the top of my head is ‘resaru,’ which means chief…and just looking at those different chief names, it goes off of what they brought to the community…so Shield Chief or Hawk Chief…our naming system in general. For instance, my sister just got her Pawnee name, which means Coyote Woman, like she’s a trickster. My sister loves to laugh, she loves to joke, she kind of just does her own thing like a coyote. You never know where they’re going to show up, and she’s definitely like that. So, I would say maybe not so much a word, but how we name people and identify people in our community. In this holistic approach, identification in Indigenous worldview is not merely about recognizing giftedness but also about crafting a meaningful and dynamic narrative of the identity of individuals as they grow and learn within the community.

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It is essential to recognize that mainstream, Westernized gifted identification tools and protocols often have roots in prominent theories of giftedness (Owens et al., 2018; Sternberg et al., 2021). As such, beyond acting as a hidden curriculum (Gentry et al., 2021; Gibson 1998; Koukkanen, 2005; Montgomery, 1990; Tonemah, 1991b), such tools and protocols represent an epistemological privilege. While some existing theories and definitions of giftedness and intelligence described in chapter one may provide scope for broadening definitions of giftedness and/or acknowledge diverse views, such as Gardner’s (1938) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, they ultimately originate from and function within Western thought. Kovach (2021) reminds us that “recognizing colonial influence in knowledge paradigms requires that we are ever mindful of the history of colonialism” (p. 64). Indigenous thought recognizes that knowledge is cognitive, embodied, instinctual, and spiritual (Cajete, 2002; Kawagley, 2006; Kovach, 2021). Ladson-Billings (2012) points out that Western concepts of truth, particularly those associated with Western philosophical and theoretical thought, have assumed epistemological privilege. Considering giftedness within Indigenous worldview thus requires that practitioners and scholars alike acknowledge that multiple truths regarding the phenomenon of giftedness exist and recognize that some of those truths are inherently hurtful, as they have roots in a colonial, Eurocentric history.

**Identifying Giftedness Beyond Western Worldview**

Many participants suggested that identifying giftedness beyond a Western worldview involves actively recognizing a potential lack of knowing in oneself. Specifically, *if we aren’t able to see giftedness, it’s not because it’s not there. It’s because we are lacking ourselves…and we need to learn. We might have to go on a*
vision quest ourselves to know why we are blinded and not able to see the beauty, the gift in every person (Alex - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa). Such a quest for knowing might support educators in understanding that there’s no box. You have to go way, way beyond what you know yourself...to realize who they [Native students] are (Christopher - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota) as well as in [putting] implicit biases back, back, back, leave it in the car if you can, and just come to class with that [clean] slate that says I'm open and willing to see what my students can bring me today (Carmelita - Lipan Band of Apache).

Moreover, many native children [are not] necessarily in an environment where they can express their giftedness...many of our Native children are within urban environments...so the children within the urban environment kind of fade into the background of not necessarily being seen or heard (Carmelita – Lipan Band of Apache), which Gentry and Gray (2021a) describe as “Indigenous student missingness” (p. 124). However, if you have a school system where there are native teachers who are connected to that community, they see those children, and they act on them. They make overtures to bring them into gifted programming that they will flourish in. That's unique, right? And nothing against those teachers [non-Native teachers in public schools], but that dynamic makes a huge difference in who has an opportunity to access that programming (Carmelita – Lipan Band of Apache).

A settler historical consciousness continues to pervade much of the modern discourse surrounding Indigenous approaches to education, insofar as Indigenous knowledge is frequently perceived as outdated, irrelevant, or even inferior to Western knowledge systems (Brant-Birioukov, 2021). While previous literature suggests the need
for a re-examination of gifted education theory and practice (Peterson, 1999), little has been said in terms of acknowledging a lack of knowing, to the point of a personal researcher/educator responsibility, in acknowledging what this means. The reluctance in Western educational contexts to embrace the idea of universal giftedness may stem from the fear that it challenges the existing hierarchical structures embedded in Western education. If education systems were built on Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning, which deeply and truly emphasize community, interconnectedness, and a holistic view of intelligence, the notion of everyone being identified as gifted would not be met with controversy. Instead, it would be an inherent and expected aspect of the educational framework. Thus, it is imperative that educators, particularly non-Indigenous White educators, recognize their potential lack of knowing as a form of cultural humility, in which they seek to know and do better in tandem with the responsibility to listen to Indigenous communities (Lefkowits & Brown, 2022).

**Gifted Programming and Indigenous Worldview**

Curriculum and instruction for students within an Indigenous worldview would perhaps involve *a leaning towards the idea of people having natural gifts*. So, *you can be working on hozho [walking in balance], but if you excel in spirituality, then they’re going to nurture that spirituality in you. You still need to work on everything, but you’re going to have extra if you excel in, like, rug making; then they’re going to make sure you’re put in a place where you’re being immersed in that...so the idea as a whole in the community is that you need to work best to help your community* (Jo - Navajo). In this regard, K-12 education, from the start, would *recognize that everyone has a gift everyone has something to do in a community. They all have a role. And for everybody to be successful,
it’s to perfect that role, to grow into that role (Pamela - Lumbee Tribe). Such an asset-based, holistic approach is also represented throughout the forms of representations of giftedness within Indigenous worldview that participants chose to share (Table 8).

Moreover, programming would intentionally support students in learning deeply about their gifts and talents in reciprocal connection to the past and the future, theirs and the community’s. As Lynn (Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee) suggested, even when I say farmers [as an example of giftedness], they have to have reciprocal relationships with the land…and now…in the time of the climate crisis, it’s like they are knowledgeable of how the climate is having an impact on crops…of course, they’re trying to think through solutions or what do these seasons look like when they shift…they’re paying close attention and observing…to how plant relatives are responding to what is happening in the environment around us…and that takes a…lifelong journey of becoming a farmer, working the land and understanding…what has happened in the past…and not only that, but it’s a form of storytelling and sharing stories with farmers of what they’ve done within their fields or what they’re noticing. Moreover, programming would also intentionally teach students how to move carefully through the world and apply their knowledge, for instance, like a potter, to know the stories of the clay, to know the relationship to the clay, of the designs, having care for that type of knowledge (Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).

Gifted programming that seeks to align with Indigenous worldview would reject the inclination to sort and categorize students based on perceived differences and capacities (Horsford et al., 2021) and instead inherently function from an asset orientation (Alex - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Annette - Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Carmelita -
Lipan Band of Apache, Chris - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota, Cora - Oglala Lakota). All students would be identified as gifted, and gifted programming might focus on a) the intention and direction of one’s gifts as related to the community; b) the spiritual well-being of students as an innate part of affective development and self-regulation; c) inviting students to engage in reciprocity and responsibility as they develop their gifts and talents; as well as d) supporting students in walking in balance with their gifts as they move through education and life. Programming would function under an asset orientation and perhaps begin with an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) for each student upon beginning their K-12 journey, supporting students as a community of learners in identifying their strengths as forms of gifts and talents.

Gifted programming that seeks to align with Indigenous worldview would thus facilitate deeper teaching and learning (Richardson et al., 2024), in which learning experiences would shift in:

- purpose (i.e., away from assimilation to a social order and towards giving students agency and sense of purpose),
- in ethos (i.e., away from transaction and towards relationships),
- in assessment (i.e., away from standardized tests and seat time and towards the creation of worthwhile projects),
- and in equity (i.e., away from closing achievement and towards knowing and loving students holistically).

(Mehta, 2022 as cited in Richardson et al., 2024, p. 158)

Moreover, in considering gifted education that seeks to align with Indigenous worldviews, it becomes apparent that Indigenous approaches to education have widespread benefits for all students, Indigenous and beyond; the same cannot be said about many Western approaches to education.
### Table 8

**Themes Across Forms of Representations of Giftedness within Participant Indigenous Worldview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tribal, Band, Clan, and/or Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>Themes Across Forms of Representations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC</td>
<td>Can you share some form of representation (song, artwork, poem, book, video, research, metaphor, etc.) that you feel represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and Linguistic Intelligence</td>
<td>“…our school has done cover songs in the language (Cherokee) like the song from Beaches.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student choir songs in Native language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>“…have you ever heard of the book Water Lily, by Ella Deloria?…she was a linguist in her time…and there’s another one that she wrote called Speaking of Indians. Those will give you good insight into some of the things I’m talking about…she has a way of putting that together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Tamaya Pueblo, NM Mvskoke, OK Yuchi, OK Shawnee, OK</td>
<td>“…a scholar I really enjoy reading is Dr. Henry Suina…he writes a beautiful piece about when he went to school and the whole research is around him being a child…growing up with his grandparents and speaking the language and being around elders…then he had to go to the day school that was built in their community, and he talks about everything he knew as a child was”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Importance of Native Narrative and Modeling</td>
<td>Suina, H. J. (n.d.). “And then I went to school”: <em>Memories of a Pueblo childhood</em>. Rethinking Schools. <a href="https://rethinkingschools.org/article">https://rethinkingschools.org/article</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
considered bad, like his language, the way he looked his clothes, and it’s like kind of, for me, when I read stories like that, it’s very powerful to share his narrative and in such an eloquent way…and I admire that he is very rooted in his pueblo and he is always constantly sharing his knowledge…and to me…I think of him as such a gifted person in that way…because I’m a younger scholar, so I look to folks like him who provide kind of like a path or guided of ‘how do we do this?’, like, how do we continue to work in education and research and really prescriptive institutions and spaces…while we continue being who we are?”

| Dezi Navajo Nation, UT | Giftedness as Intrinsically Tied to a Learning and Contributing Journey | “Can I kind of share a story? I have an older sister who qualified as gifted…and she is ridiculously intelligent, and she has always been this fascinating role model for me…and in elementary school [she] was tested and qualified as gifted…so when I got into fourth grade, they pulled me from the class to do the same gifted test…and we got the test results back, and they were like ‘no, she doesn’t qualify for gifted services’ and it was shocking to me…and it’s kind of always been this thing where it’s like, ‘on, I’m not gifted, I’m not my sister, I’m not as smart as her, and I’m not as amazing as her kind of thing. ‘And I have three sisters, and each one of them is individually incredibly intelligent and beautiful in their own ways…my gift and my skill and my talent or my representation of my gift was my persistence and my ability to take my ‘less gifted’ mind and still be able to invest in myself and invest in my own knowledge and relationships with |

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people in a way that I would be able to be in a position where I can still create change and I can be able to invest more in the education system to improve it for our communities and for Indigenous populations.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Capacity to Recognize Diverse Forms of Gifted Expression</th>
<th>Teacher perspective that both seek and understand differences among students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carmelita</td>
<td>Lipan Band of Apache, TX (southwest)</td>
<td>“...the teachers’ perspective...for the teacher to be able to understand differences in students and being able to identify those sparks...that should allow that student to express themselves more fully...whether it’s in a gifted and talented program or whether it’s a way in which they provide an assessment...is everything paper and pencil? Or can the student draw a picture, create a video, sing a song, create a poem that brings forth all the necessary standards and the bells and whistles that convey to the teacher that this student knows something...understands this concept...”</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aldean</td>
<td>Crow Nation, MT</td>
<td>“...so, right off the bat, two books come to mind...and those books are Plenty Coups and Pretty Shield, their books...and each time I learn something new...and so a lot of stuff that I’ve shared are coming from those books and how they shared their life experiences and past them on and what the young generation followed to learn.”</td>
<td>Linderman, F. B., Snell, A. H., &amp; Matthews, B. (2003).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Acts that Embody Hozho</td>
<td>“...they say, if someone is in that balance, you can see it in their eyes. And those areas are work, like physical work, spirituality, service to your community, and prayer...so you get the idea that there has to be a well-roundedness. And so, the idea is that to be successful, you need to have hozho.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Lumbee Tribe, NC</td>
<td>Holistic, Action-Oriented Understanding of Giftedness</td>
<td>“...if we're talking gifted outside of an education system because I can kind of get into my Westernized world of what that is too, but outside of that, it is just recognizing that everyone has a gift, everyone has something to do in a community. They all have a role. And for everybody to be successful, it's to perfect that role, to grow into that role...so it would have to be something around the connectedness, the nurturing of everything to grow together…”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Annette | Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND | Metaphorical Interpretations of Giftedness | “There are lots of things out there. Any genre of art or expression you have that representation. For me...I would think about the medicines. We have sacred medicines that represent the religious, the prayer, the clarification, the smudging...if you look at it, it has four quadrants, because we always think about the four directions...each of the quadrants represents a different medicine, which are sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco. So, when I

\[ \text{Sacred medicines, including sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco} \]
think about it in a metaphoric way, that’s what comes to mind as far as gifts. Like if I’m going to gift someone something, it’s going to be one of those medicines…so gifts, I think, come in different forms…giftedness.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>Holistic Representation and Indigenous Perspectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pawnee Nation, OK</td>
<td>“The first person I can think of is Brummett Echohawk, he did a lot of artwork. He became an author…and he wrote about his time in WWII, and the way he wrote it gives you a completely different idea [and perspective] of the actual history that went on there that we’re not reporting on in schools. So that’s probably the best form of representation because I think we romanticize anyone’s involvement in WWII or anything historically. Americans are very good at romanticizing it [history], but I think Indigenous perspectives on it are always like the whole picture.”</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Spiritual Dimension of Giftedness and Intergenerational Connection and Continuity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND</td>
<td>“...so, there’s this chief in our culture, he’s passed now, he’s a chief in history...his name was Poundmaker...he was a person that was given a spiritual gift, and he would make a corral...and he had a song. And when he sang the song, the buffalo would come into the corral to feed the people...and that song was passed down, and although I’ve never been to this place, there’s a reserved in Canada called Poundmaker, just because a lot of our ancestors have crossed back and forth around the border before there was a border, we have this connectedness to this song...and now we use it in the Sundance, which is the Lakota version of that ceremony. We call it the Thirsty Dance in Ojibwe. But most people know it as the Sundance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional song to call in the buffalo</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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So, we sing this song to call in the buffalo…and I think this song would show the giftedness when we sing this song…and the buffalo spirit comes…so yeah, I think that’s a very fitting song to represent, to epitomize the sense of giftedness of this late chief…”

### Holistic Representation of Giftedness

“…And the reason I wanted to show you these things [advocacy article, artwork, and flute song] is because, in my culture, a person who is gifted, you look at their whole person…and for me, I’m a storyteller, I’m a musician, I’m a visual artist, I do poetry, there’s so many different layers going on.”

### Asset-oriented, Holistic Recognition of Giftedness

“…so, this is an anecdote. There’s a singer that we had back in Rosebud who passed away about seven or eight years ago…and there’s a book by Seaver Young Bear…and he talks about the different ways that you participate in different gatherings. He was a powwow singer, and he has this one section in there that I’ve always thought was really awesome because he breaks down all the different types of singers…some were social, some were victory-type songs……so this guy from back home, he was a singer. He had a beautiful voice, and he knew a lot of different types of songs…and he had a grandson who was born legally blind…and as a young man, he taught him how to sing when he was just a little boy…and it was something that he recognized right away…what he saw was his memory, and his sound were really enhanced, so he started
teaching him different songs…and I remember I was a New Year’s powwow and this boy, he was probably like four years old, his grandpa brought him up, and he was like, he’s going to sing for everybody…and I remember having him in my classroom, and it was really cool because at that point, if you had looked at where he was at on that pathway, you might call a professional singer, he was already at a man at that phase and he was only 13 years old.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Indigenous Worldview as a Gift</th>
<th>Indigenous worldview itself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cora Oglala</td>
<td>Lakota, SD</td>
<td>“I think everything about Indigenous worldview is gifted. I think Indigenous worldview and philosophy is a higher level of understanding of the universe, of the earth, of the world. So, I think that in itself is gifted because it’s a higher level of understanding and a higher level of connecting and a higher level of spirituality, and that’s a gift”.</td>
<td>Indigenous worldview itself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Broader Implications for K-12 Practice and Policy

There are numerous implications of Indigenous perspectives on giftedness for K-12 practice and policy, broadly. Often rooted in deep community connections, Indigenous worldview not only reframes giftedness as dynamic, holistic, and action-oriented but emphasizes honoring one another’s inherent sacredness, fulfilling reciprocal responsibilities, and engaging in sustainable and balanced approaches to knowledge acquisition as critical dimensions of one’s overall educational journey. Honoring Indigenous worldview thus requires acknowledging multiple truths exist, challenging many existing paradigms that generate more hurt and havoc than harmony, and
recognizing the colonial influences in Western thought throughout the landscape of K-12 education. The implications of Indigenous perspectives extend beyond gifted educational practices, urging a transformative reconsideration of societal values and educational structures, particularly as educators, researchers, scholars, and policymakers consider practices and policies that are genuinely culturally responsive.

**Thinking Seven Generations Ahead as a Framework for Education**

A major implication for both K-12 practice and policy resulting from this research has been the sustainability and impact of teaching and learning that results from reciprocal, intergenerational transmissions of knowledge. From all participants, there is a call for a paradigm shift, urging educational institutions to recognize Indigenous approaches to knowledge transfer in fostering holistic, deep learning experiences that resonate through time, ultimately shaping a more resilient and culturally grounded foundation for K-12 education. Cora (Oglala Lakota) captured this sentiment, explaining that *as far back as seven generations ago...those ancestors, they thought of us, they thought seven generations ahead...and I think that Western society, Western thought, Western science, they’re just now catching up to what we already knew*. Similarly, Dezi (Navajo) explained that *tribal communities have existed since time immemorial...we’ve had complex education systems for millennia...and the focus was on the continuation of culture and traditions and cultural knowledges and communities...it always goes back to communities and the continuation of our communities*.

As indicated by numerous participant responses, Indigenous communities already recognize and support all learners; the Westernized educational system and corresponding habits of thought have become solidified, normalized practices that do not
Instead of letting them [students] fall in [the metaphorical river], keep them from falling in [in the first place] ...there is so much potential, and I’m so tired of people saying, ‘these kids nowadays,’ well we raised them! So, if we really want people to be successful individuals, we need to give them what they need...and they’re going to tell you if you listen...but if you don’t listen, you’ll never know (Annette - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa). In this regard, the broader field of education might ask – what would thinking seven generations ahead as a framework for education look like in practice? How is education, and corresponding well-being (or lack thereof…), like a ball… being handed over, so that what they [elders] have, what they’ve learned, what they’ve experienced…is being handed over to us, so we can continue what they’ve learned and what they were taught so that we can teach our young generation now (Aldean - Crow). How will current education practices and policies impact the generation seven generations from now? Are you, dear reader, content with the practices and policies that will be passed down to the next generations?

**Culturally Responsive Work is Anti-Racist Work**

Eurocentric culture is predicated on two racist assumptions, one *covert* and one *overt* (Horsford et al., 2021). The covert assumption is that acculturation to Eurocentric norms is “wise,” and the overt assumption is that assimilation to these norms should be desired (Horsford et al., 2021). As a result, the racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity reflected in the US K-12 schools elicits what Nieto (2010) defined as “profoundly multicultural questions” (p. 25) – uneasy questions that require educators to rethink what they have been trained to believe is impossible to change. “Students who come to school expressing eagerness to learn in culturally reflexive ways are often 

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perceived as being less capable and are taught (or not taught) accordingly” (Horsford et al., 2021, p. 87). However, rather than conceptualizing Indigenous students as objects of curiosity or compassion, it is critical to develop dispositions that reject the notion of such students as problems to be solved (Horsford et al., 2021). It is imperative to recognize that truly culturally responsive work, as informed by the individuals such work is intended to serve, is a form of anti-racist work. Not only is genuinely culturally responsive work a form of anti-racist work, but it also has the potential to be healing work (Yellow Bird, 2012; Yellow Bird, 2013).

Culturally responsive work that is both anti-racist and healing involves acknowledging that epistemological privilege and contested spaces exist (Kovach, 2021, p. 64). As Cora (Oglala Lakota) shared, it’s high time that people come to understand the atrocities that happened to our people and continue to happen to our people and that the erasure of our people is real…in a way that doesn’t further assimilate…and the issue there is that standardized tests…they’re just not culturally relevant or appropriate. They fit the standard of the person that wrote them, which is usually the white male…so those are the things that need to change as well. So, getting the knowledge out there...knowledge is power. It involves healing Westernized, harmful thoughts and correcting collective actions through active decolonization and meaningful change. It also intentionally respects that, frequently, everybody wants solutions from Native folks, but nobody realizes that healing, processing, and dreaming have to take place within that community before Native folks can provide any type of solutions...another thing is that folks have to be ready...institutions have to be ready to shift policies (Lynn – Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).
Thus, culturally responsive work that is both anti-racist and healing requires the field of gifted education (and beyond) to unlearn hurtful practices, protocols, and policies that not only further assimilate Indigenous students but keep all students from achieving their potential through strength-based orientations. As Lynn (Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee) expressed, Indigenous education is very fluid and very distinct to who we are as Indigenous people and how we live our lives and how we observe the world and how we observe relationships...and then we have over here these forms and these processes and these policies...and even though we want to validate this [Indigenous knowledges], it’s always going to be valid to us...that’s not a question...but the thing is, over here [Western practice] is questioning the validity of our knowledge...we want to demonstrate that this [Indigenous practice(s)] have so much depth to it, but we’re not trying to institutionalize oral-based knowledge...we’re not trying to institutionalize ancestral knowledge...we’re not trying to institutionalize that...so that’s tricky.

In considering the impact of Western worldview on the education of Indigenous communities, Dezi (Navajo) explained that despite the other challenges the federal government placed on us, we still overcame them... we were able to adapt... but the education system hit us the hardest...and we’re still, of course, adapting and changing our ways to accommodate for that impact on who we are. Intentional care within both policy and practice should be taken to not only avoid the institutionalization of Indigenous ways of knowing and being but toward deconstructing current hurtful practices that actively limit (Kani - Iñupiat) students; IQ and academics are easy to identify...we need to find assessments that fit our children [Native] and not try to fit our children into these assessments (Christopher - Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota).
This sentiment is poignantly captured by Leona (Rosebud Sioux Tribe Sicangu Lakota), who noted, *sometimes it’s not until you get out of the [Western] education system that you realize, like, oh, I do have a gift.* As such, ‘*how is federal policy, state policy, district policy going to make space for Indigenous people to show up and share who they are?*’ (Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee). How is the field of gifted education intentionally making space for Indigenous students to show up and share, maintain, revitalize, and/or sustain who they are?

**Indigenous Approaches to Education are Foundational**

Participants also pointed to how Indigenous communities have long employed strengths-based, cross-curricular, aesthetic, and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning that cultivate and support diverse forms of intelligence and authentic, meaningful learning experiences. Such approaches to teaching, learning, and being predate similar scholarly contributions of seminal Western theorists and scholars, such as Dewey (1916) and his progressive thoughts on educative versus miseducative experiences, Gardner (1983) and his theory of multiple intelligences, and Eisner (1994) and his approaches to aesthetic learning and forms of representation to transfer and transmit knowledge. Despite colonizing attempts to destroy such approaches to education, many Indigenous communities today are reclaiming and revitalizing those very approaches to learning, teaching, and being, begging the question – why are such approaches to education accepted as logically entertainable truths when presented through Western thought, but not Indigenous thought (Battiste, 2013; Brant-Birioukov, 2021)? As Samantha (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) noted, *our people weren’t allowed to do the talents that were passed down from generation to generation. Now,*
we’re reclaiming more than just language. We’re reclaiming those crafts, those trades...reclaiming even the presence [of those things] makes a big difference in the revitalization of the language, too, because people feel more Cherokee by partaking in different trades or crafts. The importance of such approaches to teaching and learning is critical because as the world becomes more globalized,...it’s becoming more difficult for our [Native] young folks to make sense of what is happening...how they balance that with who they are...how they balance that with the different knowledges that exist within [Indigenous] communit[ies] (Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).

Responses from all 14 participants reveal the rich cultural traditions of Indigenous education that emphasize an interconnected worldview, seamlessly integrating various disciplines and incorporating aesthetic elements. The holistic understanding of knowledge within these communities underscores the organic integration of art, culture, and practical skills into the fabric of learning. While the insights from prominent Western scholars are valuable, it is essential to recognize that many of their concepts reflect pre-existing Indigenous educational practices. The acknowledgment of pre-existing Indigenous approaches to education challenges the Eurocentric narrative that positions many White (often male) scholars as the originators of progressive educational theories. Instead, it underscores the importance of recognizing that many approaches to teaching and learning are inherent to Indigenous knowledge systems that have long emphasized cross-curricular and aesthetic dimensions. This recognition becomes crucial in advocating for incorporating these approaches into mainstream education to move beyond the limitations of the colonial, banking-model education structures (Freire, 1970).
Recognizing and valuing diverse forms of intelligence within an educational context requires reevaluating the existing system’s foundations, shifting away from a model that perpetuates hierarchical structures, and embracing alternative approaches that honor the inherent giftedness within every individual. Rather than simply attempting to “integrate” Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning, the field may consider working in critical (Freire, 1970) conversation with Indigenous K-12 practitioners toward beginning with such approaches as foundational. Incorporating cross-curricular and aesthetic approaches is not merely about replacing existing models but about honoring and learning from the longstanding Indigenous educational traditions that have thrived for generations despite colonizing attempts to destroy them (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). The findings from this study call on educators to consider alternative ways not just to integrate Indigenous approaches to education when making educational decisions for students but to prioritize such approaches. In doing so, practitioners and scholars alike must honor how many promising practices, such as cross-curricular learning, aesthetic learning, collaborative learning, and authentic assessment, have long been part of Indigenous approaches to education (Mehta et al., 2023).

**Concluding Implication: The Importance of Broadening Western Worldview**

In summary, Indigenous worldview informs culturally responsive gifted education in several critical ways. All Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates who participated in this study expressed that, based on their experiences within their identified tribal, band, clan, and/or regional affiliations, *everyone* is considered gifted within Indigenous worldview. Giftedness is dynamic and transformative in nature, representing an ongoing action and process toward a meaningful human experience achieved through
reciprocal, balanced relationships. Giftedness is grounded in a purposeful journey of self-discovery and personal growth, aligning oneself with one’s inherent talents and contributing to the greater good of one’s community, local and beyond. Identifying giftedness is deeply rooted in a holistic understanding of individuals as integral parts of a greater whole, recognizing and fostering a sense of sacred interconnectedness and shared purpose. Thus, giftedness is nurtured holistically through unconditional love and an asset-based community orientation. Emphasis is placed on recognizing giftedness and supporting individuals in crafting a meaningful and dynamic narrative of identity as they grow and learn within the community.

While Western education often perpetuates a divisive approach that categorizes individuals into gifted, potentially gifted (i.e., talent pooling), and non-gifted, Indigenous worldviews uphold a more deeply and organically inclusive and communal understanding of giftedness. Any discomfort or tension the field of gifted education may feel around universal giftedness represents in-of-itself a centering of Western norms and thus further lends toward underscoring the influence of cultural paradigms on the conceptualization of giftedness. Criticism of universal giftedness, particularly as it is conceptualized and understood within the Indigenous worldviews shared by participants, may be responded to with critical (Freire, 1970) but gentle (Lynn – Tamaya Pueblo, Yuchi, Mvskoke, Shawnee) curiosity and questions that incite individuals to recognize expansive narratives and truths beyond Western worldview -- which approach to education is liberating (i.e., Indigenous/universal giftedness), and which is limiting (i.e., Western/one “true” truth).

Honoring how Indigenous worldview informs culturally responsive gifted education is also to recognize the foundational and transformative nature of Indigenous
approaches to education. As Dezi (Navajo) expressed, the biggest impact that we can make, in my opinion, is in the education system...education is not new to us [Indigenous peoples], right? Westernized education is new to us. And that’s where our kids are...Westernized institutions. Moreover, it urges practitioners and scholars alike to quit conditioning our kids [students] with fear...and [instead condition them with] what we call ‘mino bimaadiziwin,’ a healthy life with nature, not the owners of nature, but as part of the Creator’s garden that have a responsibility to all other living things...we need to implement Indigenous ways of learning, and being, and living in all the world’s schools (Alex - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa). The findings and participant-informed hopes for the findings (Table 9) embody a powerful call to action to listen to Indigenous educators, researchers, and advocates, emphasizing the transformative potential of broadening one’s worldview. As Jo (Navajo) poignantly explained, just opening up the idea of [this study’s] information [to others] is going to help people understand because they just don’t know ... so [they] can learn to be conscious of others and learn to broaden [their] worldview. So, hopefully, it will help broaden people’s perspective because if you know about one culture that’s different, then it opens you up to other cultures as well. And if you can see value in that, then it opens up your worldview to value humans altogether.

Table 9
Themes Across Participant-Informed Use of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tribal, Band, Clan, and/or Regional Affiliation</th>
<th>Themes Across Participant-Informed Use of Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Lastly, how would you like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to your teaching and learning community?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Tribe/Membership</th>
<th>Themes/Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC</td>
<td>Holistic Recognition of Giftedness, Representation Matters, Cultural Humility/A Willingness to Learn, Promoting Positive Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Complexity of Indigenous Knowledge, Intentionally Resisting Appropriation, Simplification, and a Savior Mentality, Holistic and Lifelong Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Tamaya Pueblo, NM, Mvskoke, OK, Yuchi, OK, Shawnee, OK</td>
<td>Healing as a Prerequisite, Navigating the Tension Between Vision and Reality, Asset-based Approaches, Inclusivity and Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dezi</td>
<td>Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Rejection of Categorical Definitions of Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmelita</td>
<td>Lipan Band of Apache, TX (southwest)</td>
<td>Recognition of Unique Expressions of Giftedness, Openness and Humility Toward Addressing Implicit Bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldean</td>
<td>Crow Nation, MT</td>
<td>Cultural and Linguistic Preservation in Education, Knowledge Sharing Across Contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Navajo Nation, UT</td>
<td>Cultural Understanding and Perspective, Native Culture and Modernity, Broadening Perspectives and Worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Lumbee Tribe, NC</td>
<td>Observant and Patient Recognition of Diverse Talents, Developing Gifts through Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annette</td>
<td>Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Education, Cross-Curricular and Arts-Based Education, Critically Conscious (Freire, 1970) Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Pawnee Nation, OK, Choctaw Nation, OK</td>
<td>Identifying Strengths as Gifts, Comprehensive Understanding of Students, Cultural Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, ND</td>
<td>Transformation of the Education System, Connection with Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being, Healing Power of Indigenous Language, <em>Mino bimaadiziwin</em> = good life, a balanced life, living in unity with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kani</td>
<td>Iñupiat Alaska Native, AK</td>
<td>Advocacy, Visibility, and Cultural Relevance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Development Aligned with Indigenous Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leona</th>
<th>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sicangu Lakota, SD</th>
<th>Native Visibility and Recognition Native-informed Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Oglala Lakota, SD</td>
<td>Cultural Knowledge as Giftedness Culturally Relevant Approaches to Gifted Identification Advocacy and Knowledge Dissemination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations, Considerations, and Future Research

Through deeply listening to the Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and advocates who participated in this study, valuable insights into the intersection of Indigenous worldview and culturally responsive gifted education were gleaned. However, certain limitations remain. One notable limitation is the potential for a somewhat homogeneous view of Indigenous participants despite intentional efforts to avoid such an occurrence. A study involving participants representing various affiliations, such as this one, may inadvertently oversimplify the nuanced perspectives inherent in each group. Each Indigenous community or affiliation represented in this study has its own unique, nuanced, and place-based perspectives and practices, adding a layer of complexity to the understanding of Indigenous approaches to education. Future research might examine each distinctive community toward thinking locally but acting globally (Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee).

Another limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of fourteen participants. While these participants provided rich, valuable, and deep insights, future research might seek a larger participant pool, particularly in support of Indigenous revitalization and maintenance efforts (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). This expansion may
involve engaging K-12 Indigenous leaders and policymakers, broadening the scope of perspectives, and allowing for an even more comprehensive exploration of the intersection between Indigenous worldview and culturally responsive gifted education. A branch of this study may also examine how *processes of colonization continue within education programs* (Dezi - Navajo), including educator preparation programs and beyond.

An important consideration concerning both related and future research is that, while many aspects of Indigenous educational practices hold universal value, Western society must acknowledge and honor the existence of closed practices within Indigenous cultures. These closed practices may include traditional knowledge not intended for public dissemination or engagement by individuals outside the Indigenous community, particularly any entity seeking to institutionalize such knowledge. Any alignment with Indigenous perspectives in mainstream education should be approached with a nuanced understanding of the cultural protocols and closed practices that are inherent to many Indigenous worldviews.

Thus, research efforts seeking to explore Indigenous approaches to education should be approached with authentic cultural sensitivity and a commitment to ethical considerations. Researchers must exercise respect, reflexivity, and reciprocity in such research work, acknowledging, too, that healing is often a necessary prerequisite (Lynn – Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi, Shawnee). Such healing also involves the researcher, particularly White non-Indigenous researchers, who must recognize the critical importance of healing their thoughts and actions through ongoing decolonization (Yellow Bird, 2013).
Emphasizing the broader significance of this research, it is crucial to recognize that honoring diverse worldviews is not merely an academic pursuit but a pathway to developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) surrounding one’s place in the world, diverse forms of learning, various ways of being, and thus humans altogether (Jo-Navajo). Including diverse perspectives enriches understanding of the human experience, fostering a more inclusive, empathetic, and just society.
Chapter Six: Critical Reflections

In chapter one, I described my personal context and reflected on my time with the Daisy siblings as students in my World Language Spanish classroom. I explained that while they were incredibly adept at creating visual representations of their linguistic learning, engaging in witty humor, thinking laterally in applying language distinctions and navigating and maintaining social relationships (an often tricky endeavor for many teenagers), they were never formally identified as gifted. However, I rhetorically posed the question – would it [K-12 gifted identification and programming] have nurtured their abilities holistically and responsively, or would it have just pushed them further into an assimilationist space better designed for their gifted White counterparts? Throughout this research journey, I have realized that the answer to this question is far more layered and complex than I realized. Phenomenological research “is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, and increased thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1990, p. 163, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 163), which I have found to be incredibly accurate.

Throughout this interpretive phenomenological research study, I aimed to interpret meaning and concurrently engage in critical reflection to decolonize my Western gaze as an educator and researcher. The process of researcher self-reflection is described as critical reflexivity, which “purposefully gives space for the political
examination of location and privilege” (Herising, 2005, p. 136 as cited in Kovach, 2021, p. 33). Moreover, engaging in *The Pedagogy of Listening* (McGloin, 2015) and examining *Positionality* (Johnson-Bailey, 2012) has invited me “to listen with the conscious knowledge of how colonial relations of power [Western worldview] operate” and to recognize “how [non-Indigenous] subjects can be active agents in repositioning [themselves] within that schema” (McGloin, 2015, p. 276). By accepting this (metaphorical) invitation, I recognize myself as an active agent (McGloin, 2015). This process involved maintaining an orientation of openness and humility, with iterative changes and widening my habits of mind through intentional, critical, and reflexive reflection.

**Use of Critical Reflexivity Journal**

Beginning on November 1, 2022, several weeks before my research proposal, I wrote my first critical reflexivity research journal entry, noting how this research study was beginning to take shape. I expressed that as I’ve committed to this research topic, I’ve realized that it’s one thing to read and talk about Indigenous Worldview and quite another actually to take steps to honor it. It was this reflection entry, post-proposal, that prompted me to very intentionally seek out pilot feedback from seminal and prominent Indigenous K-12 field experts (described in detail in chapter three) as an approach to center Indigenous voice and perspectives in the early stages (and beyond) of my research. From November 1, 2022 through February 27, 2024, I wrote 40 journal entries. I wrote a journal entry after each interview with participants, after transcribing and interpreting participant responses, and at any time general thoughts, noticings, or questions surfaced throughout the research process.
From these entries, numerous outcomes emerged, including how critical reflection allowed me to consistently a) revisit how I was centering Indigenous perspective; b) grapple with new (to me) learnings; c) question my participation in covert Westernized practices; d) understand that critical reflexive reflection is an ongoing, embodied practice that can often turn into embodied solutions; and, ultimately, e) consider my responsibility as a caretaker of these new (to me) learnings. In the following sections, I share various journal entries, formatted in italics to distinguish from additional thoughts and reflections, that exemplify these aforementioned reflection outcomes.

**Careful Use of Language**

During my initial bridge-person conversation with the research coordinator for the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), she provided extra context for the term *Indigenous*. In my journal entry, I wrote that *the term ‘Indigenous’ tends to be reserved for the Native experience, globally… [prompting] me to do a deep dive into terms and to think more critically about how I am using the terms throughout the study and the impact those terms have on the communities I am talking with and about… and the need to be very clear and articulate in using terms without adding to a homogenous view [of participants]*. As I delved deeper and deeper into my research, I became acutely aware of the need to critically examine and refine my use of language throughout the entire study. This examination and refinement of language was ongoing, reflecting what I learned from the participants as the study unfolded. Thus, this journal entry became a catalyst for self-reflection, compelling me to be attentive and introspective regarding the potential impact of language on participants and how the findings were reported and would potentially be received by broader educational communities.
This process underscored the necessity to be exceptionally clear and articulate in using terms, setting the “tone” of the study, and avoiding any inadvertent contribution to a homogenous view of participants that might overshadow the rich diversity within Indigenous communities. Moreover, hooks (1994) reminds us that the English language is “the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear” (p. 168). More specifically, it has become “a territory that limits and defines” as well as a “weapon that can shame, humiliate, and colonize” (hooks, 1994, p. 168). Thus, attention to how information was relayed through language emerged as a cornerstone for centering Indigenous perspectives, aligning with my goal to honor Indigenous worldview throughout the research study. In gaining a heightened awareness of the intricate nuances surrounding language usage, I find that I feel more open to learnings and corrections on language use as well as more comfortable navigating educational settings with more cultural sensitivity, resulting in a shift in my Western-gazing habits of mind (Schwartz, 2019).

**Questioning My Truths**

Throughout this research journey, I often found myself navigating complex feelings related to taking in new (to me) information and reconciling it with what I once knew to be true. Hamilton (2024) calls this “revising stories we hold dear” after such stories have been expanded with new information, perspectives, and worldviews. In one journal entry, I expressed: *I am struck by the powerful connections Kani (Iñupiat) draws between her ideas, particularly the view of all people as gifted. This holistic approach stands in stark contrast to Western ideologies that tend to compartmentalize and assign*
value based on specific, often narrowly defined skills. Kani’s perspective disrupts the conventional narrative by asserting the inherent value of each individual beyond ‘marketable skills.’ The more I listen to Native knowledge holders, the more I wonder about the ‘value’ of education? The value of my own educational experiences and practices? About societal values in general?

Throughout the research process, I was often reminded of how, in the world language teaching and learning community, the silent letters “g” (i.e., gnarled, gnat, gnaw, etc.) and “k” (i.e., knuckle, knee, knife, etc.) in English are generally considered “debris of history” that the language never seemed to “shake off” as it evolved and in which “it would be no loss to change [narled, nat naw, nuckle, nee, nife]” (Carney, 1998, p. 35). Similarly, my time with participants invited me to reflect on how debris from a colonized Western history still silently and covertly clings to my thoughts, actions, and intentions. The truths shared by numerous participants in my study thus began to erode this debris, simultaneously creating more expansive spaces for new (to me) information and expanding pathways for novel (to me) realizations, connections, and ideas.

My time with participants can, in many ways, be considered a consciousness-raising experience, in which I began to “[break] free from one-dimensional thought, [understand] and [unmask] power structures, [recognize] hegemony, and [critique] social ideologies” (Brookfield, 2005 as cited in Cranton, 2016, p. 111). However, while my critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) was widening and expanding (Cranton, 2016) throughout this research process, it also left behind little chasms. At first, these little chasms felt akin to discomfort; however, upon further reflection, I realized it was not so much discomfort I was experiencing as it was a sense of longing – a sense of longing to
have had, as a child, opportunities to learn in a way that aligned with an inherently reciprocal, holistic approach to education; a sense of longing to have been provided the pedagogical content, context, and community beyond Western worldview throughout my teacher preparation program and beyond; a sense of longing to go back and correct numerous interactions I have had with various students in my classroom over the years; a sense of longing to find now, as an emerging scholar, support to help me understand how to walk in balance, to be in hozho (Jo - Navajo), as I develop this new layer of my professional identity.

**Questioning the Institutionalization of Knowledge**

In the same vein as questioning my truths and shaking off the debris of colonial history, I began to reflect on the institutionalization of knowledge and my complicity in it. It can often feel more accessible to uphold the practices of the system under which I was oriented (Western), to which I, as both a student and an educator, have for so long committed my abilities (Castellano, 2002). However, in one journal entry about a third of the way through data analysis, I expressed: *In thinking about the themes that are beginning to emerge across interview analyses so far, I find myself reflecting on the ways I engage in and uphold (and, in some cases, even revere) Western approaches to demonstrations of knowledge that meet/fit Western standards of learning. Such a demonstration of knowledge is this dissertation itself, isn’t it? With its concrete, formulaic requirements, and official committee to assess my learning and research, when only I can know how deeply I’ve truly learned, how much I’ve changed...how much braver and more creative and simply more aware I feel...how I, as a human, have expanded...and how I want to keep expanding.*
I find myself so intensely inspired and humbled as I listen to these Indigenous educators, researchers, and advocates, many of whom are PhD/EdD students navigating colonial knowledge structures while maintaining their Indigenous identity, knowledges, and practices. If they can do that, at the very least, I can seek out creative ways to reject Western structures and open myself up to new and diverse ways of learning, teaching, and leading. Honoring diverse worldviews, such as Indigenous worldviews, has deeply enriched my understanding of my place and role within the K-12 educational landscape as a practitioner and researcher. Moreover, this critical reflection process has immensely contributed to the decolonization of my thoughts and actions, equipping me with the awareness and responsibility to model my revised habits of thought in my everyday practice.

Ongoing, Embodied Reflection (and Solutions)

Much like Jo’s (Navajo) sharing of the concept of hozho (walking in balance), critical reflection is never static, never finished. My reflection has been and continues to be active and ever-evolving, even when it is not formalized as a concrete “entry” in a journal. As an active agent repositioning myself within colonial knowledge structures (McGloin, 2015), I have found that critical reflection is often embodied. Sometimes, reflection takes the form of revising old course syllabi to better align with Indigenous worldviews, historical narratives, and educational approaches. Sometimes, it takes the form of how I respond, on the spot, to colleagues who unknowingly perpetuate Westernized assimilation practices, in which I often pose critical questions and model alternative actions. Sometimes, reflection takes the form of wordsmithing assignment feedback to students in a way that is gentle (Lynn - Tamaya Pueblo, Mvskoke, Yuchi,
Shawnee), asset-oriented (Alex - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa), and expressionally expansive (Kani - Iñupiat). Sometimes, it takes the form of internalizing new and novel learning related to my teaching practice, particularly when I think about ongoing reciprocity, sustainability, and community (local and global). Sometimes, reflection takes the form of me noticing that a habit of mind has expanded, such as thinking about knowledge as a verb rather than a noun. Sometimes, it takes the form of me explicitly questioning program policies that are inherently limiting (Kani - Iñupiat). Finally, sometimes, it simply takes the form of intentionally curating my time to participate in new experiences, fuel my magic, curiosity, and love of learning, and be in community with others. The list goes on and continues to grow.

While I may have engaged in various acts of embodied reflection similar to those described above prior to this research, the level at which I do so now feels deeper, wider, and critically more conscious (Freire, 1970), allowing me to consider how reflections can turn into actual, embodied solutions. It is Paulo Freire who “remind[s] us not to overlook the small immediate gains that individuals can make in their own classrooms...[which] often have important positive repercussions” (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007, p. 45).

Embodied solutions possess the power to radically shape and enhance everyday teaching and learning experiences in the classroom and beyond. Seemingly small, everyday actions can lead to transforming teaching and learning roles in a way that allows educators and students alike to co-create knowledge and examine previously held assumptions (Ogletree et al., 2020; Schwartz, 2019). A collective transformation can unfold through these seemingly incremental shifts, fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational environment for all.
Researcher Responsibility

Repositioning myself as an active agent (McGloin, 2015) involved, and continues to involve, a critical (Freire, 1970) examination of my positionality and how I have been, and perhaps continue to be, complicit in choices and approaches that perpetuate the assimilation of Indigenous students. Listening to the invaluable insights of the K-12 Indigenous educators, researchers, and advocates who participated in my study has been the key to unlocking a deeper understanding of the experiences of Indigenous students not only in gifted education but also in broader K-12 contexts. This process has prompted me to reevaluate my own approaches and contribute to ongoing efforts to create genuinely culturally responsive educational practices. I often think about how many of my research participants suggested Indigenous approaches to education are suitable for all students but that the same cannot be said for Western approaches to education. I feel there was an ethos established on an educator-to-educator level in which such insights were shared, motivating me to continue actively seeking opportunities to engage further, learn further, and expand my schema even further. Hamilton (2024) describes this orientation as being a “truth seeker,” which involves letting go of old narratives in favor of broadening one’s perspectives with more accurate, wider renderings (historical and modern).

In doing so, I acknowledge the privilege of having access to and support during this research experience. Throughout the process, I often found myself thinking about earlier iterations of my practice of teaching and learning. I feel somewhat saddened that it took until I reached this point – a doctoral degree – to not only think deeply about culturally responsive teaching in a way that concurrently allowed for the ongoing
decolonization of my thoughts and practices but also to be able to engage in research that reflected such thinking. I wonder, what dispositions did I maintain that allowed me to keep an open mind as I entered this learning journey? Did any of my prior schooling, including my teacher prep program, prepare me to maintain such dispositions? Or was it, overall, a disposition of openness and imagination based on who I am as a person? Or maybe it was the intermingling of both?

Moreover, how can the universal “we” ensure access to experiential learning experiences that allow educators to actively listen to the lived experiences of liberating narratives while simultaneously deconstructing their thoughts? How do we make these experiences more common and accessible to the masses? To both new and veteran teachers? To shift stagnant, institutionalized habits of mind? What difference would such experiences have made in my classroom practices if I had access to them earlier in my professional journey? How might the chasm created by colonization between life and learning be further blurred? In an attempt to answer these questions, embody and move forward with my new learnings, as well as address participant-informed use of findings, I propose eight tenets to honor liberating worldviews in K-12 research and practice (Table 10), particularly for non-Indigenous and/or White, Western oriented researchers and practitioners. These tenets reflect my own process in becoming an active agent (McGloin, 2015) as a K-12 researcher and educator.
### Table 10

**Tenets to Honor Liberating Worldviews in K-12 Research and Practice**

| **Curiosity and Openness** | Cultivate a genuine curiosity and openness to learning about diverse cultures and perspectives, recognizing that your own knowledge may be limited. Actively seek out opportunities to expand your worldview and perspective-taking abilities through exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences. |
| **“Quiet Teachings”** (personal communication, Steinhauer, 2024) **and Growth** | Welcome corrections or guidance from diverse community members with humility and openness. Internalize the principle of "when you know better, you do better," integrating feedback into research and teaching practices to foster continuous growth and cultural responsiveness. Acknowledge that growth requires ongoing and embodied reflection, self-education, and a willingness to challenge and change assumptions and biases. |
| **Acts of Critical Consciousness** (Freire, 1970) | Question dominant narratives, power structures, and underlying assumptions. Apply critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret information in a way that promotes social justice and equity. |
| **Acts of Neurodecolonization** (Yellow Bird, 2013) | Embrace the process of healing one’s colonial thoughts and unlearning harmful practices within academic spaces and beyond. Recognize the importance of questioning and challenging colonial legacies toward rejecting harmful practices, protocols, and policies. |
| **Incremental yet Radical Transformation** | Internalize new learnings from research and diverse interactions, translating them into inclusive practices. Recognize the profound impact of seemingly small shifts in behavior and mindset on creating ripple effects that shape inclusive educational environments (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007). |
| **Courageous Knowledge Sharing** | Share knowledge through unique and creative avenues that defy Western academic norms. Challenge yourself to explore alternative modes of communication and dissemination, such as storytelling, arts-based approaches, or community engagement initiatives. |
| **Imaginative Re-Envisioning** | Foster an imaginative mindset that seeks to re-envision research and teaching/learning frameworks and methodologies in ways that are inclusive, respectful, and responsive to the needs and values of diverse communities. Be open to creative approaches that prioritize collaboration and co-creation of knowledge. |
**Gentle Engagement** (Lynn – Tamaya Pueblo, Yuchi, Mvkoke, Shawnee)

Embrace the understanding that words and actions hold multifaceted meanings and impacts. Strive to embody gentleness in both personal conduct and the utilization of knowledge, fostering a culture of respect and well-being within academic contexts and beyond.

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The tenets described above are simply a starting point. In many ways they are ongoing and developing, just like research and teaching practices. Overall, it is my hope that these tenets reflect my acknowledgement of the responsibility I now have to embody and share new (to me) insights and understandings. In this regard, I am reminded of Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer’s pilot feedback during those very early days of this project, in which she expressed:

And now that you've started this work, you have a responsibility and a commitment to it, and a commitment is to get it right. And right doesn't mean right in the way that we experience it in the English language. You know, an elder once said to me, ‘You're never going to do it wrong if you do it with a good heart. If you come with good intentions, if you do this work from a good space, you're never going to get it wrong’. Because even if it's wrong in the way that we would see it, while you didn't do this and this and this…if you didn't follow the right protocol… it's not wrong, because you will never be reprimanded for it. You might get a quiet teaching about it and next time [you will know what to do].

---

As I move forward with this work and my learning, I understand I will continue to do so from my heart in a way that is intentionally good, honest, hopeful (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), and loving. I aim to graciously listen to any “quiet teachings” from those whose narratives extend, widen, and expand my own. I understand that when I know better, I will do better and that it is my responsibility to learn what “knowing better” means. In many ways, the ongoing responsibility bound to the nature of this work parallels chapter five of this dissertation, in which it was my responsibility to weave together participant narratives in a way that fully and accurately represented the wisdom shared with me. It was challenging. It was iterative. And overall, it was deeply meaningful.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Concluding thoughts – or are they?

Solutions, rather.

Small, radical, embodied.

From a good heart and unconditional love.

Ongoing, never static.

As I,

the active agent,

continue to grow in the Garden (Alex);

move toward my gifts (Pamela);

journey through

the different phases and stages of life (Leona);

leave implicit biases

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back,
back,
back
(Carmelita);
apply my knowledge
with care and gentleness (Lynn);
seek out, support, and engage
the hell-raisers! (Christopher);
express myself with bravery (Kani);
recognize emotional intelligence
as the gift it is (Cora);
embrace the strange and unusual magics
that exist in myself,
in others,
in the world (Samantha);
welcome and pass down,
like a ball,
meaningful teachings and learnings (Aldean);
accept the responsibility
to walk upriver (Annette);
feel the power of a name
and the stories of identity we create,
as a community,
that follow it (Jane);
bear witness to the sacredness
in everyone (Dezi).
Honor worldviews
and value humans,
altogether (Jo).
Figure 4

Concluding Thoughts Illustration

Note. Watercolor artwork and poem inspired by research study participants.
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Appendix A: Introduction to Study Recruitment Email

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Vicki Boley, and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver.

For my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a research project to address the Westernized nature of gifted education programs, which leads to many Native American gifted students not receiving appropriate or culturally responsive K-12 education. Specifically, this research project will explore how Indigenous worldview can inform culturally responsive K-12 gifted education practices.

I am seeking the participation of Indigenous K-12 educators, researchers, and/or advocates who work directly with, in, or for Indigenous communities toward the goal of improving the educational experiences for Native American students. Potential participants should be willing to provide their thoughts on how giftedness is conceptualized within their particular Indigenous worldview.

Compensation:
• As a thank-you, participants will be provided a $100 digital Visa gift card at the completion of the interview.

Time Commitment:
• One 45-60 minute semi-structured interview (interview questions provided beforehand)
• Optional invitation to review interview analysis findings for accuracy
• Protection and Confidentiality:
• All participants will have the option of using their real name or a pseudonym in the research. The only data will be your role (educator and/or researcher and/or advocate) and your tribal affiliation(s); these data points are to establish the context of your participation.
• You will have the opportunity to review the analyzed themes that emerge from your interview for accuracy (i.e., is what I found accurate to what you said?)
• All questions are voluntary and you are not required to answer or share anything you are uncomfortable with. All interview questions will be provided before to allow you time to reflect and provide information accordingly.
• The interview will take place via Zoom and will be recorded. Prospective participants in Colorado may request an in-person interview (as I, too, live in Colorado). In-person interviews will also be recorded. All recordings will be

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destroyed after successful defense of the dissertation. The transcribed, de-
identified data will be kept on file for potential future research.

Verbal Informed Consent:

- In acknowledging that research is embedded within a colonial history in which
  Indigenous participants have experienced a long history surrounding severe
decception and misappropriation of their signatures in dealings with Western
institutions, prospective participants will be asked to give verbal informed
consent. Should you choose to engage in this study, a verbal consent information
sheet detailing the process will be provided to you.

Participation is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate in this study, please
contact me at vicki.boley@du.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Norma
Lu Hafenstein at norma.hafenstein@du.edu.

You may also forward this invitation to a fellow Indigenous K-12 educator, researcher, or
advocate within your professional network you think could be a potential participant.

Thank you for your time and consideration!
Vicki Boley, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gifted Education
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver
Appendix B: Communication with Participants

Initial Response following Introduction to Study email:

Thank you for your willingness to engage in my study! Please review the Verbal Informed Consent Information Sheet and decide if you’d like to engage in participation. As a reminder, informed consent will be “collected” verbally in the first few moments of your interview.

Interviews will be conducted between July, 2023 - December, 2023, depending on your availability. If you choose to participate, will you please share the following with me:

- Role (Indigenous K-12 educator and/or researcher and/or advocate)
- Tribal affiliation(s)
- Any other information you feel is relevant

Thank you again! Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Vicki Boley, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gifted Education
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

Response for Participant Selection:
Hello, and thank you for your willingness to engage in my study!

I am conducting participant interviews September - December; Please respond with some dates and times that work for you to be interviewed.

I will be in touch shortly to coordinate the interview accordingly.

Thank you again!

Vicki Boley, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gifted Education
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver
Response for Participant Non-Selection:

Hello, and thank you for your interest in my study! As there was an overwhelming interest for engagement in this study, and the maximum number of participants was ten, you have not been selected to participate in the study at this time. Thank you for your interest in this topic.

Vicki Boley, M.Ed., Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction, Gifted Education
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver
Appendix C: Verbal Informed Consent Information Sheet

Title of Research Study: *Honoring Indigenous Worldview: Cultural (Un)responsiveness in Gifted Education.*

Principal Investigator: Vicki Boley, M. Ed. PhD student, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education

Faculty Sponsor: Norma Lu Hafenstein, PhD, Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education, Clinical Professor, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time. Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty to you or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. Please consider the information carefully and to ask questions before making your decision to participate or not.

Study Purpose: Acknowledging that it is through cultural context that giftedness is recognized, acknowledged, defined, and nurtured, the purpose of this study is to examine how Indigenous worldview can inform culturally responsive gifted education. The researcher hopes that exploring giftedness within Indigenous Worldview may lend toward decentering Westernized narratives surrounding giftedness, decolonizing gifted programming and identification procedures, centering attention on non-Western definitions of giftedness as valuable, as well as acknowledging the cultural dimensions of giftedness toward more culturally responsive approaches to gifted education in both theory and practice.
You may choose not to answer any question or withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty. There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study. A direct benefit to engaging in the completion of the study is compensation in the form of a digital $100 Visa gift card post-interview.

Your interview will be recorded and transcribed. You may choose to use your name or a pseudonym to protect your privacy; only the researcher will know participant names and data will be de-identified accordingly. Your interview will be analyzed for major themes that capture the “essence” of the gifted experience within Indigenous worldview and corresponding implications for culturally responsive gifted education practices. You will have the opportunity to review these themes for accuracy. The researcher will destroy all interview recordings after the final dissertation defense. Transcripts will be retained indefinitely to be used in future potential research projects; this serves as current and future consent.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a part of this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview on the topic of giftedness within Indigenous worldview. This interview will be semi-structured and approximately 45-60 minutes in length. Interview questions will be provided beforehand to allow participants to reflect on question content and prepare any diverse forms of representation, as described in the introduction to study email. You will have an opportunity to review findings from the interview for accuracy.

**Data Sharing:** Data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance culturally responsive K-12 gifted education practices for Indigenous/Native American gifted students. Any personal information that could
identify you will be removed or coded, unless you prefer and state otherwise; despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal information.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions to Vicki Boley at vicki.boley@du.edu at any time. You may also reach out to my faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein at norma.hafenstein@du.edu.
### Appendix D: Interview Protocols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>STEP 1</strong>: Share interview questions with participants.</th>
<th><strong>Supporting Literature</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1.1</strong>: Introduction</td>
<td>Creswell and Poth (2018) encourage the use of a conversational introduction that clearly provides some context on the researcher, the purpose of the study, and a review of what to expect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1.2</strong>: Obtain verbal consent</td>
<td>Diverse forms of representation accepted in addition to or in the place of traditional Westernized “ask-and-respond” prompts allows more space for diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Introduction:

Hi, I’m Vicki Boley.

I am non-Native educator and researcher. For years, I was a middle school Spanish teacher, and I often found that many of my Native American students were high-performing, creative, and perceptive students, but were not officially recognized as gifted. I’m interested in understanding how Indigenous Worldviews may inform the Westernized nature of gifted education toward more culturally responsive gifted education practices.

I selected you to participate in this study because you indicated that you are an Indigenous K-12 educator, researcher, and/or advocate; thank you again for your willingness to engage in this study!

My hope is that our time together feels more like a conversation than an interview. I am also inviting the use of diverse forms of representation (drawings, music, observations, sample work, journals, poems, etc.) in place of traditional answers, as I have found this can be a good way to capture the essence of an idea, thought, or point that can sometimes feel hard to describe with...
just words.

I will be sharing the findings from our conversation with my dissertation committee, and you will have an opportunity to review my findings for accuracy to ensure I am not misconstruing your experiences through my Western positionality.

I have a total of seven conversation prompts on the topic of giftedness within Indigenous worldview. If you do not feel comfortable responding to a conversation starter prompt, it is okay to skip it. You may also ask for clarification of any terms or meanings.

**Verbal Consent:**

Would you like to use your real name or a pseudonym? If a pseudonym, what would you like it to be?

Have you reviewed the informed consent information sheet?

Do you consent to participation in this study?
Do you consent to being audio and video recorded?

(Kovach, 2021; Steinhauer, 2002).

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) explain that semi-structured interviews give enough space and flexibility for original and unexpected issues to arise, which the researcher may investigate in more detail further with probing questions.
**STEP 2: Confirm contact email information**

**STEP 2.1: Opening Interview Question**

**STEP 2.2: Content Questions**

### Opening Prompts:

1. You mentioned that you are a Member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians [tribal affiliation]. What’s something about your tribal culture you wish others knew more about?

2. You mentioned that you are teacher [role] for [entity name] – can you tell me more about your role and what inspires your work?

### Content Prompts:

Many definitions of giftedness exist within mainstream education. As a starting point and frame of reference for the purpose of this study, I am defining giftedness as an individual who demonstrates, or has the potential for demonstrating, an exceptionally high level of performance in one or more areas of human endeavor (Sousa, 2009).

3. In your experience, how is giftedness expressed in your tribal community/Indigenous worldview?
   a. Probe abilities (i.e., what abilities are associated with giftedness? Are there domains of ability?)
   b. Probe characteristics (i.e., what are gifted individuals like? How would you describe

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**Supporting Literature**

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest using an opening question to allow the participant to “warm up” and to set the context.

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) state that questions suitable for interpretive phenomenology may concentrate on exploring sensory perceptions, mental phenomena (thoughts, memories, associations), and specifically individual interpretations.

Gifted abilities
4. In your experience, how is giftedness nurtured within your tribal community/Indigenous worldview?
   a. Probe support (i.e., can you give an example of what supporting giftedness looks, sounds, or feels like? What does it not look, sound, or feel like?)
   b. Probe purpose (i.e., what is often the intended outcome of supporting these gifted abilities?)

5. Within the context of your tribal community/Indigenous worldview, is there a word or phrase used to describe gifted individuals?
   a. Probe conceptualization (i.e., why this word/phrase? If no word/phrase, how come?)

6. If you are willing, can you share some form of representation (song, artwork, poem, book, video, research, metaphor, etc.) that you feel represents giftedness within Indigenous worldview?

7. Lastly, how would you like to see any findings from this study implemented in practice relevant to your teaching and learning community?
   a. Probe (i.e., how should K-12 practice consider giftedness? What is a hope you have for K-12 Indigenous gifted students?)

identified by Indigenous communities often reveal important convergences and divergences with Western culture in how giftedness is conceptualized (Carter, 2021).

Romero (1994) and Lara-Cooper (2014) both explain that exploring how giftedness is characterized and valued within Indigenous contexts can help Western practitioners understand the purpose for identification and programming beyond Western gifted education practices.
Hartley (1991) notes that the term *gifted* often does not exist within many Indigenous contexts and that the terms or phrases used instead can offer insight into how individuals conceptualize the concept within cultural contexts.

Peterson (1999) posits it important to ask non-Western cultures how they perceive giftedness from their sociocultural context.