

SESSION 1: Evaluation Issues Relating to the Academic Achievement of Native American Students

Session Chair:

Cathie Martin

Group Leader

U.S. Department of Education/Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Office of Indian Education

Presenters:

Eric Jolly

Vice President and Senior Scientist

Education Development Center

Rosemary Christensen

Assistant Professor

Humanistic Studies—American Indian Studies

University of Wisconsin, Green Bay

Discussant:

Grayson Noley

Department Chair, Associate Professor

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

University of Oklahoma

Guiding Question

- The issue of the assessment of culturally diverse populations must be considered when promoting culturally sensitive evaluation. What are the specific evaluation issues relating to the academic achievement of Native American students? The discussion will highlight contextual factors, including rural vs. urban settings, approaches to high-stakes testing, test bias, test examinee preparation and best practices.

Papers/Presentations

On the Quest for Cultural Context in Evaluation: Non Ceteris Paribus - ᏆᏍᏏ Ꮜ¹

Eric J. Jolly²

Introduction

A part of the title for this paper was borrowed from my composite memories of early studies in Popperian logic, statistical systems and economic formulations, for they shared the belief that an operative requirement to making a causal attribution between intervention and outcome was “Ceteris Paribus” (an idiomatic construction). This roughly translates into “all other things being equal.” The natural title for this paper, it seemed to me, should be the negation or “non ceteris paribus” – all things are not equal. I follow it with an old Cherokee saw my father used to repeat – they never were. My point is that although we are not entering new territory when we discuss the cultural context of educational evaluation, we are often rediscovering, as if for the first time, the power of cultural nuances to disassemble the expectations and tools of the majority when applied to the minority.

Indeed, there are some tools of evaluation that lose their integrity in the translation to other cultures and contexts, but there are many that don't. It is more often our assumptions that lose their integrity under the scrutiny of new cultural contexts. For example, what are the questions we need to ask, how do we ask them (and in whose idiom?) and how do we appropriately operationalize the indicators of success that we track? All of these are issues that evaluators should reconsider whenever we change the context of our work.

Evaluators working across cultural contexts are challenged to find the difficult balance between cultural sensitivity and stereotypic thinking. We do, after all, compute an ANOVA in the same way, regardless of who our clients are. If the methods of analysis are not different, then we are often left to consider modifications in our goals, intermediate variables, outcome variables and evaluation protocols. It is in these considerations that we must exercise great caution. If Native American students and White students are both going to use mathematics to design a bridge, shouldn't we hold them to the same high performance standards? As Hughes has eloquently pointed out, “There is no argument against the logic that individuals within these groups must develop the same body of skills and expertise that standards require” (Hughes, 2000, p. 12).

What is different in evaluation of Native American education programs is the issue of context. The experiences, traditions and problem-solving approaches vary widely across Native American communities, from each other and from the majority community. In reporting on its guiding principles for evaluators, the American Evaluation Association points out that their principles “were developed in the context of western cultures and...the relevance of these principles may vary across other cultures and across sub-cultures within the United States” (American Evaluation Association, 2002).

In this paper, I will briefly review some of the issues of context for Native American education and then examine their implications for our work as evaluators.

¹ On the Quest for Cultural Context in Evaluation: All things are not equal – they never were.

² The author would like to thank Patricia Campbell, Ph.D. for her review and suggestions on this paper.

The Context of Evaluation: Who are We Measuring?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (which identifies Native Americans as American Indian/Alaskan Native or "AI/AN") the Native American population is about 1.5% of the total U.S. population or slightly more than 4 million people. Of those people identifying as AI/AN, nearly 2 out of 5 identify themselves as more than one race.

In the years between 1990 and 2000, the Native American population had a growth rate more than four times that of the White population (26.4% vs. 5.9%) and twice that of the total population (13.2%). This difference in growth rate becomes even more pronounced when you take into account multiple racial categories (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001).

This high growth rate is one contributing factor to the noticeably different age distribution pattern among Native Americans: 33.9% of the population is under age 18 compared to 23.5% of the White population (Jolly, 2002). The average age of a Native American is 27 compared to 33 in the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995, 2000).

This pattern among Native Americans, unusual for the United States, is due not only to a burgeoning youth population, but also to a relatively small elder population and low life expectancy. In 1995, 12.5% of the general population was age 65 or older, but only 5.9% of the Native American population was age 65 or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995).

The population profile of Native Americans is quite different from the general U.S. population in many other notable ways. The purpose of this paper is not to provide a detailed accounting of demographic variables, but simply to make the point that there are many differences in the daily living and learning experiences of Native Americans, especially when compared to the White population. The following are a few examples taken from Clarke, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 1997; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1998:

- About 1 in 3 American Indians aged 15 and over reported having a disability³ and 1 in 7 reported having a severe disability. For those age 65 and older, the ratio is 1 in 2.
- Nearly one third (31.6%) of Native American households live at or below the poverty level.
- 23% of Native Americans report that they do not speak English "very well."
- By percentage of the population, one third more Native Americans served in Vietnam compared to the "average" American.

Among youth aged 12 to 17:

- Illicit drug use is more than twice as high (22.2%) as the national average (9.7%).
- Binge alcohol use is somewhat higher (13.8%) than the national average (10.3%).
- Use of cigarettes is more than twice as high (27.2%) as the national average (13.4%).

³ A disability is defined as difficulty in performing functional activities such as seeing, walking, lifting and/or functions of daily living such as bathing, eating and dressing. A severe disability means that these tasks cannot be performed without an assistant or at all.

For youth aged 15 – 24:

- The death rate due to accidents is almost three times that for the total U.S. population and the leading cause of death.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death with a rate 2.5 times as high as that for all races.

Given the relatively depressed health and economic context within which Native American youth live and learn, it should not come as a surprise that they also meet with less successful academic outcomes than their White peers. Although reports vary, it is estimated that nearly 50% of Native American students never finish high school (Indian Country Today, 1999).

The school experiences of Native American students vary widely depending on a host of factors. About one third of the students attend schools identified as “rural” by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000). Another third are in large urban centers and the remainder is found in smaller urban and suburban settings. While in school, on or off the reservation, Native American students do not see many Native American role models in their classrooms. Nationwide, less than one half of one percent of new K-12 teachers are Native American and of those, about three fourths are women (National Education Association, 2002). Native American students do not find schools to be a source of inspiration either in teacher demographics and role models or in curriculum content and utility (Eberhard 1989; Tools for Schools, 1998). In addition, school is not a source of stability in many of these students’ lives. One fourth of Native American students move and change schools each year (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). As a result of these circumstances, students are not engaged and they are not achieving (Shutiva, 2001).

For many, the schools they attend are under-funded, either because they live in high poverty urban or rural areas or because they are attending schools under Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) operation. The BIA allocates \$3,075 annually for each student and nearly 50,000 students attend such schools. Compare this with the \$6,400 average per pupil expenditure of a U.S. public school (American Indian Education Foundation, 2002).

Native American K-12 achievement indices in schools do not match the national average on any standardized test. For example, while 28% of fourth-grade White students score at or above the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficiency level in mathematics, only 8% of Native American reach that level. By twelfth grade, the disparity is even greater with 20% of White (and 33% of Asian) students scoring at or above the NAEP proficiency level in mathematics and only 3% of Native American students doing the same. The percentage of Native American students scoring at NAEP’s advanced level in mathematics is 0 (Campbell, Jolly, Hoey and Perlman, 2002)!⁴

Of those who do graduate from high school, only 17% will go on to any form of college, compared with a national average of 62%. The Native American college population is predominantly female (60%) and is most likely to enroll in a two-year institution (50%) (Native American Public Telecommunications, 2002). The transition to, and success rates in, four-year institutions are quite perilous. At the time of the 1990 census, only 2.1% of Native American high school graduates had a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). The rate of graduate degree attainment is even lower, with the greatest disparities in the quantitative and scientific disciplines. For example,

⁴ Individual Native American students do score at superior levels of math proficiency. However, the overall percentage is so small that it rounds to 0 percent for reporting purposes.

in 1997 the National Science Foundation (NSF) reported only one American Indian doctorate in the field of computer science. Overall, Native American participation in quantitative and scientific disciplines is less than half of what would be predicted based on population (Commission on the Advancement of Women and Minorities in Science, Engineering & Technology, 2000; Campbell, Jolly, Hoey and Perlman, 2002).

Context and the Evaluation Plan

What is the purpose of presenting this highly selective thumbnail portrait of Native American life? Although the picture that it paints seems quite bleak, this is not intended to serve as an entry into the "Oppression Olympics." It is too easy for any sub-group to get lost in the pity of the portraiture rather than to frame these issues as challenges that must be accounted for in reform efforts. The demographic information presented above is simply meant to highlight some aspects of the context of evaluation, which we should take into account in developing our evaluation frameworks.

For example, take the statistics of Native American student mobility. When 1 in 4 students changes school each year, we may have to rethink the methodology for longitudinal studies. This mobility will impact how we collect permissions, work across different school systems and document non-continuous interventions, to name just a few core issues. Another example can be found in how evaluators respond to the high level of disability in the Native American community. Such issues as test accommodation, in terms of test modality (e.g., oral versus written), time (e.g., extended time or multiple sessions) and location (e.g., individual or group setting) must be taken into account in our evaluation and data-collection strategies.

As a third example of the importance of understanding context, we should consider the fact that 23% of Native Americans do not speak English very well and many speak a language other than English at home, often a language for which they do not have a writing system. This should impact the way that we phrase instructions and how we frame questions that are intended to assess some function other than English literacy. As Lena Canyon long ago pointed out, traditional adult-to-child instructions in the Native community include context-rich environments with verbal instructions augmented by a high level of gesture and other visual cues (Canyon, Gibbs & Churchman, 1975).

Taken together, these context variables create situations that challenge even the most seasoned evaluators. Canyon has documented how the cumulative effects of these differences can wreak havoc on the best-formulated plans. As she reported on one evaluation effort, "supplies ran out unexpectedly or were lost; test equipment was broken; (and) factors not included in the evaluation plan were discovered late in the school year to have been important" (Canyon, Gibbs & Churchman, 1975).

There is much that can be done to assure the utility and appropriateness of an evaluation plan. The factors above and other issues of cultural context are not limiting factors; rather, they are a part of what will inform the whole story of our evaluation. They are also factors that might cause us to reconsider the appropriate place for cross-cultural group comparisons and even some standardized procedures since, after all, "non ceteris paribus."

Missing Bricks

In most communities of practice or association there exists a foundational knowledge base that is presumed to frame the ideas and discussion among members. Within professional organizations, this shared knowledge base and communication style is often considered a “theoretical frame” and the argot of the profession are classified as “terms of art.” In communities of association, much of this presumed understanding falls within the broader category of “local culture.” In all cases, this notion refers to the assumed shared understanding of culture, context and experience that allows us to speak in an abbreviated idiom with certainty that the other understands both the stated and unstated intentions of our words and deeds.

When people from different professional or social communities meet, they are often very attentive to the challenges of crossing the cultures of their experience and will spend time exploring terms, their meaning and their underlying assumptions. As people become more familiar with each other’s cultures, they begin to spend less time verifying the meaning and intent of their communication and more time speaking in what they presume to be their shared idiom. At this point, they have assumed that they share a foundation of common knowledge, experience and cultural understanding. In my work across diverse communities, I have become aware of one of the more interesting quirks that accompanies this assumed shared foundation of knowledge. I refer to these quirks as the “missing bricks” from this foundation of knowledge.

Let me illustrate. When I was a young graduate student and invited to my first cocktail party at a faculty member’s home, I borrowed a tie, pressed my pants and headed off for the party determined to fit in. The first conversation in which I was engaged was absolutely painful for me. The discussion centered around modern European art and the work of a dozen artists whose names I did not know. I stood around smiling patiently, hoping desperately that someone would change the focus of the conversation to something I knew. Finally, my reprieve came when an esteemed faculty member turned to me and, changing the topic to food and fine dining, asked me what I thought of pollack. Having worked in a seafood restaurant during my studies on the East Coast, I thoughtfully proclaimed that I found pollack interesting, but sometimes a bit bland. As the conversation continued, I was a bit surprised that they were still discussing issues of art. It was perhaps six months later that it finally dawned on me that they had been discussing Jackson Pollock, the artist and not the fine fish. The fortunate choice of wording on my part allowed the “missing bricks” of foundational knowledge in this cocktail party community to pass undetected.

Since that time, I have encountered many instances in which I find myself working in communities where I have “missing bricks.” They show up in misunderstandings about such things as community needs, demographics, goals and history. The misunderstandings may be about something as simple as understanding why Americans are so enamored by refrigerator magnets to issues as complex as the religious significance of an owl’s feather. A critical challenge for evaluators is accepting the possibility that they too have “missing bricks.” The challenge lies not in the identification of the obvious areas where we know that we lack deep cultural knowledge, but in the identification of those instances where we confuse “Pollock” and “pollack.”

In cases where evaluations are being constructed, implemented and/or interpreted across cultural lines, evaluators must be especially vigilant in exploring the possible disconnects in foundational knowledge among those who are being evaluated, doing the evaluation and using the evaluation. The community whose programs are being evaluated must have a meaningful presence in

constructing both the goals of, and the means to, the evaluation. Moreover, the community context must be clearly represented to those who will interpret the evaluation, its processes and outcomes to render decisions around program design and funding.

It is therefore incumbent upon the evaluator to examine the potential interaction of cultural context and evaluation activities. To do this, an evaluator must have a fundamental awareness of cultural norms and experiences of the people with whom he or she is working. Evaluators must develop an understanding of how these norms will play out in the context of evaluation instruments and protocols. And they must develop the skills to translate materials and represent data across cultural contexts so that the evaluation informs the process of reform in meaningful ways that can be addressed by the existing and emerging systems within the community.

Context and the Questions We Ask

Although we might not have different standards for performance-based outcomes, we certainly can and should frame the context of education reform activities within the cultural surround that helps define the essential elements for student success.

In organizing the research base for the report “Upping the Numbers: Using Research-Based Decision Making to Increase Diversity in the Quantitative Disciplines,” Campbell, Jolly, Hoey and Perlman (2002) identified three broad factors that together describe essential elements for student advancement: engagement, continuity and capacity. These three elements collectively describe the features that must exist for every child to create a successful pathway for advancement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

- Engagement requires an approach to STEM that includes such qualities as awareness, interest and motivation.
- Continuity requires institutional and programmatic opportunities that support advancement to increasingly rigorous STEM content.
- Capacity requires the knowledge and skills needed to advance to increasingly rigorous STEM content.

Individually, each of these features is not sufficient for advancement along the STEM pathway. For example, if the educational system is aligned for continued student advancement and the student has high interest in STEM but has failed to achieve the requisite skills to advance to the next level, he or she simply will not be able to advance. Similarly, if a child has succeeded in content mastery and the educational system supports his or her further advancement but the child has no interest, he or she will also leave the STEM pipeline. And finally, if the student has competency and interest but the system does not offer such opportunities as Calculus, AP courses and even information on colleges and financial aid when needed, then the student will not be able to advance.

This trinity of essential elements for student success can also help identify three essential areas of focus for an evaluation plan. An evaluator can ask and assess the degree to which a student is engaged in the field of study. An evaluator can assess continuity and congruence in the system that allows student advancement in the field of study. And, finally, the evaluator can assess the degree to which the student has attained capacity in the field of study.

The degree to which culture comes into play in evaluation varies across these three areas. For example, the means to “engagement” of a student are likely to vary greatly across cultures and the measures of engagement may also vary. Who we identify as role models, how we identify individual or group aspects of engagement and how we inspire students to find meaning in a field of study will relate to how that field is manifest in the student’s community.

Identifying the cultural variability along the dimensions of continuity is a little more difficult. Here the evaluator needs to identify both the formal and informal systems of education and guidance that help students navigate the system. For Native American students, for example, the high school to college transition often involves an intermediate step through a community college system. In addition, many Native American students step in and out of college programs several times while in pursuit of a degree (McAfee, 2000). McAfee adds “stepping out” as an additional classification to our traditional construct of dropouts and matriculates. Here is an example of how we may need to reconsider an operational definition for traditional evaluation frameworks as we conduct research across cultures.

Finally, along the dimension of capacity, we should expect the same performance-based outcome for all students. However, the demonstration of that capacity may occur in differing ways. When assessing a student’s capacity, we should be certain that extraneous factors, such as time orientation, language, or attitudes toward public versus private achievement do not undermine our assessment.

Conclusion

Coming to terms with the cultural context of educational evaluation challenges us to review the most fundamental assumptions about our work. We must understand and be responsive to the nuances of culture without lowering our expectations by creating measures that reinforce stereotypes. We are challenged to create situations that offer alternative ways to demonstrate capacity and that recognize skills when they are displayed in a culturally appropriate way. It is the evaluator’s responsibility to gain a deep enough understanding of a culture to be able to develop tools and protocols that accurately reflect achievement of the goals of the educational programs. Within the Native American community, this can mean understanding and evaluating community, as well as individualistic, outcomes.

References

American Evaluation Association (2002). *Guiding Principles for Evaluators*. American Evaluation Association. www.eval.org.

American Indian Education Foundation (2002). *History and Facts about Indian Education*. www.aiefprograms.org.

Campbell, P.B., Jolly, E.J., Hoey, L., & Perlman, L.K. (2002). *Upping the Numbers: Using Research-Based Decision Making to Increase Diversity in the Quantitative Disciplines*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

Canyon, L., Gibbs, S., & Churchman, D. (1975). Development of a Native American evaluation team. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 15:1.

Commission on the Advancement of Women and Minorities in Science, Engineering & Technology (2002). *Land of Plenty: Diversity as America's Competitive Edge in Science, Engineering and Technology*. www.nsf.gov/od/cawmset.

Clarke, A.S. (2002, January). Social and emotional distress among American Indian and Alaska Native students: Research findings. *ERIC Digest* EDO-RC-01-11.

Eberhard, D.R. (1989). American Indian education: A study of dropouts, 1980-1987. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 29(1).

Hughes, G.B. (2000). Evaluation of educational achievement of underrepresented minorities: Assessing correlates of student academic achievement. In National Science Foundation Workshop Proceedings NSF 01-43, *The Cultural Context of Educational Evaluation: The Role of Minority Evaluation Professionals* (pp. 12-15). Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication.

Indian Country Today (1999, June 21-28). Oneida Nation, New York.

Jolly, E.J. (2002). *Confronting Demographic Denial: Retaining Relevance in the New Millennium*. Washington, D.C.: ASTC Dimensions.

McAfee, M.E. (2000, April). From their voices: American Indians in higher education and the phenomenon of stepping out. *Research News on Graduate Education*, 2(2).

National Education Association (2002). *Just the Stats*. www.nea.org.

NCES (2000). National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov>.

Native American Public Telecommunications (2002). *Did you know? Facts from US Census Bureau data*. www.nativetelecom.org.

Shutiva, C.L. (2001). Career and academic guidance for American Indian and Alaska Native youth. *ERIC Digest*.

Tools for Schools (1998, April). *Native American Instructional Programs: Standards for Effective Pedagogy*. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ToolsforSchools/naip.html>

U.S. Department of Commerce (2001, September). MSO/01-AI/AN.

U.S. Census Bureau (1995). ailang2.txt.

U.S. Census Bureau (1997). CB97-FS.11.

U.S. Census Bureau (1998). CB98-FF.13.

U.S. Census Bureau (2000). *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2000*. 2CKBR/01-15.

Cultural Context and Evaluation: A Balance of Form and Function

Rosemary Ackley Christensen

“If we come out of it the second time and we’ve managed not to acquire some degree of understanding of our own foibles and insensitivities and misunderstandings, if we wind up in this exact same moment, then we’re idiots. We ought to be able to learn.”

--*New York Times* (2000, June 11), p.18, by a New York writer telling how he learned to work with African Americans by listening carefully and using time wisely, so that after each time, working with each other got better.

Introduction/Background

Native American children in the United States still lack success in school achievement. Perhaps the wrong thing is measured, or the treatment provided lacks something still. Maybe our kids don’t belong in these “white-man” schools. In the tribal schools, the children are also behind, at least in the ways in which the white man measures progress. Currently, education literature provides dreary tales of the achievement gap, with charts and data on Web sites. Possible success stories are not very lucid on whether minority students are actually a big part of any real accomplishment. A recent chart, *Raising Achievement*,⁵ showed 17% of Native American fourth-grade children were at or above proficiency in reading compared to 40% of white fourth graders and 14% were at or above proficiency in math compared to 34% of white fourth graders.

Plainly, we need successful demonstrations and feasible blueprints that address and seriously consider the real world our students are in, a world where they are unable to measure up to the white man’s standards and evidently are not successful in a traditional Indian world either. We Indian educators have been around for several decades now and educational achievement doesn’t appear to be appreciably better, although it has not been for lack of trying many things.

Cultural Context

In an effort to make sense of a cultural context for evaluation purposes, at least four important concepts need to be discussed:

1. The Native American worldview is a holistic one⁶ formed by Elder epistemology or knowledge, with core values stemming from this knowledge. These values, making sense in this worldview, form principles for living and functioning through oral tradition. This form of passing knowledge uses participation learning that reflects pattern thought (see for example, Ross, 1992; Diamond, Cronk & von Rosen, 1994; Thorpe, 1996; Martin, 2001;

⁵ See www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov (accessed in May, 2002).

⁶ “Native philosophy and religion, language, historical perspectives and contemporary approaches to life are holistic in nature. That is, Native thinking sees the world and its elements in a certain totality, with a whole-to-parts mode of consciousness. This high-level mode focuses on the whole pattern, the whole concept, the overall picture of the perception of stimuli. Relationships among the parts making up the whole pattern are intuitively felt, but are not specifically obvious nor important. Logical, temporal, factually detailed components of the overall perception do not command attention in themselves...” Manitoba native educators Margot Flanagan and Ellie Iverson in Diamond, et al., 1994, p. 8.

Cajete, 2000). The 3 “Rs” or principle behaviors that fit tribal education are respect, reciprocity and relationship. *Respect* is acceptable behavior between and among all living things. *Reciprocal behavior* forms a grid among living things on the Web of Life, which forms and builds *relationships*.

This world is holistic in nature (see, for example, Brown, 1988) and Indians live currently in a very linear world. The Academy, an important part of the white man’s world, is linear and hierarchical in nature (see, for example, Wasson, 1973). Primarily, educational research projects currently funded by state and federal resources follow the form and function of the Academy relative to research.

2. The cultural context that reflects Native Americans includes a worldview, values and learning very different from that of the white man.
3. The holistic worldview concepts—participation learning, the core value of personal sovereignty, the grid behaviors of relationships, respect, reciprocity and the oral learning mode within natural circular and spiral teaching forms utilizing a group process—are teachable and learnable.
4. A culturally responsive evaluation plan assumes the item, object, thing or unit being evaluated will occur within a similar or somewhat similar cultural context as the evaluation plan.

Analysis/Reasoning Context

In looking at cultural context for evaluation, it is important to imagine and then understand certain situations in Native American culture. There are over 550 Indian tribes in the U.S. (Wilkins, 1997). Each is considered a sovereign nation by the federal government as defined by legislation (based on treaties) and case law. Many tribal languages are spoken, although these are rapidly being lost due to the overwhelming use and need for the English language. Each tribe has many differences from other tribes. Yet, it can be postulated that many if not most of these tribes share a common worldview, with life principles that fit this way of thinking. Many tribes look to Elders for tribal learning. Yet, within the holistic worldview, tribes are culturally different, one from another.

Due to the changes brought by the white man over several centuries, Indian people have suffered a great deal, yet they hold on to certain aspects of a remembered past. They live, work and play as Americans, with many attending the same schools as other Americans. The Elders and scholars, however, speak to and worry about the damages suffered to a traditional way of life (see for example, Thorpe, 1996; Gulliford, 2000; Tinker, 1993; Cook-Lynn, 2001).

In order to understand, learn and ponder a common cultural context useful for responding to a Native American perspective, it is helpful to consider the state of Indian education using ordinary measures, gain a normal understanding of suitable cultural contextual attributes held by Native Americans and juxtapose these characteristics with what evaluations usually use for these traits in the current educational framework. The state of Indian education can be best understood through a brief discussion of the achievement gap. Commonly held cultural norms are briefly discussed. A widely held notion, internalized oppression, is useful in understanding intertribal relationships, Indian students’ discontent and that of Indians with other Americans. Research as a construct is

discussed from an indigenous perspective. And the Indian educational leadership, a group frequently asked to lead activities for real change, is itself put in perspective relative to these issues.

Minority Achievement Gap Issues

The achievement gap appears to defy researchers to this day, according to reports that point out the lack of a definitive explanation for the gap but are able to offer theories as to why the gap exists.⁷ Reasons provided include poverty, non-challenging academic coursework, peer pressure (to not do well), student turnover, parenting (looking for differences in parenting of kindergartners), less access to preschool, teacher quality, stereotype threat (having to identify race in tests and other academic tasks), teacher expectations, television, test bias and genetics (Viadero, 2000). Some of the more successful program concepts or plans to lessen the gap deal with: 1) the effects of poverty (and or effects of race bias), 2) teacher training, 3) parental involvement, 4) motivational constructs, 5) emotional treatment (bonding with student by an adult that creates a trusting relationship), 6) preschool and/or early childhood programs, 7) class size limits and 8) various curriculum efforts that fit with one or more of the above. A study by RAND (Grissmer et al., 2000) indicates that ten states led by Texas have seen steady improvement on minority students' tests in math and reading for approximately a decade. The solution appears to contain state standards, tests by grade, adequate resources for teachers, lower pupil-teacher ratios and subsidized pre-kindergarten (Education Week, 2000).

A plan/design for looking at the gap problem, researched and written for a Wisconsin State organization (Christensen, 2000), centers on the process, encouraging districts to utilize forms that are more apt to provide comfort to minority groups than the currently utilized linear model reflecting popular majority culture. The particular process used in this design reflects a more holistic world in tune with minority worlds although projecting that no harm will accrue to the white linear world student. Districts are encouraged to work in groups, infuse some holistic ideas, take advantage of sharing some costs and realize that districts share similar problems that can be worked on together in a more efficient, cost-effective way.

Recently, a district in northern Wisconsin agreed to work toward understanding why it and a nearby reservation were feuding in public. The Indian Nation had asked the Office of Civil Rights to intervene. The district had asked the State Department of Public Instruction to give counsel and advice.⁸ In the spring of 2000 this problem was being worked through, with a long-term solution being sought by the district. In several days of talking to Indian community members it was clear that the Indians and the school district did not understand each other. District personnel spoke to the need to treat everyone in the same way. The Indians reported that their kids said that they were ignored, not allowed to participate as the 'stud' jocks did, and that they did not like school. In a short-term solution,⁹ district personnel agreed to a full-day dialogue where they discussed how Indians differed in their way of life from the non-Indian community. A long-term solution offered to the district speaks to the achievement gap and suggests faculty and staff learn cultural

⁷ Viadero, D. and Johnston, R.C. (2000, April 5). Lifting minority achievement: complex answers. *Education Week*, four part series on the achievement gap.

⁸ Department of Public Instruction, State of Wisconsin. Letter dated Feb. 19, 2002, to school district superintendent.

⁹ Based on Christensen, R.A. (2002, March). Exploring connections between the Indian reservation and the school district: a meta-plan for collaborative action. Unpublished document.

competencies relative to Native Americans, how teaching methods can be amended to include behaviors more attuned to a holistic worldview and that Indian students be provided assistance/strategies in understanding and coping with the concept of internalized oppression.¹⁰

A northeastern Wisconsin school has agreed to work on the achievement gap problem by looking at a cohort group beginning with the first grade and following it to the eighth grade. This effort is to begin in the fall of 2002. The district will make an effort to measure how its interventions meant to lessen the achievement gap actually make a difference (or not). Meanwhile, the district will look at ways it can learn about and work with its minority community toward lessening the achievement gap. Prior to this agreement, the district did not know how the same students did from one year to the next (that is, the same group of students that received programs meant to help them achieve success). The district is working with a community advisory group.¹¹

The three tribal “Rs” of respect, reciprocity and relationship are the grid in the frame of the design plan. This allows usage of the bonding method with students, a strategy that uses respect between teacher and student as a base premise (mentioned in the gap literature). This cultural context needs to be part of instructional program coherence (IPC) within schools. Newmann et al. (2000) define IPC as “a set of interrelated programs for students and staff that are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, assessment and learning climate and that are pursued over a sustained period” (p. 297). They suggest that IPC may make a difference in school improvement.

On the Navajo reservation in the Arizona desert, in an oral interview,¹² Bobby Wright, formerly with NASA, explains his successful math curriculum on building sheep corrals and making turquoise jewelry. Mr. Wright is using a simple but effective concept: that to reach his students he must build on local knowledge that makes sense after school is finished. Called by some “building on the local,” and by others, constructivist pedagogy, it is a strategy that works for those that try it. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) recommends the use of constructivist pedagogy (NCTM, 1989). They recommend this curricular approach because math is used in ways that students can relate to the real world, the way they think and that they will use for lifetime purposes. Obviously, if children come from a different cultural environment, their world will be reflected in this approach.

Two Elders in the Stockbridge-Munsee woods of Wisconsin provide assistance to school districts and others in understanding cultural difference. They encourage sharing of ideas, building opportunities for cooperation and solidarity and most importantly “enabling groups to translate thought and ideas into action.”¹³ Using Elders to assist those who want to learn is a fine traditional method and reinforces the notion of community that is so valued by Indians. It is clear that U.S. society is still considered a racist society, in itself a problem when addressing minority successful education. The two women teach thoughtfully about racial bias by working in groups through the use of a *bias bag* to understand and appreciate how racism works.

¹⁰ See Christensen, R.A. (2002, May). A long-term plan for a school district, including a report of short-term effort. Unpublished document.

¹¹ *Minority Student Achievement Sub-Committee* notes by member R.A. Christensen, 2001-2002. Hand-written notes, letters, minutes from school district, unpublished documents.

¹² Interview at the school while R.A. Christensen was on a site-visit, 2000. Hand-written notes, unpublished document.

¹³ Quote from Ruth Gudinas, July 2000. Full Circle is the name of the partnership that includes Elder Dorthy Davids and is located on N9136 Big Lake Road in Gresham, WI 54128.

The *New York Times*¹⁴ spent a year examining racial issues, noting in the series that, “Race relations are being defined less by political action than by daily experience, in schools, in sports arenas, in pop culture and at worship and especially in the workplace.”¹⁵ As Susan Kepecs said, quoting a member of the Latino community in Madison, Wisconsin, “people need to see themselves reflected in the social fabric” so kids spend two years immersed in Latino cultural events sponsored by the Madison Children’s Museum.¹⁶

Any good plan will use and encourage various levels of evaluation built into strategies that make sense and are useful to the districts and organizations over time. To make it culturally relevant to the group studied is another matter. It is important to monitor the fit of the treatment with the population treated, especially a minority population. For example, a district may welcome and encourage many teachers to join in teacher training programs, but may not ascertain through adequate monitoring or evaluation whether the training actually affects instruction in the classroom for the sample group. Usually, too, the teachers are not tracked, so they may get the same initial information over and over again. Frequently districts use “opinion-airs” as evaluation measures for training efforts.¹⁷

Oral research/resources provide an entrée to the cultures of many minority groups. It is logical to use oral elder knowledge to establish and document a suitable cultural context. Respect is established from this form of documentation and comfort is provided to the student through this process. One is also able to access the wisdom and knowledge of elders that may be denied a researcher by using only written literature.

Indian Educator Leadership

Winds of Change, the publication of the American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES) recently featured a discussion of leadership development in Indian country.¹⁸ The question posed was, “*Where are the new Indian leaders?*” Gerald Gipp (Lakota, Standing Rock) discusses leadership paths in the decades of the sixties and seventies.

“During this time, pioneering graduate degree programs at Pennsylvania State University, Harvard University, University of Minnesota and Arizona State University were successful in providing academic training to a critical mass of American Indian students... What appealed to me most was the opportunity to go to a major university and to take advantage of the resources there. It created a network of Indian people, not just those at Penn State but those in other programs as well. We were encouraged to get together with the other programs. We really got to know each other” (p.15).

Gipp explained that changes started to occur in Indian education, led by people from these programs. “Shortly after the programs began, we saw these changes—reform in Indian education, reform in self-determination, issues of school control—all these legislative efforts were led by people from the programs. They took the leadership roles” (p.16).

¹⁴ How race is lived in America, a 5-week series. *New York Times* (2000). (www.nytimes.com)

¹⁵ Scott, J. (2000, June 11). *New York Times*, p. 17. Fourth article in series.

¹⁶ Icaliente in the culture. (2001, June 23-29). *Isthmus* 25(25), pp. 15-16.

¹⁷ Based on collected evaluation sheets from district(s) training efforts for minority populations where respondent is asked how something was liked on a scale of, for example, one to ten.

¹⁸ *Winds of Change*. (2002, Spring). 17(2), p. 15. AISES, 4450 Arapahoe Avenue, Suite. 100, Boulder, CO 80303.

Deloria and Wildcat (2001), in speaking about involvement by Indians in education and the notion of cultural difference, say that the “thing that has always been missing in Indian education, and is still missing today, is Indians. In spite of the many advisory committees, national organizations and graduate programs in education that purport to deal specifically with Indian education, we see nary a trace of Indianness in either efforts or results” (p. 152). Deloria says that he may offend Indians that serve in these national organizations and committees, but it is his opinion that, “they generally leave their Indian heritage behind and adopt the vocabulary and concepts of non-Indian educators and bureaucrats, following along like so many sheep” (p.153). He states a mistake these Indians make is believing that “in adopting the technical language of modern education they are making Indian needs relevant to influential people who can help turn Indian education around” (p.153). Deloria talks about cultural differences by beginning with the fact that there are many cultural differences that exist between Indians and non-Indians. He selects several items (beginning with how Indians compete) to illustrate his point, acknowledging that various behaviors and effects could be used as illustrations.

He speaks about tribal elder knowledge, oral tradition and the Indian holistic worldview “where the parts and their value are less significant than the larger picture and its meaning” (p.155). He makes a case for using the cultural methods and techniques of tribal elders as non-Indian techniques and methods have certainly “proven themselves failures” (p. 154). He makes fun of current techniques passed as Indian. “If the child wants to understand the whole, we simply dress up the parts in buckskin and pretend that we have answered the problem” (p.155).

Community Involvement

Szasz (1999) in her “Indian Voice” chapter 16, discusses Indian educators concerned with involving community by using the example of their activities during the White House Indian Education Conference in 1995. She quotes John Tippeconnic (then director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Indian Education Programs) stating that, “Tribes should determine what is taught to their children” (p. 226), which she says reflects Tippeconnic’s experience in “years of dealing with the contending forces in Indian education, the tribal governments and the community and professional educators” (p. 229). She views these educators as having developed a network that was effective and efficient by the 1990s. They traveled to conferences, served on various organizations, were readers for federal agencies that granted funds to Indian tribes and organizations, staffed offices and led agencies in Washington, and as she says, their activities “enabled them to mobilize with considerable strength when confronting those crises that appeared with increasing frequency during the 1990’s” (p. 203).

Tribal educator and Director of the Menominee (WI) Tribe’s language project, Alan Cauldwell (Menominee) speaks frequently to the need for indigenous community action. He sketched for other discussants at an educational meeting in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in March 2002 his notion of what is important: community involvement or Indigenous Community Action (ICA). ICA uses the medicine wheel frame with four quadrants. In the upper left are the words, “Power” and “Grandmothers,” in the upper right, “Strength” and “Warriors/Veterans,” in the lower left, “Knowledge” and “Indian Educators” and in the lower right, “Leaders” and “Mothers.” Community change is possible when the right forces are recognized and brought together to make change for the children, using power, strength, knowledge and leaders.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cauldwell sketch, unpublished document, no date. Obtained March, 2002.

Internalized Oppression

An important issue to consider regarding cultural context in education is the premise of internalized oppression. Durán and Durán (1995) (see also Fixico, 2000, chapter 2²⁰) begin their section on internalized oppression with a discussion of the coercive boarding school public policy of the United States. The policy removed Indian children from their families and their education through tribal knowledge, by trickery and deceit. Durán and Durán (1995) explain how this policy and other policies of the federal government were policies of oppression:

“Once a group of people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victim’s complete loss of power comes despair and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power—the power of the oppressor. The internalizing process begins when Native American people internalize the oppressor, which is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people. At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. This self-hatred can be either internalized or externalized” (p. 29).

Anishinaabe Elder Lee Staples, in his work with youth, elders and community, has taken the notion of internalized oppression (IO) and worked with it in both his native Ojibwe language and in English. He says that until Indians learn, work with and understand the effects of internalized oppression, we will not be happy or successful with the results of our educational efforts (Staples, 2002). It has become part of our cultural background and we must deal with it. He has extensive experience functioning with Indians and non-Indians on this issue. He developed and works with a cognitive map, *Cultural Continuum: A Diverse Path*. Knowledgeable in his oral tradition and language and experienced with skills acknowledged by Ojibwe-first speaker elders, he works as a Native psychologist unfettered by the academy’s degree structure or over-confident approach. He consults with the University of Minnesota, Duluth Social Work Department Native American Project, Cultural Language Institute and is Consultant and Cultural Advisor to the Chief of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians (Minnesota).

Conversant with Durán and Durán and with other materials available from the Internet and the usual sources, Staples works with oral lessons from elders. Ojibwe is his first language; he understands clearly and is growing in strength and knowledge of oral tradition. He explains how internalized oppression works among Indian people, giving examples that illustrate how we show hostility and anger toward other Indians based on perceived slights, insults and implied criticisms. As cultural director of a current language project in Ojibwe country, he is advising project personnel to learn about internalized oppression, discuss its effects during project meetings and investigate strategies for minimizing these effects, so that a project evaluation will reflect a successful project and that something in the nature of new knowledge that might help other projects will occur. He and others have come up with a way to keep track of IO effects on the project.

²⁰ On pp. 26-42, he has a chapter on stereotypes and self-concepts, illuminating the issue of internalized oppression, and he describes and discusses the problems that impede progress.

Tinker (1993) says:

“Internalized racism (resulting in a praxis of self-hatred) [should] surprise no one. The phenomenon is part of a much broader process that can be seen in other aspects of human existence. Just as an abused child slowly but inevitably internalizes a parent’s abuse as a consistent demonstration of the child’s own shortcomings and may even regard the life of the abused parent as exemplary, so communities of oppressed peoples internalize their own oppression and come to believe too many of the stereotypes, explicit and implicit, spoken by the oppressor” (p. 3).

A *Winds of Change* article²¹ quotes Norbert Hill, Oneida (WI), “I learned long ago that Indian leaders have to withstand the bullets in the front and the arrows in the back. We take arrows in the back when Indian people shoot at us. If we could learn to turn to each other rather than on each other, the bullets from mainstream society would not affect us as much” (p. 17). The article speaks to the young people viewing leadership as a vehicle “to invite harsh personal criticism and hostility from their own people. They allude to the phenomenon of internalized oppression...” (p. 17).

Durán and Durán (1995) invite Indians to seek our own way of doing things: “The legitimization of Native American thought in the Western world has not yet occurred, and may not occur for some time. This does not mean that the situation is hopeless in the Native American community. The Native American community can help itself by legitimizing its own knowledge and thus allowing for healing to emerge from within the community. If the perpetrators prefer to live in denial, that is an issue with which they will have to deal presently and historically” (p. 53).

Indigenous Research Issues

Smith (1999), in her discourse on indigenous research, discusses research and its progeny. She observes how research that is known and practiced today is actually part and parcel of European colonialism. It reflects the European worldview and values. She advocates activities to decolonize research methods. The models (Graham Smith, p. 177) discussed echo the cultural mode of the indigenous person. Research defines legitimate knowledge (p. 173). And evaluation, a natural issue/offspring of research, has two reasons for existing, according to the User-Friendly Handbook (NSF, 2002): it 1) provides information to improve, and 2) provides new insights, or new information that was not anticipated (p. 3). Smith says research methods should ensure the problem has an appropriate set of research strategies and that the information sought “is accessed in such a way as to guarantee validity and reliability. This requires having a theoretical understanding, either explicitly or implicitly, of the world, the problem and the method” (p. 172). She says it is important in a cross-cultural context to ask important questions:

“Who defined the research problem?”

“For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?”

“What knowledge will the community gain from this study?” (p. 173).

²¹ Passing the torch. *Winds of Change*. (2002, Spring).

It is useful to search for research theories that are flexible enough to accommodate cultural differences. There are sufficient materials, for example, on grounded theory that will help researchers in this regard.²²

Cultural Context is a Sense of Place

Finally, we must be cognizant of our sense of place. Cajete (2000) explains, “the psychology of place”(p. 187). He explains how Indians fit into Turtle Island and how Turtle Island fits into them. It is the cultural context of Indian country. He says, “Indeed, this perception is reflected throughout myth, ritual, art and spiritual traditions of Indigenous people everywhere because in it is a biological reality. All human development is predicated on our interaction with the soil, the air, the climate, the plants and the animals of the places where we live. The inner archetypes in a place formed the spiritually based ecological mind-set required to establish and maintain a correct and sustainable relationship with place” (p. 187). In an earlier book, Cajete, from Santa Clara Pueblo (New Mexico) explains this sense of place in the Web of Life as the seventh sacred direction.

The concept of wholeness and what it means in the contemporary world is difficult, especially when we find ourselves in a very linear world organized by Euro-Americans. We are all taught in school to believe that only the linear, hierarchical world is sensible. Kincheloe et al. (1998) provides a discussion on whiteness in a similar way that racism as a subject is studied. A teacher writes a particular chapter about the three stages she went through as she developed into a teacher, with the first stage, “the white savior.” Whiteness, the authors say, defines the Academy’s practice as much as any other indicator.

Conclusion

Wholeness characterizes, frames and defines a culturally different world. It is a traditional Native world where the parts fit into the whole, where motion is circular, activities spiral to and from the center, and every living thing is related. “*Mitakuye Oyasin*,” the Lakota say to end their prayers, to greet and to say farewell. Cajete (2000) says the phrase identifies and explains community (p. 86). It is the context within which we live and work. It is what we strive for with all our being. It is inclusive rather than exclusive, seeking to fold everyone into a relationship, one that ensures that all living things are in balance. Brown (1982, p. 71) notes that Native people “generally do not fragment experience into mutually exclusive dichotomies, but tend rather to stress modes of interrelatedness across categories of meaning, never losing sight of the ultimate whole.” The beliefs, philosophy, epistemology and oral tradition found in a holistic world will be reflected in its educational practices, learning and teaching pedagogy and interrelated activities with others.

References

Brown, J.E. (1982). *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*. New York: Crossroads.

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, Santa Fe.

²² See for example, Glaser (1967). Brief, more recent articles are available on the Web, for example, Urquhart, C. (2000), Strategies for conversation and systems analysis in requirements gathering: A qualitative view of analyst-client communication. In *The Qualitative Report* (2000, January), 4(1/2). (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-1/urquhart.html>)

Christensen, R.A. (2000). *Let's expand minority achievement scores and close the achievement gap*. Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction, Equity Mission Team, Division of Learning Support.

Cook-Lynn, E. (2001). *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth*. Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Deloria, V. Jr. & Wildcat, D.R. (2001). *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources.

Diamond, B., Cronk, M.S. & von Rosen, F. (1994). *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Durán, E. & Durán, B. (1995). *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. New York: State University of New York, Albany.

Education Week. (2000). *Minority achievement gap*. Four-part series, March 15 to April 5. <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/gap.htm>.

Fixico, D.L. (2000). *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Grissmer, D., Flanagan, A., Kawata, J. & Williamson, S. (2000). *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Scores Tell Us*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Gulliford, A. (2000). *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado.

Kincheloe, J.L., Steinberg, N.M. Rodriguez & Chennault, R. E. (Eds.). (1998). *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Martin, J.W. (2001). *The Land Looks After Us: A History of Native American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

NCTM. (1989). *Curriculum and evaluation standards for school math*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

National Science Foundation. (2002). *The 2002 User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation* (NSF Publication No. 02-057). Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication.

Newmann, F.M., Smith B., Allensworth, E. & Bryk, A. (2001). Instructional program coherence: What it is and why it should guide school improvement policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(4), Winter, pp. 297-321.

Ross, R. (1992). *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*. Canada: Reed Books.

Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London and New York: Zed Books Ltd.; Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Staples, Lee. (2002, April). *Working with and understanding Internalized Oppression*. Paper presented at the Anishinaabe Wi Yung Combined Meeting, Mille Lacs Reservation.

Szasz, M.C. (1999). *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-determination Since 1928*. New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press.

Tinker, G.E. (1993). *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Thorpe, D. (1996). *People of the Seventh Fire: Returning Lifeways of Native America*. Ithaca, New York: Akwe Kon Press, Cornell University American Indian Program.

Viadero, D. (2000, May 1). Bridging the gap. *Teacher Magazine*. (http://www.edweek.org/tm/tm_printstory.cfm?slug+08blacksl.hll)

Wasson, C.W. (1973). *Philosophical differences between Europeans and Native Americans as an explanation of the alienation of Native American Students from the Education system*. Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Oregon.

Wilkins, D.E. (1997.) *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Discussion Highlights*Grayson Noley*

These two interesting papers by Dr. Jolly and Dr. Christensen are intended to contribute to the debate surrounding issues of achievement and how achievement should be measured, a task both papers certainly accomplished. The concerns held by those who evaluate programs intended to improve Native American children's achievement were listed and discussed, although the conclusions reached or implied mostly rely on "common sense" rather than empirical research. In reality, it appears that the errors made by those who reach conclusions about the academic problems faced by Native American children begin with common misunderstandings. These would include, for example, not accounting for issues related to language, poverty, culture, etc., when aggregating data and identifying achievement deficiencies and planning for interventions. To the credit of the authors, they do not propose to give definitive answers but rather seek to give more insight into a quest for a better definition of the question.

Professor Christensen's paper begins with a list of speculative conditions that are believed to lead to the so-called achievement gap. This list, while perhaps not exhaustive, is extensive. It describes conditions that affect both Native American children and the institutions that purport to serve them. These are the conditions that are unpleasant in their realization, such as poverty, prejudice and lack of opportunity among others and are not new to those of us who are long-time observers of Native American children and American education. These are conditions that cannot be ignored in the explanation of lower achievement levels of some Native American children, yet they also are conditions that can lead to other devastating assumptions that, in turn, can also contribute to poor self-esteem that results in underachievement. This is an important issue to which I will give more attention later.

In addition to the social context introduced above, Professor Christensen also calls attention to the need for observers to understand that there is a cultural context to which they should draw their attention as well. She points out that understanding the differences between the context in which Native American children find themselves may be as simple as understanding the dichotomy between the world views of Native Americans and non-Indians. Native American children live in the linear world of the non-Indian and this is in conflict with the holistic world of Native people. This conflict is viewed as a major contributor to the academic issues faced by Native American children in American schools. This may be exacerbated by the large number of Native American tribes/nations that continue to maintain their own cultures and languages. That is to say, in addition to the differences Native American children find within the majority population, they also find differences among themselves. This is supported in another critique of the contexts in which research and evaluation focusing on Native Americans occur (Fleming, 1992).

Professor Christensen also gives attention to curriculum delivery models that will enhance learning opportunities for Native American children, strategies that focus to some extent on demonstrating respect for the children and their cultural grounding. She also refers to the utility of role modeling in schools exemplifying these strategies by describing a teacher whose success is credited to his ability to create a bond with his students.

What do these concerns have to do with evaluation? I hope the answer to this question is obvious. If it isn't yet, then critical attention to Dr. Jolly's paper should bring it into better focus. This paper focuses on developing an understanding of cultural context, similar to the conditions

Christensen listed as leading to the existence of the so-called achievement gap. We probably ought to call the discrepancy in scores for one race/ethnicity as opposed to another a failure on the part of the institutions charged with the responsibility to serve all students equitably.

Dr. Jolly stated that in the discussion of a cultural context for educational evaluation, “we are not entering new territory.” It is not difficult to find agreement here. I was asked recently by an undergraduate student in our teacher preparation program how much time should be devoted to teaching about diversity in the classroom. I told her that *all* her time should be spent in such endeavors. There is a diversity of ethnicity, race, custom, tradition, music, dance, ways of knowing and yes, culture. To be American is to be diverse. This is the American context. Unfortunately, we fail to exhibit our understanding of this diversity in certain places, but the one place we should not fail is in school and when assessing what students do in school.

Americans are accustomed to working across diverse cultural constructs. It is just that the diversity with which white Americans are most accustomed and what they understand most is the diversity found in European-American cultures. What they consider to be different is Native American cultures and those of other minority populations in this country.

Dr. Jolly, like Professor Christensen, describes conditions that are important in knowing about Native American people. It is, of course, important that evaluators, teachers and others understand the contexts in which Native American children are situated, as was already pointed out by Christensen. However, we have to be careful about this. For example, Jolly lists poverty, but while it might seem to be true, not all Native American people are poor. He describes a high growth rate of our population, yet not all Native American families are exceptionally large. He describes other demographic characteristics as well, but one must be careful to understand that the children in American classrooms are not statistics. They are individuals and deserve to be treated as such. Inadvertent stereotyping is a serious problem.

Concerns raised in the discussion among the workshop participants centered around methodologies used by evaluators for collecting data, how judgments are made and what cultural understanding contributes to the conclusions reached. Questions were related to how one knows if a relationship actually exists between the Native American learner and the teaching method utilized. Is it really clear that there is an interface between the learner and the teacher? Are they talking the same language but engaging in the concepts with different imagery? Is the context in which things are being done perceived in the same way by both evaluators and subjects? These are questions that must be considered when making judgments about the performance of children in any area of learning. Evaluators need to have cultural understanding to be intellectually prepared to deduce the true meaning of the performance that is documented.

At the same time, there are questions about whether the effect of evaluation ought to be judgment at all. The discussion suggested that when a child sits down for a discussion about his or her performance in Native American cultures, what transpires is not judgment but rather instruction on how to turn a weakness into a strength. It is a way to help the child grow. The act of making judgments, it was suggested, is perhaps the wrong objective. Instead, evaluation should help make positive changes in the direction undertaken.

It appears that the latter recommendation suggests that all evaluation should be formative in nature. Indeed, it is the attitude taken by many evaluators that their mission is to help a program improve. This means, for example, that they would seek to identify ways in which individual

student performance might improve, instead of merely telling the program staff that the student's performance is deficient. This is desirable without a question, but it was also suggested that sometimes summative evaluations about a program's effectiveness should be made. For example, there are instances when one wants to know if, at the end of an intervention, the desired results emerged.

This, then, is the challenge confronted by evaluators. They need to be cognizant of the context in which teachers must educate and take into account the issues that have an effect on the achievement of some children, yet they cannot let the school and its teachers "off the hook" by providing them with an excuse for the poor performance in their institutions. Also, they cannot stereotype Native American children in their zeal to "understand." Giving educational programs excuses for not providing the best services for Native American children does no one any good. Instead we must advocate for appropriate solutions for poor performance wherever it occurs.

Some readers may be familiar with a book called *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne (1998). I think it is unfortunate that some faculty in teacher preparation programs have endorsed this book and offer it as required reading. My personal assessment of the book is that it does little more than stereotype people in poverty and give rich white people the illusion that they understand those who are impoverished. In my opinion, it is a primer for snobbery and makes those who are not forced to live in the worst possible human conditions grateful for their privileges. We have to be careful that we don't follow the same path in our quest to find better ways to evaluate programs that address the academic performance by children of poverty. We have to avoid allowing children to be stereotyped and should put the onus on the programs serving these children to do a better job. We also must educate our politicians who sit on thrones of power, offer undocumented criticisms of schools and put forth ill-conceived policies intended to punish those who don't perform according to their weak measures. Instead, they should give them resources. Resources such as teachers who are prepared to confront the various contexts of education.

I criticized a regional university in Oklahoma a number of years ago for its lack of attention to the conditions that existed in its area, *its* context. I told the dean that the institution had existed for approximately 100 years and had delivered a teacher education program for all those years in an area that was documented as being one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the country and that also had one of the largest populations of Native American people in the country. The teacher preparation program had never taken note of its own context sufficiently to address it in course structures. In spite of the fact that it prepared teachers who, for the most part, would never leave that area, the university never offered a class devoted to the preparation of teachers who would be asked daily to meet the challenges presented by poverty and diverse languages and cultures. For all those years, the program missed the opportunity to give American schools these human resources.

Who, or what, are we evaluating? Are we evaluating the students or the programs intended to serve their educational needs? The answer should be no mystery. We are evaluating the educational programs. Should we take into account the context within which the educational programs are delivered? Of course. That context includes the economic conditions from which the students emerge, the cultural milieu, the geography and the relative mobility of students, among others. Should we take into account the diversity of resources available to American schools or lack of such resources? Certainly we should. Should we reward schools merely for their students' high performance on test scores? Certainly not. That serves to punish certain schools and

teachers for their lack of resources and for the school's perceived failure even when there may be successes such as Dr. Bobby Wright's successful math classes, as cited by Professor Christensen.

I think the message given by these two papers is that we must pay attention to the diversity presented, but not by punishing or criticizing those who are being served and not by providing the institutions with excuses for their poor performance. Instead, we need to find ways to *help institutions to do a better job* of serving the American children in our schools. Some of these ways might be similar to those described by Professor Christensen. At the same time, it is important to point out that it is a disservice to always link Native American children with poverty. Although many Native American children are victims of poverty, not *all* are, and if they have difficulties in school, their problems may be linked to culture.

References

Fleming, C. M. (1992). *Native Americans and Alaska Natives: Changing societies past and present*. In L.G. Epstein (ed.), *Cultural Competence for Evaluators*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Payne, R. (1998). *Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Highland, Texas: RFP Publishing Company.